

MURSHIDABAD ADARSHA MAHAVIDYALAYA

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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

TEACHER: SUKANTA BARMAN, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, STAGE-II

Study materials provided to CLASS: 4TH SEM DATE: 11/08/2024

Topic of Discussion: Mary Shelley's Frankenstein

- **CHARACTER OF VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN**

- **TITLE OF THE NOVEL (for the Title, write whatever there is in the third brackets. For the Character, leave the third brackets and shorten the long quotation)/ PATRIARCHAL MYTH/The novel is about breaking the patriarchal myth or the Biblical myth of creation. Discuss**

[The title of the novel **“Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus”** is very significant one. It is named after the central figure, the scientist, Doctor Frankenstein in the story and his creation of the Creature or the Being who is called the monster. Eventually Frankenstein brings about his own death along with his near and dear ones. So the fate of the novel is largely associated with the fate of Frankenstein. Thus the title is very indicative of what happens in the story.]

Victor Frankenstein had to undertake a very monstrous enterprise in order to give birth to the creature. Frankenstein visited charnel houses for collecting the bones of the future body of the creature. He alienated himself both physically and emotionally by keeping his workshop in a **“solitary chamber”**. David Punter in his essay **“Gothic and Romanticism”** says, Frankenstein

considered himself as a **“pure enquirer after truth”**. Frankenstein is overconfident. He suffers from an overwhelming pride.

Mary Shelley is writing a story about a scientist who creates a monster thus potentially exposing evils of the scientific hubris which involves man’s interference with nature. Mary Shelley is also challenging the cultural biases in science that rested on a gendered definition of nature as female.

Frankenstein sees nature as female when he says, **“I pursued nature to her hiding places”**. Humphry Davy and Luigi Galvani became the models for Frankenstein. Mary Shelley believed that only that person can be happy who lives in harmony with nature. Darwin also believed that the scientists should not interfere in the work of nature. Mary Shelley pitied Frankenstein for discarding the evolutionary process of nature. Frankenstein wanted to originate a new life form by chemical means and in the process side stepping the woman’s role entirely rather than letting organic life evolve slowly over thousands of years. Frankenstein engages in a concept of science that Mary Shelley looked with suspicion.

Anne K. Mellor says, **“One of the deepest horrors of this novel is Frankenstein’s implicit goal of creating a society for men only: his creature is male; he refuses to create a female; there is no reason that the race of immortal beings he hoped to propagate should not be exclusively male”**. He has denied the woman the role of natural reproduction. Victor Frankenstein is punished by nature for his heinous acts. Elizabeth; his bride dies on the wedding night. The creature destroys not only his brother William, his friend Clerval, his servant Justine and his wife, but pursues Victor Frankenstein to his death.

The title of the novel becomes obvious when we know that Frankenstein is working with electricity as Prometheus stole fire. Prometheus was unjustly punished by Zeus for stealing fire. To the Romantics, he was a hero, both as a creator and as a rebel. Prometheus and Frankenstein are trying to take the creative role of the God. God created Adam in his own image. Similarly, Frankenstein created the creature in his own image. The creature also compares himself to Satan. **“Many times I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition”**. Mary Shelley was casting a doubt on the figure of the creator (God). She is questioning the role of the father as she was questioning in her real life. Frankenstein is not only an arrogant creator, but also the absent father. Mary Shelley brings to focus the kind of questions her text is going to ask; questions about accountability and responsibility, about dreams which seem to begin with the notion of public good but end in woe and disaster.

She is re-interpreting the myth and story of the Bible. She is giving it a gendered spin when she questions the notion of the creator and his responsibility. She does this in a quiet and invidious way behind masks. She is re-writing **Paradise Lost** from a woman’s point of view. In doing this, she is revising the cultural centrality of the epic which is about male hegemony.

Burton Hatlen talking about **‘patriarchal myth’** in the essay **“Milton, Mary Shelley and Patriarchy”** indicates how Mary Shelley always thought of herself as the “other” in front of her father as a child because she was a female. Her status in front of her father and husband was that of a marginalized woman. Therefore, for her the relationship between the master who exercises authority and the rebel who questions authority became intertwined with the relationship between God and his creation, between Frankenstein and the creature and between man and woman. The myth of creation is patriarchal. God single handedly created the Universe and then,

the man and finally, the woman from the rib of the man. Therefore, the role of the woman is neglected. Similarly, Frankenstein single handedly creates the creature where a woman has no role to play. In *Frankenstein*, she puts the creator on trials and finds him guilty. The monstrous appearance of the creature foregrounds the monstrous act that brought him into existence. Therefore, in that sense, the creator Frankenstein becomes the monster and not the creature.

[Thus the title of the novel also becomes very relevant.]