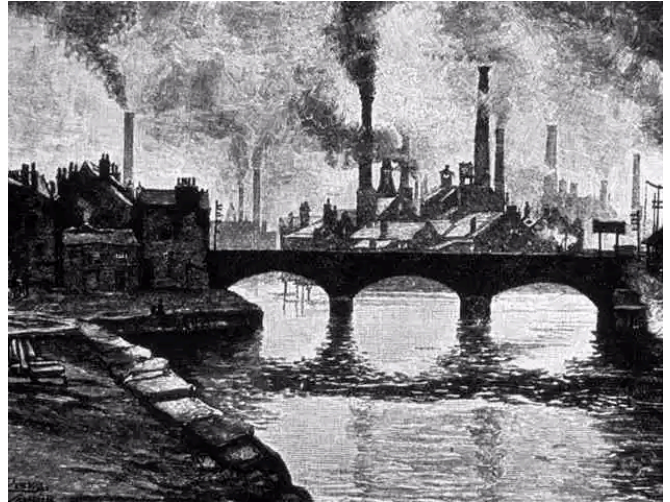


A MARXIST READING OF MARY SHELLY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

With the class divide in society increasing and a generalized anti-capitalist sentiment starting to develop in many countries once again, I think it's an opportune moment to glance back at *Frankenstein*, a monstrous tale ridden with class. A novel I think that forces you to consider the question of who is and who isn't the monster in our society.

In *Frankenstein* we have two primary contestants for the title of monster. On the one hand Victor Frankenstein, an upper class liberal intellectual driven to create what he comes to see as an abomination. On the other hand the 'Monster' itself, a creation abused and rejected from its 'birth' and therefore driven to seek revenge upon human society and its creator in particular.



The most obvious answer is that Frankenstein's Monster is the real monster of the text. However, the Monster can only be portrayed as truly monstrous from a certain point of view. This viewpoint being from that of the wealthy elite, such as Victor

Frankenstein. For the bourgeoisie, the Monster is a nightmarish vision of anarchy and revolt. With its roots in bourgeois and elite society's terror of the growing anger of the working masses, whose actions have sprawled out of the control of authority.



In order to grasp this we have to examine the context in which Mary Shelly was writing. *Frankenstein* was first published in 1818 and so was born into a world of class conflict and rapid industrialization. In the decades leading up to the creation of the novel, the Luddite movement in Britain arose, responding to the worsening economic conditions of the industrial

laborers. The Luddites 'attacked and destroyed machines that were intended to replace human labor, particularly in the trades of weaving and stocking-making.' Shelly was directly connected to the politics surrounding the Luddite movement through her friend Lord Byron. Byron had used his maiden speech in the House of Lords to attack the savage reprisals against the Luddites that had been proposed.. Also, Mary Shelly's husband, Percy Shelly, was concerned with the radical politics of the time.

What was the Luddite movement?

The machine-breaking disturbances that rocked the wool and cotton industries were known as the 'Luddite riots'. The Luddites were named after 'General Ned Ludd' a mythical figure who lived in Sherwood Forest and supposedly led the movement.

In this context, then the Monster takes on a particularly political light. For just like Victor, the ruling classes of Europe have created in the working masses a monster outside of their control, or in the words of Karl Marx 'What the bourgeoisie produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers.'