MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

An Introduction

Mary Shelley

- Born in 1797 to writers William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft.
- Her mother died shortly after Mary was born.
- Shelley learned about her mother through her writings, including *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) which advocated that women should have the same educational opportunities and rights as men.

Mary Shelley

- She knew some of the most important men of the time through her father, like William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.
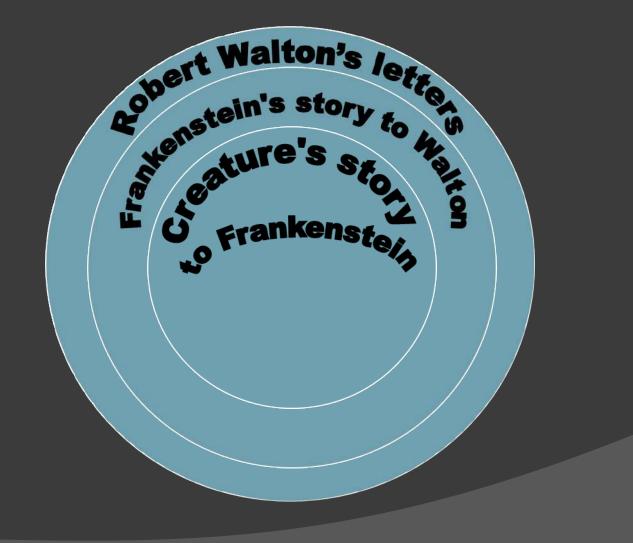- Married poet Percy Bysshe Shelley in 1816 after a scandalous affair.
- While the couple was visiting poet Lord Byron in Switzerland, Mary Shelley conceived the idea for her novel, *Frankenstein*.
- The first 3 of their children died; their fourth survived. However, Percy drowned in 1822.

Structure

- **Frame story**: the result of inserting one or more small stories within the body of a larger story that encompasses the smaller ones.

- The letters of Robert Walton frame *Frankenstein*; his letters begin and end the story.

- **Epistolary novel**: Any novel that takes the form of a series of letters—either written by one character or several characters.

Structure and Point of View

Robert Walton's letters
Frankenstein's story to Walton
Creature's story to Frankenstein

Settings

- Set in late 1700s Europe.
- Walton writes to his sister from the Artic.
- Frankenstein grows up in Geneva, Switzerland.
- He attends college in Ingolstadt, Germany.

Major Characters

- Victor Frankenstein
- The Creature
- Henry Clerval
- Elizabeth Lavenza
- Robert Walton
- Justine Moritz

Foils

- Definition: a character who sets off another character by strong contrast.

- This contrast emphasizes the differences between two characters, bringing out the distinctive qualities in each.

- Shelley provides more than one foil for the protagonist, Victor Frankenstein.

Doppelgangers

- "Doppelganger" is German for double image.
- A doppelganger is a second self or an alternate identity.
- Famous doppelgangers:
  - Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde
  - Bruce Banner and The Incredible Hulk
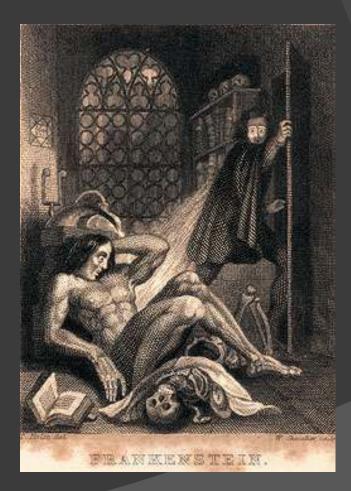 - Batman and The Joker

Double Motif

- Two characters represent opposing forces in human nature.

- Doppelgangers suggest that humans have a dual nature, a soul that is divided.

- In *Frankenstein*, the Victor Frankenstein and Creature characters represent the soul's dual good <u>and</u> evil nature.

Romanticism

- Romantic literature appeals to aspects such as emotion, nature, imagination, inspiration, and individuality.

- Romanticism began in Europe during the 18th century, and it came about as a revolt against the precise, rational, and scientific thinking of the Enlightenment period.

- In *Frankenstein*, Victor struggles with Enlightenment and Romantic ideals.

Gothicism

- *Frankenstein* is generally categorized as a Gothic novel, a genre of fiction that uses gloomy settings and supernatural events to create and atmosphere of mystery and terror.

FRANKENSTEIN.

The Modern Prometheus

- The alternate title for *Frankenstein* is *The Modern Prometheus*.
- Prometheus was the Titan god who was entrusted with the task of molding mankind out of clay.
- His attempts to better the lives of his creation brought him into direct conflict with Zeus.
  - Prometheus tricked the gods out of the best portion of the sacrificial feast, acquiring the meat for the feasting of man.
  - Then, when Zeus withheld fire, Prometheus stole it from heaven and delivered it to the mortals.

The Modern Prometheus

- As punishment for these rebellious acts, Zeus ordered the creation of Pandora (the first woman) as a means to deliver hardships to the humans.
- Prometheus was arrested and bound to a stake on Mount Kaukasos where an eagle was set to feed upon his ever-regenerating liver.