

FRANKENSTEIN

MARY SHELLEY



EDITED BY J. PAUL HUNTER

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

Mary Shelley
FRANKENSTEIN



THE 1818 TEXT
CONTEXTS
NINETEENTH-CENTURY RESPONSES
MODERN CRITICISM

Edited by
J. PAUL HUNTER
UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

W • W • NORTON & COMPANY • New York • London

This title is printed on permanent paper containing 30 percent
post-consumer waste recycled fiber.

Copyright © 1996 by W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America.

First Edition.

The text of this book is composed in Electra with the display set in Bernhard
Modern. Composition by Pennset. Manufacturing by Courier.
Cover illustration: *Sea of Ice*, c. 1823–24, by Caspar David Friedrich. Hamburger
Kunsthalle. Reproduced by permission.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* : contexts, nineteenth-century responses,
criticism / edited by J. Paul Hunter.

p. cm. — (A Norton critical edition)

Includes bibliographical references (p.).

1. Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft, 1797–1851. *Frankenstein*.
2. Women and literature—England—History—19th century.
3. Horror
tales, English—History and criticism.
4. Monsters in literature.

I. Hunter, J. Paul, 1934–

PR5397.F73M36 1995

823'.7—dc20 95-37928

ISBN 0-393-96458-2 (pbk.)

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110
W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., Castle House, 75/76 Wells Street,
London W1T 3QT

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

Preface

You've heard the name: you know his story. But you may well know it from films, TV, and conversation, and you may not know whether *Frankenstein* is the monster or his scientist-creator (it's the latter). And you may not be aware that the story comes from a nineteenth-century novel by a young woman — only eighteen when she conceived the story and began to write it, not yet twenty when she finished it — who created it for a kind of ghost-story contest. The story of how the book came to be written by Mary Shelley is almost as mysterious and convoluted as the story *Frankenstein* itself tells. It too is a story of beauty and terror, ambition and disappointment, intellectual reaching and fear of knowledge, love and hate.

Frankenstein the book came about almost by accident. Weary of the boredom of everyday life in England and irritated by the torments of conventional family values there, the author (with her lover and infant son) embarked in the summer of 1816 on a trip to Switzerland. There, among a small group of young English writers and intellectuals, she participated in intense literary and philosophical discussions. On stormy June nights on the shores of Lake Lemman (near Geneva, almost within the shadow of the Alps), the group began lengthy readings of ghost stories, and she was drawn into an agreement (later abandoned by most of the others) to write a story of the supernatural — something that would involve sublimity, terror, and the unknown. She had not deliberately set out to write a book (not, anyway, at this moment), and in the beginning she apparently had no particular idea for a plot, only an intention of inventing a scary story. But other stories were read and told (there was then a great vogue of ghost stories, and a lot of published material was available), and the group talked about contemporary science and current theories of the origins of life, matters that were to become prominent in the narrative Mary Shelley ultimately wrote. The immediate occasion of the writing thus involved both serious intellectual issues and a simpler desire to entertain and tell a compelling story.

Even though she was still a teenager, Mary Shelley brought to the occasion a background of grim experience, vivid fears, and powerful ambition. Her own mother had died in the aftermath of giving her life, and she grew up in a chaotic family that included a half-sister, a stepmother, a stepbrother, and a stepsister, in addition to her brilliant but

difficult father. At sixteen, accompanied by her stepsister, she fled to Europe with a married man whose wife was pregnant (the man she was living with as she began *Frankenstein*), and within months gave birth (prematurely) to a child who died within days. Her second child was born less than a year later and was five months old when she began *Frankenstein* (though he too would die, shortly after the book was published). For the young Mary, life and love were often associated with disappointment and tragedy, and birth and death sometimes seemed intertwined. But there were also powerful positives in her life. She was observant, highly intelligent, and extremely well read: according to her journal for the years in which she wrote *Frankenstein*, she read nearly a hundred books a year (in several languages), many of them long and difficult volumes in philosophy and history. She was sensitive, caring, and capable of giving and inspiring intense love, and (although not personally aggressive, perhaps even shy) she associated easily with the prominent and famous. She had famous parents—both of them writers and radical social reformers—and she was living with a man who, although only twenty-three years old himself, was already becoming as famous a writer as they were—the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. Her name when she began to write *Frankenstein* was still Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin; six months later, she married him.

Mary Shelley's parents were William Godwin, whose reputation was based mainly on the social theories he espoused in *An Enquiry into Political Justice* but who was almost equally famous as a novelist, and Mary Wollstonecraft, whose feminist ideas (championed in works like *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*) were either celebrated or hated by almost everyone in England or France and who had died, from complications of childbirth, less than two weeks after Mary was born. At the time she began writing *Frankenstein*, Mary had been living with Percy Shelley for two years; they married halfway through the year that she spent writing the novel (from June 1816 to May 1817), just weeks after his wife's suicide and two months after the suicide of Mary's half-sister. Her mind was full of powerful (and conflicting) hopes and anxieties; and she often saw in traditional opposites—birth and death, pleasure and pain, masculinity and femininity, power and fear, writing and silence, innovation and tradition, competitiveness and compliance, ambition and suppression—things that overlapped and resisted easy borders and definitions. And, like the structure of the novel's text—with its main plot of monster creation carefully distanced by being embedded in layers of telling by several tellers—the story of how Frankenstein's story took shape is textually as well as psychologically complex, its large cinemascopic and dreamlike imaginings often signaled by small life particulars.

Mary and Percy chose as the site of their wedding a church in Bread Street, London, where John Milton had been born two centuries ear-

lier. They had been reading Milton's *Paradise Lost* together that spring—he often reading aloud to her—and although in spirit and emphasis *Frankenstein* may seem a long way from Milton, its epigraph and some of its most important assumptions and values derive from the Miltonic moral and mythological universe. The “creature”—the “hideous Progeny” of Victor Frankenstein (and of Mary)—learns some of his most basic social and philosophical lessons from Milton, and so does Mary Shelley. Like her parents and lover, Mary distrusted the past, but she also found it irrepressible and often prophetic. But the past (including texts like *Paradise Lost*) did not always teach Mary the same things her teachers tried to teach. Readers who know well the writings of William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Percy Shelley often notice how different *Frankenstein* is in spirit from their work, how much less trustful Mary is of creativity, the imagination, intellectual ambition, and writing itself. Her feelings toward her parents and lover—all three of them important mentors to her, and powerful intimidating presences—were decidedly mixed: her admiration of each was strong, but so was resistance and suspicion (not always conscious or articulated) of their lives, their stories, their values, their books.

If the thoughts and feelings of *Frankenstein* grow out of Mary's complex emotions and a consciousness swirling with the themes of creation and destruction and with fears of knowledge and monstrosity, the immediate occasion of the writing suggests other anxieties and conflicts, especially ones involving fears of creativity and intellectual contestation. Here was an explicit competition—with established writers and proven intellects—to create an original and striking story and to produce a powerful emotional effect, and suddenly the modest and self-effacing Mary strained to conceive and establish her personal, social, and (above all) intellectual place in this high-powered group—to claim and justify her heritage at the same time that she demonstrated her intellectual “worthiness” of the man she was about to marry and her ability to compete with the best and most popular of contemporary writers. It was at once competition and no competition. That Percy Shelley edited, “corrected,” and marketed her manuscript (and perhaps wrote himself into it in ways beyond his own intention) only made it more firmly hers, confirming her personal ambitions, accomplishment, and declaration of independence. Knowledgeable readers can readily find in *Frankenstein* traces of the radical ideas of her father, mother, and husband, but they will also find subtle (and some not-so-subtle) correctives she offered to their more strident views. They can also see Mary fully asserting herself among contemporary poets, storytellers, and competitors, predicting fearful outcomes from Promethean ambitions, yet daring herself to imagine the unimaginable.

In the very making of the novel, one can see something of the desire that allowed Mary Shelley to harvest her genetic, literary, and cultural

heritage (and in a sense to challenge her husband), though exactly what it was in her temperament that enabled her to distance herself from her several influences and mentors is harder to sort out exactly. At the time the novel began to be conceived, Mary and Percy were spending much of their time with Lord Byron, then the most popular poet in England and already a legendary figure (though Percy Shelley's fame as a poet and personality was rising too). It was, by Mary's account (see pp. 169–73) “a wet, ungenial summer,” and ghost stories seemed congenial company on long nights. One June night, someone (perhaps Byron) proposed that they each write ghost stories in a kind of competition with those they had been reading—and with each other: the competitors were Byron, Percy, a bright and ambitious but bizarre man named Polidori (Byron's traveling companion and personal physician), possibly Mary's stepsister Claire Clairmont (though we have no evidence of her even beginning to write a story), and Mary herself. Percy apparently lost interest quickly and Byron not long after, though a fragment of what he wrote later became attached to one of his poems, *Mazeppa*. Polidori perhaps conceived at first a strange, Gothic tale that Mary found ludicrous (though his own account differs from Mary's [see p. 182 and pp. 169–73]), but then (typically) piggybacked on a Byron idea and published a vampire story under Byron's name. The only important result was *Frankenstein*, published anonymously but with broad hints that it might be by Percy Shelley or Byron; early reviewers assumed it was written by a man. It was hard for nineteenth-century critics (and many later ones through the mid-twentieth century) to believe that the young Mary was *that* good. And literary critics for a long time credited the accomplishment essentially to Percy's influence and help; “Mary undoubtedly received more than she gave,” the *Dictionary of National Biography* (1897) says patronizingly: “Nothing but an absolute magnetising of her brain by [Percy] Shelley's can account for her having risen so far above her usual self as in ‘Frankenstein’ ” (52:29). Percy Shelley did (with Mary's blessing) edit and “revise” the text, and twentieth-century scholarship has continued to debate just exactly what Percy is responsible for, and whether he improved or injured Mary's work. Mary Shelley, then, was the clear winner of the “contest,” but her rewards (in the Shelley/Byron group and in the contexts of Romanticism's rigid sense of personal reputations generally) were not all that great.

Experience, psychological complexity, friendly influence, competitive instincts, fear of success—all these played their part in the origins of this remarkable story. There is an eerie appropriateness in the fact that the story has been taken over by a host of adapters, retellers, and revisionists and that Mary Shelley has seldom gotten full credit for her originality and creativity—that instead of being regarded as the clear winner of the competition, she has remained in the shadow of what

she created, even (until recently) in the shadow of her own creators and conjugal reviser. Still, it is her story, and in coming to grips with it yourself as a reader, it is especially appropriate (more than with most texts) to think of it both through other people's critical perceptions and through the personal experience and contextual history of the remarkable young woman who both resisted writing it and flaunted it before her nearest and dearest.

If your acquaintance with the *Frankenstein* story comes from film versions, the book may surprise you, for there is far more to it than the scientist-creates-monster myth that popular culture has turned into one of modernity's best known and most powerful stories. In recent years *Frankenstein* has become one of the most popular texts for literature courses, and Mary Shelley has come to be known as a major writer and something of a culture hero, one of the major "Romantics." It was not always so. For most of her life, Mary Shelley lived (apparently contentedly) in the shadow of her famous parents and ultimately more famous husband, and most of the century and a half since her death in 1851 she has continued to be eclipsed by them. *Frankenstein* made something of a splash on its first appearance, and it was reprinted twice in her lifetime (in 1823 and 1831, the latter edition heavily revised). Her later novels (six published in her lifetime, another not until 1959) were respectfully but not enthusiastically received, and until the last quarter of the twentieth century, Mary Shelley was mainly known (even to historical students of literature) as Percy Bysshe Shelley's wife, widow, and editor. *Frankenstein* remained known to readers (it has never been out of print), but it had little reputation as "literature" — increasingly less in the twentieth century than in the nineteenth, when its oddity had given it a certain prominence. Mary's later works were typically advertised as "by the author of *Frankenstein*"; the identity was that of the author of a lucky piece of pop art, a one-book writer, a cultural freak.

Feminist criticism and scholarship (in the wake of several popular films) has firmly changed that over the past two decades, and now her work — not just *Frankenstein* but her other writings as well — is not only appreciated "in its own right," but often regarded as more sophisticated in outlook and more accomplished in craft than anything of Percy's. Contemporary criticism is almost unanimous now in regarding *Frankenstein* as not only canonical, after years of academic neglect, but paradigm-breaking and exemplary: it is required reading for anyone who wants to understand the nineteenth century or the making of the modern consciousness. The critical essays at the back of this volume both trace the early reception and reputation of the book and suggest the wide range of textual and cultural interpretations that have made it into a powerful text, nearly a mastertext, for the turn of the twenty-first century.

The text printed here is that of the 1818 first edition, published in London in three volumes by Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor, and Jones. Only glaring typographical errors have been corrected; otherwise the text reproduced here is that read by *Frankenstein's* first readers, except that explanatory notes have been provided with the needs of modern students in mind. Until recently, the tradition has been to use the third-edition text of 1831, which Mary Shelley revised carefully — but from a later perspective when she was considerably older and more detached from the original conception. Scholarship now strongly prefers the first edition; for the issues involved, see the essays by M. K. Joseph and Anne Mellor on pp. 157–66.

In preparing this edition, I have been blessed over time with help and guidance from many colleagues and correspondents. I wish especially to acknowledge the generous sharing of work and knowledge by Sylvia Bowerbank, Marilyn Butler, James Chandler, Morris Eaves, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Jerrold Hogle, Margaret Homans, Larry Lipking, Bette London, Maureen McLane, Anne Mellor, and James Rieger. Many people at W. W. Norton have provided counsel, support, and gentle prodding: I thank John Benedict, Barry Wade, Julia Reidhead, Donald Lamm, Alan Cameron, Carol Hollar-Zwick, Kate Lovelady, Marian Johnson, and (especially) Carol Bemis. I have also been fortunate to have had research assistants who did much valuable textual, bibliographical, and historical digging: Jayne Greenstein, Willard White, Marianne Eismann, Erica Zeinfeld, and (especially) Will Pritchard, who provided most of the notes and was more counsel and collaborator than assistant.

21 July 1995

Contents

Preface	vii
---------	-----

The Text of *Frankenstein*

MAP: Geneva and Its Environs	2
Title page (1818)	3
Dedication (1818)	4
Preface	5
<i>Frankenstein</i>	7

COMPOSITION AND REVISION

M. K. Joseph • The Composition of <i>Frankenstein</i>	157
Anne K. Mellor • Choosing a Text of <i>Frankenstein</i> to Teach	160

Contexts

Mary Shelley • Introduction to <i>Frankenstein</i> , Third Edition (1831)	169
• Letter to [?Fanny Imlay] (June 1816)	173
Percy Bysshe Shelley • Mont Blanc (1816)	175
• [The Sea of Ice] (1817)	179
George Gordon, Lord Byron • <i>From Childe Harold's</i> <i>Pilgrimage, Canto III</i> (1817)	180
[John William Polidori] • Letter Prefaced to <i>The Vampyre</i> (1819)	182

Nineteenth-Century Responses

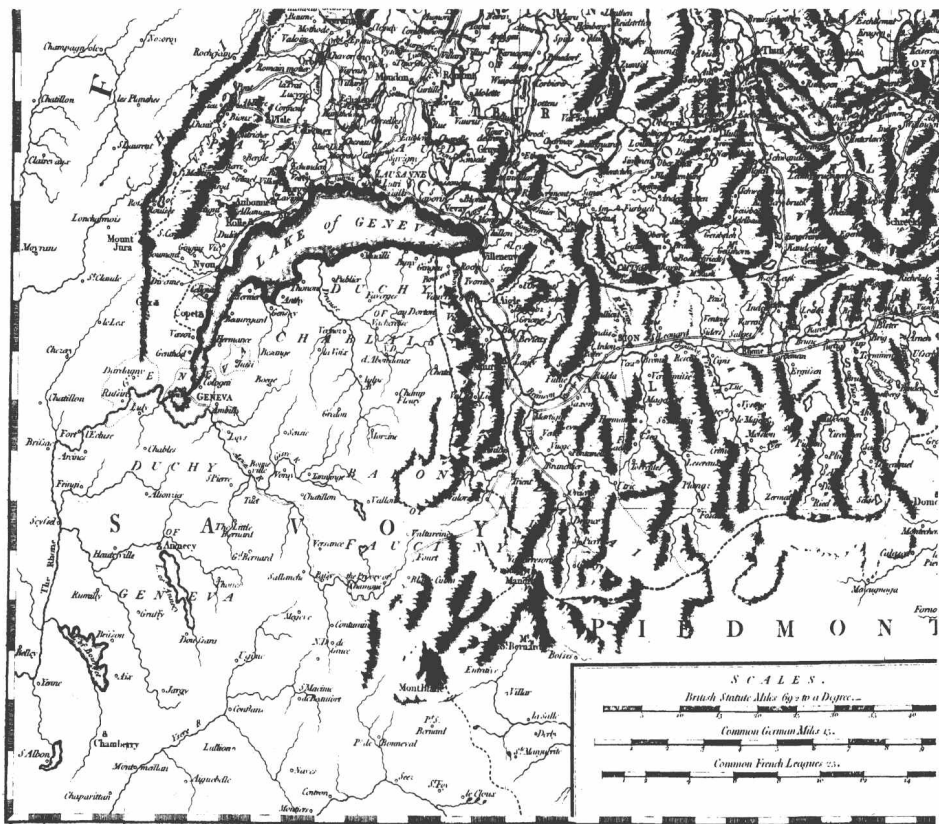
Percy Bysshe Shelley • On <i>Frankenstein</i> (1817)	185
[John Croker] • From the <i>Quarterly Review</i> (January 1818)	187
Anonymous • From <i>Edinburgh Magazine</i> (March 1818)	191
Anonymous • From <i>Gentleman's Magazine</i> (April 1818)	196
Anonymous • From <i>Knight's Quarterly</i> (Aug.–Nov. 1824)	197
Hugh Reginald Haweis • Introduction to the Routledge World Library Edition (1886)	200

Modern Criticism

Christopher Small • [Percy] Shelley and <i>Frankenstein</i>	205
George Levine • <i>Frankenstein</i> and the Tradition of Realism	208
Ellen Moers • Female Gothic: The Monster's Mother	214
Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar • Mary Shelley's Monstrous Eve	225
Barbara Johnson • My Monster/My Self	241
Mary Poovey • "My Hideous Progeny": The Lady and the Monster	251
Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak • [<i>Frankenstein</i> and a Critique of Imperialism]	262
William Veeder • The Women of <i>Frankenstein</i>	271
Anne K. Mellor • Possessing Nature: The Female in <i>Frankenstein</i>	274
Susan Winnett • Coming Unstrung: Women, Men, Narrative, and Principles of Pleasure	287
Marilyn Butler • <i>Frankenstein</i> and Radical Science	302
Lawrence Lipking • <i>Frankenstein</i> , the True Story; or, Rousseau Judges Jean-Jacques	313
Mary Shelley: A Chronology	333
Selected Bibliography	335

The Text of
FRANKENSTEIN





Geneva and Its Environs. Courtesy of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Library.

FRANKENSTEIN;

OR,

THE MODERN PROMETHEUS.¹

IN THREE VOLUMES.

Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay
To mould me man? Did I solicit thee
From darkness to promote me?—

PARADISE LOST.²

VOL. I.

London :

PRINTED FOR

LACKINGTON, HUGHES, HARDING, MAVOR, & JONES,
FINSBURY SQUARE.

1818.

Courtesy of the Newberry Library.

1. In Greek mythology, the Titan Prometheus created humankind out of mud and water and then stole fire from the gods to give his creation; as punishment, Zeus chained him to a rock where an eagle pecked out his liver. In *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), a poetic drama by Percy Bysshe Shelley, Prometheus is eventually released from captivity.
2. By John Milton (1608–1674). These lines are from book X, 743–45 and are spoken by Adam after the Fall. This epigraph appeared on the title page for each volume.

TO
WILLIAM GODWIN,³

AUTHOR OF POLITICAL JUSTICE, CALEB WILLIAMS, &c.

THESE VOLUMES

Are respectfully inscribed

BY

THE AUTHOR.

Courtesy of the Newberry Library.

3. English philosopher and author (1756–1836), husband of Mary Wollstonecraft and father of Mary Shelley; *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) was a work of political philosophy, popular in radical circles; *The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794) was a novel.

Preface¹

The event on which this fiction is founded has been supposed, by Dr. Darwin, and some of the physiological writers of Germany,² as not of impossible occurrence. I shall not be supposed as according the remotest degree of serious faith to such an imagination; yet, in assuming it as the basis of a work of fancy, I have not considered myself as merely weaving a series of supernatural terrors. The event on which the interest of the story depends is exempt from the disadvantages of a mere tale of spectres or enchantment. It was recommended by the novelty of the situations which it develops; and, however impossible as a physical fact, affords a point of view to the imagination for the delineating of human passions more comprehensive and commanding than any which the ordinary relations of existing events can yield.

I have thus endeavoured to preserve the truth of the elementary principles of human nature, while I have not scrupled to innovate upon their combinations. The *Iliad*, the tragic poetry of Greece—Shakespeare, in the *Tempest* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*,—and most especially Milton, in *Paradise Lost*, conform to this rule; and the most humble novelist, who seeks to confer or receive amusement from his labours, may, without presumption, apply to prose fiction a licence, or rather a rule, from the adoption of which so many exquisite combinations of human feeling have resulted in the highest specimens of poetry.

The circumstance on which my story rests was suggested in casual conversation.³ It was commenced, partly as a source of amusement, and partly as an expedient for exercising any untried resources of mind. Other motives were mingled with these, as the work proceeded. I am by no means indifferent to the manner in which whatever moral tendencies exist in the sentiments or characters it contains shall affect the reader; yet my chief concern in this respect has been limited to the avoiding the enervating effects of the novels of the present day,⁴ and to

1. Written by Percy Bysshe Shelley; see the 1831 introduction (pp. 169–73, below) for Mary Shelley's account of the genesis of *Frankenstein*.

2. The German physiologists included Blumenbach, Rudolphi, and Tiedemann. Erasmus Darwin (1731–1802), English scientist and poet, proposed early theories of evolution (later developed by his grandson Charles). See the 1831 introduction for Mary Shelley's account of his search for "the principle of life."

3. With Byron and Percy Shelley.

4. Novel-reading was often viewed as both the cause and the result of idleness.

the exhibition of the amiableness of domestic affection, and the excellence of universal virtue. The opinions which naturally spring from the character and situation of the hero are by no means to be conceived as existing always in my own conviction; nor is any inference justly to be drawn from the following pages as prejudicing any philosophical doctrine of whatever kind.

It is a subject also of additional interest to the author, that this story was begun in the majestic region where the scene is principally laid, and in society which cannot cease to be regretted. I passed the summer of 1816 in the environs of Geneva. The season was cold and rainy, and in the evenings we crowded around a blazing wood fire, and occasionally amused ourselves with some German stories of ghosts, which happened to fall into our hands. These tales excited in us a playful desire of imitation. Two other friends (a tale from the pen of one of whom would be far more acceptable to the public than any thing I can ever hope to produce) and myself agreed to write each a story, founded on some supernatural occurrence.

The weather, however, suddenly became serene; and my two friends left me on a journey among the Alps, and lost, in the magnificent scenes which they present, all memory of their ghostly visions. The following tale is the only one which has been completed.