

Mary Shelley and Frankenstein: An AP Introduction

A vintage movie poster for the 1931 film 'Frankenstein'. The central figure is a large, dark, stylized illustration of the monster, Frankenstein's creature, with its right arm extended forward. The background is a light, textured beige. The title 'FRANKENSTEIN' is written in large, bold, red, block letters with a black outline. Below the title, the subtitle 'THE MAN WHO MADE A MONSTER' is written in a smaller, black, sans-serif font. The names of the main cast members are listed in a black, sans-serif font. At the bottom, there is a smaller illustration of a group of people, including a man in a suit, a woman in a red dress, and a man in a brown jacket, looking towards the monster. The overall style is classic and dramatic.

CARL LAEMMLE
presents

FRANKENSTEIN

THE MAN WHO MADE A MONSTER /

COLIN CLIVE - MAE CLARKE
JOHN BOLES - BORIS KARLOFF

DWIGHT DRYE
EDWARD VAN SLOAN
and FREDERIC KERR

Music by BRUCE MITCHELL
and FRANK MURPHY

© 1931 M.P.M. Co.
All Rights Reserved
Manufactured by M.P.M. Co.

WHEN?



In the summer of 1816, 19 year old Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin and her lover, the poet Percy Shelley, visited the Lord Byron at his villa beside Lake Geneva in Switzerland.

THE MOTIVATION

Stormy weather frequently forced them indoors, where they and Byron's other guests sometimes read from a volume of ghost stories. One evening, Byron challenged his guests to each write one themselves. Mary's story, inspired by a dream, became *Frankenstein*.



Women's Rights

- Most women in *Frankenstein* act how they are supposed to act—subservient, passive, submissive
- Irony—written by female child of an early feminist, yet there are very few female characters and only one seemingly strong female role

Condemnation of “Patriarchy”

- **Male scientists violating female Nature—usurping the woman’s ability to bear children**
- **Male work ethic—self-destructive to pursue power against all odds, must sacrifice relationships with family and friends (Victor Frankenstein and Robert Walton)**
- **Who is the monster?**

Society's Influence: Educational Theories of the 1800s

- John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) argued that a child is a "blank slate" (tabula rasa) that is formed only through experience.
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile, or On Education* (1762) promotes the idea that a child's upbringing is responsible for his nature.

HER LOVE - PERCY SHELLEY



Met when she was 15.

He was married. 1st wife
drowned.

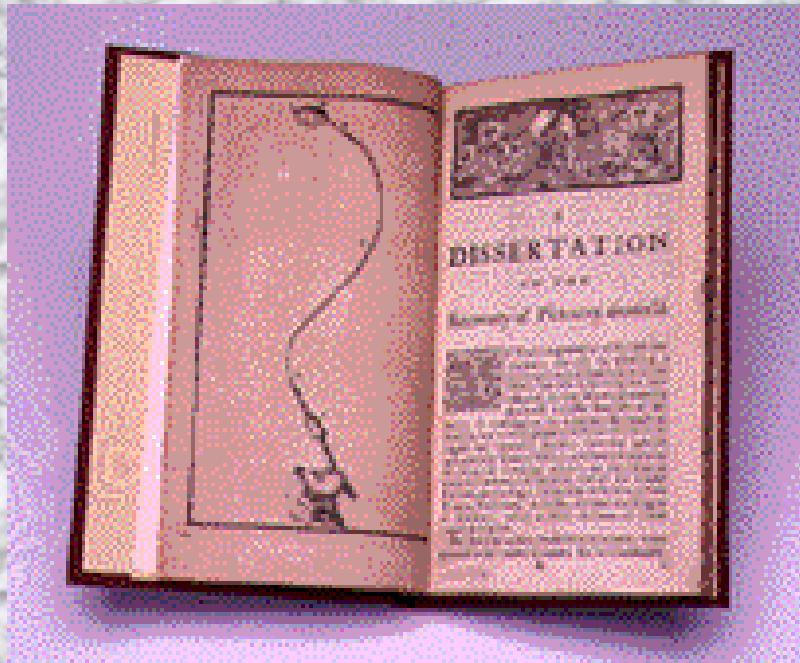
They married two years
later. She had already
had 2 of his children
by this time.

He was a famous poet.

Romanticism

- During this time of bloodshed and turmoil, Romantic writers were turning to nature as an escape from the harsh realities of the world.
- Nature was a place where human tyrannies did not exist or reign.

WHAT WAS SCIENCE UP TO AT THIS POINT?



During Mary's time, scientists and physicians were fascinated by the elusive boundary between life and death.

Experimented with lower organisms, performed human anatomical studies, attempted to resuscitate drowning victims, and performed experiments using electricity to restore life to the recently dead.

Frankenstein's Science Inspirations

- Science and philosophy were essentially the same discipline; Frankenstein's approach is more philosophical than what we would consider scientific
 - Cornelius Agrippa: the occult, Renaissance magic, the Trinity, numerology—ideas have all be discredited in terms of “real science”
 - Paracelsus—Renaissance philosopher who introduced the idea of treating diseases with chemicals instead of herbs; changed emphasis of alchemy from “the Elixir of Life” to making medicine

- Albertus Magnus—advocating searching for natural causes aside from the church's position that God is the cause of all effects

Modern Prometheus

- Prometheus was the son of a Titan
- In the battle between Zeus and the Titans for control of Olympus, he sided with Zeus and became his chief counselor.
- Zeus denied man fire.
- Prometheus stole fire and gave it to man.
- Therefore, Zeus became furious.
- He chains him to rock and lets birds devour his liver.
- Since his liver grew back every night, this torture continued indefinitely.
- The importance of fire/electricity and the theme of continual suffering are both reflected



A SUSPICIOUS DEATH

Shelley's first wife died by drowning (suicide?).

When she was found, resuscitation was attempted - smelling salts, vigorous shaking, electricity, and artificial respiration--using resuscitation bellows were used.

These were all methods that had been used since the 1760s to revive drowning victims to life.

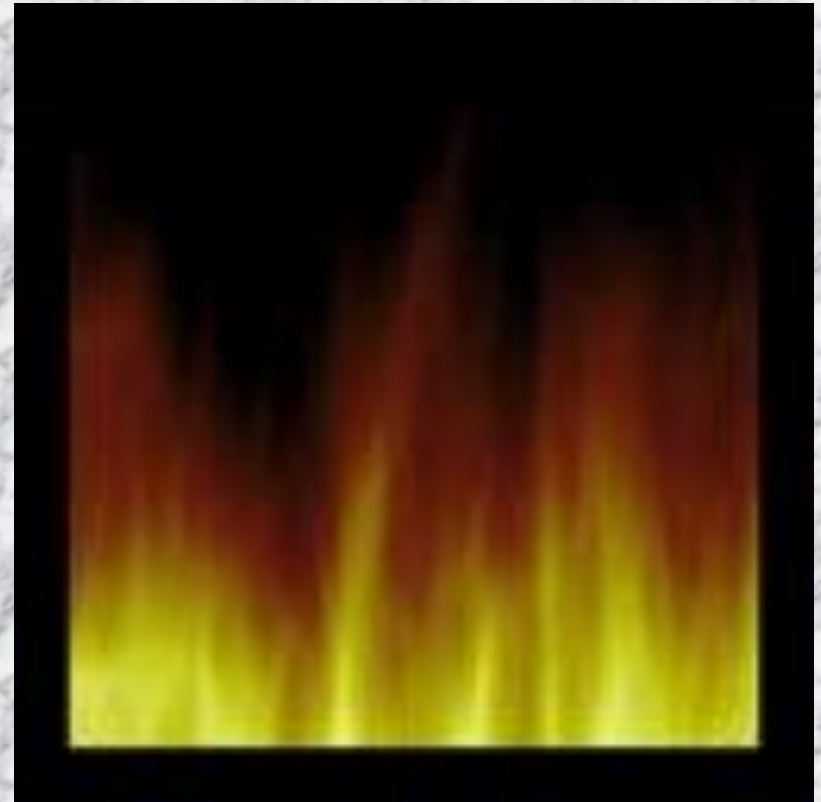
Harriet, however, did not survive.

THE BABY AND THE DREAM

Mary's daughter Clara had died.

Mary dreamed that her daughter was brought back to life through vigorous rubbing and being held near a warm fire.

This inspired her to write *Frankenstein*.



MORE BAD NEWS



Her sister committed
suicide

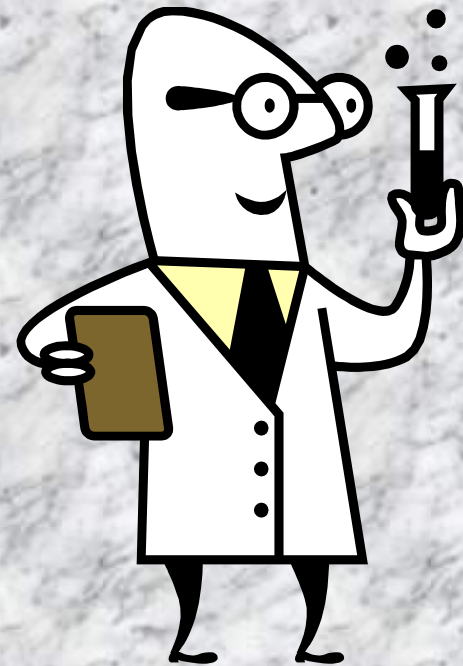
Her son (William) died
from malaria

Her daughter died from
dysentery.

Lots of bad luck!!!

MARY'S CONTEST SUBMISSION

- Not intended to be a tale of the supernatural – she even made her main character a scientist so that his building of a man would seem logical.
- Was a combo of Gothic elements and science
- Might be considered early sci-fi



THE STRUCTURE OF THE STORY

- The novel is constructed of three concentric layers, one within the other: A Framework Narrative
 - outermost--Robert Walton's letters to his sister (MWS);
 - middle--Frankenstein's story as he tells it to Walton;
 - innermost--Monster's description to Frankenstein of the development of his mind at the deLaceys'
 - **What is the purpose in creating a framework narrative?**

The Gothic Novel

- Set in medieval times
- Dark, mysterious, evil tone
- Dark castles, palaces, chambers, haunted mansions
- Isolated setting
- Repressed fears and desires
- All come together to emphasize the sense of evil



Texts

- *Frankenstein* is overflowing with texts: letters, notes, journals, inscriptions, and books fill the novel, sometimes nestled inside each other, other times simply alluded to or quoted.
- Walton's letters envelop the entire tale.
- Victor's story fits inside Walton's letters.
- The monster's story fits inside Victor's.