

Topic: *Frankenstein*

Course Title: Making a Monster

Paper: CC9

Semester: 4

Teacher: Anuradha Mukherjee

Department: English

Frankenstein: The making of a Monster

Mary Shelley's nightmare on 16th June, 1816 gave birth to one of the most powerful horrors of the entire world. As we battle the invisible ghastly coronavirus today, the Frankenstein myth has become all the more relevant, almost a trope of our everyday life. From "Frankenfoods" to biological weapons, it invokes the danger signal. Perhaps it is the most powerful analysis and critique of the modern scientific wo/man, which provides an insight into the dangers inherent in modern scientific temper and its horrifying predictable consequences. ***Frankenstein*** foregrounds the implications and consequences of uncontrolled technological exploitation of Nature, Nurture and the feminine principle. For Mary Shelley it could have been an oblique critique of the Enlightenment's celebration of science and technology.

Ann Mellor observes that *Frankenstein* is a book that probes the consequences of “unnatural” modes of production. [Ann Mellor: “*Frankenstein: A Feminist Critique of Science*,” in *One Culture: Essays in Science and Literature*, George Levine(ed.) , Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987] In other words, it explores the aftermath of Victor's attempt to procreate without a woman; quite a warning bell to 21st century's obsession with cloning and stem cell research.

The dream that led Mary Shelley to give birth to *Frankenstein*, raises questions about natural fears of giving birth and parenting. Part of this anxiety could have been her own unsettling state of mind after the death of her own daughter as well as her own memories of having instrumental in her mother's death. It is not her anxiety but the collective anxieties of all would be mothers who dread the arrival of deformed babies: “My hideous progeny”. This is also something we can easily

contextualize in our country where numerous unborn girls are killed and many others throttled to death after birth, because they are perceived as “monstrous abberations”. (By default the male body is perfect and the female is an aberration. You do the math)

Mary Shelley’s dream, therefore, finds a way into the novel and becomes a major theme. Victor Frankenstein's botched parenting becomes doubly **bad** because he chose to be a parent, and a single parent at that. People who haven’t read *Frankenstein* often call the monster Frankenstein, but the mistaken swapping of names is perhaps not entirely unfounded. Victor Frankenstein rejects the child right after birth and spends quite some time running away from it in complete disgust. The story of parental abandonment and a love- less childhood could be another autobiographical element in the novel. But the pattern that emerges as a consequence is familiar. The abused / abandoned

child in turn turns abusive and goes on in a killing spree, choosing Victor's youngest brother as its first victim.

Note the following

[Check the 1831 edition of the text and Mary Shelley's introduction.

Refer to Polidori's *A Vampyre* that is included in the Worldview edition of *Frankenstein*.]