

Frankenstein

by

Mary Shelley



Mary Shelley



- Mary Shelley was born on August 30, 1797, in London.
- She was the daughter of philosopher William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft.
- Mary Shelley was taught at home by her father.
- When she was seventeen, Mary eloped to France with Percy Bysshe Shelley.
- Mary and Shelley spent the summer of 1816 in Switzerland, and were neighbors to Lord Byron.
- It was during this time that she began writing *Frankenstein*.
- The writing of *Frankenstein* took place at Villa Diodati on the banks of Lake Geneva



Just a Competition

- In the summer of 1816, Mary, Percy , Byron and Polidori were lodging on the Swiss Alps.
- Unseasonable rain kept them trapped inside their lodgings.
- To pass time Byron decided to make a competition and see who could write the best ghost story.
- Mary won the prize.



Mary and Percy

- From the «Preface» of 1831 to the novel, we understand a lot about the relationship between the two:
- “My husband...was from the first...that I should prove myself **worthy of my parentage**,”
- “He was for ever inciting me to obtain literary reputation”
- “Have you thought of a story? I was asked each morning..(by Shelley)
- “Many and long were the conversations between Lord Byron and Shelley, to which I was a devout but **nearly silent listener**.”
- “At first I thought but of a few pages of a short tale; but Shelley urged me to develop the idea at greater length”.
- “But for his incitement, it would never have taken the form in which it was presented”



The Premise – Creation of Man

- Shelley's story did not come out of nowhere.
- “*They (Shelley and Byron) talked of the experiments of Dr. Darwin... 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.*”
- Scientists and physicians of her time explored life and death through experiments with lower organisms and human anatomical studies.
- Someone attempted to resuscitate drowning victims, and experiments using electricity to restore life to the recently dead.



Plot



- Robert Walton, an explorer, tells how he has met Victor Frankenstein in the Arctic after earlier having seen a 'gigantic figure' crossing the ice.
- Victor tells of his childhood and his caring family, particularly of his love for his foster sister Elizabeth. His mother dies of fever just before he leaves to study at university.
- While at university, Victor's interest in science becomes an obsession. Victor uses dead bodies to experiment on and creates a monster made of body parts. He is immediately disgusted by the thing he has created and abandons it.
- Victor's brother William is murdered and Justine Moritz, a family servant, is executed for it.
- However, Victor believes the Monster is to blame after witnessing it at the scene of the murder.



- The Monster and Victor meet on the Glacier of Montanvert in the Alps. The Monster tells the story of how it has survived and of the time it has spent becoming educated.
- The Monster asks Victor to admit responsibility for his actions and show some sympathy. He also pleads with Victor to build a female companion. Victor agrees.
- Victor finds a remote spot in the Orkneys where he begins to construct the female creature but suddenly, realising the consequences of what he is doing, he tears it to pieces.
- The Monster, who has followed Victor, is enraged and in revenge kills Victor's best friend, Henry Clerval.
- Victor and Elizabeth marry, but Victor finds his new wife dead at the hands of the Monster.
- He vows to hunt the creature down.
- In Walton's last letters, back in the Arctic, Frankenstein dies and the Monster, still miserable, heads off, probably to its own death.





INFLUENCES *AND* LITERARY PARALLELS



- The myth of Prometheus → Frankenstein is an example of overreacher.
- Rousseau → The Monster is a noble savage.
- Locke → The Monster's self-awareness and his education.
- Gothic stories read by Mary and Percy B. Shelley.
- S. T. Coleridge's poem : "*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*" → both the novel and the poem are stories of a crime against nature.



Frankenstein: The Modern Prometheus

- The full title of Mary Shelley's novel is *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus*.
- So it shouldn't come as a surprise that Mary Shelley was influenced by the Greek Mythology tale of Prometheus.



Prometheus



- Prometheus was said to be the wisest of all the Titans.
- In the form of fire Prometheus is credited with bringing mankind knowledge and enlightenment.
- He stole fire from the Gods of Mount Olympus.
- For acting against the decree of the Gods, who wanted to keep the power of fire to themselves, Prometheus was harshly punished.
- He was chained to a rock to have his liver eaten out every day by an eagle.
- Every night his liver would grow back.
- This was to be his punishment for all of eternity.



The Birth of the Creature

- 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.

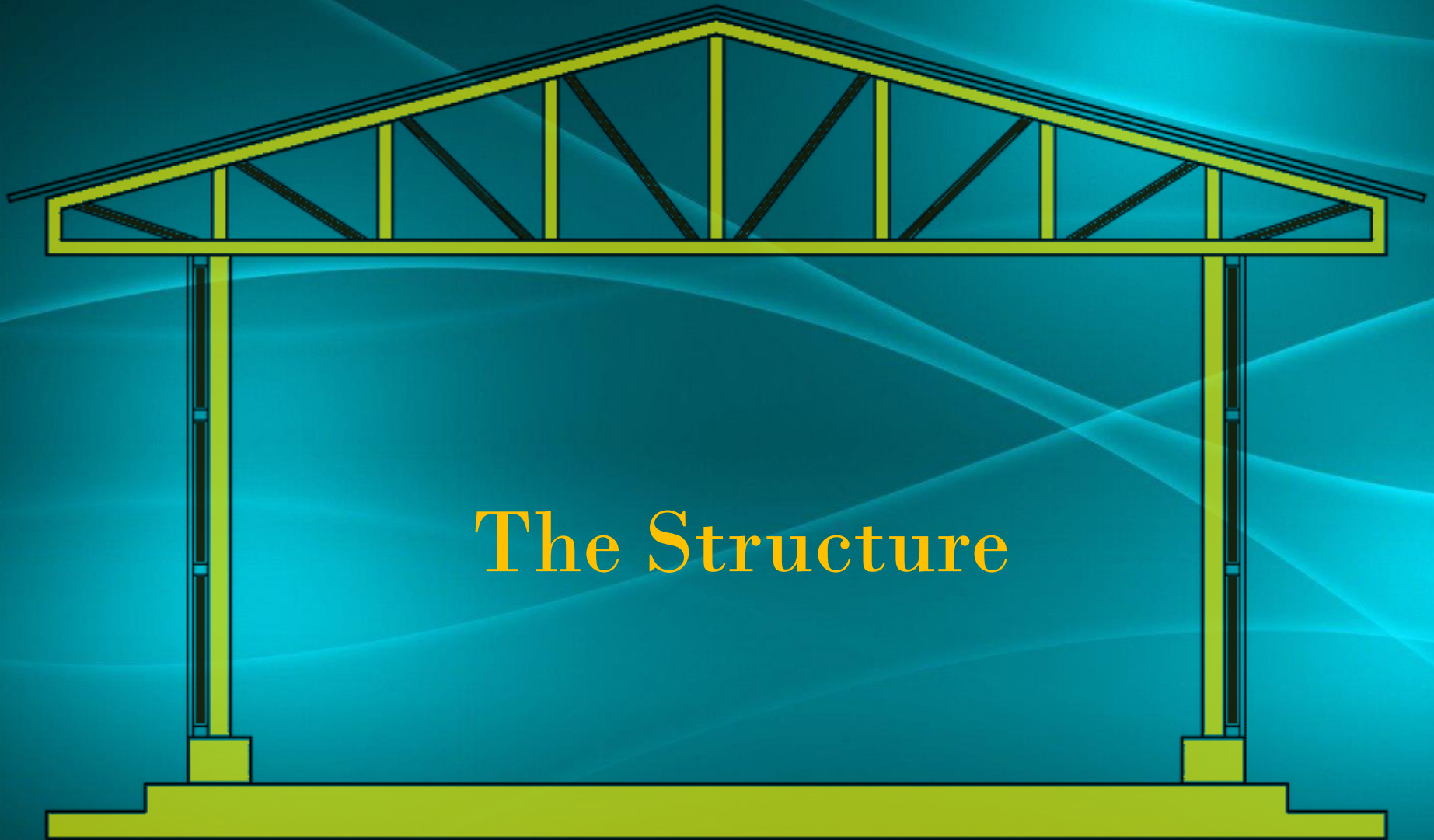




The different accidents of life are not so changeable as the feelings of human nature. I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; 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.

At length lassitude succeeded to the tumult I had before endured, and I threw myself on the bed in my clothes, endeavouring to seek a few moments of forgetfulness. But it was in vain; I slept, indeed, but I was disturbed by the wildest dreams. I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her, but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel.





The Structure

- The story is told through three intertwined stories:
 - Captain Robert Walton's letters home to his sister bookend the story
 - The narrative related by Victor Frankenstein to Captain Walton is in between the letters
 - The Creature's story is central in the novel



**Walton's narration to his sister Margaret Walton Saville
(chapters 1-10)**

**Frankenstein's narration to Walton
(chapters 11-17)**


**The Monster's narration to Frankenstein
(chapters 18-24)**

Walton Shows us the Moral

- Parallel situation between Walton and Frankenstein
- Each has a solitary nature, feels largely self-educated, is obsessed with his 'quest' and suffers from hubris
- Frankenstein's narrative warns Walton of the price payable for egocentric obsessions



The Creature's Story

- This communicates a number of views and values
 - Uses religious/philosophical ideal that man is essentially good – the creature is like Satan, the fallen angel
 - His passionate responses to nature are typically Romantic (literary era)
 - Isolation and loneliness are no good spiritually (much like when Frankenstein isolates himself with his science)
 - Social prejudices the  Monster as an outcast.





"You must create a female for me with whom I can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being. This you alone can do, and I demand it of you as a right which you must not refuse to concede."(...)

"I do refuse it," I replied; "and no torture shall ever extort a consent from me. You may render me the most miserable of men, but you shall never make me base in my own eyes. Shall I create another like yourself, whose joint wickedness might desolate the world. Begone! I have answered you; you may torture me, but I will never consent."

"You are in the wrong," replied the fiend; "and instead of threatening, I am content to reason with you. **I am malicious because I am miserable.** Am I not **shunned and hated by all mankind**? You, my creator, would tear me to pieces and triumph; remember that, and tell me why I should pity man more than he pities me? You would not call it murder if you could precipitate me into one of those ice-rifts and destroy my frame, the work of your own hands. Shall I respect man when he condemns me?



The Creator's responsibility

- Victor Frankenstein's result of his arrogant defy to the laws of nature had produced a horrible, hideous creature .
- He had cruelly sentenced it to eternal misery and loneliness.
- The monster is, in fact, rejected twice:
 1. **by human beings**, thus becoming a social outcast,
 2. **by his own creator**, who despises him not only for his ugliness, but also because he is the reminder on earth of his mortal limits.
- Victor declines the moral implication of his act towards his creation.
- The monster will strenuously try to nail him to his responsibilities of maker till the end, when he eventually kills him.
- The monster is the unfortunate expression of an imperfect creator.



Blake's Doubt

- *Tyger! Tyger! Burning bright*
 - *In the forest of the night*
 - *What immortal hand or eye*
- *Could frame thy fearful symmetry?*
- If the Tiger stands for fear, destructive power, evil, why did God make it?
- To make us suffer?
- Did our creator have a plan or are we just the imperfect product of an experiment like Frankenstein's creature?



KEY IDEAS



KNOWLEDGE

- Victor seeks knowledge for his own reasons
- Does not consider the consequences
- Walton is a similar character to Frankenstein, just not as dangerously progressed
- Victor focused on Alchemy before going to his university and learning about new sciences



EDUCATION

- Romantics favored a ‘natural’ education through reading and adventures, providing self-growth, rather than a formal education in schools.
 - Walton is self-educated: “*my education was neglected, yet I was passionately fond of reading.*”
 - The Creature learns from the DeLacey’s non-formal schooling



PARENTHOOD/FAMILY

- Mary lost her mother early
- Elizabeth's mother died early during childbirth
- Victor does not care for the Creature he 'parented' (Victor is the real monster – he neglects his own 'child')
- Critiques the notion of the individual, of solitariness and introversion, which at the time was being expressed positively



GENRE



Gothic

- The Gothic novel (mid 18th – mid 19th) is distinctive for its fascination with the horrible, the repellent, the grotesque and the supernatural
- Emphasis on emotion
 - Gothic art and architecture was intended to have a magical or preternatural effect on the viewer
 - The Gothic building was the perfect setting for a story intended to terrify or otherwise overwhelm the reader
 - Dangerous natural settings were employed (exploring the Pole)



Gothic - characters

- Characters have a chronic sense of apprehension and the premonition of impending (but unidentified) disaster
- The Gothic world is the fallen world,
- Characters live in fear and alienation,



Gothic setting

- Action tends to take place at night or in a sunless environment
- Some motifs of typical Gothic fiction include
 1. images of death;
 2. revenge;
 3. a family curse;
 4. the Doppelganger;
 5. demonic possession;
 6. masking/shape changing;
 7. madness
- These motifs and settings are prevalent throughout the novel



Gothic themes

- *Frankenstein* centred around:
 - Thirst for knowledge
 - Scientific overreaching
 - Forbidden knowledge and the mysteries of life
- The emphasis in *Frankenstein* is on psychological terror
- The scientific experiment implies that the masculine aspect of reproduction can only reanimate the dead, and by nature alienate family.
- It is the feminine and nurturing aspect of reproduction that would have saved the Creature from his lonely life.



Romantic

- Preference for grandeur, the picturesque, the sublime, passion and extraordinary beauty as opposed to completion and proportion (i.e. rugged landscape).
- The Creature is moved by the power of the natural world.
- Frankenstein and Walton seek to subjugate nature.
- The natural world reflects the danger and trauma of the emotional worlds of the characters.



Modern Topics



- The use of knowledge for good or evil
- The invasion of technology into modern life
- Treatment of the poor or uneducated
- The power of nature in the face of unnatural events
- Nature vs. nurture
- The cause of social prejudices





This is
The End