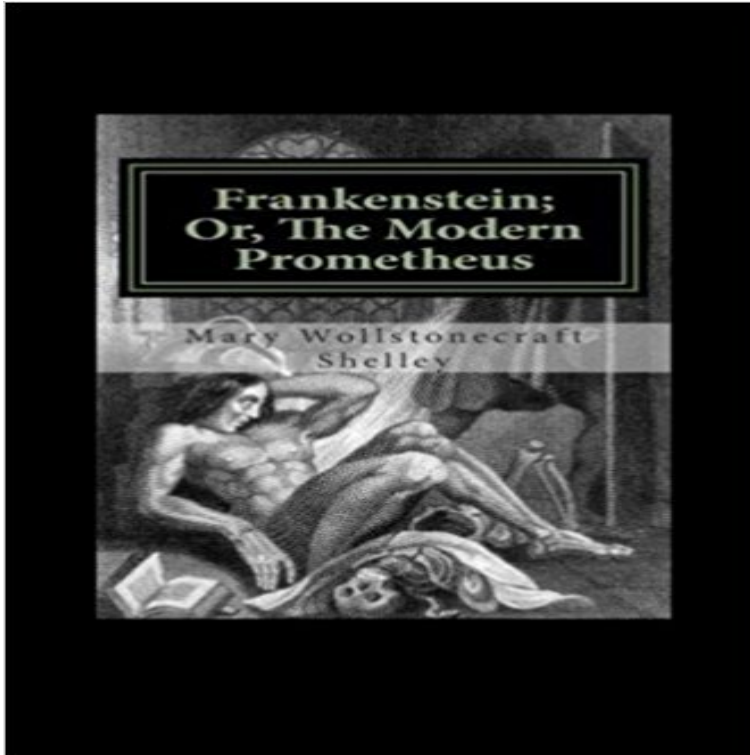


Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus



In Ancient Greek mythology, Prometheus was said to be the wisest of all the Titans. In the form of fire Prometheus is credited with bringing mankind knowledge and enlightenment. He stole fire from the Gods of Mount Olympus. For acting against the decree of the Gods, who wanted to keep the power of fire to themselves, Prometheus was harshly punished. He was chained to a rock to have his liver eaten out every day by an eagle. Every night his liver would grow back. This was to be his punishment for all of eternity. The full title of Mary Shelley's novel is Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus. So it shouldn't come as a surprise that Mary Shelley was influenced by this tale. Her husband Percy Shelley even began composing his own tale of Prometheus in the form of a poem entitled, Prometheus Unbound. He began composing this work right around the same time that Mary was publishing Frankenstein. Aside from the title, Shelley borrows from the tale of Prometheus a sense of consequence resulting from seeking enlightenment and power. Victor is her modern incarnation of Prometheus. He as Prometheus was, is fascinated by the power of electricity (lightning). We can recall from the narrative the moment when he becomes captivated by its fantastical power. It is from this power, that he has equipped himself with, that the inner torture he will suffer from the use of it stems. Immediately following the creation of the creature, Victor is ill with disgust for what he has done. His torture mirrors that of Prometheus; undying and eternal. From the beginning of the novel, when Victor warns Walton of the consequences of his quest, to the conclusion when Victor again reiterates the misfortunes he has suffered as a result of his curiosity, Mary Shelley mimics the Prometheus tale. Perhaps, this is why she saw it as a fitting subtitle.

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