

# MARY SHELLEY • FRANKENSTEIN

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### MARY SHELLEY

**Mary Shelley** was born on August 30, 1797 in London to philosopher William Godwin and feminist Mary Wollstonecraft: both her parents were **noted** writers in the 1800s. Four weeks after giving birth, Mary Wollstonecraft died of complications, so Mary Shelley never knew her mother. A voracious reader, Mary borrowed books from her father's extensive library and she enjoyed writing at a young age. The influence of her famous father's home cannot be **understated** with its constant stream of writers, including Wordsworth and Coleridge, the fathers of English Romanticism. It was at home that Mary developed into a person of letters, following in the family tradition of writers and thinkers. She married Percy Bysshe Shelley, another important Romantic poet. In the summer of 1816, a tour of continental Europe was proposed. At a stop in Switzerland, the couple and Mary's **stepsister**, Claire, rented a house near another British writer, Lord Byron. The summer proved wet and **unseasonable**, so Byron suggested the group should write ghost stories to pass the time. It was during this summer that *Frankenstein* took shape. Mary's story, the best of the group, was so frightening to Byron that he ran "shrieking in horror" from the room. *Frankenstein* was published in 1818. On July 8, 1822, Mary's life was forever altered when her husband was drowned at sea in a boating accident off the coast of Livorno, Italy. By now, her life was seemingly connected to tragedy, with the deaths of three children, her mother, and her husband, and the suicides of Percy's former wife and Mary's half-sister. She spent the rest of her life writing original works and **tending to** the works of her husband. On February 1, 1851 Mary died in London.



## ABOUT THE NOVEL

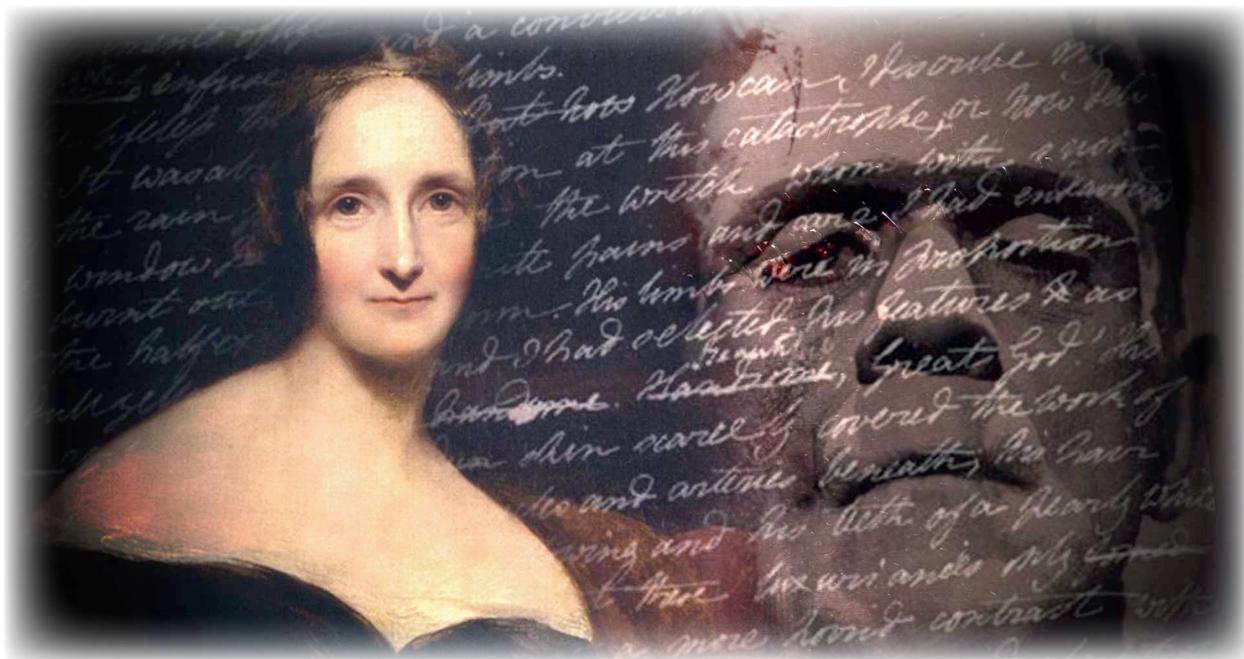
### FRANKENSTEIN

*Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*, is the story of the gifted scientist Victor Frankenstein who succeeds in giving life to a "human" being of his own creation. However, this creature is not what he expected to create, but rather a **hideous** creature who is then rejected by Victor and mankind in general. The Monster seeks its revenge through murder and terror.

Victor Frankenstein is obsessed with the idea of creating the human form and acts upon it. Immediately after creating the monster, he falls into a depression and fear and will spend his entire life trying to destroy his same creation. The monster is a hideous and gigantic creature, for this reason "it" faces rejection and fear from its creator and society. The monster's rejection from society pushes it to commit murder against its creator's family.

*Frankenstein* is a unique novel in English literature. The novel seeks to find the answers to questions that perplexed Mary Shelley and the readers of her time: she was **keenly** aware of the concern that technology was advancing at a rate that **dizzied** the mind of early 18<sup>th</sup> century readers. This novel addresses the issue of advances created by men, but which **fly in the face of** "natural" elements and divine plans.

*Frankenstein* contains a compilation of Romantic and Gothic elements combined into a singular work, making it an unforgettable story. Some literary historians also consider *Frankenstein* to be the first science-fiction novel.



Gothic novels take place in gloomy places like old buildings, dungeons, or towers that serve as a background for the mysterious circumstances. Victor's laboratory is the perfect place to create a new type of human being. Laboratories and scientific experiments were not known to the average reader and added a sense of mystery and **gloom**.

Romantic writers are concerned with nature, human feelings, compassion for mankind, freedom of the individual and rebellion against society. Romantics often concern themselves with rural and rustic life versus modern life; **faraway** places and travels to those places; medieval folklore and legends. The monster is a sort of Romantic hero because of the rejection it must bear from normal society. Wherever it goes, the monster is chased away because of its hideous appearance and its huge size. Shelley is attempting to show the readers how many people in conventional society reject those who live on the borders. We cannot blame the monster for what happens to it, and Shelley **elicits** from the reader a **sympathetic** response for a creature so misunderstood. The monster tries to fit into a regular community, but because it is hideous to look at and does not know about social interaction, it can never become part of **mainstream** society.

The novel makes the reader meditate on the nature of human life and the potential of science. It emphasises man's ultimate responsibility for his creations: while we witness Victor Frankenstein's agony at the results of his horrific experiment, we also see the pain of the monster at being abandoned by its father/creator.

to dizzy: *stordire, confondere*

elicit: *provocare, suscitare*

to fly in the face of: *essere in contraddizione con*

faraway: *remoto, lontano*

gloom: *oscurità, tristezza*

hideous: *orribile*

keenly: *intensamente*

mainstream: *convenzionale, tradizionale*

noted: *famoso, rinomato*

stepsister: *sorellastra*

sympathetic: *comprensivo, empatico*

to tend to: *prendersi cura*

to understate: *sottostimare, sminuire*

unseasonable: *non appropriato alla stagione*

## THE TEXT

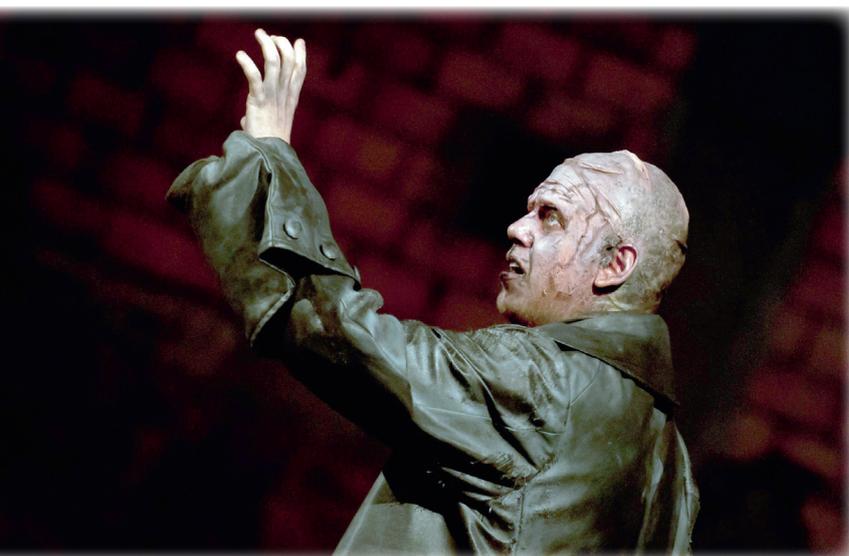
It was on a **dreary** night of November that I **beheld** the accomplishment of my **toils**. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain **pattered** **dismally** against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature

open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs.  
 How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips.



(...) I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room and continued a long time traversing my bed-chamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep. (...) I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed; when, by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window shutters, I beheld the wretch, the miserable monster whom I had created. He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me. His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. He might have spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped and rushed downstairs. I took refuge in the courtyard belonging to the house which I inhabited, where I remained during the rest of the night, walking up and down in the greatest agitation, listening attentively, catching and fearing each sound as if it were to announce the approach of the demoniacal corpse to which I had so miserably given life. Oh! No mortal could support the horror of that countenance. A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch. I had gazed on him while unfinished; he was ugly then, but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived.

*Frankenstein, chapter 5.*



corpse: *cadavere*  
 countenance: *espressione del viso*  
 to behold: *guardare, osservare*  
 dismally: *terribilmente*  
 dreary: *tetro, cupo*  
 dun-white: *bianco grigiastro, giallastro*  
 to endeavour: *sforzarsi di, provare a*  
 to endure: *sopportare*  
 grin: *gran sorriso*  
 limb: *arto*  
 lustrous: *lucido*  
 luxuriance: *rigogliosità*  
 shrivelled: *avvizzito, raggrinzito*  
 socket: *orbita*  
 toil: *lavoro duro, fatica*  
 to mutter: *borbottare*  
 to patter: *picchiare*  
 to traverse: *attraversare, andare su e giù*  
 wretch: *disgraziato*

## COMPREHENSION

### 1 Answer the questions.

1. The first line reads "It was on a dreary night in November." What does the word "dreary" create in the reader?
2. What atmosphere does Dr Frankenstein create when he states "my candle was nearly burnt out" and "by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light"?
3. Victor says, "the rain pattered dismally against the panes." What is the effect of this use of sound imagery?

## ANALYSIS

### 2 Answer the questions.

1. What type of connotation do the adjectives "watery" and "dun-white" referred to the monster's eyes have? What do they suggest?
2. In the brief moment shared between the creator and the "created thing," before Frankenstein flees, the monster smiles at him. Why does the monster smile?
3. Dante's *Divine Comedy* and the characters present in "Hell" were well-known. What does Victor mean when he says "it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived"?

## FURTHER ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### 3 Complete the text with the missing words.

amputation • anatomy • collected • decomposed • died • excuse • job • kindness • necessary  
 • organs • practice • process • research • students • transplanting

#### How did Frankenstein Create the Monster?

Victor Frankenstein (1) ..... body parts for his monster through body snatching, a common, though gruesome, (2) ..... of the time. Historically, a shortage of cadavers available for medical (3) ..... created an industry of enterprising thieves



who would prowl graveyards for recently buried corpses to sell for medical (4) .....  
 The corpses allowed medical students to learn more about the internal (5) ..... of the  
 body and how they work as well as giving doctors the opportunity to improve (6) .....  
 techniques. Body snatching, common 200 years ago, really revolutionised how we understand  
 (7) ..... and medicine: the bodies were physically sewn up and divided, presumably  
 so that different medical students could dissect different parts of the same body before it would  
 have (8) ..... . But how did Frankenstein create the monster? He doesn't say:  
 the (9) ..... he gives, eminently reasonable in light of how things turned out, is that  
 he wants to prevent others from discovering the (10) ..... . We are not sure if he gave  
 life or restored it, we are left in the dark. He assembled his monster piece-by-piece, until finally he gave it  
 the element (11) ..... for life, however Mary Shelley did not spell out what the final  
 element was, but in the science of the time only one organ could do the (12) .....  
 she required, that of giving the spark of biological life and emotion: the heart. Imbued with life,  
 Frankenstein's monster would go on to look for love and (13) ..... among humans  
 and then, in failing to find either, to terrify the society and scientist who created it. It was not until a  
 hundred years after Shelley (14) ..... that scientists first performed the surgery  
 closest to what she imagined, (15) ..... a human heart from one person into another.

Adapted from: [//blog.lib.uiowa.edu/science/2015/10/22/science-of-frankenstein/](http://blog.lib.uiowa.edu/science/2015/10/22/science-of-frankenstein/)  
[//www.huffingtonpost.com/rob-dunn/the-hearts-of-mary-shelley\\_b\\_6654650.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rob-dunn/the-hearts-of-mary-shelley_b_6654650.html)  
[//fabledlands.blogspot.com/2012/04/what-is-frankensteins-monster-made-of.html](http://fabledlands.blogspot.com/2012/04/what-is-frankensteins-monster-made-of.html)

#### 4 Discussion.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* conveyed important aspects of Romanticism to science, in particular the manipulation of nature: she stressed the role and responsibility of society regarding science, and through the moral of her story supported the Romantic viewpoint that science could easily go wrong unless man took more care to appreciate nature rather than control it. When you join different materials, such as metals or plastics, you create an inanimate, lifeless object, while Victor Frankenstein tried to give life by joining human organs and failed. What lessons can modern man learn from this novel?

Discuss with your classmates.

