

Topic: Contexts

Course Title: *Frankenstein*

Paper: CC9

Semester:4

Teacher: Anuradha Mukherjee

Department: English

Contexts: Ingolstadt

Victor Frankenstein attends the university of Ingolstadt which was associated with the Illuminati. This was a Enlightenment secret society that was founded in Bavaria in 1776. The Illuminati devoted themselves to opposing unnecessary religious interference in public life, superstitions, blind faith and abuses of state power. In other words, they opposed all kinds of injustice by authority be it religious or secular. Naturally, they were outlawed but continued to function and generate a whole lot of conspiracy stories. Interestingly, the Illuminati was born in Bavaria, where the university of Ingolstadt lay, and the connection is hard to miss. The Illuminati were supporters of the French revolution. Victor Frankenstein's formal education begins at this centre of political and **epistemological** radicalism, after the French Revolution as Walton's letters suggest.

(****Epistemological**- relating to the theory of knowledge and its methods, validity and scope)

Political Contexts

- One cannot miss how the **scientific debate** in *Frankenstein* is **intricately bound** to the **political concerns** of the **time**. For the average English reader of *Frankenstein* in 1818, the fear of revolution may have been a valid source of concern.
- It is not uncommon for **people in power** to **influence** and **decide** the course of scientific research. **History teaches** us how **people** down the ages have been **rewarded** or **burnt at the stake** for **scientific** and **artistic pursuits**. It is important to look at the kind of cultural policing in Science and research that was prevalent during the early decades of 19th century to understand where Mary Shelley's commitments lay. However, by 1818 the French Revolution was over, Napoleon was dead and people could travel

around the continent with ease, as Victor Frankenstein's numerous journeys demonstrate.

- *Frankenstein* can be viewed as a critique of Enlightenment as well as idealism in general. The novel has several references to **paradise** from which Victor, his Creature and Walton are estranged. The frequent references to Milton's *Paradise Lost* imply that the world of *Frankenstein* is a post-lapsarian, post-idealistic one. With her association with radical philosophers it is not difficult to perceive Mary Shelley's commitment to the cause and consequently *Frankenstein* can be read as a lament for the lost discourse of scientific and political radicalism. The fracture between ideal and reality is revealed in Victor's account of the Creature: **“How can I describe.... straight black lips.”** (pp38-39, Worldview)

Victor's pursuit of beauty and perfection has generated ugliness of hideous proportion.

- This loss of idealism by extension is loss of faith in the radical models of social progress that French Revolution had caused and anticipated.

Ref: check worldview ed. Introduction, for science.