

## ***Frankenstein* – The Romantic Movement**

The Romantic Movement originated in Germany with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Goethe's play *Faust* (1808–1832) addresses the issue of how man can acquire too much knowledge, how man can make deals with the Devil to get that knowledge, and how man can move from one human experience to another without achieving full satisfaction. Ideas about a new intellectual movement had circulated for some time in continental Europe and drifted across the English Channel to the islands of Great Britain. The earliest Romantic writer was William Blake, who was a printer by trade and whose works transcended art and literature. In England however, it was William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's book of poetry, *Lyrical Ballads*, in 1798 that established the mark of European Romanticism on the British Isles. From this small volume, the criteria for Romantic writing were established.

Romantic writers are concerned with nature, human feelings, compassion for mankind, freedom of the individual and Romantic hero, and rebellion against society. Writers also experiment with the discontent that they feel against all that seems commercial, inhuman, and standardized. Romantics often concern themselves with the rural and rustic life versus the modern life; faraway places and travel to those places; medieval folklore and legends; and the common people. Mary Shelley lived among the practitioners of these concepts and used many of these principles in her novel *Frankenstein*.

The monster is a Romantic hero because of the rejection he must bear from normal society. Wherever he goes, the monster is chased away because of his hideous appearance and his huge size. Shelley is attempting to show the readers how many people in conventional society reject the less than average or disfigured souls who live on the borders of our society. We cannot blame the monster for what happens to him, and Shelley elicits from the reader a sympathetic response for a creature so misunderstood. The monster tries to fit into a regular community, but because he is hideous to look at and does not know the social graces, he can never become part of mainstream society. The monster's response is to overcompensate for his lack of learning and then shun all human contact except when necessary.

Mary Shelley knew many of the famous writers of the time or knew the works of those authors intimately: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Keats, and her husband, Percy Shelley. Mary uses Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* several times in her novel to align her misguided monster with Coleridge's ancient Mariner. Thus, she ties her novel to one of the most authentically Romantic works.

The influence of her husband cannot be disputed and is sometimes the subject of debate among literary scholars. How much did Percy Shelley influence the novel that his wife wrote? Some argue that Percy Shelley wrote the novel under Mary's name; others claim that he had a direct influence upon the writing of the book; while others maintain that Mary was the sole author, with some encouragement from Percy. Nevertheless, the novel was a work that was the product of an obviously fertile mind at a young age. From this viewpoint, *Frankenstein* is the pinnacle of Romantic thought and novel writing.