

# Meet Mary Shelley



*[Frankenstein] offers a rare opportunity to investigate the way that an individual work can merge into general consciousness: how a personal act of imagination may become myth.*

—Christopher Small in *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*

Mary Shelley's fame as a writer rests on a single novel, *Frankenstein*. Millions of people who have never heard of Mary Shelley know her story through the films and other media inspired by the novel. The word "Frankenstein" has become a synonym for monster, and Shelley's tragic tale—about a well-intentioned student of science and his human-like creation—has been given myth-like status.

Born in 1797, Shelley was the daughter of two of England's leading intellectual radicals. Her father, William Godwin, was an influential political philosopher and novelist. Her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, the author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, was a pioneer in promoting women's rights and education. Shelley never knew her mother, who died ten days after giving birth, but she was influenced throughout her life by her mother's writings and reputation.

When Mary was four, her father remarried. Mary received no formal education, but Mr. Godwin encouraged his daughter to read from his well-stocked library. The Godwin household

was also a place of lively intellectual conversation. Many writers visited Godwin to talk about philosophy, politics, science, and literature. When Mary was nine, she and her stepsister hid under a sofa to hear Samuel Taylor Coleridge recite his poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." This popular poem later influenced Shelley as she developed her ideas for *Frankenstein*.

Mary's future husband, the widely admired poet Percy Shelley, was one of her father's frequent visitors. When Mary was sixteen, she and Percy eloped to France. They married in 1816 and lived together for eight years, until Percy's early death. They spent their time traveling in Switzerland, Germany, and Italy, visiting with friends; studying literature, languages, music and art; and writing. In her journal, Shelley described her years with Percy as "romantic beyond romance." Her life during this period was also filled with personal tragedy. She gave birth to four children in five years, three of whom died as infants. Many critics have pointed out that thoughts of birth and death were much on Shelley's mind at the time she wrote *Frankenstein*.

Mary Shelley did not put her name on the novel when it was published in 1818. Many reviewers and readers assumed it was written by Percy Shelley because he had written the preface. Mary Shelley's name was first attached to the novel in the 1831 edition for which she wrote the introduction. Remembering back fifteen years, she explained in the introduction how an eighteen-year-old came to write the unusual novel.

After Percy's death in 1822 in a boating accident, Mary Shelley returned to England and supported herself, her son, and her father with her writings. She wrote four novels, including *The Last Man* (1826), a futuristic story about the destruction of the human race. She also wrote short stories, essays, and travelogues. To preserve her husband's literary legacy, she collected and annotated Percy Shelley's poems for publication. She died in 1851.

# Introducing the Novel

*I busied myself to think of a story, . . . One which would speak to the mysterious fears of our nature and awaken thrilling horror.*

—Mary Shelley

In the introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley explains how she came to write her famous novel. In the summer of 1816, she and Percy Shelley were living near the poet Lord Byron and his doctor-friend John Polidori on Lake Geneva in the Swiss Alps. During a period of incessant rain, the four of them were reading ghost stories to each other when Byron proposed that they each try to write one. For days Shelley could not think of an idea. Then, while she was listening to Lord Byron and Percy discussing the probability of using electricity to create life artificially, according to a theory called galvanism, an idea began to grow in her mind:

*Perhaps a corpse would be re-animated;  
galvanism had given token of such things:  
perhaps the component parts of a creature might  
be manufactured, brought together, and  
[endued] with vital warmth.*

The next day she started work on *Frankenstein*. A year later, she had completed her novel. It was published in 1818, when Shelley was nineteen years old.

*Frankenstein* is an example of a gothic novel. This type of novel was popular between 1760 and 1820. The main ingredients of the gothic novel are mystery, horror, and the supernatural. The word *gothic* itself has several meanings. It can mean harsh or cruel, referring to the barbaric Gothic tribes of the Middle Ages. It can also mean “medieval,” referring to the historical period associated with castles and knights in armor. In literature the term applies to works with a brooding atmosphere that emphasize the unknown and inspire fear. Gothic novels typically feature wild and remote settings, such as haunted castles or wind-blasted moors, and their plots involve violent or mysterious events.

While the atmosphere of Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is nightmarish, the novel is much more than a

horror story. Shelley’s central characters—a young student of science and the man-like being he creates—are both morally complex. Through their conflict, Shelley poses profound questions about science and society and about the positive and destructive sides of human nature. These questions struck a chord with Shelley’s readers in the early 1800s—a time of startling breakthroughs in science and technology and a growing faith in the power of science to improve human life. Today, in a world where scientific advances such as cloning and genetic engineering seem to be redefining life itself, her questions are no less relevant.

## THE TIME AND PLACE

The novel takes place in the late 1700s in various parts of Europe, especially Switzerland and Germany, and in the Arctic. *Frankenstein* was published in 1818 in England at the height of the Romantic movement. This movement in art and literature was based in part on the feeling of optimism about human possibilities that pervaded Western culture after the American and French revolutions.

In England the post-revolutionary period was also a time of economic suffering and social disorder as the new industrialism transformed English society. Shelley’s readers lived in hopeful, but also disturbingly turbulent, times.

The Romantic movement, which lasted from about 1798 to 1832, pulled away from the period known as the Enlightenment, which emphasized reason and logic. English writers of the Romantic period believed in the importance of the individual. They valued subjectivity, imagination, and the expression of emotions over rational thought. The typical Romantic hero, found especially in the poetry of Lord Byron and Percy Shelley, is passionate, uninhibited, and unconventional. Often the hero is an artist who is a social rebel or a melancholy outcast from society.

The Romantic poets, including William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John

Keats, and Percy Shelley, transport their readers to the private worlds of the poets' imaginations. Often, they isolate themselves in nature and celebrate its beauty or its elemental rawness.

They were also attracted to stories and settings from the past. Percy Shelley, for example, made Prometheus, the symbol of creative striving in Greek mythology, the hero of his poetic drama *Prometheus Unbound*.

Mary Shelley's gothic novel *Frankenstein* was labeled "romantic fiction" by an early reviewer. It is a powerful work of imagination that uses exotic natural settings and emphasizes the emotions of fear and awe. Many scholars also see her novel as a critique of Romantic ideals. The "modern Prometheus" she holds up for readers' evaluation, Dr. Frankenstein, is an ambiguous character who may or may not be worthy of our admiration.

### Did You Know?

In the early 1800s, scientists were on the verge of discovering the potential of electricity. At this time, scientists knew about the existence of static electricity as well as electricity produced by lightning. But they were just beginning to discover that electricity could be produced by a chemical reaction.

In the 1780s, Luigi Galvani, a professor of anatomy in Bologna, Italy, conducted experiments on animal tissue using a machine that could produce electrical sparks. He concluded that animal tissue contained electricity in the

form of a fluid. Galvani's theory of "animal electricity" was shown to be incorrect, but he had proven that muscles contracted in response to an electrical stimulus. His research opened the way to new discoveries about the operation of nerves and muscles and showed that electrical forces exist in living tissue. In the novel, Frankenstein learns about the controversial theory of "galvanism" as part of his scientific training at a university in Germany. Today, galvanism refers to a direct current of electricity produced by a chemical reaction.



## Biography Resource Center

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### Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley

**Also known as:** Mary Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley, Mrs. Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Wollenstonecraft Shelley

**Birth:** August 30, 1797 in London, England

**Death:** February 1, 1851 in Bournemouth, England

**Nationality:** English

**Occupation:** novelist

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### BIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797-1851) is best known for her novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818), which has transcended the Gothic and horror genres and is now recognized as a work of philosophical and psychological resonance. In addition to *Frankenstein*, Shelley's literary works include several novels that were mildly successful in their time but are little known today and an edition of poetry by her husband, the Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, which she issued with notes that are now regarded as indispensable. Her reputation rests, however, on what she once called her "hideous progeny," *Frankenstein*.

Shelley's personal life has sometimes overshadowed her literary work. She was the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft, the early feminist and author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, and William Godwin, the political philosopher and novelist. Her parents' wedding, which occurred when Wollstonecraft was five months pregnant with Mary, was the marriage of two of the day's most noted freethinkers. While they both objected to the institution of matrimony, they agreed to marry to ensure their child's legitimacy. Ten days after Mary's birth, Wollstonecraft died from complications, leaving Godwin, an undemonstrative and self-absorbed intellectual, to care for both Mary and Fanny Imlay, Wollstonecraft's daughter from an earlier liaison. Mary's home life improved little with the arrival four years later of a stepmother and her two children. The new Mrs. Godwin, whom contemporaries described as petty and disagreeable, favored her own offspring over the daughters of the celebrated Wollstonecraft, and Mary was often solitary and unhappy. She was not formally educated, but absorbed the intellectual atmosphere created by her father and such visitors as Samuel Taylor Coleridge. She read a wide variety of books, notably those of her mother, whom she idolized. Young Mary's favorite retreat was Wollstonecraft's grave in the St. Pancras churchyard, where she went to read and write and eventually to meet her lover, Percy Shelley.

An admirer of Godwin, Percy Shelley visited the author's home and briefly met Mary when she was fourteen, but their attraction did not take hold until a subsequent meeting two years later. Shelley, twenty-two, was married, and his wife was expecting their second child, but he and Mary, like Godwin and Wollstonecraft, believed that ties of the heart superseded legal ones. In July 1814, one month before her seventeenth birthday, Mary eloped with Percy to the Continent, where, apart from two interludes in England, they spent the next few years traveling in Switzerland, Germany, and Italy. These years were characterized by financial difficulty and personal tragedy. Percy's father, Sir Timothy Shelley, a wealthy baronet, cut off his son's substantial allowance after his elopement. In 1816, Mary's half-sister Fanny committed suicide; just weeks later, Percy's wife, Harriet, drowned herself. Mary and Percy were married in London, in part because they hoped to gain custody of his two children by Harriet, but custody was denied. Three of their own children died in infancy, and Mary fell into a deep

depression that was barely dispelled by the birth in 1819 of Percy Florence, her only surviving child. The Shelleys' marriage suffered, too, in the wake of their children's deaths, and Percy formed romantic attachments to other women. Despite these trying circumstances, both Mary and Percy maintained a schedule of rigorous study—including classical and European literature, Greek, Latin, and Italian language, music and art—and ambitious writing; during this period Mary completed *Frankenstein* and another novel, *Valperga* (1823). The two also enjoyed a coterie of stimulating friends, notably Lord Byron and Leigh Hunt. The Shelleys were settled near Lenci, Italy, on the Gulf of Spezzia in 1822 when Percy drowned during a storm while sailing to meet Leigh and Marianne Hunt. After one mournful year in Italy, Mary returned permanently to England with her son.

Shelley's life after Percy's death was marked by melancholy and hardship as she struggled to support herself and her child. Sir Timothy Shelley offered her a meager stipend, but ordered that she keep the Shelley name out of print; thus, all her works were published anonymously. In addition to producing four novels in the years after Percy's death, Mary contributed a series of biographical and critical sketches to *Chamber's Cabinet Cyclopaedia*, as well as occasional short stories, which she considered potboilers, to the literary annuals of the day. The Shelleys' financial situation improved when Sir Timothy increased Percy Florence's allowance with his coming of age in 1840, which enabled mother and son to travel in Italy and Germany; their journeys are recounted in *Rambles in Germany and Italy in 1840, 1842, and 1843* (1844). Too ill in her last few years to complete her most cherished project, a biography of her husband, Shelley died at age fifty-four.

Although *Frankenstein* has consistently dominated critical discussions of Shelley's oeuvre, she also composed several other novels in addition to critical and biographical writings. Her five later novels attracted little notice, and critics generally agree that they share the faults of verbosity and awkward plotting. After *Frankenstein*, *The Last Man* (1826) is her best-known work. This novel, in which Shelley describes the destruction of the human race in the twenty-first century, is noted as an inventive depiction of the future and an early prototype of science fiction. *Valperga* and *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck* (1830) are historical novels that have received scant attention from literary critics, while *Lodore* (1835) and *Falkner* (1837), thought by many to be autobiographical, are often examined for clues to the lives of the Shelleys and their circle. Shelley's stories were collected and published posthumously, as was *Mathilda*, a novella that appeared for the first time in the 1950s. The story of a father and daughter's incestuous attraction, it has been viewed as a fictional treatment—or distortion—of Shelley's relationship with Godwin. The posthumously published verse dramas, *Proserpine* and *Midas* (1922), were written to complement one of Percy Shelley's works and have garnered mild praise for their poetry. Critics also admire Shelley's non-fiction: the readable, though now dated, travel volumes, the essays for *Chamber's Cabinet Cyclopaedia*, which are considered vigorous and erudite, and her illuminating notes on her husband's poetry.

Since Shelley's death, critics have devoted nearly all of their attention to *Frankenstein*. Early critics, generally with some dismay, usually relegated the novel to the Gothic genre then practiced by such popular authors as Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Gregory "Monk" Lewis. While most early Victorian reviewers reviled what they considered the sensationalist and gruesome elements in *Frankenstein*, many praised the anonymous author's imagination and powers of description. In the later nineteenth century and throughout *Frankenstein* criticism, commentators have focused on Prometheanism in the novel, an aspect that Shelley herself highlighted in the book's subtitle. This line of inquiry, which continues to engage critics, likens Dr. Frankenstein to the Greek mythic figure who wreaks his own destruction through abuse of power. Percy Shelley treated the same mythic-philosophic theme in his poetry, most notably in *Prometheus Unbound*, and critics have searched for his influence on *Frankenstein*, particularly in the expression of Romantic ideals and attitudes. Scholars have also debated the value of the additional narratives that he encouraged her to write. While some have praised the novel's resulting three-part structure, others have argued that these additions detract from and merely pad the story, although most have valued the other-worldly Arctic scenes. Commentators have also frequently noted the influence of Shelley's father, tracing strains of Godwin's humanitarian social views; in addition, some critics have found direct thematic links to his fiction, particularly to his novel, *Caleb Williams*. Other literary allusions often noted in *Frankenstein* include those to John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the source of the book's epigraph, as well as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust* and Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

*Frankenstein* criticism has proliferated since the 1950s, encompassing a wide variety of themes and approaches. The monster, who is often the focus of commentary, has been interpreted as representing issues ranging from the alienation of modern humanity to the repression of women. Many commentators have viewed the monster as Dr. Frankenstein's double, an example of the doppelgänger archetype. In a similar vein, critics have discussed Dr. Frankenstein and the monster as embodying Sigmund Freud's theory of id and ego. Students of the Gothic, supernatural horror, and science fiction novel have adopted *Frankenstein* as a venerable forebear and have approached it from a historical slant. Alternately, Shelley's life has served as a starting point for those who perceive in the novel expressions of the author's feelings toward her parents, husband, children, and friends. Recent feminist critics, in particular, have found Shelley and *Frankenstein* a rich source for study, describing it, for example, as a manifestation of the author's ambivalent feelings toward motherhood.

Leigh Hunt once characterized Shelley as "four-famed—for her parents, her lord / And the poor lone impossible monster abhorr'd." Today, she has emerged from the shadow of her parents and husband as an artist in her own right. The volume and variety of *Frankenstein* criticism attests to the endurance of her vision.

In the central pages of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein or, The Modern Prometheus* the reader encounters for some six chapters a personal narrative of the monster. For the first time since his creation, he is approaching his maker who sits sad and pensive near the awful majesty of Mont Blanc. Conscious of his "duties as a creator towards his creature," Frankenstein agrees to listen to the tale of this blighted being who has developed from a *tabula rasa*, experiencing in true Lockean fashion first confused, then distinct sensations, and developing in turn social affections, then moral and intellectual judgments. Crucial to his learning, we discover, has been a leather portmanteau, found one day in the forest where he has hidden himself from the eyes of mankind, and in which are contained, together with some articles of dress, a volume of Plutarch's *Lives*, [Goethe's] *Sorrows of Werter*, and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The latter, he explains, has had a most profound effect upon him:

I read it [*Paradise Lost*], as I had read the other volumes which had fallen into my hands, as a true history.... I often referred the several situations, as their similarity struck me, to my own. Like Adam, I was apparently united by no link to any other being in existence; but his state was far different from mine in every other respect. He had come forth from the hands of God a perfect creature, happy and prosperous, guarded by the especial care of his Creator; he was allowed to converse with, and acquire knowledge from, beings of a superior nature: but I was wretched, helpless, and alone. Many times I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition; for often, like him, when I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall of envy rose within me.

This is no idle image which the creature evokes here, comparing his own situation with Satan's, and with Adam's paradisaic state in Eden. The confusion apparent in his own consciousness--whether he is an Adam, destined ultimately for eternal grace, or a Satan, doomed to eternal darkness--is a motif crucial to the entire novel. It is crucial to the monster's tale, embedded as the innermost circle of the text. It is crucial to Frankenstein's narrative, which, unfolded to Captain Walton, encircles the monster's tale like the middle ring of a vast inferno. And it is crucial to Walton's letters, which hover about the outermost fringes of these depths. Indeed, these three circles--their relationship to one another and to the Miltonic motif--form the basic structure of the novel, a structure from which Mrs. Shelley has spun a moral web, with consistency and with precision....

To examine [*Frankenstein*] for the terror it evokes, without perceiving its relationship to the moral context of early nineteenth-century England, is, in reality, to distort the essence of the tale.

We encounter the first indications of this moral context in the letters of Captain Walton, who has been inspired since early youth to satiate an ardent curiosity about the unknown regions of the earth....

One major failing seems to threaten Walton's relentless pursuit: the lack of compassionate society, "intimate sympathy with a fellow mind." Significantly, Walton regards this want as "a most severe evil" and he readily acknowledges that "a man could boast of little happiness, who did not enjoy this blessing."

Once he encounters Victor Frankenstein amid the ice floes of the north, this conflict--between his thirst for knowledge which increasingly carries him away from society and a thirst for social love which is frustrated by this pursuit of knowledge--appears happily reconciled. His newly-found friend reminds him, however, "You seek for knowledge and wisdom, as I once did," and hopes that Walton's temptation "may not be a serpent to sting you, as mine has been." In order that Walton might "deduce an apt moral" from his own experience, Frankenstein consents to disclose the secret of his life.

Frankenstein's tale, forming the middle circle of the novel, is clearly intended, then, as an *exemplum*, aimed at weaning the captain from his obsession. Just as Walton's opening letters sound this didactic note, so do his closing epistles. "Learn my miseries, and do not seek to increase your own," Walton is cautioned at the close of Frankenstein's narrative, just as he has been previously warned: "Learn from me, if not from my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge."...

An examination of Frankenstein's central narrative reveals that this opening motif, the temptation of knowledge and the punishment of estrangement, is echoed with consistency and clarity.

From the beginning Frankenstein is "deeply smitten with the thirst for knowledge." He too is tempted by the forbidden fruit, and his earliest sensations are "curiosity, earnest research to learn the hidden laws of nature." For him "the world was ... a secret which I desired to divine," and even in his youth his "inquiries were directed to the metaphysical, or, in its highest sense, the physical secrets of the world."...

Like Prometheus--whom Apollodorus describes as having first created man out of clay, then instilled into his bosom a sacred spark of fire, stolen from the heavens--Frankenstein, his nineteenth-century disciple, succeeds in infusing "a spark of being into the lifeless being" that lies before him in his laboratory.... What is glory for the omnipotent deity of *Genesis* or the Babylonian god Bel, for the Egyptian father-of-gods Khnoumou or the Australian creator Pund-jel, is for lesser gods, like

Frankenstein, the "modern Prometheus," a crime. The apple of knowledge bears within it the acrid seeds of punishment. As with Satan and Beelzebub, this passion to usurp divine prerogatives casts the new creator into a burning cauldron of his own making....

Like Coleridge's guilt-ridden mariner, Frankenstein has a deadly weight hanging round his neck, bowing him to the ground.... His father had wished him "to seek amusement in society [but] I abhorred the face of man," Frankenstein admits. "I felt that I had no right to share their intercourse." Now, he reveals only the "desire to avoid society" and fly "to solitude, from the society of every creature." ... He is "immersed in solitude," for he perceives "an insurmountable barrier" between him and his fellow-man. "I felt as if I had committed some great crime, the consciousness of which haunted me. I was guiltless, but I had indeed drawn down a horrible curse upon my head, as mortal as that of crime," ... he confesses. Though his inner-being longs for the compassion and sympathy that society affords, his guilt has already driven him out of love's garden. He dares not even whisper "paradisaical dreams of love and joy" to Elizabeth, for, as he readily concedes, "the apple was already eaten, and the angel's arm bared to drive me from all hope." ...

[In] his final hours of life, he confesses to Robert Walton the sin he shares with Milton's archangel:

All my speculations and hopes are as nothing; and, like the archangel who aspired to omnipotence, I am chained in an eternal hell.... I conceived the idea and executed the creation of a man. Even now I cannot recollect without passion my reveries while the work was incomplete. I trod heaven in my thoughts, now exulting in my powers, now burning with the idea of their effects. From my infancy I was imbued with high hopes and a lofty ambition; but how am I sunk! ...

Although parallels between the temptations of Frankenstein or Walton and those of Adam or Satan are clearly delineated, it would be a grave distortion to force the analogy without noting pertinent differences. Milton's is a seventeenth-century reinterpretation of the Fall described by the Jehovistic writer of *Genesis*; but Milton's narrative also parallels to no small degree the Hellenic myth of Prometheus who having usurped the powers of the higher gods, is alienated forever from both men and gods, and chained to the frozen top of the Caucasus. This is an allusion of which Mrs. Shelley was certainly conscious, since she refers to Frankenstein as a "Modern Prometheus" in her sub-title. Also, Shelley himself was obviously aware of the structural similarity between Milton's narrative and the Greek myth, for in his preface to *Prometheus Unbound* he remarks that "the only imaginary being resembling in any degree Prometheus, is Satan." Parallels for Mrs. Shelley's handling of the guilt-theme, however, can also be found in Dostoyevsky and Kafka, or in Jung who suggests that "every step towards greater consciousness is a kind of Promethean guilt: through knowledge, the gods are as it were robbed of their fire, that is, something that was the property of the unconscious powers is torn out of its natural context and subordinated to the whims of the conscious mind."

But Frankenstein's guilt is not the psychological and mystic soul-searching of Kafka or Dostoyevsky, just as it is never completely the crime of *hubris* manifested in Aeschylus or the failure to recognize derivation which we discern in Milton. Frankenstein's crime, like Walton's, is social. Both sin against society. In syncretizing the Miltonic and Promethean motif Mrs. Shelley has clearly translated her materials into early nineteenth-century terms, just as Keats revised the myth of Endymion, and as Shelley transformed the story of Prometheus within his own contemporary framework.

Walton and Frankenstein both sin, not against self or God, but against the moral and social order. Though both begin their pursuit with benevolent intentions, each discovers his error in assuming that knowledge is a higher good than love or sympathy, and that it can be independent of the fellow-feeling afforded by a compassionate society. As a result, what had appeared initially as a benevolent intention becomes in the final analysis misguided pride, a selfish pursuit aimed at self-glory, because it evades the fulfillment of higher duties toward the social community, the brotherhood of man which forms the highest good. Understandably, then, Mrs. Shelley's book is paralleled most significantly, not by Aeschylus or Milton, but by her own contemporaries. In Byron's *Manfred*, for example, an analogous "quest of hidden knowledge" leads the hero increasingly toward a "solitude ... peopled with the Furies." Manfred's avowed flaw ("though I wore the form, / I had no sympathy with breathing flesh") rises from the same ethical assumptions implicit in the guilt-ridden consciousness of Victor Frankenstein. Similarly, Shelley's prefatory remarks on *Alastor or, The Spirit of Solitude* indicate that "the Poet's self-centred seclusion was avenged by the furies of an irresistible passion pursuing him to speedy ruin." Shelley's supposition, that "the intellectual faculties, the imagination, the functions of sense, have their respective requisitions on the sympathy of corresponding powers in other human beings," is obviously engendered from the same general principle which has ordered the materials of *Frankenstein*.

Mrs. Shelley offers in her novel--as does Byron in *Manfred* and Shelley in *Alastor*--a theme which is clearly in the tradition of Cudworth and Price, the seventeenth-century Platonists. This is a conception inherited in the eighteenth century by Shaftesbury and Hutcheson; later, by the Scottish Common-Sense School, as represented by Adam Smith; and finally by William Godwin, who had assumed as basic to his doctrine of political justice that virtue is essentially social. Insistent that reason and free will, as developed in an enlightened society, would naturally result in the subordination of individual pleasures for the good of society as a whole, Godwin set himself in opposition to La Rochefoucauld, Hobbes, and



Mandeville, for whom man was basically selfish and non-social, and to Rousseau, who had seen society as a force destructive to natural benevolence. "No being can be either virtuous, or vicious, who has no opportunity of influencing the happiness of others," Godwin had contended in his *Enquiry concerning Political Justice*, insistent that "the true solitaire cannot be considered as a moral being.... His conduct is vicious, because it has a tendency to render him miserable." Explaining that "virtue consists in a desire of the happiness of the species.... It must begin with a collective idea of the human species," Godwin argues that true knowledge is also dependent upon the social structure. "Even knowledge, and the enlargement of intellect, are poor, when unmixed with sentiments of benevolence and sympathy," he points out; "... and science and abstraction will soon become cold, unless they derive new attractions from ideas of society."

Similarly, Thomas Paine develops the relationship between happiness and social virtues in *The Rights of Man*. Since nature created man for social life, Paine writes, "no one man is capable, without the aid of society, of supplying his own wants; and those wants, acting upon every individual, impel the whole of them into society, as naturally as gravitation acts to a centre." Nature has gone even further than this, Paine continues. "She has implanted in him a system of social affections, which, though not necessary to his existence, are essential to his happiness. There is no period in life when this love of society ceases to act. It begins and ends with our being."...

Through Mrs. Shelley's journal entries we know that during 1816-1817, when *Frankenstein* was conceived, she and Shelley discussed the work many times. We know, too, through the *Journal*, that in these years she and Shelley both read Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and that Shelley was immersed at this same time in Godwin's *Political Justice* and Paine's *The Rights of Man*, as well as in the *Prometheus Bound* of Aeschylus. I do not mean to imply that Mary Shelley borrowed her social and moral conceptions from Paine, or from Shelley or Godwin, then deliberately embodied them within her mythological framework. It is perfectly understandable that she shared the social thought of her father and her husband, and that she wove these ideas, which were shared also by many of the enlightened English public during those decades, into an esthetic pattern of her own making.

The consistency of her social and moral theme is certainly nowhere more apparent than in the narrative of the monster, whose experience forms an essential parallel with that of Frankenstein and Walton. Like the latter, whose original intentions were directed at benevolence and sympathy, the creature initially bears the seeds of virtue. The sympathies of Walton and Frankenstein have been rendered torpid by their monomaniacal pursuit of knowledge which removes them increasingly from a compassionate society; similarly, the creature discovers that his sympathies are perpetually blunted by the misery of loneliness and isolation, estranged as he must be from human kind. At first, he views "crime as a distant evil; benevolence and generosity were ever present" in the persons of the DeLaceys, behind whose cottage he has hidden. "My heart yearned to be known and loved by these amiable creatures: to see their sweet looks directed towards me with affection was the utmost limit of my ambition," he confesses. His readings only reinforce this natural propensity for social love, so that before long he feels "the greatest ardour for virtue ... and abhorrence for vice." ...

Like his maker, and like Captain Walton, the creature soon comes to realize that "sorrow only increased with knowledge," ... for the more he learns about the nature of good and its dependence upon social intercourse, the more he recognizes the impossibility of immersing himself in it....

Alternating between the role of Adam and Satan, hoping he might still be lifted to the glories of love and sympathy, but fearing that he might be forced into the depths of malevolence and depravity because of his isolation, the creature soon finds his fate determined, once the DeLaceys reject his friendly advances, just as all mankind has rejected him beforehand. "From that moment I declared everlasting war against the species," he admits. "I, like the arch-fiend, bore a hell within me; and, finding myself unsympathized with, wished to ... spread havoc and destruction." ... Natural proclivities toward virtue compel the creature to approach his maker and urge him to create a mate "with whom I can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being.... I am malicious because I am miserable," he explains, as he begs for the happiness which is his right. "Let me feel gratitude towards you for one benefit! Let me see that I excite the sympathy of some existing thing; do not deny me my request." ... With an understanding strikingly analogous to that revealed in Godwin, Shelley, Byron, and Paine, the monster describes his moral state:

If I have no ties and no affections, hatred and vice must be my portion; the love of another will destroy the cause of my crimes, and I shall become a thing of whose existence every one will be ignorant. My vices are the children of a forced solitude that I abhor; and my virtues will necessarily arise when I live in communion with an equal. I shall feel the affections of a sensitive being, and become linked to the chain of existence and events, from which I am now excluded....

In an 1817 review which has generally been ignored [see excerpt above], Shelley draws some interesting parallels between Godwin's *Caleb Williams* and *Frankenstein*, and summarizes thematic development in Mary Shelley's book with penetrating incisiveness:

... The crimes and malevolence of the single Being, though indeed withering and tremendous, [are not] the

offspring of any unaccountable propensity to evil, but flow irresistibly from certain causes fully adequate to their production. They are the children, as it were, of Necessity and Human Nature. In this the direct moral of the book consists.... Treat a person ill, and he will become wicked. Require affection with scorn;--let one being be selected, for whatever cause, as the refuse of his kind--divide him, a social being, from society, and you impose upon him the irresistible obligations--malevolence and selfishness. It is thus that, too often in society, those who are best qualified to be its benefactors and its ornaments, are branded by some accident with scorn, and changed, by neglect and solitude of heart, into a scourge and a curse.

The distinction which Shelley draws here between an "unaccountable propensity to evil" and that necessitated by external social forces which isolate the individual, thus causing selfishness and malevolence, points indeed to the "direct moral of the book." Although a recent biographer [Elizabeth Nitchie], noting this theme of estrangement throughout Mrs. Shelley's novels, interprets this as the author's "symbol of her own loneliness," it is apparent in any close examination of the text that "loneliness" assumes its fullest meaning relative only to the social and moral context of early nineteenth-century England. This is the context of Godwin and Paine, as well as Byron and Shelley, and certainly the context of the woman who came to be known as "the author of *Frankenstein*."

## PERSONAL INFORMATION

Born August 30, 1797, in London, England; died of complications from a brain tumor, February 1, 1851, in Bournemouth, England; buried in the churchyard of St. Peter's, Bournemouth; daughter of William (a philosopher and writer) and Mary (a writer; maiden name, Wollstonecraft) Godwin; married Percy Bysshe Shelley, December 30, 1816 (died, 1822); children: first child, a daughter (died in infancy), William (died, 1819), Clara Everina (died, 1818), Percy Florence.

## CHRONOLOGY

### • The Life and Times of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797-1851)

- **At the time of Shelley's birth:**
  - George III was king of England
  - John Adams was president of the U.S.
  - Johann Wolfgang von Goethe published epic pastoral poem, "Hermann and Dorothea"
  - Britain issued first copper pennies and one pound notes
- **At the time of Shelley's death:**
  - Seattle was founded in Oregon Territory
  - Franklin Pierce was president of the U.S.
  - Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* was published
  - London was the world's largest city with a population of 2.37 million
  - First successful cable was laid between Dover and Calais under the English Channel
- **The times:**
  - 1792-1815: Napoleonic Wars
  - 1795-1815: Napoleonic Era
  - 1798-1870: Romantic Period in English literature
  - 1812-1814: War of 1812
  - 1830-1914: Industrial Revolution
- **Shelley's contemporaries:**
  - John Keats (1795-1821) English writer
  - Nicholas I (1796-1855) Russian tsar
  - Mary Lyon (1797-1849) American educator
  - Franz Schubert (1797-1828) Austrian composer
  - Honore de Balzac (1799-1850) French writer
  - Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837) Russian writer
- **Selected world events:**

- 1799: Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, was founded at Camberley, England
- 1818: Samuel Woodworth's "The Old Oaken Bucket" was a popular song in the U.S.
- 1824: Portland cement was patented by English bricklayer Joseph Aspdin
- 1836: 75 percent of gainfully employed Americans were engaged in agriculture
- 1840: U.S. population was 90 percent rural
- 1850: University of Sydney was founded in Australia

## WORKS

- *Mounseer Nongtongpaw; or, The Discoveries of John Bull in a Trip to Paris*, [London], 1808.
- *History of a Six Weeks' Tour through a Part of France, Switzerland, Germany, and Holland, with Letters Descriptive of a Sail round the Lake of Geneva, and of the Glaciers of Chamouni*, Hookham, 1817.
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- *Valperga; or, The Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca*, three volumes, Whittaker, 1823.
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- *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck*, three volumes, Colburn & Bentley, 1830, two volumes, Carey, Lea, & Blanchard, 1834.
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- *The Journals of Mary Shelley*, two volumes, edited by Paula Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert, Clarendon Press, 1987.
- *Maurice; or, The Fisher's Cot*, edited by Claire Tomalin, Knopf

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- Gerson, Noel B., *Daughter of Earth and Water: A Biography of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, Morrow, 1973.
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## SOURCE CITATION

"Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley." *Encyclopedia of World Biography*, 2nd ed. 17 Vols. Gale Research, 1998. Reproduced in *Biography Resource Center*. Farmington Hills, Mich.: Thomson Gale. 2007. <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/BioRC>

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## E312: British Literature since 1760

### Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* Study Questions

Alfred J. Drake. Office: 424 University Hall  
Office Hours: TTH 9:45-10:45 + appt. Phone: 714-434-1612

#### Home | Syllabus | Policies

**Extra-Credit Journal Instructions:** Respond to 10 questions (the total applies to the book as a whole, so you would only need to respond to ten questions for the entire volume). The responses need not be lengthy, but they should be thoughtful -- a few sentences may prove sufficient for some responses, while others may require a paragraph.

#### Book 1

1. How does the presence of Robert Walton in this book affect the text's treatment of science? What is his scientific motivation and goal? How does it differ from the scientific quest that Victor Frankenstein relates?
2. Describe the relationship that develops between Walton and Victor Frankenstein when he and his crew meet the doctor on their way to the North Pole. Does their relationship parallel that between the doctor and the being that he has created? If so, how?
3. On pages 922 and following, what is the significance of the relationship between Victor and his cousin Elizabeth? How do their differences complement each other?
4. How does Victor describe (page 924 *Norton* and following) the way he came to pursue knowledge in the natural sciences? What does he at first find lacking in modern natural science, and what makes him at last find such modern studies and methods attractive?
5. On 931 and following, how does Victor describe his discovery of the life principle? Does the discovery itself bring about a further change in his attitude towards scientific endeavor? If so, describe the change.
6. What goes wrong once Victor dares to apply his understanding of "animation" to material substance -- i.e. to a human body? How, that is, do his methods and material underscore and embody the grotesqueness of his quest? When he speaks of the Being he has created, what kind of language does he employ?
7. To what extent is the romantic conception of "imagination" involved in Victor's actions as a creator? How might his creation of the Being be a parody of the poetic or creative process -- i.e. a misuse of imagination?
8. What powers does the text attribute to nature with regard to human happiness? Follow out the fluctuations in Victor's relationship to and interpretations of his natural environment.
9. What is the significance of Book 1's many references to the domestic tranquility of the Frankenstein household -- at least before little William is murdered and Justine is falsely convicted of the crime and executed?

10. On page 947 and following, how does Victor interpret the devastation that has been visited upon his family? How might William's murder and Justine's execution amount to "poetic justice" against Victor for his own misdeeds?

11. Trace the "light" imagery in Book 1 -- what are the connotations of "light" at various points in the book?

## **Book 2**

1. Why can't ordinary humans accept the Being's appearance? What does this inability imply about the basis of human community? In other words, why so much emphasis on physical similarity or dissimilarity?

2. In Book 2, the Being tells the story of his initial moments of consciousness. Describe some of his first impressions about himself and nature and comment on what you find significant about them.

3. As his narrative develops, we hear about his impressions of language's value and the nature and habits of other human beings. Describe some of those views and comment on what you find significant about them.

4. How does the Being's narrative as a whole *not* fully reflect Adam's account of his creation in *Paradise Lost*? See **Adam and Eve's First Impressions** from *PL*. How, that is, does the Being arrive at the desire to seek his creator?

5. Why does the Being keep comparing himself to Milton's Satan -- what do they have in common?

## **Book 3 and General Questions**

1. Why might it be construed as "poetic justice" (of an infernal sort) that Victor Frankenstein's worst catastrophe comes just as he is to be married?

2. Describe the cycle of vengeance that consumes both the Being and Victor in Book 3. Does either one truly renounce this sentiment?

3. After having read *Frankenstein*, who has your sympathies -- Victor or the Being he has created? Or neither? Explain.

4. Discuss the final usage made of fire and the natural setting. Why is it significant that the Being determines to immolate himself? Why is it appropriate that he will do this when he reaches the North Pole?

5. Has Walter the scientist learned anything from Victor? If so, what has he learned? If not, why not?

6. Does Mary Shelley's novel conform to what you take to be the typically romantic view of scientific endeavor? Why or why not?

7. What are some "romantic" elements about the novel?

\* Choose "Print" from your browser to print the document. Choose "Back" on your browser to return to the document.

## An overview of *Frankenstein*

**Critic:** George V. Griffith

**Source:** *Exploring Novels*, Gale, 1998

**Criticism about:** Mary Wollstonecraft (Godwin) Shelley (1797-1851), **also known as:** Mary (Wollstonecraft Godwin) Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley

**Nationality:** British; English

[Griffith is a professor of English and philosophy at Chadron State College in Chadron, Nebraska. In the following essay, he considers *Frankenstein* as a novel that both represents and goes beyond the ideas of the Romantic era.]

Perhaps no book is more of its age than *Frankenstein*. Written and published in 1816–1818, *Frankenstein* typifies the most important ideas of the Romantic era, among them the primacy of feelings, the dangers of intellect, dismay over the human capacity to corrupt our natural goodness, the agony of the questing, solitary hero, and the awesome power of the sublime. Its Gothic fascination with the dual nature of humans and with the figurative power of dreams anticipates the end of the nineteenth century and the discovery of the unconscious and the dream life. The story of its creation, which the author herself tells in a "Preface" to the third edition to the book (1831), is equally illuminating about its age. At nineteen, Mary Godwin was living in the summer of 1816 with the poet Percy Shelley, visiting another famous Romantic poet, Lord Byron, and his doctor at Byron's Swiss villa when cold, wet weather drove them all indoors. Byron proposed that they entertain themselves by writing, each of them, a ghost story. On an evening when Byron and Shelley had been talking about galvanism and human life, whether an electric current could be passed through tissue to animate it, Mary Shelley went to bed and in a half-dream state thought of the idea for *Frankenstein*. She awoke from the nightmarish vision of a "pale student of unhallowed arts" terrified by the "yellow, watery... eyes" of his creation staring at him to stare herself at the moon outside rising over the Alps. The next morning she wrote the first sentence of chapter five: "It was on a dreary night of November that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils." With Percy Shelley's encouragement and in spite of a failed childbirth and the suicide of a half-sister, over the next several months she worked on the story. It was completed in 1817 and published the following year, the only successful "ghost" story of that evening, perhaps the most widely known ever written.

Shelley's was an age in which heart triumphed over head. Frankenstein's moral failure is his heedless pursuit to know all that he might about life without taking any responsibility for his acts. His "sin" is not solely in creating the monster, but in abandoning him to orphanhood at his birth. The monster's unnatural birth is the product of what the Romantic poet Wordsworth called humankind's "meddling intellect." Childlike in his innocence, the monster wants only to be loved, but he gets love from neither his "father" nor from any other in the human community.

Behind the novel's indictment of the intellect stand three important myths to which Shelley alludes. She subtitles her book "A Modern Prometheus," linking Victor Frankenstein to the heroic but ultimately tragic figure of Greek myth who contended with the gods, stole fire from them to give to humans, and was punished by Zeus by being chained on Mount Caucasus to have vultures eat his liver. Her husband Percy Shelley wrote a closet drama, *Prometheus Unbound*, and fellow Romantic poets Byron and Coleridge were also attracted to and wrote about a figure of defiant ambition. The story of Faust, like the Prometheus myth, also involves one who would trade everything to satisfy an aggressive and acquisitive intellect. Finally, Adam's fall from grace came of his eating of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. All are unhappy with the limits life places on them; all challenge those limits; all suffer great loss. Such is Victor Frankenstein's story, one which Walton appears about to

replicate on his journey to the Pole. Walton tells Frankenstein,

“I would sacrifice my fortune, my existence, my every hope, to the furtherance of my enterprise. One man's life or death were but a small price to pay for the acquirement of the knowledge which I sought, for the dominion I should acquire and transmit over the elemental foes of our race.”

Frankenstein, to whom “life and death appeared... ideal bounds” to be broken through, succeeds in his intellectual pursuit but at great cost. He loses friend, brother, and wife. He loses all contact and sympathy with the human community. At both the beginning and end of the novel, he is the most alienated figure, alone, in mad pursuit in a desolate spot on the earth.

The novel's structure enhances these ideas. It is a framed narrative with a story within a story within a story. At the outer layer the novel is framed by the letters which Walton writes to his sister while he is voyaging to the Pole, a Frankenstein-like figure consumed by an intellectual ambition, heedless of feeling, alienated and unbefriended. His drama is internal, his isolation all the more clear in the one-way communication the letters afford. The next layer is Frankenstein's story, told because he has the opportunity before his death to deter one like himself from the same tragic consequences. Finally, although the novel is titled *Frankenstein*, the monster is at its structural center, his voice the most compelling because the most felt. Perhaps not coincidentally, in the popular imagination, the word “Frankenstein” conjures in most minds not Victor but the monster, although popular treatments of the story on stage and film have half-misconstrued Shelley's purpose by focusing only on the monster as a terrible being.

That the monster begs for our pity, that he descends from his native-born goodness to become a “malignant devil,” illustrates another notion familiar to Shelley generally in her age and particularly in her family. Her father, William Godwin, had written *Political Justice* (1793) and her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, had written *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), both works on social injustices. These leading philosophical radicals of the day believed that, as Rousseau put it, “Man is born free and is everywhere is chains,” that in our civilizations we corrupt what is by nature innocent. The monster is not evil; he is transformed into evil by a human injustice, an Adam made into a Satan. “I was benevolent and good,” he says; “misery made me a fiend.” The De Laceys, unjustly expelled from society, represent the possibility of our restoration to native goodness in retreat from society amid the sublime splendors of the Alps. Old Mr. De Lacey tells the monster that “the hearts of men, when unprejudiced by any obvious self-interest, are full of brotherly love and charity.” The monster sees in the De Laceys the loving family he has never known and their simple cottage life is a model of the happily primitive which the Romantics idealized.

If *Frankenstein* is a book of its age, it also looks ahead to its century's end when interest in the human psyche uncovered the unconscious mind. The idea of the *Doppelgänger*, the double who shadows us, had been around since the origins of the Gothic novel in the 1760s. By the end of the nineteenth century, works such as Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* made the idea that we had more than one self common. Capable of both great good and evil, we had, it seemed, a “monster” always potentially within us and not always under our control. Freud's splitting of the psyche put the monster-like id at the core of our persons. Freudian readings of *Frankenstein* see the monster as the outward expression of Victor's id or his demoniacal passions. In other words, Victor and the monster are the same person. Hence, Victor must keep the monster secret. His hope to create a being “like myself” is fulfilled in the monster whose murders we must see as expressions of Victor's own desires. Victor calls himself “the true murderer” of Justine, who, along with his brother William, he labels “the first hapless victims to my unhallowed arts.” Driven by remorse, he wanders “like an evil spirit,” his own wandering a mirror image of the monster's. When we see both in the outer frame of the book, Victor pursues the monster, but it is the monster who has pursued Victor, whom he calls “my last victim.” Since Victor's story is a story of creation, murder, investigation, and pursuit, *Frankenstein* is ultimately a book about our pursuit of self-discovery, about the knowledge of the monster within us.

Devices conventional in both gothic novels and novels of more modern psychological interest appear in *Frankenstein*. Victor's passions frequently induce lapses in consciousness; his nightmares beg for interpretation. The most powerful occurs at one in the morning on the evening he succeeds in animating the corpse. He dreams



that he sees Elizabeth walking the streets of Ingolstadt "in the bloom of health," but when he kisses her, she appears deathlike and is transformed into the corpse of his dead mother. When he awakens from the horror of his sleep, his monstrous creation looms over him. Frankenstein flees. Victor creates a monster and the nightmare hints that the monster of his desire is to take Elizabeth's life, perhaps because, as some suggest, unconsciously he holds her responsible for his mother's death.

The implications of the perverse in the sexual relationships of the characters also seem well served by a Freudian reading. Frankenstein is the monster's "father," yet were he to agree to the monster's demand to create for him a bride, would his next offspring be a "sister"? That hint of the incestuous is echoed in Victor's marriage to Elizabeth. An orphan brought home by Mrs. Frankenstein, she seems to the young Victor his possession, and though they "called each other familiarly by the name of cousin," Victor acknowledges that the ambiguity of their relationship defied naming: "No word, no expression could body forth the kind of relation in which she stood to me—my more than sister, since till death she was to be mine only." The monster's threat—"I shall be with you on your wedding night"—puts the monster in the nuptial bed with his "father" and his father's "sister/bride." That the novel closes with the monster's killing of the "father" pleads for an Oedipal reading which Freud's arguments regarding infantile sexuality and the competition within the birth family for the love of the mother made possible.

Numerous psychological readings of the novel have focused on Mary Shelley's life. Ellen Moers proposed that in *Frankenstein* Shelley wrestled with the pain of birth. Her own mother died only days after she was born, and Mary's firstborn died the year before she began the novel. Later, she referred to the book as "my hideous progeny." More recent feminist interpretations, such as that by Gilbert and Gubar noting that the novel is about a motherless orphan, similarly point to Mary's youth and remind us that books and children and birth and death are so mixed in both Shelley's life and in the novel that one cannot be understood without the other.

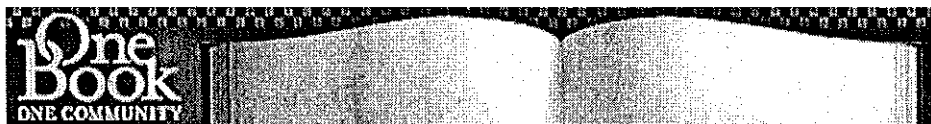
*Frankenstein* shocked readers in 1818 for its monstrous impiety, but its fame seemed fixed at birth. Initial reviews, politically oriented, denounced the book as a bit of radical Godwinism, since the book was dedicated to William Godwin and many presumed that its anonymous author was Percy Shelley. A stage adaptation called *Presumption, or, The Fate of Frankenstein* appeared as early as 1823. Mary Shelley attended a performance. In Shelley's life two additional editions were published; numerous editions since then have appeared. Burlesques on stage began in the late 1840s and continued to the end of the century. Thomas Edison created a film version as early as 1910, followed by the most famous film version, in 1931, starring Boris Karloff. It fixed for several generations an idea of "the monster Frankenstein," which gave birth to numerous other films and parodies of the story which continue to the present. In film, in translation into many of the world's languages, in its presence in school curricula, and in an unending body of criticism, *Frankenstein* lives well beyond its young author's modest intentions to write an entertaining Gothic tale to pass some time indoors on a cold Swiss summer evening.

**Source:** George V. Griffith, An overview of *Frankenstein*, in *Exploring Novels*, Gale, 1998.

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## **Frankenstein: Discussion Questions**



- 1.** Frankenstein has many elements of a horror story. What strategies and devices does Shelley use to make the story scary? How does Shelley go beyond the usual horror story elements to focus on characters and the differences between their behaviors, beliefs and values?
- 2.** Who is the actual monster in Frankenstein?
- 3.** Why did Victor create the creature? What responsibilities did Victor, as the creator, have toward his creature? Why did Victor abandon the creature?
- 4.** What purpose is served by having Robert Walton tell Victor's story? Compare and contrast Robert's and Victor's goals and interests.
- 5.** Victor warns Robert that acquiring knowledge can lead to "destruction and infallible misery." What serious consequences might the acquisition of knowledge have?
- 6.** One of the novel's tragedies is the inability of characters to recognize the humanity of the creature. What qualities make us human? Which of these qualities does the creature possess? What qualities does he not have?
- 7.** Scholars sometimes use Frankenstein as an argument against scientific technology that creates life forms; others argue that it is not technology itself but the use to which it is put that presents an ethical problem. What is Shelley's position? What is your position?
- 8.** Explain the novel's popularity. What makes the novel a classic? How is the story appropriate for today and our society?
- 9.** Choose one of the many film versions of this novel and compare it to the book.

### **Resource Guide:**

[Foundation President's Letter](#) | [The Frankenstein Poet](#) | [Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley](#) | [Works by Mary Shelley](#) | [Related Web Sites](#) | [Events](#) | [Acknowledgments](#) | [Project Committee](#) | [Exhibit Information](#)

### **Related Reading:**

[Frankenstein & Other Monsters in Literature](#) | [Genetic Engineering & Biotechnology](#) | [Mary Shelley](#) | [Medical Ethics](#) | [Mutant Science: Technology and Monsters for Teen Readers](#) | [Social Aspects of Science](#)

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## Study Guide

for

# Frankenstein

by Mary Shelley



**Glencoe  
McGraw-Hill**

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# Before You Read

## *Frankenstein* Letters 1–4

### FOCUS ACTIVITY

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What do you think spurs people to explore the unknown?

#### Share Ideas

In a small group, list ways in which people throughout the ages have explored the unknown. Also, identify some reasons why individuals devote themselves to a life of exploration and discovery. Does such devotion involve sacrifices?

#### Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how two eighteenth-century men's lives are changed as they pursue their separate dreams of exploring the unknown.

### BACKGROUND

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#### The Arctic

When the novel opens, an explorer named Robert Walton is organizing an expedition through the Arctic, the area around and within the Arctic Circle and near the North Pole. The Arctic Ocean covers most of this region, and more than half of the ocean's surface is frozen at all times. Travel by ship is extremely dangerous. Huge sheets of ice float through the frigid waters, threatening to crush the vessels that appear in their paths.

#### Did You Know?

In the letters, which set the stage for the novel, Robert Walton says he has been deeply affected by the narrative poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a leading poet of the Romantic era. In the poem, an old sailor, or mariner, tells the story of a horrific sea voyage that changed his life. Sailing in stormy seas near the South Pole, the mariner's ship is surrounded by ice. When the crewmen spot an albatross, a huge seagull-like bird, flying through the fog, the ice splits open, freeing the ship. Then, unexpectedly, the mariner shoots the albatross. After this act of cruelty, the ship is cursed. Driven north, it becomes stranded in a hot, windless sea. All of the crew except the mariner die. Ever since, the remorseful mariner has traveled the world to tell his story and to teach others to revere God's creatures.

Walton's comments about "The Ancient Mariner" are examples of allusion. An **allusion** is a reference in a written work to something from history, art, religion, myth, or another work of literature. Writers use allusions to give readers additional insights about what is happening in the story and why. Shelley makes frequent use of literary allusions in *Frankenstein*.

### VOCABULARY PREVIEW

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**ardent** [ärd'ənt] *adj.* passionate

**countenance** [koun'tə nəns] *n.* face; expression

**dauntless** [dônt'lis] *adj.* fearless

**harrowing** [har'ô ing] *adj.* extremely distressing

**irrevocably** [i rev'ə kə blē] *adv.* in a way impossible to change

**mariner** [mar'ə nər] *n.* navigator of a ship

**perseverance** [pur'sə vēr'əns] *n.* steady persistence

# Active Reading

## ***Frankenstein* Letters 1-4**

Robert Walton and the stranger he rescues share a number of similarities. As you read Walton's letters, make notes in the chart below about each character's situation, goals, attitude, and personal qualities. Consider both the character's statements and his actions. When you complete the chart, take time to think about the things the men have in common.

	Walton	The stranger
Situation	is searching for the source of magnetism in the polar regions	
Goals		
Attitude		
Personal Qualities		

# Responding

## *Frankenstein* Letters 1–4

### Personal Response

How did you react to the two characters introduced in this section? Explain.

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### Analyzing Literature

#### Recall and Interpret

1. Who is Robert Walton? What is he searching for? What is his attitude toward his quest? What do these details suggest to you about his character?

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2. In this letter to his sister, what does Walton say he longs for? Why do you think Walton feels lonely even though he is on board a ship with a full crew?

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3. How does Walton respond to the stranger? Why do you think Walton is attracted to the stranger?

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# Responding

## *Frankenstein* Letters 1–4

### Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

#### Evaluate and Connect

4. Why is the poem *The Ancient Mariner* important to Walton? How is the stranger similar to the ancient mariner? What mood does Shelley create by alluding to this poem?

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5. Walton has a thirst for knowledge, as the stranger once did. What details suggest that both are willing to make sacrifices in the search for knowledge? Do they seem unusual in this respect? Refer to your discussion in the **Focus Activity** on page 12.

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### Literature and Writing

#### A Good Beginning?

Urged by her husband, Percy Shelley, to expand her ghost story into a novel, Mary Shelley added Walton's letters as a frame to *Frankenstein's* tale. Do you believe the letters are an effective device for drawing readers into the story. What did you learn about explorers through Walton's letters? What did you learn about the stranger? Why do you think Shelley chose to lead into the stranger's story by starting with a frame story about Robert Walton? On a separate sheet of paper write your analysis of the letters as a frame for the novel.

### Extending Your Response

#### Listening and Speaking

In a small group, take turns reading aloud the three letters contained in Letter IV. In these letters, Walton describes how he rescued the stranger. Assign one letter to each reader. To prepare for your reading, you may want to use an enlarged photocopy for easier reading and marking. Practice reading the letter, underlining the most important sentences and making marginal notes about the emotions the character is expressing, if you have a copy to work with. Circle any difficult words and check their pronunciation in a dictionary. When you read, adjust your rate of speaking, volume, and pitch to convey the feelings and attitude of the characters. After the reading, discuss any new insights you gained into Walton's character or the events he described.

#### Learning for Life

While many people use E-mail, especially in business, letter-writing remains an important skill. E-mail is a good choice for short, to-the-point messages, but a letter may be a better choice if you want to explain something at length. A letter is also a good way to share and reflect on your experiences with people you know well. Following Walton's example in the novel, write a letter to a friend or relative. In your letter, describe one or more recent personal experiences in detail and reflect on the meaning of those experiences.



**Save your work for your portfolio.**

# Before You Read

## *Frankenstein* Chapters 1–10

### FOCUS ACTIVITY

How do you define personal responsibility? When something bad happens that involves you, how do you know whether or not you bear some responsibility for it?

#### Discuss

Evaluate these situations. In each case, discuss whether person *B* has a responsibility to person *A*.

- *A* falls off *B*'s roof while mending it.
- *B* walks by *A*, who is homeless and begging on the street.
- *B* lends *A* his car, which has faulty brakes, and *A* has an accident.

#### Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how Victor Frankenstein deals with his sense of personal responsibility.

### BACKGROUND

#### Two Well-Rounded Characters

In Chapters 1 through 10, Shelley develops the two main characters in the novel: Victor Frankenstein and his creature. She also introduces a number of minor characters. Both Frankenstein and the creature have complex and multifaceted personalities. In this regard, they stand out from the other characters in the novel. When a fictional character has individuality and depth, and experiences personal growth or change, he or she is called a **round character**. The opposite of a round character is a **flat character**.

Round characters are life-like and three-dimensional, while flat characters seem more like cardboard figures or stereotypes, and are not as well developed.

#### Did You Know?

Victor Frankenstein develops an interest in science after reading about the “wild fancies” of several noted alchemists who lived 300 to 500 years before his lifetime. Alchemy was a field of philosophy that speculated about natural processes and often involved chemical experiments. Medieval alchemists believed they could find substances that would enable them to transform ordinary metals, such as lead, into gold or create a magical drink that would extend life and youth forever. While alchemy is not true science, the alchemists did make some scientific contributions. They discovered mineral acids and alcohol. They also invented types of laboratory equipment and procedures, which were later modified and used by scientists.

### VOCABULARY PREVIEW

**benevolent** [bə nev'ə lənt] *adj.* showing charity

**commiserate** [kə miz'ə rāt'] *v.* to express sympathy

**consolation** [kon sə lā'shən] *n.* something that eases sorrow or disappointment

**discern** [di surn'] *v.* to detect; to perceive

**fiend** [fēnd] *n.* evil spirit; devil

**hideous** [hid'ē əs] *adj.* extremely ugly

**omen** [ō'mən] *n.* a sign of future good or evil



# Active Reading

## ***Frankenstein* Chapters 1–10**

In Chapters 1 through 10, the author introduces the two major characters in the novel as well as several minor characters. In the chart below, list each character and note important details about his or her background or personality.

Character	Important Details
Victor Frankenstein	from happy home; thirsty for knowledge; ambitious; hard-working

# Responding

## *Frankenstein* Chapters 1–10

### Personal Response

What do you think of Victor Frankenstein as a student and scientist? What do you admire or dislike about his goals? Explain.

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### Analyzing Literature

#### Recall and Interpret

1. Who is Elizabeth and how does Frankenstein feel about her? What does their relationship tell you about Frankenstein's values and personality?

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2. What is Frankenstein's purpose in pursuing science? What does he study? How do you interpret Frankenstein's initial response to the success of his experiment?

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3. Frankenstein says, "I shunned my fellow creatures as if I had been guilty of a crime." From your reading, give specific examples of Frankenstein's isolation from others. What does this tell you about his personality? Explain.

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# Responding

## *Frankenstein* Chapters 1–10

### Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

#### Evaluate and Connect

4. How is Frankenstein affected by the knowledge that the creature may be responsible for the death of William? In Chapter 7, what statement suggests that he views the creature as part of himself? Do you agree with Frankenstein that he bears some responsibility for the death? Why?

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5. How does the creature explain his evil behavior? Why does the creature compare himself to the biblical character Adam? Do you think this comparison is accurate? Why or why not?

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### Literature and Writing

#### Thrills and Chills

Gothic novels emphasize horror, mystery, and the supernatural. Write an analysis of the gothic features of the novel *Frankenstein* that are evident in Chapters 1 through 10. How does Shelley establish an atmosphere of mystery? How does the action create a feeling of terror in the reader? What supernatural elements does she include? Consider setting, plot, and character in your analysis.

### Extending Your Response

#### Literature Groups

Evaluate the character of Victor Frankenstein using evidence from Chapters 1 through 10 of the novel. Focus your discussion on the following questions as well as others that occurred to you as you were reading.

- What can you infer about Frankenstein's character from his close personal relationships? his scientific project? In your opinion, is he an appealing person?
- Do you think that Frankenstein went too far in his quest for knowledge? Did he have a good motive for his project? Did he have adequate knowledge to begin his project? Did he consider possible consequences of his actions?
- How is Frankenstein affected by what happens after he abandons the creature? Why does he call himself the "true murderer" of William?

#### Art Connection

Illustrate a scene from Chapters 1 through 10 that includes both Frankenstein and his creature. Before you begin, reread the related passages of the novel to gather details provided by the author. Remember that the familiar image of the creature from films is just one interpretation of his appearance. Use the evidence in the novel and your imagination to create your own visual interpretation of the creature.



**Save your work for your portfolio.**

# Before You Read

## *Frankenstein* Chapters 11–16

### FOCUS ACTIVITY

What are some reasons why a person might be rejected by others?

#### Quickwrite

Describe on paper a situation in which a person might feel he or she has been repeatedly rejected by others. What emotional response might the person have?

#### Setting a Purpose

Read to find out what the creature did after he left Frankenstein's workshop.

### BACKGROUND

#### Did You Know?

There are many definitions of tragedy. In literature, a **tragedy** is a story that ends in the downfall of its main character and arouses pity or fear in the reader. In general, tragedy also expresses a tragic view of life—the idea that a noble person inevitably brings on his or her suffering or death through some failure or error. As you continue to read *Frankenstein*, think about whether the novel fits this definition of a tragedy.

#### A Fallen Angel

Do these words sound familiar? "Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay / To mold me man? Did I solicit thee / From darkness to promote me?" This quotation appears on the title page of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. It could have been spoken by Frankenstein's creature. In fact, the words come from John Milton's poem *Paradise Lost* (1667) and are spoken by the character of Adam. This book-length poem is a retelling of the story of Adam and Eve from the Bible. An equally prominent character in the poem is Satan, the lord of evil. Milton depicts Satan as the chief angel of heaven who rebels against God and is cast into hell. To avenge himself, he tempts Adam and Eve to disobey God in the Garden of Eden.

Near the end of Chapter 10 of *Frankenstein*, the creature confronts his creator. He compares himself not only to Adam but to "the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed." In Chapters 11 through 16, Shelley expands on this allusion to *Paradise Lost*, emphasizing the parallels between God and Satan in the poem, and Frankenstein and his creature in the novel.

### VOCABULARY PREVIEW

**conjecture** [kən jek 'chər] v. to guess using the available evidence

**disconsolate** [dis kon 'sə lit] adj. unable to be cheered up

**enigmatic** [en 'ig mat 'ik] adj. puzzling

**flagrant** [flā 'grənt] adj. highly offensive

**pensive** [pen 'siv] adj. deeply or dreamily thoughtful

**venerable** [ven 'ər ə bəl] adj. worthy of respect or reverence

**vengeance** [ven 'jəns] n. punishment inflicted in return for a wrong

**wantonly** [wont 'ən lē] adv. maliciously; without restraint

# Active Reading

## ***Frankenstein* Chapters 11–16**

In this section, the creature recounts what has happened in his life since Frankenstein abandoned him. Use the chart below to record the main experiences in the creature's life as well as his thoughts and feelings about those experiences.

Experiences	Thoughts and Feelings
discovers his senses; finds fire and food; observes moon	feels joy in discovering nature

# Responding

## *Frankenstein* Chapters 11–16

### Personal Response

What questions would you like to ask the creature?

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### Analyzing Literature

#### Recall and Interpret

1. How does the creature get to know the family who lives in the cottage? Why is he drawn to the family? How does the family's reaction to the creature affect his view of himself and the human race?

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2. After reading *Paradise Lost*, why does the creature think he is like Adam in that book? Why does he think he is like Satan? What are the specific reasons that the creature gives for hating his creator?

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3. How does the creature cause the deaths of William and Justine? What does the murder of William tell the creature about himself? According to the creature, what can save him from doing evil?

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# Responding

## *Frankenstein* Chapters 11–16

### Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

#### Evaluate and Connect

4. Thus far, do you find the creature more or less sympathetic than the character of Victor Frankenstein? Explain.

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5. How believable is the account of the creature's education? Refer to the novel and your own experience in your answer.

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### Literature and Writing

#### Friend or Fiend?

Analyze the creature's personality. In your written analysis, discuss the different aspects of his character by addressing questions such as these:

- In what ways is he like any human being? In what ways is he different?
- What does he want most in life? Why does his goal seem unattainable?
- How have the creature's experiences shaped his opinion of himself? Does he have the potential for good as well as evil? To whom does he compare himself and why?

Support your analysis by citing events from the story as well as quoting statements made by the creature.

### Extending Your Response

#### Literature Groups

Now that you have heard the creature's story, do you think he is justified in declaring an "ever-lasting war" against the human species and his creator? Debate this question in your group. As you do, consider the following questions:

- What have the creature's interactions with humans been like? What acts of revenge does the creature take? Are these acts justified? Is revenge ever justified? Before answering, consider the quickwrite you did for the **Focus Activity** on page 20.
- How has the creature grown intellectually and emotionally since his "birth"? How does he justify his actions?
- Does the creature bear responsibility for the suffering he causes, or is Frankenstein ultimately responsible?

#### Learning for Life

Many companies and organizations have policies to help them evaluate job candidates. These policies help to ensure that hiring decisions are made on the basis of relevant facts, not on prejudices and preconceptions. Imagine you are an employer. Everyday you see job applicants who vary widely in their appearance. Come up with a list of guidelines for job interviewers that will ensure that diverse candidates are evaluated fairly.



**Save your work for your portfolio.**

# Before You Read

## *Frankenstein* Chapters 17–21

### FOCUS ACTIVITY

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Why is it important to love and be loved?

#### Think-Pair-Share

On a sheet of paper, write three reasons why companionship or love is an important part of the human experience. Then meet with another student and read your ideas aloud. Discuss, blend, and adjust your lists to come up with three reasons that you both agree on.

#### Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how the need for love continues to motivate Frankenstein's creature.

### BACKGROUND

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#### The British Isles

The British Isles include two main islands, Great Britain and Ireland, as well as numerous smaller islands. They lie a relatively short distance off the coast of Europe and were once connected to the continent. Four groups of people call the islands home, the English, Scots, Welsh, and Irish. While the climate is uniformly maritime, consisting of mild winters, cool summers, and ample precipitation, the landforms vary from the mountains and rocky headlands of Scotland to the plains of Southeast England.

#### Did You Know?

Tales of horror create suspense by raising questions or uncertainties about the action in the reader's mind. Sometimes we don't know what will happen. As we read, we wonder *who* or *what* is responsible for the events that take place, or we wonder *how* the events came about. In other cases, the tragic outcome is known or strongly hinted at at the beginning of the story. As we read, the suspense comes from anticipating *when* the worst will occur or wondering if it can be prevented. Authors often increase the readers' feeling of fear or dread through *foreshadowing*. They give hints that suggest or prepare the reader for a later event. Such hints, or foreshadowing, might take the form of a statement by a character, a mood established in the description of the setting, or the revelation of an important trait in one of the characters.

### VOCABULARY PREVIEW

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**base** [bās] *adj.* mean-spirited

**inexorable** [i nek' sər ə bəl] *adj.* unyielding

**insurmountable** [in' sər moun' tə bəl] *adj.* impossible to overcome

**irksome** [urk' səm] *adj.* annoying

**listless** [list' lis] *adj.* lacking energy

**malicious** [mə lish' əs] *adj.* deliberately harmful

**torpor** [tôr' pər] *n.* state of inactivity or apathy

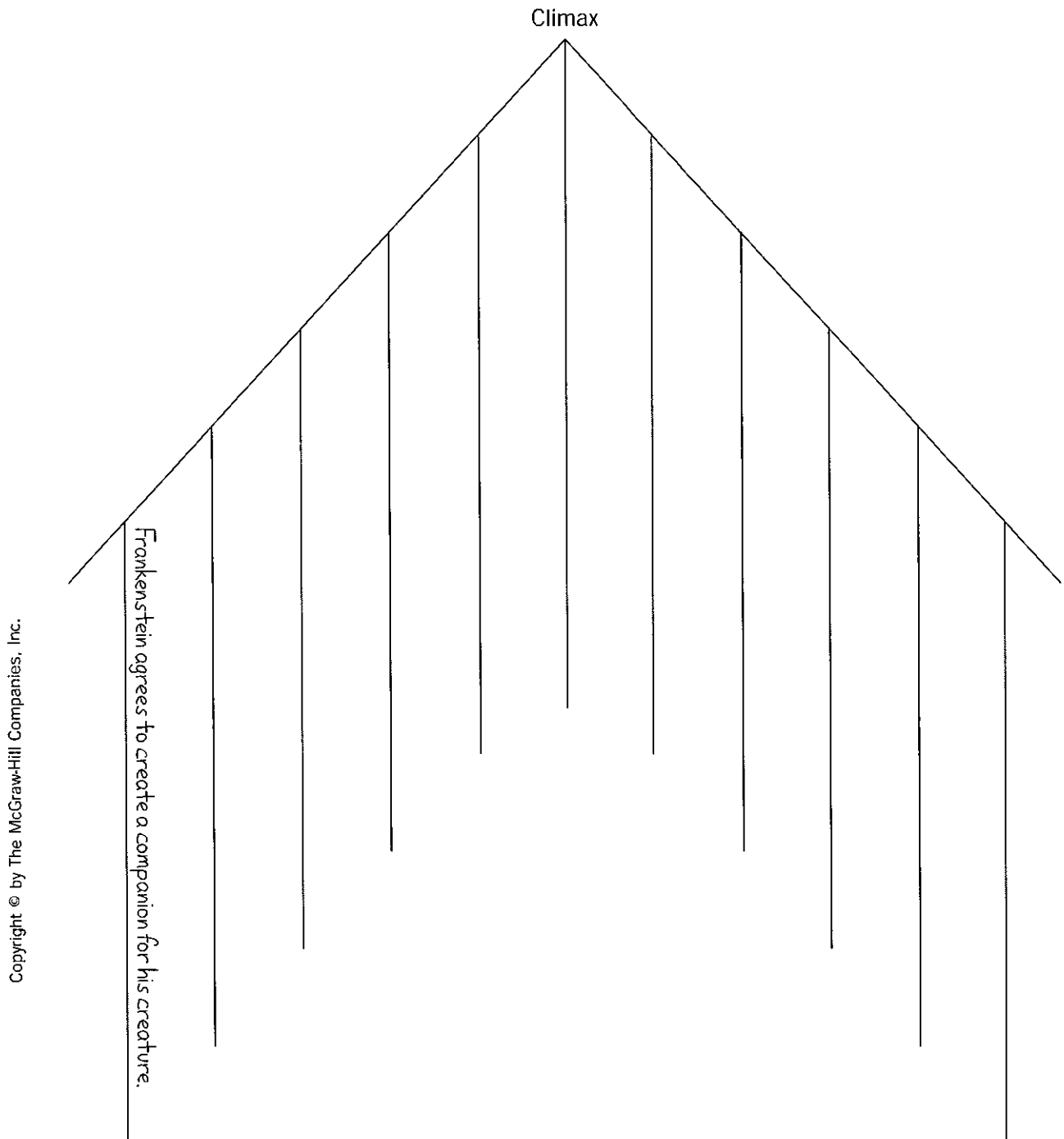
**traverse** [trav' ərs] *v.* to travel across



# Active Reading

## *Frankenstein* Chapters 17-21

Use the sequence chart below to trace the main events that occur after Frankenstein agrees to create a companion for his creature. Use as many boxes as you need but record the climax, or turning point, of this part of the novel at the peak of the diagram.



# Responding

## *Frankenstein* Chapters 17–21

### Personal Response

Which of the events in this section of the novel surprised you the most and why?

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### Analyzing Literature

#### Recall and Interpret

1. What arguments does the creature use to persuade Frankenstein to make the female creature? How does Frankenstein's decision affect Frankenstein's mood and personal life?

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2. What keeps Frankenstein from completing the second creature? In your opinion, why does the creature direct his revenge to Frankenstein's wedding?

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3. How does Frankenstein become lost at sea? What happens when he lands in Ireland? Why does he call himself Henry Clerval's murderer?

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# Responding

## *Frankenstein* Chapters 17–21

### Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

#### Evaluate and Connect

4. How does Shelley create a feeling of suspense in Chapters 17 through 21?

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5. Did you find the events in Chapter 21 probable or improbable? Explain.

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### Literature and Writing

#### The Second Time Around

Imagine that Victor Frankenstein has decided to write a letter to Elizabeth or his father that describes his thoughts about creating another creature. Take on the role of Frankenstein as you write a letter of explanation. You may want to compare Frankenstein's creation of the second creature to his creation of the first one. Does he have the same motives or different ones? Do you think his attitude toward such ambitious projects has changed?

### Extending Your Response

#### Literature Groups

In your group, develop a soundtrack for this section of the novel. Make a list of specific songs or types of music you might play for each of the major scenes, such as the creature's visit to Frankenstein's room or Frankenstein's debate with himself at the side of the female creature. Review Chapters 17 through 21 to make a list of key scenes. Then skim for details about the physical setting or the characters' emotions that might spark ideas for music. Make a two-column outline of your soundtrack. In the first column list the key scenes or events in order. In the second column identify or describe the music that will accompany the scene. Focus on conveying the mood of the scene. If possible, play your music for the rest of the class or explain your choices.

#### Math Connection

Chart Victor Frankenstein's path on a map of Europe as he travels from Geneva to London and then to other cities and locations farther north. Then use the scale on the map to estimate the mileage between each pair of locations in sequence. To do this, you will need to consult the novel or make a guess about the form of transportation and route used. Record and label your figures clearly on a separate sheet of paper. Add up the mileage to find the total distance he traveled from the beginning of Chapter 17 to the end of Chapter 21. Compare your figures with those obtained by other students. If some figures disagree sharply, discuss the method you used to arrive at your figure. Decide which figure is most accurate.



**Save your work for your portfolio.**

# Before You Read

## *Frankenstein* Chapters 22–24

### FOCUS ACTIVITY

It is sometimes said that the key to living a responsible and happy life is to balance intellectual and emotional pursuits. What does this mean to you?

#### Freewrite

Freewrite for five minutes about a person who is governed more by intellectual decisions than by emotional decisions. What are the positive and negative consequences of relying more on your intellect than your emotions?

#### Setting a Purpose

Read to find how *Frankenstein* weighs emotional and intellectual factors in a decision he must make.

### BACKGROUND

#### Did You Know?

Five years after *Frankenstein* was published, Mary Shelley saw the first dramatic production of her novel. She liked the actor's portrayal of her creature. How well she might like the hundreds of interpretations since is interesting speculation. In the 1931 film *Frankenstein*, starring English actor Boris Karloff, the monster comes to life on an operating table after being zapped with electricity. Given a huge, squared-off skull and pale corpse-like skin, Karloff portrayed the monster as a gentle, almost childlike character. His interpretation struck a chord with audiences, especially young children, from whom he received much fan mail. In the 1995 film version of the novel, *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, Robert De Niro, an actor known for his violent tough-guy roles, was cast as the creature. The director, Kenneth Branagh, explained, "I wanted a wise and intelligent and multifaceted Creature who could be angry and even funny at times, and who would have a sense of humor, however darkly ironic." To develop the physical appearance of the creature, make-up artists did research in books from the early 1800s on surgery, skin disorders, and embalming. They wanted to find out what *Frankenstein* would have been able to achieve using the techniques and knowledge available at the time. The result is a gray, scarred, hulking, patchwork sort of man.

#### Two Characters in One?

Many people who have not read Shelley's novel think that *Frankenstein* is the name of the creature, not the scientist who brought him to life. Careful readers of the novel, however, point out that this mistake has a certain symbolic truth. They see the two characters as doubles of each other, or two parts of a divided self. The idea of the double comes from German folklore and is known as the *doppelgänger* ("double goer"). The concept was based on the ancient belief that each living creature has an exact double who exists as a spirit or ghost. Many writers of horror stories have employed the idea of the double. For example, in Robert Louis Stevenson's novella of double identity, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, a respectable doctor becomes a murderous stalker by night.

### VOCABULARY PREVIEW

**adversary** [ad'vər ser'ē] *n.* enemy; opponent

**consternation** [kon'stər nā'shən] *n.* state of confusion

**illustrious** [i lus'trē əs] *adj.* very distinguished

**omnipotent** [om nip'ət tənt] *adj.* all-powerful

**pilgrimage** [pil'grə mij] *n.* long journey for a spiritual purpose

# Active Reading

## ***Frankenstein* Chapters 22-24**

In the final chapters of the novel, Victor Frankenstein and his creature are involved in a mad contest of revenge. In the chart below, record at least four statements made by each character that reveal his motives, feelings, or state of mind. Note the chapter number after each statement.

Frankenstein

"Human beings, their feelings and passions, would indeed be degraded if such a wretch as I felt pride." (Chapter 22)

The creature

"A frightful selfishness hurried me on, while my heart was poisoned with remorse." (Chapter 24)

# Responding

## *Frankenstein* Chapters 22–24

### Personal Response

Did the ending of the novel surprise you? Can you imagine a different ending to the novel? Explain.

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### Analyzing Literature

#### Recall and Interpret

1. What does Frankenstein promise to tell Elizabeth after they are married? How does he behave in the weeks leading up to their wedding? Why is Frankenstein especially agitated as evening approaches on their wedding day?

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2. What happens to Elizabeth? What is ironic, or unexpected, about the creature's revenge on Frankenstein? What does Frankenstein resolve to do?

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3. How does Shelley show that Frankenstein and the creature are both obsessed with revenge? Does either of them win? Explain.

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# Responding

## *Frankenstein* Chapters 22–24

### Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

#### Evaluate and Connect

4. How does Shelley return to her frame story in Chapter 24? What effect does she achieve by using this frame story?

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5. How do you think Frankenstein failed or erred as a human being? What traits or attributes, do you think, led to the creature's fate?

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### Literature and Writing

#### Creating Dialogue

On board Walton's ship, the creature sees his creator for the last time. If they had had a chance to talk at this point, what might they say to each other at the end of their long chase? Write a dialogue that reveals each character's feelings about the other and about himself. You may wish to incorporate or paraphrase quotations from the novel. Make sure your dialogue accurately conveys the character's attitudes, feelings, and insights. After you have written your dialogue, ask two other students to read it aloud and offer comments.

### Extending Your Response

#### Literature Groups

In your group, come up with a personality profile, in the form of a word web, for each of the two main characters. Draw the webs on the chalkboard or on paper, putting the name of each character in the center and branching out from there.

#### Listening and Speaking

The **theme** of a work is the main idea, insight, or observation the writer offers. A work may have more than one theme, and even a single theme can be expressed in different ways. Furthermore, each reader will have his or her own ideas about a work's main themes. Meet with five or six other students. Cut a sheet of paper into equal-size strips, enough for the members of your group. On your strip, write a single sentence that, in your opinion, expresses one of the important themes of the novel. Put all the strips into a bag. Then take turns drawing them out one at a time (make sure you do not get your own). Read the theme statement aloud. Then, state whether you agree or disagree with the writer's choice and why. Lead a brief discussion of the theme in your group. Continue until each theme has been discussed.



*Save your work for your portfolio.*

# Responding

## *Frankenstein*

### **Personal Response**

What is your reaction to the fate of Victor Frankenstein? to his creature? Explain.

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What would you like to ask Shelley about her main characters' fate?

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### **Writing About the Novel**

What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the novel? Did you find yourself engaged in the central conflict Shelley presents or the questions she raises? Do you believe that *Frankenstein* is a well-crafted work of literature? Write a short evaluation of the novel. State whether you would recommend the book to others.

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*Save your work for your portfolio.*



# Mary Shelley's Frankenstein

**Roger Ebert**

## Before You Read

### Focus Question

Think about a time when you had a mixed reaction to a movie or television show. What did you say when friends asked you whether or not you liked what you saw?

### Background

One of the most celebrated movie critics in the United States, Roger Ebert has been reviewing films for the daily newspaper, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, since the late 1960s. In his review of *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, he takes issue with the idea that a movie version of a novel must exactly follow its source.

## Responding to the Reading

1. What does Ebert say the "true subject" of the *Frankenstein* tale is? What does he say the "real story" or "whole issue" of the film is?

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2. What does Ebert like about the movie? What does he dislike? Overall, how does he feel about *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*?

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3. **Making Connections** After reading this review, what similarities would you expect to find between the creature in this movie and the creature in the novel? What differences would you expect to find?

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### Art Connection

Make a poster advertising *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*. Include an attention-getting image from the movie along with an excerpt from Ebert's review and the names of the director and the main stars. Arrange the information and images in the way most likely to lure viewers to the theater.

# A Frankenstein Monster Ended Up Being a Lamb

Ed Regis

## Before You Read

### Focus Question

What do you think it would be like to be a scientist involved in cutting-edge research on cloning?

### Background

In this article, book reviewer Ed Regis gives an overview of a book about animal cloning research. Unlike Shelley, who gives the reader only hints about Frankenstein's procedure in making his creature, Regis describes in detail the process the scientists used.

## Responding to the Reading

1. Why were biologists interested in cloning a sheep?

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2. What problems made it difficult for scientists to create the first clone?

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3. **Making Connections** Based on this book review, what can you infer about Regis's attitude toward cloning? Does he think animal cloning is an alarming development or something to celebrate? Do you think Mary Shelley would share his attitude? Explain.

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### Art Connection

Draw a cartoon for the editorial page of a newspaper to illustrate ideas and views on animal cloning. You may want to focus on the ideas expressed in the review, or you may want to focus on your own views. As you brainstorm ideas, consider the visual possibilities suggested by the title of the book review. Add labels, dialogue, or a caption, as needed, to clarify the message of the cartoon.

# A New Life

Ramsey Campbell

## Before You Read

### Focus Question

Have you ever awakened from a deep sleep and not immediately recognized your surroundings? Can you remember your sensations?

### Background

Mary Shelley's gothic masterpiece has cast a long shadow. Published more than 180 years ago, *Frankenstein* continues to inspire and influence other horror writers. Among them is British author Ramsey Campbell, who wrote this short mystery in 1976.

## Responding to the Reading

1. What vague memories does the main character have as the story opens? How do you know he is afraid?

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2. What is the main character's first guess about where he is and why? What terrifying discovery does he make?

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3. What thought did the main character have as he was drowning? What does he think happened to him as a result?

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4. **Making Connections** In what way is Campbell's story indebted to Shelley's *Frankenstein*? Consider the plot, the central characters, the mood, and setting.

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## Creative Writing

Mary Shelley's description of the creature's coming to life is very spare; few details are given. In addition, this event is described from Frankenstein's point of view. Rewrite the "birth" scene in *Frankenstein* from the creature's point of view. What does it feel like to suddenly become conscious of the world? What sounds and sights in your surroundings make an impression on you? What sensations and feelings, or possibly memories, are you aware of?

# The Golem

Isaac Bashevis Singer

## Before You Read

### Focus Question

What is your favorite folktale and why? Why do you think certain folktales have been passed on from generation to generation?

### Background

Isaac Bashevis Singer, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, is known for his stories about Jewish life in Poland and the United States. In *The Golem*, Singer retells a European legend about a giant artificial man who, like Frankenstein's creature, is physically powerful.

## Responding to the Reading

1. Why is life difficult for the Jews of Prague? Why is Rabbi Leib told to make a golem?

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2. How does Rabbi Leib create the golem and bring him to life? How does the Rabbi feel about his power to create the golem?

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3. How does the golem begin to change? Why is he unhappy? How does he express his unhappiness?

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4. **Making Connections** Compare the rabbi's attitude toward the golem with Frankenstein's attitude toward his creature. Compare the golem's search for love with the creature's search.

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## Speaking and Listening

Folktales were originally passed on by word of mouth, with members of an older generation often telling the stories to members of a younger one. Adapt the story of the golem of Prague for a younger audience. Practice telling the story out loud, using your voice and gestures to keep your listeners' attention. Then tell the story to your class or to an audience of younger students.

# ... That Thou Art Mindful of Him

Isaac Asimov

## Before You Read

### Focus Question

Do you think scientists should have complete freedom in their research, or should society and government control research?

### Background

In this science fiction story set far in the future, a research-based company manufactures highly intelligent robots. In order to make sure the robots help the human race instead of threatening it, the inventors have devised a set of "Laws of Robotics."

## Responding to the Reading

1. What is the "Frankenstein Complex"? Do you think the Frankenstein Complex affects society today? How?

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2. What are Harriman's goals in developing the robo-bird? Do you believe he might be successful in his scheme for overcoming the fear of robots? Explain.

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3. **Making Connections** If Victor Frankenstein had been satisfied with his superhuman creatures and began producing them in numbers, do you think society would have passed laws to control them? Based on what you know about the creature and what you have learned about the Laws of Robotics, what laws do you think would enable the creatures to coexist with human beings?

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## Learning for Life

Imagine that company officials are discovered taking the robot off company property. Write a newspaper editorial denouncing the company's action and point out the dangers to society. Make references to Frankenstein's experiences with his creature.