

# Mary Shelley and Frankenstein: An AP Introduction

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 MAX YERGAN  
Produced by CARL LAEMMLE



# 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

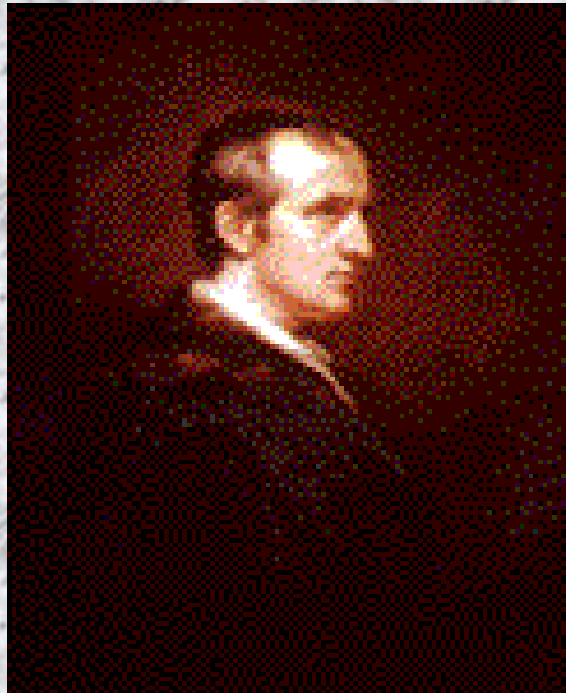
Stormy weather frequently forced them indoors, where they and Byron's other guests sometimes read from a volume of ghost stories. One evening, Byron challenged his guests to each write one themselves. Mary's story, inspired by a dream, became *Frankenstein*.



# HER FAMILY'S INFLUENCE

Her father,  
William  
Godwin, was a  
political thinker  
and writer.

Her mother,  
Mary  
Wollstonecraft,  
was a feminist.



# Women's Rights

- Shelley is the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1798)—demanded equal rights to vote of all who were deprived (middle class, workers, women)
- Mother died when she was 11 days old
  - What does it mean to grow up without a mother?

# 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. 1<sup>st</sup> wife  
drowned.

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

He was a famous poet.

# Other Historical Events

- 1789—Start of the French Revolution; British were happy that French were trying to rid themselves of an absolute monarchy and common people were standing up for themselves. They, however, became disillusioned with bloodshed and the common leaders who turned to tyrants themselves.
- 1793-1794 French Reign of Terror
- 1804 Napoleon crowned Emperor

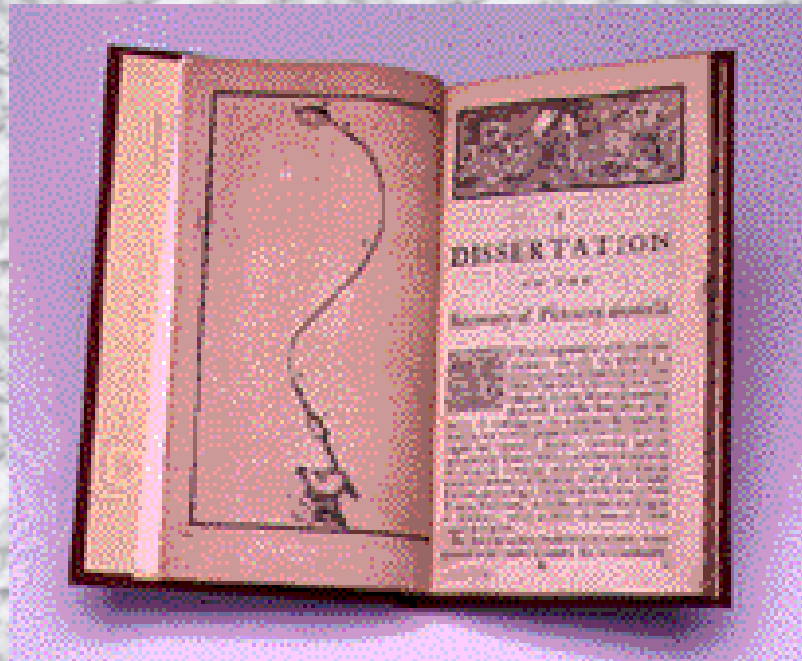
# Romanticism

- 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.

# The Pre-Hippies

- They were into nature, free love, and were not particularly bound by Christian ideals
- Absinthe and opium
- Shelley even had a mistress, Jane Clairmont
- Jane later became involved with Lord Byron and that's how Mary and Percy met him.

# 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

# **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

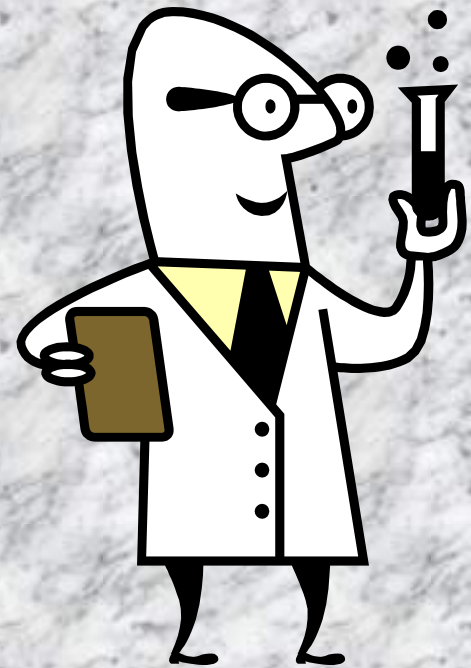
Her son (William) died  
from malaria

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?**

# Forbidden Knowledge

- The pursuit of forbidden knowledge is at the heart of *Frankenstein*, as Victor attempts to surge beyond accepted human limits and access the secret of life.
- Likewise, Robert Walton attempts to surpass previous human explorations by endeavoring to reach the North Pole.

# Sublime Nature

- The sublime natural world, embraced by Romanticism (late eighteenth century to mid-nineteenth century) as a source of unrestrained emotional experience for the individual, initially offers characters the possibility of spiritual renewal.
- Mired in depression and remorse after the deaths of William and Justine, for which he feels responsible, Victor heads to the mountains to lift his spirits.
- Acceptance, nurturing, calm.

# Monstrosity

- The monster is only the most literal of a number of monstrous entities in the novel, including the knowledge that Victor used to create the monster.
- One can argue that Victor himself is a kind of monster, as his ambition, secrecy, and selfishness alienate him from human society. Ordinary on the outside, he may be the true “monster” inside, as he is eventually consumed by an obsessive hatred of his creation.
- Finally, many critics have described the novel itself as monstrous, a stitched-together combination of different voices, texts, and tenses.

# 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.