

Mary Shelley

Frankenstein



free Audiobook



Mary Shelley

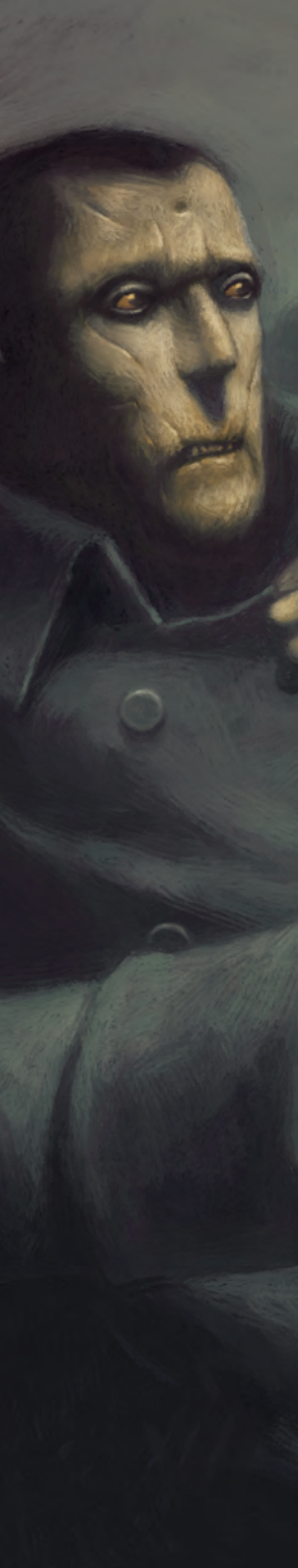
Frankenstein

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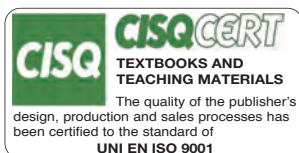
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end parts of the story that are recorded



Mary Shelley, painted in 1840 at the age of 43 by the English artist Richard Rothwell (1800-68).

The Life of Mary Shelley

The author of *Frankenstein* was born in London in 1797. Her parents were Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, two of the most famous radical thinkers of the day. Godwin was a social philosopher, author of *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), and Wollstonecraft was a feminist, author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), which attacked contemporary ideas that men were superior and demanded equal education for women.

Godwin and Wollstonecraft got married and had Mary in the same year, 1797, but Mary's mother got an infection during childbirth and died just a few days later. Godwin got married again four years later, to Mary Clairmont, a widow with two young children of her own. Mrs Clairmont didn't get on well with Mary, and ensured that her own daughter, Jane, went to school while Mary did not. Nevertheless, Mary received an excellent education from her father. He also gave her access to his extensive library, encouraged her to

write stories and allowed her to be present at the conversations he had with many of the leading intellectuals and poets of the day.

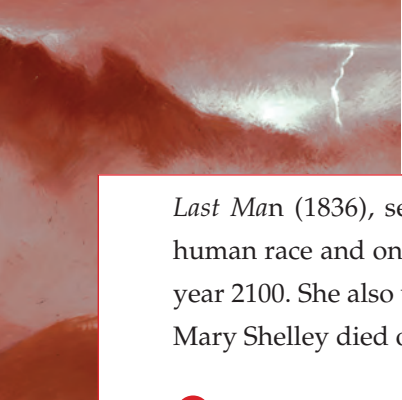
One of the young poets who visited Godwin was Percy Bysshe Shelley, who was five years older than Mary. Shelley's relationship with his wife, Harriet, was failing, and he and Mary fell in love and ran away to France together in 1814, taking Jane Clairmont with them. The next year, back in England, Mary gave birth to a baby girl, who died only a few weeks later.

Shelley, Mary and Jane spent the summer of 1816 with Lord Byron on Lake Geneva in Switzerland, where Mary began writing *Frankenstein*. Later the same year, Shelley's wife committed suicide, and Shelley and Mary, by now back in England, immediately got married.

In 1818, the same year as the publication of *Frankenstein*, money problems and ill health forced Shelley to leave for Italy with Mary and Jane. For the next four years they travelled constantly in Italy, living briefly in Lucca, Venice, Naples, Rome, Florence and Pisa. Mary lost two more babies, which caused her a nervous breakdown, and only a son – called Percy Florence Shelley, born in Florence in 1819 – survived. In the summer of 1822 they were staying at Lerici on the north-western coast of Italy. Shelley had sailed to visit Lord Byron and another literary friend in Livorno, but during a storm on the return journey the boat sank and he was drowned.

In 1823 Mary returned to England with her only son, Percy Florence. She devoted herself to his education and to publicising her husband's works. In 1824 she published the poems he had written before his death, and in 1839 she produced the first edition of Shelley's collected poems, which included long, informative notes written by her.

She earned her living through writing, but never again wrote anything as successful as *Frankenstein*. Her several other novels include *Valperga* (1823), a romance set in 14th-century Italy, and *The*



Last Man (1836), set in the future, in which a plague destroys the human race and only one man is left among the ruins of Rome in the year 2100. She also wrote articles, biographies and short stories. Mary Shelley died of a brain tumour in 1851.

1 Comprehension check

Make brief notes about each of the following:

- 1 Her parents
- 2 Her education
- 3 Her age
 - when she ran away with Shelley
 - when she started writing *Frankenstein*
 - when she became a widow
- 4 When she died
- 5 Married life
- 6 Her children
- 7 What she did after her husband's death
- 8 What she wrote after *Frankenstein*

2 Discussion

Look at the notes you made in activity 1. Which two of them did you find most surprising or interesting?

The Making of Frankenstein

Lord Byron was the most famous poet of his day – and the most scandalous. His behaviour was fiercely criticised by the public when his wife left him after only one year of marriage, and he left England – permanently – in April 1816. His first stop was Switzerland, where in the summer Shelley, Mary and Jane Clairmont came to visit him. People called 1816 ‘the year without a summer’: we know now that the worldwide severe weather conditions that year were caused by

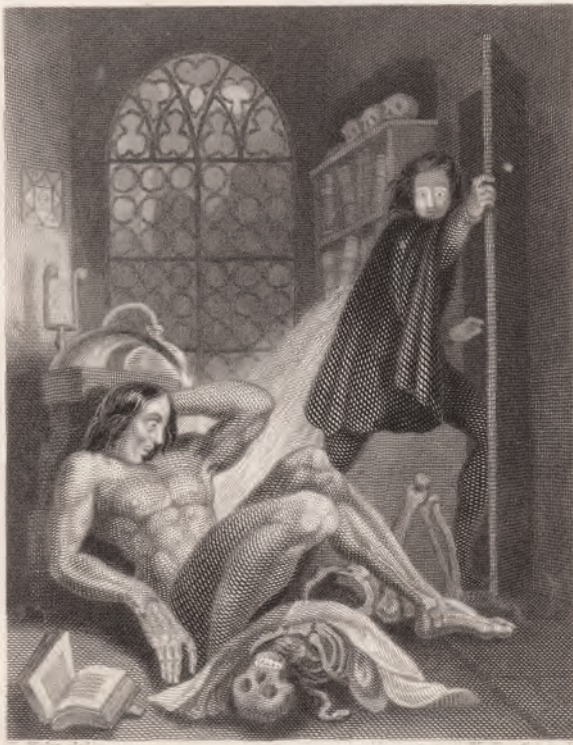
eruption of the volcano Mount Tambora in Indonesia. Almost constant rain forced Byron, Shelley, Mary, Jane and Byron's doctor, John Polidori, to spend most of their time indoors.

They entertained themselves by reading a collection of German ghost stories, *Fantasmagoriana*. When they got bored with this, Lord Byron suggested a competition: they should each write a frightening story. Jane didn't respond to the challenge, but the other four spent the next days thinking of something to write about.

Shelley started writing about an episode from his early life, but lost interest. Polidori had an idea involving a skull-headed lady, but did not develop it. Byron began a story about an aristocratic vampire, but gave it up; he published parts of it at the end of his poem *Mazeppa*. After the summer, Polidori developed the idea, and in 1819 he published *The Vampyre*, the first vampire story in English.

In her introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, Mary says she had no inspiration for days, until she listened to Byron and Shelley talking about recent scientific experiments, including the 1783 experiment by the Italian Luigi Galvani (1737-98) in animating the legs of dead frogs with electricity. They went on to talk about how corpses might be animated and a creature made from body parts. She describes how that night, in a state between sleeping and waking, she had a vision of a "pale student ... kneeling beside the thing he had put together ... the hideous phantasm of a man"; in this kind of dream, she saw how "on the working of some powerful engine" the creature started to move. "What terrified me will terrify others" Mary thought, and next morning announced she had found the idea for her story.

Her husband encouraged Mary to complete the story, and *Frankenstein* was published in 1818. It was an immediate success. The preface to this edition was written by her husband, and



FRANKENSTEIN

*In the gloomer of the half-acknowledged night, I saw the dull, yellow eye of the Creature glow; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs.
... I rushed out of the room.*

The creature comes to life in this illustration from the 1831 edition of **Frankenstein**. The electrical machines included in later films are not present. Notice the unused body parts.

many people thought Percy Bysshe Shelley had written the novel itself. Mary, however, was soon recognised as the real author of *Frankenstein*, and wrote her own introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*.

1 Comprehension check

Work in pairs or small groups and make up at least six questions to ask the class beginning with:

Where When Who What Why How

2 Discussion

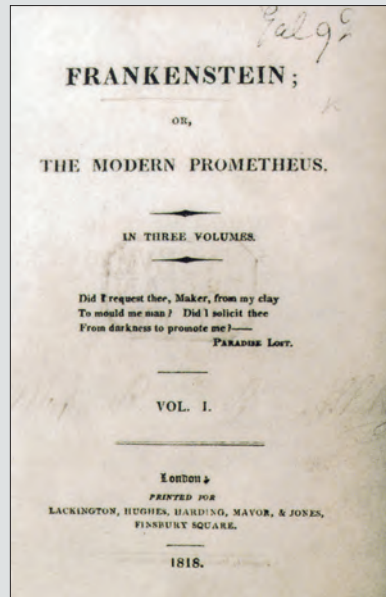
- 1 On your own, decide which of the events of the summer of 1816 you found most surprising or interesting, and compare your choices in class.
- 2 Is there anything else you would like to know about Mary Shelley and/or the events of the summer of 1816? Make a list in class, then use reference books or the Internet to look for the answers.

Before you read

1 The alternative title

In the 18-th and 19-th centuries it was quite common to give novels alternative titles. Mary Shelley gave her novel the alternative title *The Modern Prometheus*. Read the following information about Prometheus.

Prometheus in Greek myth was the son of one of the Titans, divine creatures who were defeated by a new set of gods, the Olympians, led by Zeus. Prometheus had intellectual powers (his name means 'forethought' in Greek) and was on the side of humans. In some stories he is the creator of the first man, who he makes from earth. In others, Zeus hides fire from humans but Prometheus steals it and brings it back. Zeus punishes him by tying him to rock where an eagle comes every day to eat his liver, which grows again every night, so his punishment is constantly repeated.



- A Why you think Mary Shelley chose this alternative title?
- B Do you think Prometheus is good (he gave fire to humans) or bad (he disobeyed the gods)?

2 The epigraph

An epigraph is a short quotation put at the beginning of a book or poem to suggest its theme. Mary Shelley chose some lines from the poem *Paradise Lost* (1667) by John Milton. The lines mean "Did I ask you to create me? No, you wanted to create me."

Why you think Mary Shelley chose this epigraph? Discuss your ideas, make a note of them, and check them as you read the story.

The Characters



From left to right: **Robert Walton, Frankenstein's mother, Frankenstein's father, Elizabeth, William, Victor Frankenstein, the creature, Henry Clerval, Justine, De Lacey, Safie, Agatha, Felix.**





Walton's Narrative

To Mrs Margaret Saville, England
Saint Petersburg, 11 December 17—
My dear sister,

I arrived here yesterday, in good health and full of hope. The cold wind from the north fills me with excitement. I dream of the North Pole, the goal of my voyage. In my dream it is a beautiful place where the sun never sets, and I will be the first man to walk upon its virgin snow. I am not afraid of danger or death. Who knows? I might find a passage to the East that will help our traders, or perhaps I will discover something useful to science. So do not worry about me, Margaret. You know that I always wanted to be an explorer, except for the few years when I tried to be a poet and failed. Ever since I inherited my fortune six years ago, I have dreamt of this voyage. In two weeks I will go to Archangel to hire a ship and a crew.¹ In June we will sail north.



track 02

1. **crew** : people to work on the ship; sailors.

When will I return to you? I do not know. If I succeed, years will pass before we meet again. If I fail, you will see me soon or never.

Goodbye, my dear Margaret.

Your affectionate brother,

R. Walton

To Mrs Saville, England

Archangel, 28 March 17—

I have hired a ship and crew. The men are brave and diligent, but I have no friend. I have no one to talk to about my hopes and fears. I will not find a friend here at Archangel or on the sea.

As I wait for the voyage to begin, I am full of excitement. Sometimes I am happy. At other times I am afraid. Will I see you again, dear Margaret? Write to me often. Your letters comfort me. If you never hear from me again, remember me with affection.

Your brother,

Robert Walton

To Mrs Saville, England

7 July 17—

My dear sister,

The voyage has begun at last. I am well and in good spirits.¹ Although great sheets of ice float past us on the sea, it is summer, and warm winds blow us north. Now I feel sure that I will succeed! Goodbye, Margaret!

Robert



end

1. in good spirits : happy.



PART ONE

To Mrs Saville, England

5 August 17—

I must tell you about the strange thing that has happened. Last Monday we were surrounded by ice. The ship could not move. We were very far from land. We waited anxiously, looking out at the ice, which stretched to the horizon. Suddenly, we saw a sledge¹ pulled by dogs going north. A gigantic man drove the sledge. We watched until he disappeared from sight.

Later the ice broke, and we were able to move again. The next morning, we found another sledge on a floating sheet of ice in the sea. The man in this sledge was weak, tired, and half-frozen. We invited him onto the ship, but he said, 'Tell me first where you are going.' When I told him we were going north, he climbed onto the ship. We gave him food and warm clothes. For two days he was very ill, and I feared he had gone mad. When he had recovered a little, I asked him what he was doing alone on the ice.

'I am following someone,' he said.

'Someone who is also travelling alone on a sledge?' I asked.

'Yes.'

'Then I think we have seen him.'

He asked many questions about 'the devil', as he called the other man. Which way was he travelling? Did I think that the breaking of the ice had destroyed the other sledge? From that moment, he was full of energy and purpose. He is an interesting man, and I like him very much. I wrote in one of my letters that I would not find a friend on the sea, but maybe I was wrong. I cannot send this letter, so I will continue it as a journal² to send you when I can.

1. **sledge** : vehicle used for travelling over snow. (See picture opposite).

2. **journal** : diary.





Extracts from Walton's Journal

13 August 17—

The man's name is Victor Frankenstein. I like him more every day. I admire him and pity him. He speaks well, he is intelligent and sensitive, but he has some secret sadness.

Now that he is a little stronger, he spends all his time on the deck,¹ watching for the other sledge. I watch with him, talking about my hopes for this voyage. One day I told him of my ambitions to gain knowledge and succeed where other men have failed. My words disturbed him.

'Unhappy man!' he said, 'Do you share my madness? Let me tell you my story, and I hope it will be a warning to you.'

He was too ill to continue.

19 August 17—

Yesterday the stranger said to me, 'I have had a very unhappy life. I want to tell my story to you, because you too are ambitious. You want knowledge and wisdom, as I once did.' Today he will begin to tell me his tale. Every night I will write down his words. You must be eager² to read his story. Think, then, how eager I am. I know him. I can hear his wonderful voice and see his shining eyes. How awful must be the tale that has ruined such a man!

1. **deck** : the top floor of the ship, overlooking the sea.

2. **eager** : enthusiastic, interested.

The text and **beyond**

1 Comprehension check

Answer the following questions.

- 1 Where is Robert Walton when he writes his first letter? Do you know where this place is? (If not, you will find out on page 18).
- 2 What do we know about Walton's background? Think about:
 - his family — how much we are told and what we can guess;
 - how he has the money for this voyage to the North Pole;
 - what he did before this voyage.
- 3 Walton is happy with the crew that he has hired, but not completely. Why not?
- 4 Where was Walton's ship when they saw the first man on a sledge?
- 5 In what physical condition was Frankenstein when he was found?
- 6 How did Frankenstein begin to feel after Walton told him that they had seen another man on a sledge?
- 7 What word does he use Frankenstein use to refer to the other man on a sledge?
- 8 Why does Walton 'admire and pity' Frankenstein?
- 9 What is Walton going to do every night?
- 10 Who do you think is the man that Frankenstein is following?

2 Discuss the following questions.

- 1 Walton gives several reasons why he wanted to go on this voyage. What are they? Which do you think is the most important reason?
- 2 Walton invites Frankenstein on board his ship but Frankenstein, despite his physical condition, replies '*Tell me first where you are going*'. Why? What does this tell us about Frankenstein?
- 3 Frankenstein asks Walton 'Do you share my madness?' What does he mean by the word 'madness'?

3 After asking '*Do you share my madness?*', Frankenstein says '*Let me tell you my story, and I hope it will be a warning to you*'. What do you think he means? Make his warning explicit: finish the following sentence in no more than ten words:

'Robert, I warn you

4 Robert Walton's voyage

Look at the map and find Saint Petersburg and Archangel. What route do you think Robert Walton took from England to get to Saint Petersburg and Archangel? Where do you think his ship is now?



5 The setting

The setting of a story or film is the place where the events happen and the time when the events happen. Some stories or films have just one setting; others, like *Frankenstein* have several settings.

- 1 Were you surprised that *Frankenstein* begins in the Arctic?
- 2 Why do you think Mary Shelley chose this setting to begin her novel? Look at the list of reasons at the top of the next page. In small groups, choose the three most important reasons, and number them 1 to 3. Then explain your choices to the class.

- A the extreme cold
- B its remoteness: it is a long way from anywhere
- C the whiteness of the landscape
- D nobody lives there
- E travelling through it is difficult
- F the strange beauty of the landscape
- G it is a dangerous place
- H it is light for much of the day in August
- I it is inhospitable: it would be very difficult to live there

FCE 6 Speaking

Work in pairs. One student talks about photos A and B and the other talks about C and D. Each student compares the photos and says why he/she thinks one of the landscapes is more inhospitable (one minute). The students then say which landscape in the photos of the other student he/she finds more attractive (20 seconds).



7 A new setting

You are making a new film of *Frankenstein*: it has a different setting from Mary Shelley's novel. Which of the four landscapes on page 19 would you choose as a new setting for the beginning, and why?

8 Storytelling: flashbacks

The word 'flashback' comes from the cinema, but we also use it about novels and stories. A flashback shows us an event which happened at an earlier time. Writers and film-makers often tell events in a different order ('narrative order') from the order in which they actually happened in time ('chronological order').

Frankenstein, just like a modern film, uses flashback. In Part One we saw Frankenstein in the Arctic, but Part Two of the story begins with Frankenstein saying 'I was born in Geneva'.

- 1 Do you know any films which use flashbacks? Make a list in class.
- 2 Do you know any stories or novels which use flashbacks?
- 3 What do you think are the advantages of narrating a film or story with flashbacks?

9 Storytelling: different kinds of texts

Frankenstein is made up different kinds of texts. In Part One you read letters and journal extracts written by Robert Walton, and in Part Two you will read Frankenstein's own story.

- 1 Do you know any other novels which contain different kinds of texts?
- 2 What could be the advantages of telling a story in this way?

10 Discussion

'Do you share my madness?' asks Frankenstein.

- 1 In small groups, make a list of three kinds of 'madness', things that people think, feel or do that could be described positively by some people but that could also be described as madness by others. Compare your lists in class. Did you have similar ideas?

- 2 Decide on the thing which could be most ambiguous: that is, the thing which many people might consider positive but that many people could also consider madness.
- 3 Can you think of any characters from fiction or films and real-life people from history who are examples of this kind of 'madness'?

11 Writing

You have read two entries in the journal of Robert Walton, for 13 August and 19 August. Imagine that Frankenstein also keeps a journal. Write his journal entries for this period. You can choose to write either two or three journal entries. You can choose any dates between 13 August and 19 August. Write about 150 words.

Before you read

1 Prediction

The following sentences come from Part Two, but they are not in the order in which they occur. Put them in the order you think they will occur, and talk about what you think they refer to.

- A ☐ By the time I was well enough to look out of my window again, it was springtime.
- B ☐ He was standing beside my bed, looking down at me. He made a sound...
- C ☐ You will find a happy home full of people who love you.
- D ☐ The thought of science filled me with anxiety and disgust.
- E ☐ Everyone knows that sadness, or will know it one day.
- F ☐ The moon watched me through the window as I uncovered the secrets of Nature.
- G ☐ I hid myself like a criminal.
- H ☐ I left the lecture full of a new ambition.

2 Facts about Frankenstein

After you have read pages 23 and 24, pause for a moment and fill in the table below with the facts we know about Frankenstein (n.b. they are not in the same order as in the story).

Name: Victor Frankenstein

Place of study:

Subject studied:

Influential professor:

Professional ambition:

Place of birth:

Occupation of father:

What happened to his mother:

Name of brother:

Name of adopted sister:

Genetic parents of adopted sister:

Ambitions of parents regarding adopted daughter:

Name of best friend:

Ambition of best friend: