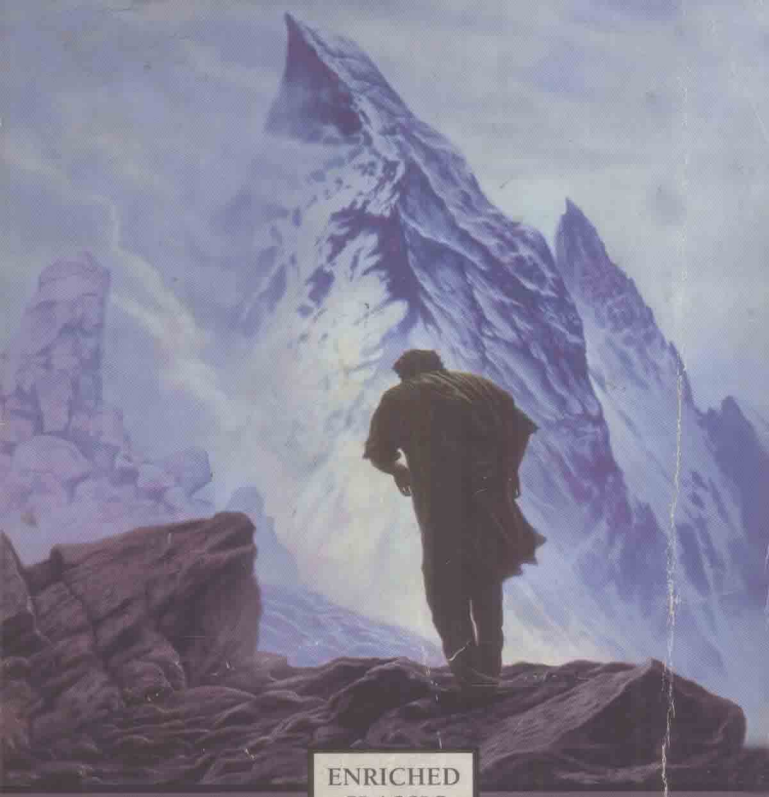


ENRICHED CLASSIC

FRANKENSTEIN

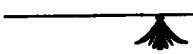
MARY SHELLEY

Includes detailed explanatory notes, an overview of key themes, and more

FRANKENSTEIN;

OR,

THE MODERN PROMETHEUS



Mary Shelley

Supplemental material written by Margaret Brantley

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POCKET BOOKS
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POCKET BOOKS, a division of Simon & Schuster, Inc.
1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020

ISBN: 0-7434-8758-3

This Pocket Books printing May 2004

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Cover illustration by Blue Terrell

Manufactured in the United States of America

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FRANKENSTEIN:
THE MOTHER OF GOTHIC HORROR

Published in 1818, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* is a model for Gothic fiction, science fiction, and all the horror novels that followed it. Weaving the Gothic elements of the supernatural, terror, anguish, and love with the Romantic values of nature and individualism, Shelley delivers a chilling tale about unchecked ambition and the consequences of disturbing the order of nature. Generations of scientists, ethicists, psychologists, feminists, and artists have been inspired and riveted by Mary Shelley's dark story.

Almost every science fiction writer—from Jules Verne to Gene Roddenberry—owes a debt to Shelley. She was able to see clearly the lure and the danger of technology, and her foresight laid the groundwork for countless fantastical stories that followed. *Frankenstein* introduces the ever-popular ideas of the mad scientist,

the experiment gone awry, and the devastating effects of psychological trauma. Mr. Hyde, Dr. Moreau, and even slasher Jason Voorhees of the *Friday the 13th* films should all remember Mary Shelley on Mother's Day.

Frankenstein was first adapted for the stage in 1823, and since the dawn of film dozens of adaptations, sequels, and parodies have paid tribute to it. The constant reinvention of the Frankenstein story as it nears its two hundredth anniversary is a testament to its timelessness. As humankind grapples with the ethical and environmental issues related to nuclear power, fossil fuels, and genetic engineering, the novel's warning is as relevant as it has ever been.

In Greek legend, Prometheus stole fire from the gods for human advancement. Shelley's "modern Prometheus," Victor Frankenstein, continues to represent the destruction that scientists try to avoid as well as the genius that artists strive to achieve.

The Life and Work of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley

Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin was born in 1797 into the most celebrated intellectual and literary marriage of the day. Her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, was among the most influential Enlightenment radicals, and wrote passionately and persuasively for the rights of women, most famously in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Her father, William Godwin, was a celebrated philosopher and writer who believed in man's individual perfection and ability to reason. His best-known work, *The Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and Its*

Influence on General Virtue and Happiness, was published in 1793.

Young Mary never knew her mother, who died of complications from her birth. Godwin, also raising Wollstonecraft's other daughter, Fanny Imlay, needed a mother for his girls and found one in Mary Jane Clairmont, the unmarried mother of two. Clairmont was jealous of the attention paid to her notable stepdaughter and favored her own children, making life at home difficult for young Mary, who was often whipped for impertinence and found solace reading or taking her meals at her mother's grave. Although she received no formal education, growing up in William Godwin's house provided ample opportunities for learning, with its well-stocked library and frequent visits from the great minds of the time. When relations between his wife and daughter became intolerable, Godwin sent Mary to live with his friends the Baxters in Scotland in 1812, where she enjoyed her first taste of domestic harmony.

That year she briefly met the newly married Percy Bysshe Shelley, a noted young Romantic poet and ardent follower of Godwin's philosophy. She returned to her father's home in 1814, where Shelley was a frequent visitor. The two fell in love, and with Mary's stepsister, Jane (later known as Claire) Clairmont, ran off to the Continent. The couple's first child was born prematurely in 1815 and survived only a few weeks, and their second child was born in early 1816. Claire began an affair with another famous young poet, Lord Byron, and the four passed the unusually cold summer of 1816 together on the shores of Lake Geneva. They stayed by the fire talking and telling ghost stories, and Percy,

Byron, and Mary decided to see who could write the most frightening tale. Mary's tale became the basis for *Frankenstein.*

Percy's wife, Harriet, drowned herself in November 1816, and Percy and Mary married in December. Mary published *Frankenstein* anonymously in 1818, but since Percy had written the Preface and the book was dedicated to his mentor William Godwin, he was suspected of being the book's author. Tragedy followed the Shelleys as their third child, Clara, died in 1818 and their second child, William, died in 1819. Mary began writing her novel *Mathilda* in August 1819, and gave birth to her fourth child, Percy Florence, in November. She suffered a miscarriage in June 1822, and the following month Percy drowned when his boat sank in a storm in the Gulf of Spezia, near Genoa, leaving her a widow at the age of twenty-four.

Mary continued to write for the rest of her life. Her second novel, *Valperga; or, the Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca,* found success after it was published in 1823. Other works of fiction include *The Last Man* (1826), *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck, a Romance* (1830), *Lodore* (1835), and *Falkner, a Novel* (1837); *Lives of the Most Eminent Literary and Scientific Men of Italy, Spain, and Portugal* and *Lives of the Most Eminent Literary and Scientific Men of France* were published in 1835 and 1838, respectively. An account of her European travels with her surviving son in the 1840s was published in two volumes under the title *Rambles in Germany and Italy in 1840, 1842, and 1843* (1844). She lived with her son and his family until she died, in 1851, at the age of fifty-three.

Historical and Literary Context of *Frankenstein*

The Enlightenment

The eighteenth century was the Age of Enlightenment, or Age of Reason, in Europe and America. Advances in science in the 1600s gave rise to the belief in natural law and confidence in human reason, which led thinkers of the 1700s to apply a scientific approach to matters of human importance including religion, society, politics, and economics. The movement was centered in the salons of Paris, coffeehouses of England, and universities of Germany.

Human rationality was seen to be in harmony with the universe, and belief in the importance of the individual was popular. Philosophers looked for universal truths to govern humanity and nature, and the sense of progress and perfectibility through rationality abounded. Human reason was considered the path to understanding the universe and improving the human condition, the result of which would be knowledge, freedom, and happiness.

The scientific approach to discovery was very successful in the fields of science and mathematics and spurred the search for rules that could define all areas of human experience. Rather than trusting innate goodness or blaming original sin for people's behavior, Enlightenment thinkers crafted new theories about heredity and psychology. Whereas once the political state was viewed as a representation of divine order, new political thinkers began touting the rights of individuals and arguing for establishment of democracies.

Revolution: American, French, and Industrial

The revolutionary political theories born in Europe had a revolutionary impact in the New World. By the mid-1700s, after more than a century of imperialist rule, American colonists had developed customs and values that differed from English ways. Rather than relaxing its influence and accommodating those differences, the English tightened control by passing laws demanding tax revenue in the colonies without offering the colonials a voice in Parliament to represent their interests. To the colonial political leaders, this taxation without representation amounted to tyranny. The war for American independence broke out in 1775 and had almost reached a stalemate when assistance from France arrived in 1777. The fighting lasted four more years before, with the help of the French navy, the war ended with the British surrender at Yorktown. The Treaty of Paris recognized the United States of America in 1783, a country founded on the principles of liberty and democracy.

The success of the young democracy in America fired the imaginations of progressives in France who were eager to establish a representative government at home. France's privileged classes—the clergy and the nobility—governed the country, while the productive class—the third estate—was heavily taxed to foot the bill. Outdated farming methods created food shortages, while extravagances in the court of King Louis XVI and his queen, Marie Antoinette, sparked outrage. The king was forced to order a general election of popular representatives who met in 1789 to present him with their complaints; instead, they declared themselves to be the

National Assembly and vowed not to adjourn until a constitution had been written. Violence erupted as frustrated peasants lashed out at the ruling classes, forcing the nobility to abolish the feudal system and accept the Declaration of the Rights of Man. By 1791 a limited constitutional monarchy was created, but the Revolution was far from over. "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" was the rallying cry as the National Assembly suspended the monarchy and called for new elections to create a convention to draw up a new constitution. In 1792 the new Legislative Assembly abolished the monarchy and arrested, convicted, and executed the king for treason. Internal power struggles led to the creation not of a democracy but of a military dictatorship that tried to maintain order by executing everyone it considered a threat. In the span of about a year, from 1793 to 1794, thousands, including the queen, lost their heads to the guillotine in a period known as the Reign of Terror.

Turmoil was not contained within the country's borders, however. France had declared war on Austria in 1792 and was busy in Europe fighting governments sympathetic to the deposed monarchy. The year 1795 saw another new constitution in France, followed in 1797 by another coup. In 1799, General Napoleon Bonaparte returned home from a military campaign in Egypt, seized control of France, and established the Consulate. Within a decade he had conquered Europe from Spain to the border of Russia for France, but the empire was short-lived. He went into exile in 1814 after losses at the hands of Britain, Prussia, and Spain, and returned only to be definitively defeated at Waterloo in 1815.

Another revolution, social and technological rather

than political, was also under way at the turn of the nineteenth century. Mechanical innovations shifted the basis of England's economy from agriculture to industry between 1750 and 1850. The development of steam power and a boom in the cotton textiles industry caused a population shift from rural to urban areas. New steam-powered railroads and ships broadened the market for England's output. France's Industrial Revolution took off in the 1830s, followed by Germany's in the 1850s and the United States' after the Civil War.

Laborers were more at the mercy of their employers than ever before, and working conditions in factories and mills were often brutal. Children and parents alike worked long hours six days a week in dangerous conditions for very low wages. It was clear that the economic philosophy of laissez-faire capitalism—the belief that market pressures alone would resolve production issues in capitalist economies—would not protect workers. Karl Marx and Frederich Engels published their *Communist Manifesto* as a solution to the tense relationship between labor and capital. They called for the more equitable distribution of the vast wealth being generated in the newly industrialized world. Their ideas, however, did not produce much political change until the early twentieth century. Throughout the nineteenth century, most of the Western world struggled to adjust to the impact of industrialization.

The Romantic Movement

Imbued with revolutionary spirit, the Romantic movement lasted from the late eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century. It was a rejection of the order,

calm, and rationalism of the Enlightenment in favor of innovation and emotional expression. Although disappointed that the French Revolution was overshadowed by the horrors of the Reign of Terror and the egomania of Emperor Bonaparte, intellectuals of the day lauded the ideals of the Revolution and were fascinated by the possibility of radical social reformation. They were optimistic that humankind could create its own utopia, but the reality of events around them made them pessimistic about the darker side of human nature.

Romantic art is marked by an appreciation of the beauty of nature, the importance of self-examination, and the value of the creative spirit. Nationalism, folk culture, the exotic, and the supernatural were also topics of interest. To the Romantic artist, inspiration, intuition, and imagination were seen as divine sparks that pointed to Truth. The subjects of the literature of the Romantic movement focused on the quest for beauty; the faraway, the long-ago, and the lurid; escapism from contemporary problems; and nature as a source of knowledge, refuge, and divinity. To explore these subjects, Romantic writers stressed emotion and subjectivity, and often asked their readers to suspend their disbelief.

Romanticism valued individual voices, including those of women and "common people." They tended to idealize the pastoral lives of farmers, shepherds, milkmaids, and other rustic people, figures who seemed to them to belong to a simpler, more wholesome, less cynical time when humankind lived in harmony with nature. The works of poet William Wordsworth—especially his *Lyrical Ballads* (1798)—provide good examples of this idealization. The Romantic sensibility also

allowed women authors such as Ann Radcliffe, Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, and the Brontë sisters to flourish.

Gothic Literature

The Romantic literature preoccupied with mystery, horror, and the supernatural is known as Gothic. The name is a reference to the barbaric Gothic tribes of the Middle Ages, or to medieval times in general with its castles, knights, and adventure. Gothic novels tended to feature brooding tones, remote settings, and mysterious events. The characters' inner emotional lives receive a lot of attention, as does the struggle between good and evil. The style took its name from Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story*, the first book identified as belonging to the genre. Published in 1764, it is set in a medieval society and features plenty of supernatural happenings. English writers Ann Radcliffe and Mary Shelley, and Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe in the United States, are regarded as masters of the form. Among them, Shelley is known for using a contemporary setting and modern issues to illustrate the weird and terrible to evoke the reader's fear of the darkness in human nature.

Chronology of Mary Shelley's Life and Work

1797: William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft marry on March 29. Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin is born on August 30. Mary Wollstonecraft dies on September 10.

1801: William Godwin and Mary Jane Clairmont marry on December 21.

1808: Mary Godwin anonymously publishes her parody, *Mounseer Nongtongpaw,* with the Juvenile Library.

1812: Mary meets Percy Bysshe Shelley and his wife, Harriet, at Mary's home in November.

1814: Mary, her stepsister, Jane Clairmont, and Percy spend the summer traveling in Europe.

1815: Mary Godwin and Percy Shelley's first child, a daughter, is born prematurely in February and dies in March.

1816: Mary Godwin and Percy Shelley's son William is born in January. They travel to Switzerland to meet noted poet Lord Byron, and Mary begins

work on *Frankenstein*. Mary's half-sister commits suicide in October. Percy's wife, Harriet, commits suicide in November. Percy and Mary are married in December.

1817: Mary and Percy's daughter Clara is born in September. Mary and Percy publish their co-written *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* in November.

1818: *Frankenstein* published. Clara dies in September.

1819: William Shelley dies in June. Mary begins work on *Mathilda* in August. Mary and Percy's son Percy Florence is born in Florence in November.

1820: Mary writes mythological dramas *Prosperine* and *Midas*.

1822: Percy Shelley drowns in a shipwreck near Genoa in July.

1823: Mary Shelley's novel *Valperga; or, the Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca* is published in February. She returns to England in August.

1826: Mary publishes *The Last Man* in February.

1830: Mary publishes *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck, a Romance* in May.

1831: Mary publishes a revised edition of *Frankenstein*.

1835: Mary publishes *Lives of the Most Eminent Literary and Scientific Men of Italy, Spain, and Portugal*, vol. I, in February, and *Lodore* in April.

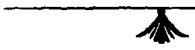
1836: Mary's father, William Godwin, dies in April.

1837: Mary publishes *Falkner, a Novel* in February.

1838: Mary publishes *Lives of the Most Eminent Literary and Scientific Men of France*, vol. II, in August.

1851: Mary dies on February 1.

Historical Context of *Frankenstein*



1750s: Benjamin Franklin establishes the electrical nature of lightning through experiments using kites.

1764: James Hargreaves invents the spinning jenny for textile manufacture. Horace Walpole publishes *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story.*

1769: James Watt patents his steam engine.

1771: Richard Arkwright produces the first spinning mill for cotton thread.

1774: Joseph Priestley discovers oxygen. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe publishes *The Sorrows of Young Werther.*

1776: The American Declaration of Independence is signed in July. Adam Smith publishes *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations.*

1777: Antoine Laurent Lavoisier establishes the oxygen and nitrogen basis of air.

1781: Immanuel Kant publishes the *Critique of Pure Reason.*
1785: James Watt and Matthew Boulton install a steam engine in an English cotton factory.
1789: The storming of the Bastille begins the French Revolution.
1791: Thomas Paine publishes *The Rights of Man,* part I. Luigi Galvani publishes his paper on his theory of animal electricity.
1792: Mary Wollstonecraft publishes *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.*
1793: Reign of Terror begins in Paris.
1794: Robespierre is executed, ending the Reign of Terror.
1797: Samuel Taylor Coleridge writes "Kubla Khan" and the first version of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."
1800: Alessandro Volta develops the electric battery.
1806: The first steam-driven textile mill opens in Manchester, England.
1813: Jane Austen publishes *Pride and Prejudice.* Percy Bysshe Shelley publishes *Queen Mab.*
1814: The British navy develops the first steam-driven warship. George Stephenson invents the steam locomotive.
1818: James Blundell, a London surgeon, performs the first successful transfusion of human blood.
1825: The first railroad starts operation in England.
1832: England's Parliament outlaws body-snatching for medical research.
1837: Samuel F. B. Morse makes a public demonstration of the electric telegraph in New York.