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**FRANKENSTEIN; or THE MODERN PROMETHEUS**

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I. **Important Details:**

- a) Author- Mary Shelley
- b) Year of Publication- 1818 (preface by P.B.Shelley)
- c) Genre- Gothic fiction, Science fiction

d) Style- Epistolary

e) Important characters- Victor Frankenstein, Monster, Robert Walton, Margaret Saville, Henry Clerval, Elizabeth Lavenza

## II. About the author:

Mary Shelley(1797-1851), was the proponent of the Gothic and Science fiction in English Literature. She was influenced mostly by her parents and her husband. Her father, William Godwin, was a political philosopher who wrote “Things as They are; or The Adventures of Caleb William”. Her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, was a prominent feminist whose work “ A Vindication of the Rights of Woman” became a stepping stone for the Feminist Movement in the 18<sup>th</sup> Cent. England. Her husband, P. B. Shelley, was a Romantic poet and philosopher whose famous works include “Ozymandias”, “Ode to the West Wind”, “Prometheus Unbound”. Some of her important works are:

- a. Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus
- b. Mathilda
- c. Valperga
- d. The Last Man

Influences- Mary Shelley went on a trip to Switzerland with her husband where she met Lord Byron. They were moved by the occult stories related to the place where they were staying. They decided to think of a horror story and then Mary dreamt of a scientist who engaged himself in such experiments.

### III. Title and Epigraph:

The subtitle of the novel 'the Modern Prometheus' refers to the myth of Prometheus. In Greek mythology, Prometheus was a trickster who created humans from clay and stole fire from Zeus and gave the human civilization as a gift for which he was punished. It is also believed that when the human race was created by the gods, each god was asked to gift the humans and then Prometheus gave them the gift of fire, a very essential invention, and the art of making things with clay and metal. So the stories associated with Prometheus marks him as a creator or one who serves the consequences of giving away things that were forbidden.

Epigraph- the epigraph is taken from Paradise Lost which moves around the aspect that Satan was doomed from Heaven because he challenged God and went for the Forbidden power. Frankenstein deals with this idea of danger of creating something beyond human powers. The fall of Victor Frankenstein is the result of his giving life to a dead creature which is against the laws of Nature.

### IV. Summary:

The novel surrounds around the letters written by Robert Walton to his sister Margaret Saville, who decides to go on a trip towards the North

Pole, to enhance his scientific knowledge about the place. He suffers throughout the journey in the search of a companion and spends most of his time thinking about his safe return. He narrates through his letters, the meeting with Victor Frankenstein, in whom he finds solace. Victor confides him with the story of his life and his misfortunes. The narrative shifts to a linear form where Victor describes about his pampered childhood, his loving parents, his lover and his friends. He narrates how he was infatuated by the idea of creation of life and started reading the works of various philosophers. He is guided by his professors and thus with the desire to challenge Nature, he assimilates various parts of human body and finally gives life to it. This serves as a life changing moment for him as he gets frightened by the monster that he had created and thus runs away the next day. Though he moves towards his home, the fear lurks in his mind regarding the danger that he has created and how he had let it loose in the world. The death of his little brother marks the start of the revenge of the monster. Victor finally encounters the Monster who takes over the narrative and narrates his sad story of his trials to adjust with the world that he was born into. Though he was left alone all by himself, he tries to learn the language and even socialize with the villagers but he is not welcomed anywhere and this idea of not belonging to anyone leads him into taking revenge on Victor. He, thus, warns Victor and orders him to create another female of his stature. Victor promises to create such a creature but is frightened by the thought of its catastrophic effect on the world. So he breaks his promise and his misfortunes begins as the monster kills all his loved ones one by one and Victor is left alone in this world.

The narrative continues in the form of letters again where Walton describes his despair and his desire to return back. Victor succumbs to the exhaustion of his life and dies and after his death, monster pays him the last visit and explains himself to Walton. Thus, the novel ends with the monster going back to his solitude.

V. **Important points:**

a) **Science Fiction-** it is a form of fiction that deals principally with the impact of actual or imagined science over society or individuals. The genre was initiated by the Industrial Revolution, which gave the writers vent for imagining future technology. A sci-fi is marked with prophetic warnings, utopian aspiration, strange voyages, and elaborate scenarios for entirely imaginative world but guided by scientific laws.

Frankenstein as a sci-fi : Victor Frankenstein is the representative of modern scientist who created a monster due to his excess focus on the quest of scientific knowledge. The novel deals with the dangers of science and its impact on a society which was over hopeful for science. The setting of the novel satisfies the horrific experiments being done to challenge the laws of Nature.

**b) Narrative style**

The novel follows Frame narrative, that is, story within a story, or also known as Russian doll narrative. The narration is of

multiple levels where each one narrates his story and all these narratives are written in an epistolary form. The letters being written by Robert Walton includes his narration, Victor narrating his life and even the monster declaring his side of the story as well.

**c) Themes of association and alienation:**

The novel revolves around this theme of want of companionship and to be accepted widely by the society. The quest for discovery resides with the desire to be famous in the world. Frankenstein and Walton both are in the search of such a glory but both had to pay a price for it. The despair of being alienated haunts the monster and he wants to be easily accepted by the society. Being left alone by his creator, the monster is completely on his own in the world and this becomes his reason for revenge. He discards Victor from his family too and thus takes his revenge.

**VI. Suggested questions:**

- a) Discuss "Frankenstein" as a science fiction.
- b) Comment on the narrative style of "Frankenstein"
- c) The novel revolves around the character of monster, Who is the real monster? Justify your answer.