**Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus (1818)**

To finish our excursus on science-fiction let’s go back to a novel written by ***Mary Shelley***, wife of the Romantic poet P.B. Shelley.

**Plot**

A British explorer, **Robert Walton,** wants to reach the North Pole. He finds Victor Frankenstein on the ice and listens to his tale.

Science student **Victor Frankenstein** defies (=sfida) all limits of human knowledge and, after four years of intense study and seclusion, he creates a “monster” that becomes his alter ego. The monster, rejected (=rifiutato) by his own “father”, only desires revenge (=vendetta). First he kills Victor’s younger brother, then his friend and next Elizabeth, Frankenstein’s wife, on their wedding night. Frankenstein meets his creature in the Alps (=Alpi) and follows the monster North till Walton finds him on the ice. Finally, Frankenstein dies, the monster disappears and Walton gives up his voyage to the North Pole.

The novel is infused with **elements of the Gothic novel**  (the horror of the creature and the setting of the Alps and of the North Pole, the presence of mystery and terror). These Gothic novels expressed the emotional trend of the period (the end of the 18th century) as a reaction against the rational and well ordered world of the Classic Age:

* a fantastic, mysterious and sensational atmosphere,
* improbable adventures of strange and extraordinary characters, culmitang in treasons (=tradimento), murders and appalling (=spaventoso) events
* desolate landascapes, gloomy(=tetro) castles and old abbeys as settings.

*Frankenstein* is also an example of **science fiction** as (=poiché) Frankenstein’s experiment with life raises (=solleva) questions concerning the purpose and limits of science: how far the human desire for ultimate knowledge and power through science can go? Give your answer and support your opinion (50 words).

After reading activity: compare Frankenstein’s thirst (=sete) for knowledge and his absolute dedication to the cause of science in the text to the actual results of his experiment in infusing life, and discuss the potential dangers of a total dedication to science (50 words).

Chapter 5 (abridged)

It was on a dreary (=cupa, uggiosa) night of November that I beheld (=osservai) the accomplishment of my toils (=duro lavoro). With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected (=raccolsi) the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark (=scintilla) of being into the lifeless (=inanimata) thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered (=picchiettava) dismally against the panes (=vetri), and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer (=barlume) of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull (=spento) yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed (=respirava) hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs (=membra).

How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch (=disgraziato, miserabile) whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured (=tentato) to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features (=lineamenti) as beautiful. Beautiful! Great God! His yellow skin scarcely (=a malapena) covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath (=sotto); his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing (=fluenti); his teeth of a pearly (=perlaceo) whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery (=lacrimosi) eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets (=orbite) in which they were set, his shrivelled (=disidratata) complexion (=carnagione) and straight black lips.

The different accidents (=disgrazie, incidenti) of life are not so changeable as the feelings of human nature. I had worked hard for nearly (=quasi) two years, for the sole purpose of infusing (=infondere) life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest (=riposo) and health. I had desired it with an ardour (=ardore) that far (=a lungo) exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless (=mozzafiato) horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure (=sopportare) the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out (=mi precipitai fuori) of the room and continued a long time traversing (=attraversando) my bed-chamber, unable (=incapace) to compose my mind to sleep. At length lassitude (=fiacchezza) succeeded to the tumult I had before endured (=sopportato), and I threw myself on the bed in my clothes, endeavouring (=tentando, sforzandomi) to seek a few moments of forgetfulness (=oblio). But it was in vain; I slept, indeed, but I was disturbed by the wildest (=più selvaggi) dreams. I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom (=fioritura) of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted (=deliziato) and surprised, I embraced (abbracciai) her, but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid (=bluastre) with the hue (=tinta, tonalità) of death; her features (=lineamenti) appeared to change, and I thought that I held (=stringevo) the corpse (=cadavere) of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud (=sudario, velo) enveloped (=avvolgeva) her form, and I saw the grave-worms (=vermi) crawling (=strisciavano) in the folds (=pieghe) of the flannel. I started from (=mi svegliai di soprassalto da) my sleep with horror; a cold dew (=rugiada) covered my forehead (=fronte), my teeth chattered (=battevano), and every limb (=arto) became convulsed (=scosso, agitato); when, by the dim (fioco, tenue) and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window shutters (persiana), I beheld (=osservavo) the wretch—the miserable monster whom I had created. He held up the curtain (=tenda) of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me. His jaws (=mascella) opened, and he muttered (=borobottò) some inarticulate sounds, while a grin (=sorriso largo) wrinkled his cheeks (=guance). He might have spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out, seemingly (=apparentemente) to detain (=trattenere) me, but I escaped and rushed downstairs. I took refuge in the courtyard (=cortile) belonging to the house which I inhabited, where I remained during the rest of the night, walking up and down in the greatest agitation, listening attentively, catching and fearing each sound as if it were to announce the approach of the demoniacal corpse to which I had so miserably (=infelicemente) given life.

Oh! No mortal could support the horror of that countenance (=espressione del viso). A mummy (=mummia) again endued (=dotato) with animation could not be so hideous (=orrendo) as that wretch. I had gazed (=fissato) on him while unfinished; he was ugly then, but when those muscles and joints (=articolazioni) were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived (=concepito).

I passed the night wretchedly (=tristemente). Sometimes my pulse (=polso, battito) beat so quickly and hardly that I felt the palpitation of every artery; at others, I nearly sank (=affondare) to the ground through languor and extreme weakness. Mingled (=mescolato) with this horror, I felt the bitterness (=amarezza) of disappointment; dreams that had been my food and pleasant rest (=riposo, calma) for so long a space were now become a hell to me; and the change was so rapid, the overthrow (=rovesciamento) so complete!

Morning, dismal (=tetra) and wet, at length dawned (=albeggiava) and discovered to my sleepless and aching (=doloranti) eyes the church of Ingolstadt, its white steeple (=campanile) and clock, which indicated the sixth hour. The porter opened the gates of the court (=corte), which had that night been my asylum, and I issued into the streets, pacing (=camminando) them with quick steps, as if I sought (=cercassi) to avoid (=evitare) the wretch (=miserabile) whom I feared every turning (=svolta) of the street would present to my view. I did not dare (=osare) return to the apartment which I inhabited, but felt impelled (=spinto) to hurry on, although drenched (=inzuppato) by the rain which poured (=riversava) from a black and comfortless sky.

I continued walking in this manner for some time, endeavouring (=sforzando) by bodily exercise to ease (=alleviare) the load that weighed upon my mind. I traversed the streets without any clear conception of where I was or what I was doing. My heart palpitated in the sickness (=nausea) of fear, and I hurried on (=mi affrettavo) with irregular steps, not daring (=osando) to look about me:

Like one who, on a lonely road,
Doth walk in fear and dread (=timore),
And, having once turned round, walks on,
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows a frightful fiend (=demonio)
Doth close behind him tread (=andatura, passo).

[Coleridge’s “Ancient Mariner.”]