Frankenstein Study Guide

Frankenstein by Mary Shelley

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Introduction

Mary Shelley made an anonymous but powerful debut into the world of literature when *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* was published in March, 1818. She was only nineteen when she began writing her story. She and her husband, poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, were visiting poet Lord Byron at Lake Geneva in Switzerland when Byron challenged each of his guests to write a ghost story

Settled around Byron's fireplace in June 1816, the intimate group of intellectuals had their imaginations and the stormy weather as the stimulus and inspiration for ghoulish visions. A few nights later, Mary Shelley imagined the "hideous phantasm of man" who became the confused yet deeply sensitive creature in *Frankenstein.* She once said, "My dreams were at once more fantastic and agreeable than my writings." While many stage, television, and film adaptations of *Frankenstein* have simplified the complexity of the intellectual and emotional responses of Victor Frankenstein and his creature to their world, the novel still endures. Its lasting power can be seen in the range of reactions explored by various literary critics and over ninety dramatizations.

Although early critics greeted the novel with a combination of praise and disdain, readers were fascinated with and a bit horrified by the macabre aspects of the novel. Interestingly, the macabre has transformed into the possible as the world approaches the twenty-first century: the ethical implications of genetic engineering, and, more recently, the cloning of livestock in Scotland, find echoes in Shelley's work. In addition to scientific interest, literary commentators have noted the influence of both Percy Shelley and William Godwin (Mary's father) in the novel. Many contemporary critics have focused their attention on the novel's biographical elements, tracing Shelley's maternal and authorial insecurities to her very unique creation myth. Ultimately, the novel resonates with philosophical and moral ramifications: themes of nurture versus nature, good versus evil, and ambition versus social responsibility dominate readers' attention and provoke thoughtful consideration of the most sensitive issues of our time.

Author Biography

Surrounded by some of the most famous authors in history, Mary Shelley struggled to find her own authorial voice in *Frankenstein.* She was born in August, 1797 to William Godwin, a revolutionary thinker who wrote *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice,* and Mary Wollstonecraft, author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women.* Shelley's freethinking parents married when Wollstonecraft was five months pregnant with Shelley. Even though both Godwin and Wollstonecraft philosophically opposed the institution of marriage, they wanted to give Mary social respectability. Unfortunately, Shelley would never witness her parents' marital relationship because Wollstonecraft died ten days after Mary's birth. A doctor (summoned by the midwife, who could not remove the placenta after Mary's delivery) infected Wollstonecraft's uterus with his unwashed hands.

Shelley turned to Wollstonecraft's books to learn about a mother she never knew. Self-taught, she also engaged herself with the books that graced her father's library shelves. The new Mrs. Godwin, Mary Jane Clairmont, affirmed Godwin's decision not to give Shelley any formal schooling, even though they both recognized Shelley's curious mind. Clairmont played a major role with other decisions in Mary's life, which gradually heightened Mary's unhappiness with her home life. In fact, Mary's upbringing mirrored certain elements of the childhood story *Cinderella* because Clairmont favored her own children above Godwin's. Clairmont harbored jealous feelings towards the offspring of two of the most progressive thinkers of the time. In addition, Clairmont resented Shelley's strong devotion to Godwin, so she limited Shelley's interaction with her father. Mary eventually transferred her affections to Percy Shelley, another prominent literary figure of the day.

Percy Shelley and his wife, Harriet, dined with Mary's family after Percy wrote a letter of admiration to Godwin. Mary Shelley met Percy for a second time, two years later, and the pair began spending almost every day with each other. Percy was twenty-two and his wife was pregnant with their second child when Mary declared her love for him. Initially, Mary agreed not to see Percy when Godwin condemned their relationship. But Percy's dramatic threat to commit suicide convinced Mary to flee with him to France in July 1814.

The year 1816 revealed both tragedy and creativity for Shelley. Most of Mary Shelley's biographies trace 1816 as a happy year for the Shelley marriage; a son, William, was born, and the couple did extensive traveling. Mary and Percy met poet Lord Byron at his home in Lake Geneva, the infamous site where Mary gave birth to the *Frankenstein* myth. But this year also brought much grief to the couple's happiness, as both Fanny Imlay (Mary's older half-sister) and Harriet Shelley committed suicide only weeks apart from each other. Their deaths lead to a series of other deaths and produced the beginnings of Mary's depression. Both William and Clara Shelley, Percy and Mary's son and daughter, died a year apart from each other, and Percy drowned in a boating accident in 1822. Mary spent the remainder of her years in England with her only

surviving son, Percy, writing five other novels and other critical and biographical writings. She died of complications from a brain tumor in 1851.

Plot Summary

Opening Letters

Frankenstein opens with Robert Walton's letter from St. Petersburg, Russia, to his sister in England. He encourages her to share his enthusiasm about his journey to the North Pole to discover both the secret of magnetism and a passage through the pole. In additional letters he wavers between his solitude and alienation on the one hand, and his determined heart and resolved will on the other. His last letter tells the startling story of his having seen a being of gigantic stature shaped like a man, fleeing across the ice which is threatening to enclose the ship. The next day another sled appears, carrying the wasted and maddened Victor Frankenstein, who is pursuing the giant. Walton takes Frankenstein aboard. When he tells Frankenstein his purpose, how he hopes to make great discoveries, Frankenstein cautions him to leave off his mad pursuit. He asks him to listen to his story of how once he began in earnest to know all that could be known.

Victor's Story, Part I

Born in Naples, Italy, to a wealthy Swiss family, Victor Frankenstein is the only child of doting parents. When he is five, his mother brings home an orphaned girl named Elizabeth to be Victor's "sister." In Victor's happy childhood in Geneva, he and Elizabeth grow in their parents' love, and they are joined by more siblings. Victor develops a deep friendship with Henry Clerval, a fellow student. Where Clerval studies "the moral relations of things," Victor conceives a passion to discover the physical secrets of the world.

At seventeen, as he is to leave for the University at Ingolstadt, Elizabeth contracts scarlet fever. Nursed by Victor's mother, she recovers, but his mother dies. On her deathbed, she begs Elizabeth and Victor to wed. After some delay, Victor departs for Ingolstadt, where his chemistry professor so encourages him in the study of science that Victor determines to discover the secret of life, perhaps even how to create life itself. He pursues his studies in the chemistry lab and in dissecting rooms and morgues, gathering the material for his experiment to make a creature from discarded corpses, perhaps one "like himself." Cut off from contact with all others, ignoring letters from friends and family, he exhausts himself. Finally, on a dreary November night, Victor succeeds in animating a creature. Drained of all strength, he falls asleep, only to awaken from a nightmare to find the creature staring at him. He flees in horror at what he has done.

The next day Clerval arrives and Victor's appearance and condition shock him. Victor can not tell Clerval what he has done. He believes he can keep his secret, for, on his return to his room, he discovers that the creature has fled. The nervous exhaustion into which Victor then falls lasts for several months, during which Clerval nurses him by taking him away from the lab and into the mountains on long walks.

Victor receives from his father a letter relating the death of Victor's younger brother William, strangled by someone while out walking. A necklace with a miniature likeness of Victor's mother was missing when the corpse was found. On his frantic return journey, in an electrical storm in the mountains near Geneva, Victor sees the monster, and thinks that the monster might have killed William. At home Victor learns that everyone believes Justine, a family servant, to be guilty, for the necklace missing from the corpse was found on her. Victor exclaims that she is innocent, that he knows who the killer is, but does not speak up at her trial. Justine gives a forced confession and is convicted and hung. Overcome with remorse at the deaths of William and Justine, convinced of his own guilt, Victor seeks solitude. Elizabeth and his father attribute his behavior to his grief at his brother's death. He leaves the house to walk the Swiss Alps, journeying to the village of Charnounix. In a painful retreat amid the "solitary grandeur" of the mountains, he meets the monster crossing an ice field. To Victor's shocked expressions of outrage the monster replies calmly, asking Frankenstein to listen with compassion to his tale.

The Monster's Story

After fleeing from the laboratory on the night of his "birth," the monster discovers himself cold, unfed, and unbefriended in the mountains outside Ingolstadt, "a poor, helpless, miserable wretch" He searches for food and shelter, which he finally finds in a hovel adjoined to a cottage He observes the cottage's inhabitants an old man, a young man and woman. When he learns that the cottagers are not so happy as he believes they should be, he gathers firewood at night to replenish their woodpile and lessen their labors. Meanwhile, in the course of several seasons, he studies them, learns their names (Felix and Agatha and their father), and begins to study their language.

One day another woman arrives on horseback. Felix seems especially happy in her presence. The monster listens as Felix instructs her from a history book. He learns of human law and government, of rank and wealth, of human greatness and vileness. "Of what a strange nature is knowledge!" he exclaims. Above all, he learns of his own lonely deformity.

He later tells Frankenstein the story of this De Lacey family, a wealthy French family who suffered a reversal of fortunes, were imprisoned, and exiled to the poverty in which the monster finds them. From such books as John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost* the monster learns more of human virtues and vices and of his own misery.

And what was I? Of my creation and creator I was absolutely ignorant, but I knew that I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property. I was, besides, endowed with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome; I was not even of the same nature as man. I was more agile than they and could subsist on a coarser diet; I bore the extremes of heat and cold with less injury to my frame; my stature far exceeded them When I looked around I saw and heard of none like me. Was I, then, a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled and whom all men disowned?

One day when only the old man is in the cottage, the monster enters, introducing himself as a weary traveler. He discovers that because the old man is blind, he is not repulsed by him. The monster then tells his tale of misery and loneliness; the old man responds sympathetically. When the others return, horrified at his monstrous appearance, they chase him. From seclusion in the forest, the next night he emerges to burn down the cottage. He then flees toward Ingolstadt, determined on vengeance. He comes upon young William Frankenstein out walking. When the boy repulses the monster's friendly overtures, the monster kills him. He takes from the boy a locket with the likeness of a woman and when he later meets another young woman asleep in a barn, he places the locket on her, certain that he can implicate her in the boy's murder. He concludes his tale by proposing to Victor that only Victor's creation of a female of similar deformity will grant him the happiness he cannot find among humans.

Victor's Story, Part II

The monster pleads with Victor to make him a mate, threatening him and his family If he does not Frankenstein agrees, but only on condition that the creatures flee to uninhabitable parts of the earth where they will do no harm to humans. Victor returns to his family, more downhearted than ever

His father proposes that the long-hoped-for marriage of Victor and Elizabeth might restore Victor to happiness. Victor wishes instead to travel to England to discover from philosophers there something he believes might complete his work. He promises to marry Elizabeth on his return. His father arranges to have Clerval meet him along the way in Strasbourg, France. They walk in the mountains, then travel by boat down the Rhine River and to England. In Edinburgh, Scotland, Victor asks Clerval to permit him to travel on alone for a time. Frankenstein, convinced that the monster has been following him, seeks solitude for his work on a remote island in the Scottish Orkneys. On a moonlit night his fears' are realized when he looks up from his work on the new creature to discover the monster peering at him through the window. Victor then vows to destroy his new, half-finished creation. The monster threatens him: "I will be with you on your wedding night."

Frankenstein takes the remains of the new creature and dumps them into the sea from a boat he takes offshore. When he awakens hours later, he has drifted to Ireland. Several people on shore take him to a magistrate to answer for the death of a man found murdered the previous evening. The man, to Victor's horror, is Clerval. Imprisoned for several months, Frankenstein is freed after the magistrate discovers Victor's innocence. The magistrate sends for Victor's father in Geneva to bring him home.

On his return he marries Elizabeth, worried all the while about the monster's threat, "I shall be with you on your wedding night." He interprets this to mean that the monster will kill him. On the wedding night, however, the monster breaks into their room and kills Elizabeth. After he sees the monster staring through the window, grinning, Victor vows to seek revenge. He pursues the monster across the Alps, across Europe, into Russia

and north to the pole, where he finds himself stranded on an ice flow before he is taken aboard Walton's ship.

Closing Letters

One week after his last letter to his sister, during which Frankenstein relates his story, Walton writes again to say that Frankenstein still intends to pursue the creature until he dies. Walton, too, is still determined to pursue his quest, although mountains of ice surround the ship and threaten to lock it in place. When his sailors ask to turn back, Walton consents to turn south. His final letter to his sister recounts Frankenstein's death and his dying advice to Walton to forego ambition and seek tranquility instead. Walton's grief over his new friend's death is interrupted by the appearance of the monster in Frankenstein's cabin, grieving over the death of his creator. The monster tells Walton how his vengeance had never been joyful to him, how he was unjustly treated by the humanity which had created him. Thus, though born in innocence and goodness, he became malignant evil. He now lives in remorse, alone. After having said all this, he springs from the cabin window and disappears across the ice.

Characters

Henry Clerval

Victor's closest friend and companion. who balances his emotional and rational pursuits. He studies Oriental languages but passionately loves nature and life. Victor acknowledges that "[H]is wild and enthusiastic imagination was chastened by the sensibility of his heart." And unlike Victor, who wishes to learn "the secrets of heaven and earth," Clerval aspires "to become one among those whose names are recorded in story as the gallant and adventurous benefactors of our species."

After Victor runs from the creature when the creature comes to life, Clerval nurses Victor back to health, playing the role of protector and comforter—a role Victor fails to assume for his own "child," the creature. The creature eventually strangles and kills Clerval because Victor destroys his half-created mate. Victor then vows revenge upon the creature

The creature

Like a newborn baby reaching out to his mother, the creature reaches out to Victor when he is transformed from an inanimate to an animate being. Victor labored for two years in order to give the creature life, but he is so appalled by the creature's hideous appearance that he flees, leaving the creature to fend for himself. Shelley initially leaves her readers in suspense as to the creature's whereabouts. We do not hear his story until after he finds Victor and requests a mate for himself. He describes Ins life to Victor after he "awoke," explaining the difficulties he had learning basic survival techniques. The creature then describes his happiest moments watching the De Lacey family together. Living in a shack attached to the De Lacey cottage, the creature viewed the family without their knowledge. He discovered a family relationship rooted in mutual respect and benevolent love, he learned how to speak and to read as the result of Safie's efforts to learn English, and he "looked upon crime as a distant evil".

John Locke, a famous eighteenth-century philosopher, invented the concept of the "Tabula Rasa," the idea that the mind is a "blank slate" when we are born. Most critics agree that Locke strongly influenced Shelley's characterization of the creature. She wanted her readers to understand how important the creature's social conditioning was to his development as a conscious being. The creature's environment, therefore, plays a critical role in shaping his reaction to and interaction with Victor during their first meeting. While the creature uses both rational and emotional appeals to convince Victor that he deserves and needs another being like himself to share his life with, he tries to emphasize Victor's duties as a creator The creature eventually realizes that not only has Victor rejected him, the entire race of humankind abhors his image—an image resembling no one else in existence.

The creature vows revenge against his creator and takes Victor's youngest brother, William, as his first victim. After this incident, he discovers Justine asleep in a barn, and purposely puts William's locket in her hand so that she will be accused of the murder. Clerval and Elizabeth's murders follow this incident after Victor goes back on his promise to create a mate for the creature. The creature finally appears at Victor's deathbed and confesses his crimes to Walton. He assures Walton that he will fade from existence when a funeral pile consumes his body with flames and sweeps him into the dark sea.

Agatha De Lacey

Daughter of Mr. De Lacey, Agatha shows tenderness and kindness towards her family and Safie. She too, however, is horrified by the creature and faints upon seeing him.

Felix De Lacey

A hard-working son who cares for his family and his beloved Safie. He appears sad and unhappy until Safie, his fiancée, arrives at his home. His involvement with Safie's father gets him, his father, and his sister Agatha exiled from their homeland, France. Nevertheless, his unasked-for kindness to Safie's father, a foreign convict, stands in contrast to his cruel dismissal and beating of the creature, who is doing nothing but sitting at the feet of Felix's father.

Mr. De Lacey

As the blind father of Felix and Agatha, Mr. De Lacey serves as a surrogate father to the creature. The creature notes his benevolence towards his family, and notes that "he would talk in a cheerful accent, with an expression of goodness that bestowed pleasure even upon me." De Lacey and his children are in their current exile because of the aid they rendered, unasked, to a Turkish merchant who was wrongly sentenced to death; the merchant later betrayed them. Because Mr. De Lacey is blind, the creature approaches him to try to gain his sympathy and friendship Even though Felix and Agatha return home and run the creature off, Mr. De Lacey is the only one in the book who does not Judge or fear the creature.

Alphonse Frankenstein

Victor's father is described by his son as "respected by all who knew him for his integrity and indefatigable attention to public business." Alphonse met Victor's mother because of his persistence in pursuing a friend who had fallen on hard times in order to give him assistance. Alphonse is also a nurturing, loving parent, and tries many times to remind Victor that family and happiness are just as important as books and learning. It is his letters to Victor that serve as occasional reminders of the outside world while he is occupied with his experiments.

Caroline Frankenstein

Victor Frankenstein's mother, Caroline was the orphaned daughter of an impoverished merchant who was one of Alphonse Frankenstein's merchant friends. She married the much-older Alphonse two years after he completed his long search for the family. A devoted mother, she contracts the scarlet fever while caring for Elizabeth, Victor's adopted sister. She dies just before Victor leaves to attend the University.

Victor Frankenstein

Born to an affluent, loving family, Victor Frankenstein hopes to leave a lasting impression on his fellow humanity. He leaves home to attend the University of Ingolstadt, where he studies natural sciences. His professor M. Waldman inspires him to push his experiments beyond the realm of "acceptable" science, so he begins to determine the limits of human mortality. Collecting cadaver parts from graveyards, he slowly pieces together the form of a human being It takes him two years to complete his experiment, but when he finally gives his creature the spark of life, Victor can only run in fear. The creature's hideous appearance appalls Victor, upsetting him so much that he becomes very ill. He knows nothing about the creature's whereabouts until the creature finally approaches him

Although Victor listens to his creature's tale with a mixture of loathing and dread, he reluctantly acknowledges that he owes the creature "a small portion of happiness"; so he promises to create a mate for the creature After much consideration, however, Victor fears the consequences of his decision and destroys what little of the female he had created. Although he honestly believes the creature despises humanity and would therefore inflict harm upon anyone and everyone, Victor is more concerned about the creature and his mate creating other "monsters" to wreak havoc upon society Although he feels guilt for the monster's actions, realizing that by making the creature he is the cause of them, he never accepts responsibility for how he has driven the creature to vengeance.

Ironically, he continues to worry about the creature's treatment of others even when both of them slip deeper into the Arctic Iceland, far away from any form of civilization, and even after he hears of the creature's benevolent efforts to help the De Lacey family survive The ending of the novel only reaffirms Victor's truly selfish motivations, as he falls to consider the needs of Walton's crew by asking them to continue their journey in order to kill the creature. He even calls the crew members cowards for wanting to return home without completing their mission. What Victor does not realize is that his quest to conquer the unknown has left him without family or friends; he dies on Walton's ship as lonely and bitter as his unfortunate creature.

Throughout the novel, Victor's self-centered actions are shown in stark contrast to those of his family, friends, and even strangers Whereas his parents have taken in two orphaned children and treated them as their own, Victor relinquishes responsibility for the only creature he has actually created. Unlike Elizabeth, who testifies on Justine's

behalf despite the other townspeople's disapproval, Victor remains silent because he fears to be disbelieved or thought insane. Even the behavior of minor characters such as Mr. Kirwin, who exerts himself to nurse and defend a stranger who to all outward appearances is a murderer, serves to show how Victor is unnaturally selfish and as a result has performed an unnatural act.

William Frankenstein

Victor's youngest brother, who runs from the creature's presence in fear. The creature kills him, but Justine Moritz, a family friend, gets blamed for the death. Victor knows from the first that the creature is the murderer, but arrives home too late to prevent Justine from accepting blame for William's death.

Frankenstein's monster

See The creature

Mr. Kirwin

An Irish magistrate who believes Victor is responsible for Clerval's murder, for Victor is agitated on hearing the manner of the man's death. After Victor becomes bedridden upon viewing Clerval's corpse, Kirwin cares for Victor's needs and helps him recover his health. Kirwin is sympathetic to the suffering young man, even though his feverish ravings seem to indicate his guilt in the murder. He also arranges for the collection of evidence in Victor's behalf, sparing him a trial.

Elizabeth Lavenza

The Frankensteins adopt Elizabeth when she is only a girl. She and Victor share more than the typical sibling affections for each other; they love each other and correspond while Victor attends the University. In her letters to him, Elizabeth keeps Victor abreast of family and other social matters, such as town gossip. She also describes Justine's welfare, reminding Victor that orphans can blossom physically as well as mentally, given the proper love and attention. Her unselfish behavior serves as a contrast to Victor's: Elizabeth gives testimony on Justine's behalf during her trial while Victor remains silent even though he knows Justine did not murder William. Elizabeth and Victor are reunited and get married, despIte the creature's threats to be with Victor on his wedding night. Elizabeth is kept ignorant of the creature's existence and his threats, and when Victor leaves the room on their wedding night, the creature kills Elizabeth.

Justine Moritz

The Frankenstein family adopts Justine because she had been abandoned by her mother. She is a favorite of Caroline Frankenstein, but returns for a time to her own mother after Caroline's death. Justine later returns to the Frankensteins, and continually reminds Elizabeth "of my dear aunt." She is found with young William's locket after his death and put on trial for his murder. Although Victor knows the creature is responsible for William's death, he says nothing at Justine's trial, reasoning that "I was absent when it was committed, and such a declaration would have been considered as the ravings of a madman and would not have exculpated her who suffered through me." Despite Elizabeth's testimony regarding Justine's good character, she is sentenced to death and then executed.

Safie

Safie becomes known to Felix through the letters of thanks she writes to him. Although her father is Turkish, her mother was a Christian Arab who had been enslaved by the Turks before marrying one of them. Safie cherishes the memory of her mother, who instructed her daughter in Christianity and fostered "an independence of spirit forbidden to the female followers of Muhammed." Against her father's wishes, Safie flees Turkey and joins Felix De Lacey and his family. Her broken English becomes a learning opportunity for the creature, because he receives the same language lessons as she does. Shelley's stereotypical treatment of Turkish Muslims in her portrayal of Sadie's situation was most likely a way to bring up the issues of women's rights that were articulated by her mother, writer Mary Wollstonecraft.

Margaret Saville

Robert Walton's sister, with whom Walton corresponds at the beginning and end of the novel.

M. Waldman

Victor's kind professor inspires him to "unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation." Victor hears M. Waldman's lecture on the progress of science and determines "more, far more, will I achieve." The behavior of this man of science stands in stark contrast to Victor's, for M. Waldman takes time away from his research to teach Victor and introduce him to the laboratory, whereas Victor pursues his experiments to the exclusion of all else.

Robert Walton

Walton's letters begin and end the novel, framing Victor's and the creature's narratives in such a way that Walton embodies the most important qualities found in both Victor and his creature. Walton, in other words, balances the inquisitive yet presumptuously arrogant nature of Victor with the sympathetic, sensitive side of the creature As an Arctic explorer, Walton, much like Victor, wishes to conquer the unknown. Nevertheless, when he discovers Victor near death on the icy, vast expanse of water, he listens to Victor's bitter and tormented tale of the creature. This makes him reconsider continuing ills own mission to the possible peril of his crew. When the creature appears at Victor's deathbed, Walton fails to fulfill Victor's dying wish to destroy the creature. Instead, he does what Victor continually failed to do throughout the novel: he listens to the creature's anguished tale with compassion and empathy.

Themes

Alienation' and Loneliness

Mary Shelley's emphasis on the Faust legend, or the quest to conquer the unknown at the cost of one's humanity, forms a central theme of the novel. The reader continually sees Victor favor his ambition above his friendships and family. Created by a German writer named Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, the Faust myth suggested that the superior individual could throw off the shackles of traditional conventions and alienate himself from society. English Romantic poets, who assumed the status of poet-prophets, believed that only in solitude could they produce great poetry. In *Frankenstein,* however, isolation only leads to despair. Readers get the distinct feeling that Victor's inquisitive nature causes his emotional and physical peril because he cannot balance his intellectual and social interactions. For instance, when he leaves home to attend the University of Ingolstadt, he immerses himself in his experiment and forgets about the family who lovingly supported him throughout his childhood. Victor actually does not see his family or correspond with them for six years, even when his father and Elizabeth try to keep in touch with him by letters. Shelley's lengthy description of Victor's model parents contrasts with his obsessive drive to create the creature.

Margaret's correspondence with Walton at the beginning of the novel also compares with Shelley's description of Victor's home life; both men were surrounded by caring, nurturing individuals who considered the welfare of their loved ones at all times. Not surprisingly, Walton's ambition to conquer the unknown moves him, like it does Victor, further away from civilization and closer to feelings of isolation and depression The creature, too, begins reading novels such as Goethe's *The Sorrows of Werter* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost,* claiming that an "increase of knowledge only [showed] what a wretched outcast I was." For the creature, an increase in knowledge only brings sorrow and discontent. Victor and Walton ultimately arrive at these two states because of their inquisitive natures.

Nature vs. Nurture

The theme of nurturing, or how environment contributes to a person's character, truly fills the novel. With every turn of the page, another nurturing example contrasts with Victor's lack of a parental role with his "child," the creature. Caro line nurtures Elizabeth back to health and loses her own life as a result. Clerval nurtures Victor through his illness when he is in desperate need of a caretaker after the creature is brought to life. The De Lacey's nurturing home becomes a model for the creature, as he begins to return their love in ways the family cannot even comprehend. For instance, the creature stopped stealing the De Lacey's food after realizing their poverty. In sympathy, he left firewood for the family to reduce Felix's chores

Each nurturing act contrasts strongly with Victor's gross neglect of the creature's needs. And by showing the affection between Caroline Frankenstein and her adopted daughters Elizabeth and Justine, Shelley suggests that a child need not have biological ties to a parent to deserve an abundance of love and attention.

Appearances and Reality

Victor's inquisitive probing causes him to delve beneath the appearances of "acceptable" science and create an animate being from inanimate materials. Nevertheless, he forgets to extend this inquiring sensibility toward his creature. The creature's physical appearance prompts Victor to flee from his creation; Victor never takes the time to search beneath the creature's ugliness to discover the very human qualities that the creature possesses. While Victor easily manipulates nature and natural laws to suit his own intellectual interests, he lacks an understanding of human nature, as proven throughout the novel.

In addition to the importance of the creature's appearance, Shelley emphasizes the magnificent landscape throughout the novel. This demonstrates her loyalty to the Romantic movement of her time, which often glorified nature. Although Victor often turns to nature to relieve his despondent thoughts, Clerval notices the intimate interaction between nature and humans in Switzerland. He says to Victor, "Look at that... group of labourers coming from among their vines; and that village half hid in the recess of the mountain' Clerval looks beyond nature's surface appearance, drawing Victor's attention to the harmonious interaction between nature and a productive society. Victor praises his friend as having a "wild and enthusiastic imagination [which] was chastened by the sensibility of his heart," a sensibility Victor ironically lacks. In the isolated Arctic, when Walton's ship is trapped by mountains of ice, he respects nature's resistance to his exploration and eventually leaves the untamed region. Like Clerval, Walton experiences life by interacting harmoniously with nature and people, as he proves when he honors his crew members' request to return home.

Duty and Responsibility

Victor's inability to know his creature relates directly to his lack of responsibility for the creature's welfare or the creature's actions. The role of responsibility or duty takes many shapes throughout the story, but familial obligations represent one of the novel's central themes. Whether Caroline nurses Elizabeth or Felix blames himself for his family's impoverished condition, Victor's dismissal of his parental duties makes readers empathize with the creature. Victor only feels a sense of duty after the creature says the famous line, "How dare you sport thus with life? Do your duty towards me, and I will do mine towards you and the rest of mankind." The creature compares himself to Adam—thus comparing Victor to God—and claims that Victor owes him a certain amount of happiness. Even though the creature temporarily convinces Victor to grant him his rights, Victor never really learns the virtues of parental or ethical responsibility.

Justice vs. Injustice

By showing how Victor ignores his responsibilities while those around him do not, Shelley invites the reader to judge his character. Themes of justice and injustice playa large role in the novel, as the author develops Issues of fairness and blame. Usually those characters who take responsibility for others and for their own actions are considered fair and Just For example, Elizabeth pleads Justine's case in court after Justine is accused of William's murder Victor knows the creature committed the crime, yet he does not—or cannot—reveal the creature's wrongdoing

However, the most important aspect of the trial is Justine's confession. Elizabeth claims, "I believed you guiltless.. until I heard that you had yourself declared your guilt" When Justine explains that she confessed after being found guilty because that was the only way to receive absolution from the church, Elizabeth accepts her at her word and tells her, "I will proclaim, I will prove your innocence." Making confessions, listening to others, and offering verbal promises all signal the highest truths in this novel. Elizabeth accepts Justine's guilt only if Justine says she is guilty; never mind the facts or evidence, never mind intuition words reveal true belief. Except for Victor, every character listens to others: Mr. Kirwin listens to Victor's story, the creature listens to the De Lacey family, Felix listens to Safie's father, Margaret listens to Walton, and Walton listens to Victor and to .

his crew. Listening helps all of these characters distinguish fair from unfair. Victor's refusal to listen impartially to his creature says much about his character. Shelley suggests that Victor not only played God when he created the creature; he also unfairly played the role of judge and accuser.

Style

Narration

Instead of beginning with Victor's point of view, Shelley introduces us to Walton first. Using a frame device, in which the tale is told to us by someone who reads it or hears it from someone else, Shelley invites readers to believe Victor's story through an objective person. Shelley also uses an important literary device known as the epistolary form—where letters tell the story—using letters between Walton and his sister to frame both Victor's and the creature's narrative. Before the novel's first chapter, Walton writes to his sister about the "wretched man" he meets, building suspense about the "demon" Victor mentions at the beginning of his narrative. Once Victor begins telling his story, we slowly learn about his childhood and the eventful moments leading up to his studies at the University. Then, the creature interrupts Victor, and we get to hear all the significant moments leading up to his request for a partner. Since the theme of listening is so central to this novel, Shelley makes sure, by incorporating three different narratives, that readers get to hear all sides of the story . Walton's letters introduce and conclude the novel, reinforcing the theme of nurturing.

Setting

The majority of the novel takes place in the Swiss Alps and concludes in the Arctic, although Victor and Clerval travel to other places, such as London, England, the Rhine River which flows from Switzerland north to the Netherlands, and Scotland. All of these locations, except for the Arctic, were among the favorite landscapes for Romantic writers, and Shelley spends great care describing the sublime shapes of the majestic, snow-clad mountains. However, aside from the dark Arctic Ocean, Shelley's setting is unusual; most Gothic novels produce gloomy, haggard settings adorned with decaying mansions and ghostly, supernatural spirits. It is possible the author intended the beautiful Alps to serve as a contrast to the creature's unsightly physical appearance. In addition to the atypical Gothic setting, Shelley also sets her story in contemporary times, another diversion from Gothic novels which usually venture to the Middle Ages and other far away time periods. By using the time period of her day, Shelley makes the creature and the story's events much more realistic and lifelike.

Romanticism

Spanning the years between 1785 and 1830, the Romantic period was marked by the French Revolution and the beginnings of modem industrialism. Most of the early Romantic writers favored the revolution and the changes in lifestyle and sensibility which accompanied it After shaking off old traditions and customs, writers experienced the newfound freedom of turning inward, rather than outward to the external world, to reflect on issues of the heart and the imagination. In addition, writers like English poet

William Wordsworth suddenly challenged his predecessors by writing about natural scenes and rustic, commonplace lifestyles

English poet Samuel Coleridge explored elements of the supernatural in his poetry.

Mary Shelley combined the ethical concerns of her parents with the Romantic sensibilities of Percy Shelley's poetic inclinations Her father's concern for the underprivileged influenced her description of the poverty-stricken De Lacey family. Her appeals to the imagination, Isolation, and nature represented typical scenes and themes explored in some of Percy Shelley's poetry. But Mary's choice of a Gothic novel made her unique in her family and secured her authorial place in the Romantic period.

Gothicism

Horace Walpole introduced the first Gothic novel in 1764 with *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story.* Gothic novels were usually mysteries in which sinister and sometimes supernatural events occurred and were ultimately caused by some evil human action. The language was frequently overly dramatic and inflated. Following this movement was the Romantic movement's fascination with the macabre and the superstitious aspects of life, allowing them the freedom to explore the darkest depths of the human mind. Most critics agree that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* reflected her deepest psychological fears and insecurities, such as her inability to prevent her children's deaths, her distressed marriage to a man who showed no remorse for his daughters' deaths, and her feelings of inadequacy as a Writer. The Gothic novel usually expresses, often in subtle and indirect ways, our repressed anxieties. The settings usually take place far away from reality or realistic portrayals of everyday life. Shelley's setting, of course, is the exception to most Gothic novels. The fact that the creature wanders the breathtaking Alps instead of a dark, craggy mansion in the middle of nowhere either compounds the reader's fear or makes the creature more human.

Doppelganger

Many literary critics have noted the *Doppelganger* effect—the idea that a living person has a ghostly double haunting him—between Victor and his creature Presenting Victor and the creature as doubles allows Shelley to dramatize two aspects of a character, usually the "good" and "bad" selves. Victor's desire to ignore his creature parallels his desire to disregard the darkest part of his self. The famous psychologist Sigmund Freud characterizes this "dark" side as the Id, while Carl Jung, another famous psychologist, refers to our "dark" side as the Jungian shadow. Jung claims that we all have characteristics we don't like about ourselves, yet these unsavory attributes stay with us like a shadow tailgating its leader The creature represents Victor's "evil" shadow, just as Victor represents the creature's When presented this way, It makes sense that so many readers confuse the creature and Victor by assuming that the creature is named Frankenstein. Both of these characters "alternately pursue and flee from one another... [L]ike fragments of a mind in conflict with itself," as Eleanor Ty observes in the *Concise*

Dictionary of British Literary Biography. But taken together as one person, Victor and his creature combine to represent the full spectrum of what it means to be human—to be joyful, compassionate, empathetic, and hateful, and also love humanity, desire knowledge, honor justice, fear the unknown, dread abandonment, and fear mortality. No other character in the novel assumes this range of human complexity.

Historical Context

The French Revolution and the Rise of Industrialism

Most of the early Romantic Writers strongly advocated the French Revolution, which began in 1789 with the storming of the Bastille, a prison where the French royalty kept political prisoners. The revolution signaled a throwing off of old traditions and customs of the wealthy classes, as the balance of economic power shifted toward the middle class with the rise of industrialism. As textile factories and iron mills increased production with advanced machinery and technology, the working classes grew restive and increasingly alarmed by jobs that seemed insecure because a worker could be replaced by machines. Most of England's literary thinkers welcomed revolution because it represented an opportunity to establish a harmonious social structure. Shelley's father William Godwin, in fact, strongly influenced Romantic writers when he wrote *Inquiry Concerning Political Justice* because he envisioned a society in which property would be equally distributed. Shelley's mother Mary Wollstonecraft, also an ardent supporter of the revolution, wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* in response to Edmund Burke's attack on the revolution. She followed two years later with *A Vindication of the Rights of Women,* supporting equality between the sexes.

The bloody "September Massacres" in which French revolutionaries executed nearly 1200 priests, royalists, aristocrats, and common criminals, occurred in 1792. This event and the "Reign of Terror," during which the revolutionary government imprisoned over 300,000 "suspects," made English sympathizers lose their fervor With the rise of Napoleon, who was crowned emperor in 1804, England itself was drawn into war against France during this time. After the war ended in

1815, the English turned their attention to economic and social problems plaguing their own country. Much of the reason why England did not regulate the economic shift from a farming-based society to an industrialized society stemmed from a hands-off philosophy of non-governmental interference with private business. This philosophy had profound effects, leading to extremely low wages and terrible working conditions for employees who were prevented by law from unionizing.

Science and Technology

Eventually, the working class protested their conditions with violent measures. Around 1811, a period of unemployment, low wages, and high prices led to the Luddite Movement. This movement encouraged people to sabotage the technology and machinery that took jobs away from workers. Because the new machines produced an unparalleled production rate, competition for jobs was fierce, and employers used the low employment rate against their workers by not providing decent wages or working conditions. In addition to technological advances and new machines such as the steam engine, scientific advancements influenced the Romantic period. The most significant

scientist was Erasmus Darwin, a noted physician, poet, and scholar whose ideas concerning biological evolution prefigured those of his more famous grandson, Charles Darwin. Both Mary and Percy were very familiar with his description of biological evolution, which became one of the central topics at the poet Lord Byron's home when Shelley conceived her idea for *Frankenstein.* Percy and Mary also attended a lecture by Andrew Crosse, a British scientist whose experiments with electricity bore some resemblance to Frankenstein's fascinations. Crosse discussed galvanism, or the study of electricity and its applications. This lecture no doubt fueled Shelley's imagination enough for her to suggest Victor Frankenstein's step-by-step invention of the creature in her novel.

Arctic Exploration

The late I700s also marked the beginnings of a new era of ocean exploration. England's Royal Academy, which promoted the first voyage to the South seas, appealed to scientists and travelers alike. Explorers eventually wanted to find a trade route through the Arctic that would connect the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans. In 1818, the year that Shelley published *Frankenstein,* a Scottish explorer named John Ross went searching for the Northwest passage and discovered an eight mile expanse of red-colored snow cliffs overlooking Baffin Bay, between Greenland and Canada. His journey reflected Walton's quest to the North pole and the era of discovery in which Shelley lived.

Critical Overview

When Mary finished her novel in May 1817, Percy Shelley sent her manuscript, under an anonymous name, to two different publishers, both of whom rejected it. LakingtOn, Allen, and Co. finally accepted it. Early reviews of the work were generally mixed. As quoted in Diane Johnson's introduction to the novel, a critic for *The Edinburgh Review* found that "taste and judgement [sic] alike revolted at this kind of writing,"_ and "it inculcates no lesson of conduct, manner of morality; it cannot mend, and will not even amuse its readers unless their tastes have been deplorably vitiated." A writer from the *Monthly Review,* as quoted by Montague Summers in *The Gothic Quest,* claimed that the setting was so improbable—the story so unbelievable—that it was "an uncouth story... leading to no conclusion either moral or philosophical." Even though this conclusion regarding the novel's lack of moral implications seems absurd to readers today, most of the earliest unfavorable reviews related to the story's grotesque or sensationalist elements. On the other hand, some early reV1ewers enjoyed the novel's uniqueness and praised the author's genius. As Johnson related, Sir Walter Scott stated in *Blackwood's Edinburgh* magazine that he was impressed with "the high idea of the author's original genius and happy power of expression." The rest of England seemed to agree with Scott's opinion, since so many readers enjoyed *Frankenstein.* The novel resembled many works of the popular gothic genre, but 1t also became one of the triumphs of the Romantic movement. People identified with 1tS themes of alienation and isolation and its warning about the destructive power that can result when human creativity 1S unfettered by moral and social concerns. Even if readers did not identify the Romantic themes present in Shelley's novel, the sensationalist elements piqued interest in other forms of dramatization.

In 1823, the English Opera House performed *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein,* and fourteen other dramatizations were staged within three years of the play's premiere. The Opera House, in fact, used the protests against this play to further its own interests. As Steven Forry notes in his book *Hideous Progenies: Dramatizations of Frankenstein from the Nineteenth Century to the Present,* public outrage regarding the "immoral tendency" heightened the appeal of both the play and the book. Eventually, the various dramatizations shaped Shelley's characters to fit whatever popular appeal would draw audiences to the playhouses. Even today, numerous film adaptations distort the novel's original story, especially concerning the creature's very complex response to his world.

Since the 1800s, *Frankenstein* has continued to appeal to a wide audience. Criticism of the novel represents a diverse range of approaches. These include feminist interpretations, which describe the novel as reflecting Shelley's deepest fears of motherhood. Marx1St analyses explore the effects of the poor versus the bourgeois families (the De Lacey's versus the Frankenstein's). In addition, some critics have focused on psychoanalysis, interpreting Dr. Frankenstein and the monster as embodying Sigmund Freud's theory of id and ego. Today, much critical focus seems to rest on the autobiographical elements of *Frankenstein,* as critics wish to rightfully consider Shelley as one of the leading Romantic writers of her day.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Griffith is a professor of English and philosophy at Chadron State College in Chadron, Nebraska. In the following essay, he considers Frankenstein *as a novel that both represents and goes beyond the ideas of the Romantic era.*

Perhaps no book is more of its age than *Frankenstein.* Written and published in 1816-1818, *Frankenstein* typifies the most important ideas of the Romantic era, among them the primacy of feelings, the dangers of intellect, dismay over the human capacity to corrupt our natural goodness, the agony of the questing, solitary hero, and the awesome power of the sublime. Its Gothic fascination with the dual nature of humans and with the figurative power of dreams anticipates the end of the nineteenth century and the discovery of the unconscious and the dream life. The story of its creation, which the author herself tells in a "Preface" to the third edition to the book (1831), is equally illuminating about its age. At nineteen, Mary Godwin was living in the summer of 1816 with the poet Percy Shelley, visiting another famous Romantic poet, Lord Byron, and his doctor at Byron's Swiss villa when cold, wet weather drove them all indoors. Byron proposed that they entertain themselves by writing, each of them, a ghost story. On an evening when Byron and Shelley had been talking about galvanism and human life, whether an electric current could be passed through tissue to animate it, Mary Shelley went to bed and in a half dream state thought of the idea for *Frankenstein.* She awoke from the nightmarish vision of a "pale student of unhallowed arts" terrified by the "yellow, watery... eyes" of his creation staring at him to stare herself at the moon outside rising over the Alps. The next morning she wrote the first sentence of chapter five: "It was on a dreary night of November that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils." with Percy Shelley's encouragement and in spite of a failed childbirth and the suicide of a half sister, over the next several months she worked on the story. It was completed in 1817 and published the following year, the only successful "ghost" story of that evening, perhaps the most widely known ever written

Shelley's was an age in which heart triumphed over head. Frankenstein's moral failure is his heedless pursuit to know all that he might about life without taking any responsibility for his acts His "sin" is not solely in creating the monster, but in abandoning him to orphanhood at his birth. The monster's unnatural birth is the product of what the Romantic poet Wordsworth called humankind's "meddling intellect." Childlike in his innocence, the monster wants only to be loved, but he gets love from neither his "father" nor from any other in the human community.

Behind the novel's indictment of the intellect stand three important myths to which Shelley alludes She subtitles her book "A Modem Prometheus," linking Victor Frankenstein to the heroic but ultimately tragic figure of Greek myth who contended With the gods, stole fire from them to give to humans, and was punished by Zeus by being chained on Mount Caucasus to have vultures eat his liver. Her husband Percy Shelley wrote a closet drama, *Prometheus Unbound,* and fellow Romantic poets Byron and Coleridge were also attracted to and wrote about a figure of defiant ambition. The story of Faust, like the Prometheus myth, also involves one who would trade everything

to satisfy an aggressive and acquisitive intellect Finally, Adam's fall from grace came of his eating of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. All are unhappy with the limits life places on them; all challenge those limits; all suffer great loss. Such is Victor Frankenstein's story, one which Walton appears about to replicate on his journey to the Pole. Walton tells Frankenstein,

"I would sacrifice my fortune, my existence, my every hope, to the furtherance of my enterprise. One man's life or death were but a small price to pay for the acquirement of the knowledge which I sought, for the dominion I should acquire and transmit over the elemental foes of our race".

Frankenstein, to whom "life and death appeared .. ideal bounds" to be broken through, succeeds in his intellectual pursuit but at great cost. He loses friend, brother, and wife. He loses all contact and sympathy with the human community. At both the beginning and end of the novel, he is the most alienated figure, alone, in mad pursuit in a desolate spot on the earth.

The novel's structure enhances these ideas. It is a framed narrative with a story within a story within a story. At the outer layer the novel is framed by the letters which Walton writes to his sister while he is voyaging to the Pole, a Frankenstein-like figure consumed by an intellectual ambition, heedless of feeling, alienated and unbefriended. His drama is internal, his isolation all the more clear in the one-way communication the letters afford. The next layer is Frankenstein's story, told because he has the opportunity before his death to deter one like himself from the same tragic consequences. Finally, although the novel is titled *Frankenstein,* the monster is at its structural center, his voice the most compelling because the most felt. Perhaps not coincidentally, in the popular imagination, the word "Frankenstein" conjures in most minds not Victor but the monster, although popular treatments of the story on stage and film have half-misconstrued Shelley's purpose by focusing only on the monster as a terrible being.

That the monster begs for our pity, that he descends from his native-born goodness to become a "malignant devil," illustrates another notion familiar to Shelley generally in her age and particularly in her family. Her father, William Godwin, had written *Political Justice* (1793) and her mother,

Mary Wollstonecraft, had written *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), both works on social injustices. These leading philosophical radicals of the day believed that, as Rousseau put it, "Man is born free and is everywhere in chains," that in our civilizations we corrupt what is by nature innocent. The monster is not evil, he is transformed into evil by a human injustice, an Adam made into a Satan. "I was benevolent and good," he says; "misery made me a fiend." The DeLaceys, unjustly expelled from society, represent the possibility of our restoration to native goodness in retreat from society amid the sublime splendors of the Alps. Old Mr. DeLacey tells the Monster that "the hearts of men, when unprejudiced by any obvious self-interest, are full of brotherly love and charity." The monster sees in the DeLaceys the loving family he has never known and theIr simple cottage life is a model of the happily primitive which the Romantics idealized.

If *Frankenstein* is a book of its age, it also looks ahead to its century's end when interest in the human psyche uncovered the unconscious mind. The idea of the *Doppelganger,* the double who shadows us, had been around since the origins of the Gothic novel in the 1760s. By the end of the nineteenth century, works such as Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* made the Idea that we had more than one self common. Capable of both great good and evil, we had, it seemed, a "monster" always potentially within us and not always under our control. Freud's splitting of the psyche put the monster-like Id at the core of our persons. Freudian readings of *Frankenstein* see the monster as the outward expression of Victor's id or his demoniacal passions. In other words, Victor and the monster are the same person. Hence, Victor must keep the monster secret. His hope to create a being "like myself' is fulfilled in the monster whose murders we must see as expressions of Victor's own desires. Victor calls himself "the true murderer" of Justine, who, along with his brother William, he labels "the first hapless victims to my unhallowed arts." Driven by remorse, he wanders "like an evil spirit," ills own wandering a mirror image of the monster's.

When we see both in the outer frame of the book, Victor pursues the monster, but it is the monster who has pursued Victor, whom he calls "my last victim." Since Victor's story is a story of creation, murder, Investigation, and pursuit, *Frankenstein* is ultimately a book about our pursuit of self-discovery, about the knowledge of the monster within us.

Devices conventional in both gothic novels and novels of more modem psychological interest appear In *Frankenstein.* Victor's passions frequently induce lapses in consciousness; his nightmares beg for interpretation. The most powerful occurs at one in the morning on the evening he succeeds in animating the corpse. He dreams that he sees Elizabeth walking the streets of Ingolstadt "in the bloom of health," but when he kisses her, she appears deathlike and is transformed into the corpse of his dead mother When he awakens from the horror of his sleep, his monstrous creation looms over him. Frankenstein flees. Victor creates a monster and the nightmare hints that the monster of his desire is to take Elizabeth's life, perhaps because, as some suggest, unconsciously he holds her responsible for his mother's death.

The implications of the perverse in the sexual relationships of the characters also seem well served by a Freudian reading. Frankenstein is the monster's "father," yet were he to agree to the monster's demand to create for him a bride, would his next offspring be a "sister"? That hint of the incestuous is echoed in Victor's marriage to Elizabeth. An orphan brought home by Mrs. Frankenstein, she seems to the young Victor his possession, and though they "called each other familiarly by the name of cousin," Victor acknowledges that the ambiguity of their relationship defied naming: "No word, no expression could body forth the kind of relation in which she stood to me—my more than sister, Since till death she was to be mine only"' The monster's threat—"I shall be with you on your wedding night"—puts the monster in the nuptial bed with his "father" and his father's "sister/bride." That the novel closes with the monster's killing of the "father" pleads for an Oedipal reading which Freud's arguments regarding infantile sexuality and the competition within the birth family for the love of the mother made possible.

Numerous psychological readings of the novel have focused on Mary Shelley's life. Ellen Moers proposed that in *Frankenstein* Shelley wrestled with the pain of birth. Her own mother died only days after she was born, and Mary's firstborn died the year before she began the novel. Later, she referred to the book as "my hideous progeny." More recent feminist interpretations, such as that by Gilbert and Gubar noting that the novel is about a motherless orphan, similarly point to Mary's youth and remind us that books and children and birth and death are so mixed in both Shelley's life and in the novel that one cannot be understood without the other.

Frankenstein shocked readers in 1818 for its monstrous impiety, but its fame seemed fixed at birth. Initial reviews, politically oriented, denounced the book as a bit of radical Godwinism, since the book was dedicated to William Godwin and many presumed that its anonymous author was Percy Shelley. A stage adaptation called *Presumption, or, The Fate of Frankenstein* appeared as early as 1823. Mary Shelley attended a performance. In Shelley's life two additional editions were published; numerous editions since then have appeared. Burlesques on stage began in the late 1840s and continued to the end of the century Thomas Edison created a film version as early as 1910, followed by the most famous film version, in 1931, starring Boris Karloff. It fixed for several generations an Idea of "the monster Frankenstein," which gave birth to numerous other films and parodies of the story which continue to the present In film, in translation into many of the world's languages, in its presence in school curricula, and in an unending body of criticism, *Frankenstein* lives well beyond its young author's modest intentions to Write an entertaining Gothic tale to pass some time indoors on a cold Swiss summer evening.

Source: George V Griffith, in an essay for *Novels for Students,* Gale, 1997

Critical Essay #2

In the following excerpt, noted American novelist, educator, and critic Oates explores literary influences on Shelley's Frankenstein *and comments on various stylistic and thematic aspects of the work.*

Quite apart from its enduring celebrity, and its proliferation in numberless extra-literary forms, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* is a remarkable work A novel *sui generis,* if a novel at all, it is a unique blending of Gothic, fabulist, allegorical, and philosophical materials Though certainly one of the most calculated and *willed* of fantasies, being in large part a kind of gloss upon or rejoinder to John Milton's *Paradise Lost, Frankenstein* is fueled by the kind of grotesque, faintly absurd, and wildly inventive images that spring direct from the unconscious: the eight-foot creature designed to be "beautiful," who turns out almost indescribably repulsive (yellow-skinned, shriveled of countenance, with straight black lips and near-colorless eyes); the cherished cousin-bride who is beautiful but, in the mind's dreaming, yields horrors ("As I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death, her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave—worms crawling in the folds"); the mad dream of the Arctic as a country of "eternal light" that will prove, of course, only a place of endless ice, the appropriate landscape for Victor Frankenstein's death and his demon's self-immolation.

Central to *Frankenstein—as* it is central to a vastly different nineteenth-century romance, *Jane Eyre—is* a stroke of lightning that appears to Issue in a dazzling "stream of fire" from a beautiful old oak tree ("So soon the light vanished, the oak had disappeared, and nothing remained but a blasted stump"): the literal stimulus for Frankenstein's subsequent discovery of the cause of generation and life. And according to Mary Shelley's prefatory account of the Origin of her "ghost story," the very 'image of Frankenstein and his demon-creature sprang from a waking dream of extraordinary vividness:

I did not sleep, nor could I be said to think My Imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bound of revene. I saw—with shut eyes, but acute mental vision—I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half-vital motion

The student sleeps: but he is awakened; he opens ills eyes' behold the horrid thing stands at ills bedside, opening his curtains, and looking on him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes.

Hallucinatory and surrealist on its deepest level, *Frankenstein* is of course one of the most self-consciously literary "novels" ever written: jts awkward form is the epistolary Gothic; its lyric descriptions of natural scenes (the grandiose Valley of Chamounix in

particular) spring from Romantic sources; its speeches and monologues echo both Shakespeare and Milton; and, should the author's didactic intention not be clear enough, the demon-creature educates himself by studying three books of symbolic significance—Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther,* Plutarch's *Lives,* and Milton's *Paradise Lost.* (The last conveniently supplies him with a sense of his own predicament, as Mary Shelley hopes to dramatize it. He reads Milton's great epic as if it were a "true history" giving the picture of an omnipotent God warring with His creatures; he identifies himself with Adam, except so far as Adam had come forth from God a "perfect creature, happy and prosperous." Finally, of course, he identifies with Satan: "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. Everywhere I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous.")

The search of medieval alchemists for the legendary philosophers' stone (the talismanic process by which base metals might be transformed into gold or, in psychological terms, the means by which the individual might realize his destiny), Faust's reckless defiance of human limitations and his willingness to barter his soul for knowledge, the fatal search of such tragic figures as Oedipus and Hamlet for answers to the mysteries of their lives—these are the archetypal dramas to which *Frankenstein* bears an obvious kinship. Yet, as one reads, as Frankenstein and his despised shadow—self engage in one after another of the novel's many dialogues, it begins to seem as if the nineteen-year-old author is discovering these archetypal elements for the first time. Frankenstein "is" a demonic parody (or extension) of Milton's God; he "is" *Prometheus plasticator,* the creator of mankind; but at the same time, by his own account, he is totally unable to control the behavior of his demon (variously called "monster,", "fiend," "wretch,'" but necessarily lacking a name). Surprisingly, it is not by way of the priggish and "self-devoted" young scientist that Mary Shelley discovers the great power of her narrative but by way of the misshapen demon, with whom most readers identify: "My person was hideous, and my stature gigantic. What did this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination?" It is not simply the case that the demon-like Satan and Adam in *Paradise Lost—has* the most compelling speeches in the novel and is far wiser and magnanimous than his creator: he is also the means by which a transcendent love—a romantically *unrequited love—is* expressed. Surely one of the secrets of *Frankenstein,* which helps to account for its abiding appeal, is the demon's patient, unquestioning, utterly faithful, and utterly *human* love for his irresponsible creator.

When Frankenstein is tracking the demon into the Arctic regions, for instance, it is clearly the demon who is helping him in his search, and even leaving food for him; but Frankenstein is so blind—in fact so comically blind—he believes that "spirits" are responsible. "Yet still a spirit of good followed and directed my steps, and, when I most murmured, would suddenly extricate me from seemingly insurmountable difficulties. Sometimes, when nature, overcome by hunger, sunk under the exhaustion, a repast was prepared for me in the desert, that restored and inspirited me. I may not doubt that it was set there by the spirits that I had invoked to aid me."

By degrees, with the progression of the fable's unlikely plot, the inhuman creation becomes increasingly human while his creator becomes increasingly inhuman, frozen in a posture of rigorous denial. *(He* is blameless of any wrongdoing in terms of the demon and even dares to tell Walton, literally with his dying breath, that another scientist might succeed where he 'had failed!—the lesson of the "Frankenstein monster" is revealed as totally lost on Frankenstein himself.) The demon is (sub)human consciousness-in-the-making, naturally benevolent as Milton's Satan is not, and received with horror and contempt solely because of his physical appearance. He is sired without a mother in defiance of nature, but he is in one sense an infant—a comically monstrous eight-foot baby whose progenitor rejects him immediately after creating him, in one of the most curious (and dreamlike) scenes in the novel:

"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? . I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health I had desired it with an ardor that far exceeded moderatos; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room, and cononued a long orne traversing my bed-chamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep."

Here follows the nightmare vision of Frankenstein's bride-to-be, Elizabeth, as a form of his dead mother, with "grave-worms crawling" in her shroud; and shortly afterward the "wretch" himself appears at Frankenstein's bed, drawing away the canopy as Mary Shelley had imagined. But Frankenstein is so cowardly he runs away again; and this time the demon is indeed abandoned, to reappear only after the first of the "murders" of Frankenstein's kin. On the surface, Frankenstein's behavior is preposterous, even idiotic, for he seems blind to the fact that is apparent to any reader—that he has loosed a fearful power into the world, whether it strikes his eye as aesthetically pleasing or not, and he *must* take responsibility for it. Except, of course, he does not. For, as he keeps telling himself, he is blameless of any wrongdoing apart from the act of creation itself.

The emotions he catalogs for us—gloom, sorrow, nusery, despair—are conventionally Romantic attitudes, mere luxuries in a context that requires *action* and not simply *response.*

By contrast the demon is all activity, all yearning, all hope His love for his maker is unrequited and seems incapable of making any impression upon Frankenstein; yet the demon never gives it up, even when he sounds most threatening: "Beware," says the demon midway in the novel, "for I am fearless, and therefore powerful. I will watch with the wiliness of a snake, that I may sting with its venom Man, you shall repent of the injuries you inflict." His voice is very like his creator's—indeed, everyone in *Frankenstein* sounds alike—but his posture is always one of simple need: he requires love in order to become less monstrous, but, as he is a monster, love is denied him; and the man responsible for this comically tragic state of affairs says repeatedly that he is not to blame. Frankenstein's typical response to the situation is: "I felt as if I had committed some great crime, the consciousness of which haunted me. I was guiltless,

but I had indeed drawn a horrible curse upon my head, as mortal as that of crime." But if Frankenstein is not to blame for the various deaths that occur, who is? Had he endowed his creation, as God endowed Adam in Milton's epic, with free will? Or is the demon psychologically his creature, committing the forbidden acts Frankenstein wants committed?—so long as Frankenstein himself remains "guiltless. "

It is a measure of the subtlety of this moral parable that the demon strikes so many archetypal chords and suggests so many variant readings He recapitulates in truncated form the history of consciousness of his race (learning to speak, react, write, etc., by closely watching the De Lacey family); he is an abandoned child, a parentless orphan; he takes on the voices of Adam, Satan ("Evil thenceforth became my good,", he says, as Milton's fallen angel says, "EvIl be thou my good"), even our "first mother," Eve When the demon terrifies himself by seeing his reflection in a pool, and grasping at once the nature of his own deformity, he is surely not mirroring NarcIssus, as some commentators have suggested, but Milton's Eve in her surprised discovery of her own beauty, in book 4 of *Paradise Lost:*

I thither went

With unexperienc't thought, and laid me down On the green bank, to look into the clear Smooth Lake, that to me seem'd another sky. As I bent down to look, just opposite,

A shape within the wat'ry gleam appear'd bending to look on me, I started back,

It started back, but pleas' d I soon return' d, pleas'd it return'd as soon with answering looks of sympathy and love, there I had fixt

Mine eyes till now, and pin'd with vain desire

[11 455-66]

He is Shakespeare's Edmund, though unloved—a shadow figure more tragic, because more "conscious," than the hero he represents. Most suggestively, he has become by the novel's melodramatic conclusion a form of Christ: sinned against by all humankind, yet fundamentally blameless, and yet quite willing to die as a sacrifice. He speaks of his death as a "consummation"; he is going to burn himself on a funeral pyre somewhere in the Arctic wastes—unlikely, certainly, but a fitting end to a life conceived by way of lightning and electricity:

"But soon," he cried with sad and solemn enthusiasm, "I shall die, and what I now feel be no longer felt. Soon these burning miseries will be extinct. I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly, and exult in the agony of the torturing flames. The light of that conflagration will fade away; my ashes will be swept into the sea by the winds. My Spirit will sleep in peace, or, if it thinks, it will not surely think thus."

But the demon does not die within the confines of the novel, so perhaps he has not died after all. He is, in the end, a "modem" species of shadow or *Doppelganger—the*

nightmare that is *deliberately created by man's ingenuity* and not a mere supernatural being or fairy-tale remnant.

Source: Joyce Carol Oates, "Frankenstein's Fallen Angel," in *Critical Inquiry,* Vol 10, No.3, March, 1984, pp. 543-54.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Millhauser considers Frankenstein's *monster* In *relation to the tradition of the "noble savage" in literature.*

The estimate of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* familiar to us from literary handbooks and popular impression emphasizes its macabre and pseudo-scientific sensationalism: properly enough, so far as either its primary conception or realized qualities are concerned. But it has the effect of obscuring from notice certain secondary aspects of the work which did, after all, figure in its history and weigh with its contemporary audience, and which must, therefore, be taken into consideration before either the book or the young mind that composed it has been properly assayed. One such minor strain, not too well recognized in criticism, is a thin vein of social speculation: a stereotyped, irrelevant, and apparently automatic repetition of the lessons of that school of liberal thought which was then termed "philosophical."

In the work of Godwin's daughter and Shelley's bride, some reflection of contemporary social radicalism—crude, second-hand, very earnest, already a little out of date—occurs almost as a matter of course; what deserves comment is just that this element entered the author's notion of her plot so late and remained so decidedly an alien in it; for it governs the story only temporarily and, so to speak, extraneously, and confuses as much as it promotes the development of the character of the central figure, the monster itself. Where one might have expected, from Mary's character, that It would prove a main *motif* of the narrative, it is actually both detrimental thereto and ill-assimilated, and must be discarded altogether before the story can advance to its principal effect.

For, throughout a considerable part of the book—roughly speaking, the first half of the middle section, beginning with chapter xi—the monster is so far from being the moral horror he presently becomes that it is hardly credible he should ever be guilty of wanton brutality at all. (The transformation, by the way, is effected most abruptly, without even the degree of psychological consistency appropriate to fantasy; two violent rebuffs and an astonishingly rigid logicality of temperament turns the monster from his lonely and contemplative benevolence to a course of harsh, melodramatic vengefulness,) Rather, in the solitary student of Volney, musing on the pageant of human history, or on the contrast between man's accomplishments and his failures—"Was man, indeed, at once so powerful, so virtuous and magnificent, yet so viscous and base?"—It is not hard to recognise that gentle lay figure of late eighteenth century social criticism, the "natural man," bringing his innocence into forceful and oversimplified contrast with the complexities and contradictions of our civilisation Or, more precisely, may we not see in him (because of his strange origin and untutored state) something approximating to that variation of the general "child of nature" pattern to which Professor Fairchild has attached the name of Noble Savage? Like the savage, the monster approaches our society as an outsider, tests it by natural impulse and unsophisticated reason, and responds to it with a mixture of bewilderment and dismay,

Now, this aspect of the monster's character is basically unnecessary to the horror-plot; he need not pass by this road to ferocity and misery. (There might, for instance, as easily have been an original moral flaw in his constitution, paralleling the physical one; he might, as in the vulgar imagination, have been *created* bestial.) Indeed, the more this phase of his development is dwelt upon, the less consistent with the later stages does it appear. Nor is his experience as a Noble Savage too closely integrated into the story; it is connected rather arbitrarily to his education in language, but the social reflections, as well as the narrative which is their more Immediate occasion, are pure interpolation, and lead to nothing This is a real flaw in the story, felt by the reader as expectation disappointed; the author fails to *make use* of all her speculative preparation. When, for instance, the monster is hurt—brutally attacked—by those he trusted, it is because of their human ignorance and natural terror, not society's injustice; so that his radical observations are irrelevant to his own fate. Before long, indeed, the author is able to forget that the monster was ever a "natural man" (and consequently gentle and Just by inclination) at all, without apparent loss to the dramatic values of the story. Everything points to the whole idea's having been an afterthought, arising, perhaps, before the full detail of the book had been worked out, but well after the general mood and drift and structure of the plot had been decided. The chance for it was offered by the story, and Mary Shelley could not decline it, but it was not an essential part of her idea, and could only be fitted in as a disproportioned and almost pointless interpolation.

The temptation seems to have been offered by the problem of the monster's intellectual development. The effort to make her creature psychologically credible must have troubled Mrs. Shelley most in his early days. What the difficulty was appears as one writes of it; how is one to speak of the "youth," the "childhood," of a being that appeared upon the earth full-grown, and yet how else is one to speak of his period of elementary ignorance and basic learning? The author cannot allow him the normal protracted human infancy and gradual education, for the plot demands that he escape from his creator and fend for himself at once; yet both plot and probability demand that he escape unformed, that he be confused and ignorant III the world into which he has blundered. As a result, the author bestows upon him a curious apprenticeship (to call It that), an amalgam of two quite different rates of development' for he is at the same time both child and man, and learns alternately like each. Thus he can walk and clothe himself from the moment of his creation, yet, infant-like, has trouble for a long while in separating the effects of the various senses; he learns the use of fire (by strict inductive reasoning!) in a few minutes, yet it is years before he can teach himself to speak or read For the most part, however, his story is that of an adult in the state of nature, with faculties full-grown but almost literally without experience, and therefore making the acquaintance of the most primitive social facts by toilsome and unguided individual endeavour. If one distinguishes the difficulties (possible to an adult) of ignorance from those (peculiar to a child) of incapacity, there is really only a single effort to make him behave like one new-born—the confusion of the senses; thereafter he is a full-grown and decidedly intelligent but extraordinarily inexperienced man.

Now this comes close to being a description of the Noble Savage: an adult, but an alien to our world. If at this point (that is, chapters xi through xv) he differs markedly from the average of the type, it is only in being not an average but an extreme; the actual savage

has his own commendable if elementary civilisation that he can compare with ours, but Frankenstein's monster has only the impulses of his nature—which are, to start with, absolutely good. But this mixture of innocence with ignorance was the very point to be exhibited by the Noble Savage or the "natural man"—"man as he is not"—both forms familiar to tediousness in the literature upon which early nineteenth century ingenuous radicalism fed its mind. So that, having brought her monster, untutored and uncorrupted, into the wilderness, there to spy upon and so study civilised ways (all of which was demanded anyhow by the plot), Mrs. Shelley would have found it hard not to fall into what must have been a very familiar habit of thought. She must surely have recognised that she was straying from the plotted path, whether she identified the new influence or not; but she was trying to write a full-length novel on the basis of a rather slim idea, and in those days interpolation was not yet a sin. So, not deliberately and yet not unwillingly, she permitted the assimilation of her story and her creature into the well-worn patterns they had skirted; none the less gratefully, perhaps, because they gave the young rebel an opportunity to utter a little of what was seething in her environment—the Shelley atmosphere, crossed by Byron's sulphureous trail—and in her own eager mind.

But if the temptation was strong enough to attract her into a rather long and somewhat incongruous philosophical digression, it was still subsidiary to her initial impulse. If Godwin's daughter could not help philosophising, Shelley's wife knew also the eerie charms of the morbid, the occult, the scientifically bizarre. Her first purpose, which was melodrama, stood Therefore the alien figure appears in the novel only momentarily—so long as; with a little effort, the plot accommodates itself to him; when he really threatens to interfere with it, he is abandoned. But if he never dominates the story, he does figure in it, and should be reckoned with. However relentlessly the first lurid vision is finally pursued to its end, the familiar lineaments of the Noble Savage, the child of nature, did come for a little while to be visible in Frankenstein's Impious creation; however sharply his hideous features and terrible career may have distinguished him from the brooding Islander or haughty Indian sachem, the central theme, the uncongeniality of our actual world with a certain ideal and touchingly beautiful simplicity, served to associate his history, m some degree, with theirs, and so attract him temporarily into their form.

Source: Milton Millhauser, "The Noble Savage in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,"* in *Notes and Queries,* Vol 190, No. 12, June 15, 1946, pp. 248-50.

Adaptations

There have been so many plays, movies, and recordings of Frankenstein that it would be difficult to list all of the productions. Therefore, the list below represents the most popular, most controversial, and most influential recordings and dramatizations:

Recordings: *Frankenstein* phonodisc dramatiza tion with sound effects and music, directed by Christopher Casson, Spoken Arts, 1970; *Frankenstein,* taken from a broadcast of the CBS program *Suspense,* starring Herbert Marshall, American Forces Radio and Television Service, 1976; *Frankenstein* read by James Mason, Caedmon Records, 1977; *Weird Circle,* containing Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* and Shelley's *Frankenstein,* recorded from original radio broadcasts, Golden Age, 1978.

Films' *Frankenstein* starred Cohn Clive and Boris Karloff; it was released by Universal in 1931. *The Bride of Frankenstein,* the sequel to the 1931 film, starred Bons Karloff and Elsa Lanchester; It was released in 1935 by Universal. *Son of Frankenstein,* also a sequel to the above mentioned productions, starred Basil Rathbone, Karloff, and Bela Lugosi and was released in 1939 by Universal. All three are available from MCA/Universal Home Video.

The Curse of Frankenstein, a 1957 horror film produced by Warner Brothers, included Peter

Cushing and Christopher Lee as cast members; the first in a series of films inspired by Shelley's novel, it is available from Warner Home Video. *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed'* was released in 1969 by Warner Brothers, Peter Cushing and Veronica Carlson star as the central characters. *Young Frankenstein* was released in 1974 by Fox; available from CBS-Fox Video, this comedy-horror film received Academy Award nominations for Best Adapted Screenplay and Best Sound; cast includes Gene Wilder, Peter Boyle, and director-star Mel Brooks.

More recent films include 1985's *The Bride,* starring Sting and Jennifer Beals, available from CBS/Fox Video, famed horror director Roger Corman's 1990 work *Frankenstein Unbound,* which includes Mary Shelley as a character and stars John Hurt, Raul Julia, and Bndget Fonda, available from CBS/Fox Video, the 1993 cable production *Frankenstein,* starring Patrick Bergin and Randy Quaid, available from Turner Home Entertainment; and *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein,* released in 1994 by American Zoetrope and available from Columbia Tristar Home Video, featuring Robert De Niro and director-star Kenneth Branagh.

Plays: *Frankenstein: A Gothic Thriller* by David Campton, published by Garnet Miller in 1973; *Frankenstein* by Tim Kelley, published by Samuel French in 1974.

Topics for Further Study

Compare and contrast Robert Walton's and Victor Frankenstein's personalities. You might draw parallels between their quest to conquer the unknown, their emotional ties to other Individuals, or their loneliness,

Research some of the prominent Issues in your society that Shelley addresses in her novel, such as genetic engineering, or the effects of abandonment on children whose fathers have disappeared from their lives. Make a comparison between the novel and your discoveries and discuss observations about how your society is coping with or addressing these sensitive issues.

Analyze the theme of justice In the novel. What does Justine's trial have to do with Victor's treatment of his creature or the creature's treatment of Victor's family and friends? How does the theme of revenge relate to issues of justice?

Research some of the characteristics of the Romantic movement, such as isolation, an emphasis on nature, or the notion that humans are inherently good, and argue how and why Shelley's novel is an embodiment of the English Romantic movement. Or, argue why her novel is not an embodiment of the English Romantic movement.

Compare and Contrast

Early 1800s: After the French Revolution ended, England turned its attention to domestic and economic concerns-particularly to problems resulting from a rapidly growing industrial nation.

Today: Domestic and economic concerns about employment and education also stem from rapid change, as the business world moves from emphasizing industrial production to a service and information economy.

Early 1800s: Scientific advancements, especially Erasmus Darwin's studies in biological evolution, caused individuals to question God's authority and inquire into matters regarding the generation of human life.

Today: Animal scientists in Scotland successfully tweak the DNA from an adult sheep to clone another individual sheep. The U.S. government bans federal funding of experiments with cloning using human DNA.

Early 1800s: Romantic writers experience a literary Renaissance as critical theory affirms the achievements of the great poets of the age. Writers enjoy literary freedom, experimenting with a bold new language and new genres like Gothicism.

Today: Appreciation of the arts seems to be on the decrease, as most individuals spend their time with television rather than with various art mediums. Funding has been greatly reduced for the National Endowment of the Arts, and even high school music and art classes have had to be cut at many public schools.

Early 1800s: Nautical explorations establish trading routes and open up communication to other cultures. Robert Walton's quest to find the North Pole mirrors the adventures of nineteenth-century scientists and explorers alike.

Today: The continuing exploration of space that seemed so likely after the lunar landing in 1969 has slowed down, as governments can no longer afford to fund large space programs. Projects involving a space station around Earth and a manned mission to Mars are more likely to come from cooperative efforts involving several nations.

What Do I Read Next?

Dracula by Bram Stoker was published in 1897 and horrified audiences with its tale of a bloodsucking vampire who appears at nightfall to pursue vulnerable women.

Written by Mary Shelley in 1826, *The Last Man* is a work of science fiction that chronicles the extermination of the human race by plague.

A work by Mary Shelley's father, William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794) is the story of a man bound to and haunted by another man through his knowledge of a secret crime.

Prometheus Unbound, by Percy Shelley, is a dramatized philosophical essay about the origin of evil and the moral responsibility of individuals to restore order in their world. It was published in 1820.

Lois McMaster Bujold's Hugo-winning science fiction novel *Mirror Dance* (1994) explores issues surrounding clones and an individual's responsibility to his clone.

In *Genetic Engineering: Dreams and Nightmares* (1996), authors V. E. A. Russo, David Cove, and Enzo Russo present a discussion of the ethical issues surrounding modem scientific advances in genetics. The book is targeted toward the average lay reader.

Further Study

Chris Baldick, *1n Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-Century Writing,* Oxford University Press, 1987

Treats *Frankenstein* as a modern myth and examines the effects of the book on later nineteenth-and twentieth-century writers.

Sandra GIlbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic, The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary 1magination,* Yale University Press, 1979.

A feminist and psycho-biographical reading which emphasizes the place of books in the novel.

M A Goldberg, "Moral and Myth in Mrs Shelley's *Frankenstein,* in *Keats-Shelley Journal,* Vol 8, 1959, pp 27-38.

Provides the most conventional reading of Frankenstein's tale as a moral lesson to Walton.

George Levine, *"Frankenstein* and the Tradition of Realism," in *Novel,* Vol 7, Fall, 1973, pp. 14-30

Discusses the place of *Frankenstein* in the tradition of realism in the novel.

George Levine and U C. Knoepflmacher, *The Endurance of 'Frankenstein,* ' University of California Press, 1979.

A wide-ranging collection of essays about the novel.

Anne K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters,* Methuen, Inc., 1988.

As one of the most well-known Shelley critics, Mellor draws from unpublished archival material, studying the relationships between Mary and the central personalities in her life Her biography contains a powerful warning to parents who do not care for their children and to scientists who refuse to take responsibility for their discoveries.

Masao Miyoshi, *The Divided Self, A Perspective on the Literature of the Victorians,* New York University Press, 1969, pp 79-89.

Discusses the *Doppelganger,* or double, in *Frankenstein.*

Ellen Moers, *Literary Women,* Doubleday, 1976, pp. 91-99 Examines the pain of maternity in *Frankenstein,* relating the birth of the monster to Shelley's birth and her experiences as a mother.

Christopher Small, *Mary Shelley's 'Frankenstein,'* University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973.

A wide-ranging examination of Shelley, her father and husband, the novel, and her era.

Emily W. Sunstein, *Mary Shelley Romance and Reality* Little, Brown, and Co., 1989

A comprehensive biography winch assigns Shelley her proper place among English Romantic Writers. She dispels many of the myths and ill-founded prejudices against Shelley.

MartIn Tropp, *Mary Shelley's Monster,* Houghton Mifflin, 1976.

A more popular treatment of the novel winch emphasizes the "Mad Scientist" theme and treats film adaptations. Includes a filmography.

William Veeder, *Mary Shelley and Frankenstein. The Fate of Androgyny,* University of Chicago Press, 1986

Includes in an appendix Percy Shelley's unpublished review of the novel.

Bibliography

Steven Earl Forry, *Hideous Progenies. Dramatizations of 'Frankenstein' from the Nineteenth Century to the Present,* University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990.

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein,* introduction by Diane Johnson, Bantam Books, 1991.

Montague Summers, *The Gothic Quest,* Russell & Russell, 1964.

Eleanor Ty, "Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley," in *Concise Dictionary of British Literary Biography,* Volume 3, *Writers of the Romantic Period,* 1789-1832, Gale, 1991, pp 338-52.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

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