Mary Shelley's Frankenstein

**Introduction**

"It is not singular that, as the daughter of two persons of distinguished literary celebrity, I should very early in life have thought of writing." - Mary Shelley’s Introduction to Frankenstein

Mary Shelley was born to William Godwin (1756-1836) and Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) in London, 1797. Godwin was an English journalist, political philosopher, and novelist who hoped to remove the impurities of "power, wealth, and tradition" through "reason, education, and individual improvement" (Garrett). He is spoken of as the founder of philosophical anarchism and his moral theory is often described as Utilitarian. (1) Wollstonecraft wrote mainly on the injustices of human society. She believed any advantage of men over women to be merely physical and that any inferiority of women was due to a cultural education that encouraged ignorance and superficiality (Garrett). Shelley, like her parents, infused her novels with ideas, reasoned arguments, and pushes for social reform.

Mary Wollstonecraft died only twelve days after the birth of Mary, who was raised by her father and his new wife Mary Jane Clairmont. This marriage brought a new friend into Shelley’s life, a step-sister Claire Clairmont, who proved to be a close friend in later years. In 1814, Shelley met Percy Bysshe Shelley, a follower of her father’s philosophies. The two fell in love and although her father believed in free love, he tried to keep them apart to preserve the reputation of his daughter and family. Claire helped the two escape and the three ran away to travel across Europe to such places as Switzerland, Germany, and Italy. Shelley bore three children, but only the third, Percy, survived. In 1822 her husband died and Shelley returned to England to devote the majority of her time to the editing and publishing of his works.


*This page was created by: Fionnuala Carey, Katie Ferring, Y.H., Michael Leali, Susan Presto, and Tessa Poppe.*

![Mary Shelley](Mary_Shelley_by_Reginald_Easton,_1857.jpg)
Beginnings of Frankenstein

The story of Frankenstein was conceived in the summer of 1816, during which Shelley and her husband were staying with Lord Byron in Geneva. Most of their stay was spent indoors due to bad weather where they spent their time sharing philosophies and reading volumes of ghost stories. At one point Lord Byron proposed that each of them should “write a ghost story,” and they accepted the challenge. Days after the others had composed and shared their inventions, Shelley was kept up at night trying to think of her own tale.

“I busied myself to think of a story, – a story to rival those which had excited us to this task. One which would speak to the mysterious fears of our nature, and awaken the thrilling horror – one to make the reader dread to look round, to curdle the blood, and quicken the beatings of the heart. If I did not accomplish these things, my ghost story would be unworthy of its name.”

On one of those restless nights, the story finally came to Shelley. The story started only as a few pages, but with the motivation of her husband, Shelley was able to expand it into the novel we now know as Frankenstein.

From Mary Shelley’s Introduction to Frankenstein, 1831

The Myth of Prometheus

The myth of Prometheus appears in the subtitle of Frankenstein as “the modern Prometheus.” The myth essentially contains two main components. The first is that Prometheus brought fire down from the sun to bring aid to humans. The second is that he created humans by forming lumps of clay to resemble the gods. These myths were later combined so that Prometheus was known to use the fire he stole from the sun to animate his man of clay, and he, in effect, became known as an image of an artist or creator. Many authors used this image of Prometheus as the creator, but Shelley was the first to link the myth with “certain current scientific theories which suggested that the ‘divine spark’ of life might be electrical or quasi-electrical in nature.”

From the Introduction to Frankenstein by M.K. Joseph

Modern Media Portrayal of Frankenstein
The above photo features the monster as we most commonly know him, with his prominent eyebrow ridge, vacant stare, large forehead, neck screws and grotesque, undead color. This image came from the 1931 film *Frankenstein* in which Boris Karloff portrayed the monster. Since its publication in 1818, *Frankenstein* has inspired many monstrous plays, radio broadcasts, films, Halloween costumes, and even cereal.
The first film adaptation of the novel was made in 1910 by J. Searle Dawley for Edison Studios. It is a 16 minute black and white, silent film in which a scientist creates a monster in a vat filled with chemicals. The scientist is followed by the monster until he finds true love on his wedding night, after which the monster disappears. It was believed to be lost until 1980, when a rare print was found. There were several other Frankenstein-inspired silent films produced shortly after, including 1915's *Life Without Soul*, in which a doctor creates a man with no soul. At the end of the film, it is revealed that everything was dreamt by a young man after reading the novel *Frankenstein*. There was also an Italian version made in 1920 called *Il Mostro di Frankenstein*, or, *The Monster of Frankenstein*, which is lost.
1931’s *Frankenstein*, directed by James Whale for Universal Pictures, spawned a plethora of cameo appearances for the monster made famous by Boris Karloff. The sequel, 1935’s *The Bride of Frankenstein*, has become one of the most famous horror movies of all time. The monster also appears in *Son of Frankenstein* (1939), *The Ghost of Frankenstein* (1942), *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* (1943), *House of Frankenstein* (1944), *House of Dracula* (1945), and the comedy *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948), all produced by Universal Pictures. There was also a similar series made in England by Hammer Films. Truer to the novel, the focus was on Dr. Frankenstein instead of the monster. Since the Hammer Films productions of the 1950's and 60's, there have been dozens of movies influenced by *Frankenstein* or featuring a mad scientist and monster-like creation. *Frankenstein* is the subject of several parodies, including *Young Frankenstein* (1974) and *Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1974), in which transvestite Dr. Frank N. Furter creates a man-slave named Rocky. Both of these parodies have been made into live productions, *Young Frankenstein* making it to Broadway. One of the most well-known monster films made recently is 2004’s *Van Helsing*. The title character, a monster hunter, is sent to kill Frankenstein’s monster, who is directly referred to as Frankenstein instead of the monster. As it is in Shelley's novel, Van Helsing in unable to kill Frankenstein because of his human-like qualities.
In other media, *Frankenstein* was adapted for radio in 1931 by Alonzo Dean Cole for his program *The Witch’s Tale*. In 1938 George Edwards made the novel the subject of a thirteen-part, three-hour broadcast. Similar broadcasts were created in 1945, 1946 and 1952. Mostly recently, in 1999, National Public Radio adapted the novel for the series *Radio Tales*. The character of a Frankenstein-esque monster has appeared in television, including roles on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *X-Files* and *Scooby Doo*. The monster has been featured in many comics, including a retelling of the novel in comic book form in 1945. Other comics have featured the monster as a superhero who battles evil. Over the years, the monster has even become edible. In 1971, strawberry-flavored Franken Berry cereal was released along with its spooky chocolate counterpart, Count Chocula.

Go here for more information on this topic

See *Frankenstein in Theater and Film* on this page for clips.
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### Additional Materials

#### Other Works by Author

Although Shelley is mainly known for *Frankenstein* and the edited works of her husband Percy Shelley, her list of published works is far more extensive. A list of her novels is provided below. For a more thorough look at her writings go to the [List of works by Mary Shelley.](#)

- *Frankenstein; Or, The Modern Prometheus*
- *Valpanga: Or, the Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca*
- *The Last Man*
- *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck, A Romance*
- *Lodore*
- *Falkner*
- *Mathilda*

#### Important Literary Sources in *Frankenstein*

Throughout the novel there are many references to other works such as Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Goethe’s *Sorrows of Werter*, and *Faust*. It is with purpose that the monster’s library, which he uses to educate himself, contains works by both Milton and Goethe as well as Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives*. Most of these works, such as *Paradise Lost* and *Sorrows of Werter*, Shelley had read herself and they contain similar themes that we see in *Frankenstein* such as fallen creation, abandonment, and solitude. *Paradise Lost* seems to be the most vital of these works in *Frankenstein* as the monster often refers to himself as the Fallen Angel and Victor’s Adam (Shelley 100). In addition to this, the ultimate question asked in the novel about creation itself is first foreshadowed by a quote from *Paradise Lost* on the opening page (see Form is Content). Another important literary source in the background of *Frankenstein* is Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, a poem with religious indications about creation and original sin. A part of this poem is quoted in *Frankenstein* shortly after Victor brings his monster to life (Shelley 59).

Therefore, to understand some of the reasoning behind the novel’s themes as well as Mary Shelley herself, it would be helpful to also study these literary sources to discover why she chose them to play a role in her novel and how they influenced the inner workings of *Frankenstein*.

- Milton’s *Paradise Lost*
- Goethe’s *Sorrows of Young Werther*
- Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives*
- The *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*
Frankenstein in Theatre and Film

Frankenstein 1910 Film

Frankenstein 1931 Film

Mel Brook's Film

Young Frankenstein

Topics for Discussion

Monsters and Outcasts

The definitions have changed throughout history but the Oxford English Dictionary's reoccurring definitions are: A person of repulsively unnatural character, something extraordinary or unnatural, an ugly or deformed person, animal, or thing and a creature of huge size. In Frankenstein, the monster fits all the definitions of what a monster is. The monster's appearance is considered both extraordinary, beautiful, huge, and repulsive by his own creator. When there is that unnatural combination of beauty and deformity, it is almost as if creature is monstrous because he is deformed but he has beautiful qualities to him that it is impossible to deny the beauty of his hair or teeth. Because of this conflict, it is easier to cast him out of society for long belonging tradition society. But it is not just appearances that makes something or someone monstrous. It could also be the actions of that person that makes the monstrous. He murders Frankenstein's loved ones. Even how the monster came to be can be considered monstrous. He is not a dead body coming back to life, he is a collage of other human being's parts that were sewed together to only be animated. He is also an outcast from society, not just because of his appearance but because he is a product of science, made with chemicals and supernatural forces. The Oxford English Dictionary defines an outcast as "A person who has been cast out (of a society, institution, etc.); a person ostracized by his or her friends or social group; an exile, a homeless vagabond; a lowly or humble person. In early use freq.: a sinner, a person rejected by God." Victor Frankenstein plays God in this novel, creating life. The monster is rejected from his "God" when Victor abandons him after his "birth." Another definition that works well with the novel is an outcast is "Something which is thrown away; refuse or offal; a plant thrown out from a garden." The interesting part of this definition is the last part "a plant being thrown out of the garden." This can relate to Milton's Paradise Lost, God being Frankenstein and the monster being Adam who was created in Eden and thrown out shortly after. Because Frankenstein abandons his creation and does not help the monster learn how to survive in society, he pretty much throws the monster out of society himself.

Discussion Questions:

What is a monster?

Is the monster the only monster in the story?

What about Frankenstein, do his actions make him a monster, an outcast? And whose fault is it that the monster is an outcast, driven to murder? Is it Frankenstein's, the monster's? And what is society's role in this?

What It Means to Be Human

The creation of Frankenstein's monster raises the question: what makes a person human? Throughout the novel the creature searches for purpose and meaning; his journey ultimately leads him on a quest for companionship and acceptance. All that he really wants is for someone to love him for what he is. When he is rejected by his creator, the cottagers, and every other human he comes into contact with he reasons that a being like himself should be created, which would fulfill his desire for a counterpart. The monster is in utter misery without a partner or some sort of companion, which is why he approaches Victor with the proposition of creating a female version of himself. The creature states, "I am alone, and miserable; man will not associate with me; but one as deformed and horrible as myself would not deny herself to me. My companion must be of the same species, and have the same defects. This being you must create" (Shelley 118). This passage leads readers to believe that humanity is not simply based merely on relationships, but relationships with others who share similar faults and problem. Shelley argues that sympathy and unity under a similar cause or oppression are the basis for finding companionship, the soul of humanity. This desolation is a recurring emotion, seen greatly in Walton's letters to his sister. Near the start of the novel Walton writes, "I bitterly feel the want of a friend," "I greatly need a friend," and "I shall certainly find no friend on the wide ocean, nor even here in Archangel, among merchants and seamen" (Shelley 9). The diction is so desperate and raw, emphasizing the hunger Walton has for companionship. Similar to the monster he is surrounded by people and yet can find no one with which to form a friendship. However, after meeting Victor and developing a friendship with him, Walton becomes a changed man, filled with the spirit of life. The monster, after all of his travels, never connects to a single being, thus remaining separated from the human race.
Discussion Questions:

Does Shelley imply that relationships are what make people human?

How does the monster view relationships? Victor?

What is it that keeps the monster from being fully human? Why? Is it possible for this to change?

The Role of the Creator

A major theme throughout the novel is that of the Creator. Victor Frankenstein first begins his quest for knowledge in the hopes of bringing to life a Being created by himself, "A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs," (Shelley 54). In this passage Victor reflects on the monster shortly before it comes to life. What is particularly interesting about this quotation are the word choices: "new species", "creator", and "father." These words show Victor's intentions to act as God in the creation of life. Victor is blinded by his ambitions and does not see the distortion in his own act. He fails to see the consequences of bringing life to something so unnatural as a creature built from dead body parts. We see a change in his demeanor, however when the monster takes its first breath. "How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavored to form?" (Shelley 57). Victor is not only frightened by his work, but no longer sees it as a noble endeavor. He is horrified at his own creation and soon abandons it. This abandonment of his creation leads the monster to try and survive on his own and educate himself. The monster because of this abandonment grows to hate Victor and later the monster confronts Victor saying, "Remember, that I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam..." (100); this passage shows that the monster despite being on his own since his creation still feels the pain of rejection from his creator. This pain is what drives the monster to find acceptance everywhere else including Victor's brother William. But he is constantly rejected and this soon develops into the longing for revenge against his creator. Therefore, Victor's role as a creator ushers in numerous questions about what responsibility a creator has to their creation and/or a parent to their child.

Discussion Questions:

What is Victor's responsibility to the creature after bringing it into the world?

How is he at fault for what the monster becomes?

What is the novel saying about parent and child relationships?

Birth and Abortion

It is apparent that Shelley wants to bring the aspect of birth forefront in her novel by calling attention to the monstrous manner in which the monster is brought into the world. Mary Shelley herself had several tragic experiences with birth and raising children as she had lost her first child and had recently given birth to another at the time the first edition of Frankenstein was published. In addition to this her mother had lost her life several days after her birth and these darker aspects of giving life seemed to haunt Shelley (Harris-Fain 222-228). Therefore the concept of birth in the novel can be seen as a reflection of these anxieties of giving birth: what kind of child will I have? What if I can't love it? Am I capable of raising something in the right way?

Another aspect of the novel that is seen in not so clear terms is the theme of abortion. Victor, after seeing what his creation is capable of, makes his new quest of seeking and destroying the very being he worked so diligently to bring to life; he is attempting to kill his own creation. This is in stark contrast to Victor's attitude prior to his monster coming to life. It is after the "birth" of his creation that Victor finds himself unable to love or admire it. Victor Frankenstein also, later in the novel, decides to abort his subsequent creation of a female monster because he fears what will become of the race of mankind if the monsters were to populate and threaten human beings, "Had I a right, for my own benefit to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations?" (Shelley 165). In this passage Victor is debating on his intention to abort the female creature he has built shortly before the "spark" that would bring her to life. Victor subsequently aborts the female creature as a way of protecting the world from his creations, however what does this say about abortion within the novel? Is it a cost of being a creator?

Discussion Questions:

What does the novel want to say about birth overall?

How does Victor's belief of his responsibility to humanity justify his abortion of the female monster?


Science and religion are two themes that are very prominent in the novel. The theme of science becomes apparent from the beginning of the novel when Robert Walton writes in his letter to his sister that he has set on a journey to the North Pole in search of scientific knowledge: "I may there discover the wondrous power which attracts the needle; and may regulate a thousand celestial observations..." (Shelley 16). Throughout the novel, the thirst for knowledge can be seen, especially in Victor Frankenstein. Since childhood, Victor had "an eager desire to learn," (Shelley 37) especially the "secrets of heaven and earth... [and] the metaphysical." (Shelley 37). He concentrated on natural philosophy and read the works of Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelsus, Albertus Magnus, and Isaac Newton (Shelley 38-39). From reading these philosophical works Victor "entered with the greatest diligence into the search of the philosopher’s stone and the elixir of life." (Shelley 40). However, Victor states that he is not interested in obtaining wealth, rather he is interested in attaining glory if he could only "banish disease from the human frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death." (Shelley 40). One can argue that those thoughts contributed to the creation of the monster. When Victor turns seventeen he becomes a student at the university of Ingolstadt, where he meets M. Krempe, a professor of natural philosophy (Shelley 45). M. Krempe rejects the philosophers Victor had been studying, calling them "nonsense" and instead instructs him to begin his studies anew (Shelley 46). But it is not until he attends a lecture by chemistry professor, M. Waldman, that Victor possesses the idea of creation: "So much has been done, exclaimed the soul of Frankenstein, - more, far more, will I achieve: treading in the steps already marked, I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation," (Shelley 48). Victor thinks this after M. Waldman has lectured how science has advanced the discoveries of the human body and nature.

The theme of religion becomes prominent after this point, when Victor Frankenstein takes on the role of God in his task of creating the monster. Victor became fascinated with how the human body worked "and, indeed, [with] any animal endued with life," (Shelley 51). Victor starts studying physiology to see how the human body works; he starts going to vaults and charnel houses at night, inspecting corpses to see how they decay (Shelley 51-52). Victor is successful in his research: "after days and nights of incredible labour and fatigue, I succeeded in discovering the cause of generation and life; nay, more I became myself capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter," (Shelley 52). Victor becomes god-like because he can now create life and he further accentuates that by considering whether to mould his creation after his image (Shelley 53). The way Victor manages to create the monster is seen as dark knowledge, something people don't want to be involved with. Victor himself says that, "In my education my father had taken the greatest precautions that my mind should be impressed with no supernatural horrors," (Shelley 51). It is seen as anti-religious; no one should be taking on the role of God.

Discussion Questions:

Can knowledge be dangerous?

What is natural and what is not?

What is life?

Form is Content

"Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay
To mould Me man? Did I solicit thee
From darkness to promote me? ---" (Paradise Lost X.743-5)

These lines appear in the title page of Frankenstein.

"The starry sky, the sea and every sight afforded by these wonderful regions, seems still to have the power of elevating his soul from earth. Such a man has a double existence: he may suffer misery, and be overwhelmed by disappointments; yet when he may suffer misery, and be overwhelmed by disappointments; yet when he has retired into himself, he will be like a celestial spirit, that has a halo around him, within whose circle no grief or folly ventures.

Will you laugh at the enthusiasm I express concerning this divine wanderer?" (Shelley 16-17).

In this section Walton doesn’t fully realize how accurate his perception of Frankenstein is. It acts as a wonderful source of prolepsis, pointing to the role of God that Frankenstein attempts to portray. The diction is full of reverence as if to exaggerate the point that there is something supernatural connected to Frankenstein.

"How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavored to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! --Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shriveled complexion and straight black lips" (Shelley 57).
Frankenstein reacts with horror and disgust when his creation comes to life. Although he has selected body parts that were beautiful in life, they take on a grotesque appearance when put together for the monster.

"So much has been done, exclaimed the soul of Frankenstein,—more, far more, will I achieve: treading in the steps already marked, I will pioneer a new way, explore unkown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation" (Shelley 48).

Here Frankenstein gives fruition to his desire of gaining knowledge and achieving something no one else has ever done. Here begins his task of creating life.

"I had admired the perfect forms of my cottagers—their grace, beauty, and delicate complexions: but how was I terrified, when I viewed myself in a transparent pool! At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification" (Shelley 90).

In this passage the monster realizes his own horrific appearance. He begins to understand and accept that he is an imperfect being, very different from the humans he perceived at the cottage. The reaction he has to his own figure solidifies his monstrous image which provokes him to seek vengeance. Without this realization he would not feel the need to pursue Frankenstein. This then leads to the idea that humans are superficial creatures. If the monster was beautiful there is no doubt that he would be accepted by society. The irony is that the monster also notices and qualifies his brutishness making him appear all the more human.

"I, the miserable and the abandoned, am an abortion, to be spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on" (Shelley 222).

The monster, after killing Frankenstein, first describes the injustices committed against him by his creator, but later laments those he has murdered.

"A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs," (Shelley 54)

Here, Victor Frankenstein reflects on his initial hope for his project shortly before it comes to life. This quote reflects his desire to be Creator and to bring forth new life from death.

"Remember, that I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. Every where I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded," (Shelley 100)

Shortly after the monster meets his creator face to face and confronts why he abandoned him; he makes this reference again to Victor as his creator and himself as Victor Frankenstein's creature. There is also strong religious sentiment evident as the monster is refering to himself as Adam and then as Satan, the fallen archangel.

"...A race of devils would be propagated upon the earth, who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror. Had I a right, for my own benefit, to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations?" (Shelley 165)

Victor reflects upon what he is about to do while creating the female companion to the monster. This calls attention to the responsibilities of the creator. Victor certainly feels here that he would be responsible for whatever acts his two creatures would commit and shortly aborts this project while his first creation looks on sparking an even deeper revenge on the part of the monster against his creator.

"...Like the archangel who aspired to omnipotence, I am chained in an internal hell."(Shelley 261)

Frankenstein wanted greatness, he lusted for great power and because of this he was driven to create this great evil. Now he is being punished for what he has done. This passage relates to the fallen angel in Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

"Beautiful-Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes." (Shelley 55)

This is our first description of the monster. It is interesting to see how in one sentence Frankenstein can be overwhelmed by his beauty and yet repulsed. The contrast between beautiful features mixed with ugly features create a real sense of a monstrous outcast.
“...for nothing contributes so much to tranquillise the mind as a steady purpose,- a point on which the soul may fix an intellectual eye” (Shelley 16).

R. Walton explains in his letter to his sister, Mrs. Saville, how his passion to journey through the North Pacific Ocean to discover the magic of the North Pole controls his state of mind. His mood brightens by just explaining to her in writing the details of his expedition. This idea seems to be proven false later by Frankenstein, who tries to satisfy his intellectual turmoil with his scientific pursuits, but finds that his creation does little to quiet his mind.

“...‘we are unfashioned creatures, but half made up, if one wiser, better, dearer than ourselves–such a friend ought to be–do not lend his aid to perfectionate our weak and faulty natures’” (Shelley 28).

This line, spoken by Frankenstein to Walton, confirms the need for human companionship. It is ironic that this line is spoken by the same man who denies his own creation any form of friendship or camaraderie.

Character List and Analysis

**Dr. Victor Frankenstein**

Frankenstein is the protagonist of the novel. It is with Frankenstein that the initial conflict begins: the creation of the monster. Through Victor, Shelley explores the role of man playing God and the ability to give life, which also leads to the question: who has the right to take life? Throughout the novel Frankenstein is an emotionally driven character, pursuing desires with a fiery passion, first being the acquisition of knowledge and the creation of the monster and then the destruction of the creature. Often, Frankenstein becomes enraptured in romantic thoughts maintaining a "woe-is-me" attitude. Therefore, he is often categorized as a Byronic hero.

The first time we see Frankenstein is when he is received onto Walton's ship. From their we travel back in time in Victor's recounting of his life. The tale comes full circle, ending with the presently old Frankenstein.

**The monster**

The monster may be seen as the antagonist of the novel. Although he is Frankenstein's sworn enemy, he also acts as Victor's double, mirroring many of his creator's attributes, emotions, desires, and circumstances. The novel displays a steady growth of the monster from "birth" to his final repose. He begins as an innocent child, curious and hungry for knowledge. After being abandoned by Victor, he finds sanctuary in a shack on the property of the De Lacey family where he learns about life by monitoring their daily life as well as reading classic literature, such as Milton, and the Bible. Like Frankenstein, the creature is easily swayed to act upon his emotions. His rage towards Frankenstein emerges exponentially with the murders of Victor's family and friends. The misery of the monster is finally abated with the taking of his own life.

The creature is first seen in the novel by Walton, riding his sledge across the frozen tundra. We then hear of the creature from Frankenstein's story, and then from the creature's own mouth. The story ends with Walton's final meeting with the creature.

**Robert Walton**

Walton is the first character introduced in the novel. He encounters the disheveled, distressed, and nearly frozen Victor Frankenstein on his expedition, thereby coming upon this tale of woe. Though the story is entirely recounted by Walton, his voice is only heard through his letters to his sister, Margaret Saville. Walton is obsessed with companionship, which is satisfied through his friendship with Victor. His initial loneliness echoes the creature's own desolation and desire for fellowship. The novel is also framed around Walton, beginning and ending with his experiences.

**Margaret Saville**

Margaret is Robert Walton's sister. Her role in the novel is minor (that of a silent listener) and she never makes a physical appearance. Margaret is the first female character to appear in the novel. She is the correspondent of Walton's letters while he travels to the North Pole in search of new scientific knowledge. Walton describes Margaret as being "tutored and refined by books... [and] somewhat fastidious" (Shelley 29), other than that the reader never truly finds out anything else about her. Margaret can be considered the most passive female character in the novel given the fact that she is never granted a voice or an opinion when regarding Walton's writings.

**Elizabeth Lavenza**
Elizabeth is Victor Frankenstein's love interest, and therefore, can be regarded as the most significant female character in the novel. She embodies the motif of a passive woman and spends the majority of the story waiting patiently for Victor's return, hoping that he will marry her. Elizabeth is an orphan, whose German mother died after giving birth to her, so she was placed under the care of good-hearted peasants (Shelley 35). As a child she is described as being "a child fairer than pictured cherub - a creature who seemed to shed radiance from her looks, and whose form and motions were lighter than the chamois of the hills," (Shelley 35). Elizabeth was adopted by Victor's mother, who presented her as a gift to him (Shelley 35). Elizabeth is described as having a "calmer and more concentrated disposition," (Shelley 36) and is often mentioned as being calming to others as well: "[Elizabeth] strove to act the comforter to us all" (Shelley 44).

Elizabeth eventually does marry Victor, but her life with him is cut short after Frankenstein's monster kills her as an act of revenge towards Victor. "She was there, lifeless and inanimate, thrown across the bed, her head hanging down, and her pale and distorted features half covered by her hair," (Shelley 195).

**Henry Clerval**

Henry is Victor Frankenstein's boyhood friend, his nature is described earnestly by Victor in chapter 2, "He was a boy of singular talent and fancy. He loved enterprise, hardship, and even danger, for its own sake. He was deeply read in books of chivalry and romance," (37). When Victor leaves for school, Henry is dismayed that he will have to work for his father since he too has an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. The book describes how Henry's father "...was a narrowed minded trader and saw idleness and ruin in the aspirations and ambition of his son," (Shelley 44). However, later in the novel we find out that Henry has left his father's business and pursued science like Victor in Ingolstadt. Henry finds Victor in a despairing condition when he was ill and nurses him back to health since Victor has just created the monster and is appalled by his creation. He comes to Victor's aid in Ingolstadt and is eventually killed by the Monster. It is this scene we get an idea of the importance of Henry and Victor's relationship. At the sight of Henry's body Victor is unable to contain himself emotionally and throws himself on the body and soon collapses.

**Alphonse Frankenstein**

Alphonse is Victor Frankenstein's father. Alphonse is described in depth in Chapter 1 of the novel as a man of integrity and that "He was respected by all who knew him," (Shelley 31). Victor finds it important to relate the history of his father and how his works reflected his true nature of charity towards others; mainly being the fact that he took in the orphan Elizabeth who is Victor's adopted sister and later becomes his wife. Victor often relates how wonderful both his parents were and that "No human being could have passed a happier childhood than myself;" (37). Thus, the nature of Alphonse creates a strong foundation of family for Victor and this commitment to family when he seeks revenge for the murder of his brother and is completely destroyed by the murder of Elizabeth. However, Alphonse is different from his son in the fact he is described as "not scientific" (Shelley 40) and does not share his son's longing to know "the secrets of heaven and earth" (37). This upbringing creates a thirst for knowledge early on in Victor, however Alphonse remains loyal and sympathetic to his son throughout the novel.

**William Frankenstein**

William is the youngest of the Frankensteins and adored by his family. In a letter to Victor, his cousin Elizabeth references William by saying, "I wish you could see him; he is very tall for his age, with sweet laughing blue eyes, dark eyelashes, and curling hair. When he smiles, two little dimples appear on each cheek, which are rosy with health. He has already had one or two little wives, but Louisa Biron is his favourite, a pretty little girl of five years of age" (Shelley 66).

William is the first of the monster's victims. Upon seeing him, the monster thinks that the young boy will be unprejudiced and therefore he can teach him to accept him despite his appearance, but when William shows his disgust and his identity as a Frankenstein. The monster strangles him both out of rage and revenge to Victor. Blame for his murder is placed unjustly on the family friend, Justine Morwitz.

**Justine Moritz**

Justine is a servant to the Frankenstein Family and a close friend to Elizabeth. Justine was accused of the murder of William Frankenstein and was convicted and then executed for crime in which she did not commit.

**Caroline Beaufort**

The daughter of Beaufort. After her father's death, Caroline is taken in by, and later marries, Alphonse Frankenstein. She dies of scarlet fever, which she contracts from Elizabeth, just before Victor leaves for Ingolstadt at age seventeen.

**Beaufort**

A merchant and friend of Victor's father; the father of Caroline Beaufort.
De Lacey Family (Mr. De Lacey, Felix, Agatha and Safie)

The monster observes the De Lacey family. It is in their shack that he hides, learning how to speak and read. He longs to become a part of their family, but when he approaches them he is rejected due his grotesque appearance.

Kempe

M. Kempe is the professor of natural philosophy at Ingolstadt. He is described as a "little squat man, with a gruff voice and a repulsive countenance," (Shelley 46). It is Kempe that criticizes Frankenstein's studying of alchemists and their metaphysical science. Although Kempe seems to be a voice of reason to contradict Victor's passions; Victor does not fall for it and continues his admiration of the metaphysical world and the grand visions he has in mind. Throughout Victor's studies at Ingolstadt, Kempe remains a negative voice in his ear, a voice Victor in turn refuses to listen to.

Waldman

Waldman is another professor at Ingolstadt and specializes in Chemistry. He is described as a man of about fifty with a sweet voice and mild manners (Shelley 48). He like his colleague, Kempe, question Frankenstein's previous study of ancient science, but unlike Kempe does not harshly renounce such philosophers. It is Waldman that encourages Frankenstein to study all of the natural sciences and takes Victor under his wing to show him various machines and the workings of his laboratory. Waldman works to inspire Victor and seems to speak his language as he describes the purpose of ancient and modern scientists during a lecture, "They penetrate into the recesses of nature, and show how she works in her hiding places," (47). The character of Waldman has a fleeting but crucial relationship with Victor as he encourages Victor's progress in school and inspires his efforts. An important moment in the novel is a reflection on the day Victor meets Waldman, "Thus ended a day memorable to me: it decided my future destiny," (49).

Mr. Kirwin

The magistrate who accuses Victor of Henry's murder.

Image Gallery

#26 of the Classic Comics series (1945)  Still from The Bride of Frankenstein (1935)  Poster from the first film adaptation of Frankenstein (1910)
Mary Shelley. Portrait by Richard Rothwell (1800-1868)

Steel engraving for frontispiece to the revised edition of Frankenstein, published by Colburn and Bentley, London 1831.

Mary Wollstonecraft - mother of Mary Shelley. Portrait by John Opie, 1790-91.

Mary Shelley. Portrait by Reginald Easton, 1857.