

FRANKENSTEIN

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The Idea of Prometheus

- Prometheus was one of the titans. He is usually thought of as the figure who stole fire from the sun and brought it down to man, earning wrath from Zeus, who punished Prometheus by binding him to a rock in the Caucasus and sending an eagle to eat his liver (which grew back every day so the punishment would be everlasting).
- In Frankenstein, Mary Shelley is looking at the rebellion of Prometheus and not judging it. The question arises whether it is a rebellion against God.
- The only imaginative being, resembling Prometheus in any degree, is Satan.
- The original full title for Frankenstein was Frankenstein: or The Modern Prometheus. The subtitle links to the novel to myths of mankind's creation and fall.
- The allusive complexity of the novel draws a parallel between Victor Frankenstein and the Titan Prometheus; at the same time, Victor is likened to God and the creature is variously equated with the ^{fallen} Adam and Satan.
- The conflict between the creator and his creation and the horrible consequences of this conflict form the central theme of Frankenstein.
- The subtitle of Shelley's novel clearly casts Victor Frankenstein in the role of Prometheus. Like the Titan, Frankenstein creates a man and gives him life, and, also like Prometheus, he

ultimately endures great torment (as he watches friends and loved ones murdered by the Creature).

- Unlike Prometheus, however, Frankenstein has no affection for his creation, but reviles and abandons it.
- Prometheus is the character who over-reaches his boundaries. During the Renaissance and also in the Romantic Age, there were characters to overreach in the quest for knowledge.
- Mary Shelley seems to keep on one single thing in the novel — isolation. Isolation is repeatedly idealised in the novel. In Shelley's Frankenstein, isolation and alienation are the two factors which enhance the monstrous behaviour of the monster created by Victor Frankenstein.
- For the female Romantic writers, isolation gave rise to anger (towards an individual and towards the social conditions), demonic activities, etc.
- The novel worked out through a complex series of variations and transformations, in which Victor moves through the role of Prometheus, God and Adam, and his Creature shifts from Adam to Satan, and even God. These shifts are signalled by shifting allusions to ancient Greek mythology, as well as to the various parts of Paradise Lost, the greatest work in the English language about the myth of man's creation and fall.
- In the novel, Mary Shelley raised important questions of human existence, which has pervaded the philosophical, scientific and aesthetic quest for certainties: whether a man can play the role of God, producing his own kind and whether it is right to intervene in the mysteries of nature.

- Shelley's novel arose at the junction of the Gothic, Enlightening and Romantic aesthetics, powerfully sprouted in the 20th Century.
- The growing interest in humanitarian knowledge confirmed once again the ideas of: the loss of moral values, the use of culture as a maid of a technological civilization leads to an almost irreversible consequences.
- Frankenstein has been described by many readers as the first work of science fiction. The protagonist Victor Frankenstein harnesses a mixture of alchemy, chemistry, and mathematics to gain an unprecedented insight into the secrets of animating sentient flesh.
- Victor's insatiable desire to complete his scientific feat are, like his creature, both captivating and repulsive. The monster is the product of his all-consuming need to gain the power of a God & conquer the laws of nature.
- From its beginnings, the Romantic Movement was concerned with regulating the unchecked pursuit of scientific or technological advancements via natural philosophy or the sciences - a potential that was prized above all else by the Enlightenment.
- The Romantic Movement was an artistic movement which directly opposed the excess of the Industrial Revolution. The Industrial Revolution marked a period of development in the later half of the 18th Century that transformed largely rural, agrarian society in Europe and America into industrialized, urban ones.

- Romanticism, whilst recognising the exciting potential of science, valued the importance of the natural order. In the generation who saw unprecedented technological advancements, including the invention of the steam engine and indoor plumbing, this must have seemed a particularly pertinent issue to a young Shelley. She conceived her literary creation in what she described as a 'waking dream', which she feverishly wrote during a summer spent holidaying with her husband in the home of Lord Byron.
- Shelley travelled through Europe in 1815 along the river Rhine in Germany stopping in Bensheim, 17 kilometres away from the Frankenstein Castle, where two centuries before, an alchemist engaged in various experiments. She then journeyed to the region of Geneva, Switzerland, where much of the story takes place.
- Shelley's novel doesn't present scientific and technological advancements as purely monstrous. Rather, it is the callousness of the creator, who cannot or will not anticipate the dangers of their invention, who is truly monstrous.
- German Philosopher Immanuel Kant used the phrase "Modern Prometheus" for scientist, Benjamin Franklin, who was a major figure in the American Enlightenment and the history of physics for his discoveries and theories regarding electricity.
- In the fictional work, the prodigious Victor Frankenstein places the spark of life into a creature which he does not know how to control. The brilliance of his achievement is undeniable, but

the unchecked flame eventually consumes his loved ones, himself, and even his creation. Like Prometheus, Frankenstein steals a gift from the realm of gods, which he cannot wield and is sorely punished for.

→ In the age of complex machine learning, Shelley's reimagined Prometheus has never been more modern than he is today. Victor Frankenstein is fixated on the glory of achievement, without considering what it will mean to have a new species be dependent on him.