

## ***Frankenstein* and the eruption of Tambora: the deadly kiss of winter in Mary Shelley's literary masterpiece**

The eruption of Mount Tambora took the warmth away from the world and, consequently, cold seeps into every corner of Shelley's novel. The story opens up with Captain Walton, who has been travelling through the icy waters of the Arctic Ocean in hopes of reaching the North Pole for study purposes, and the desolation of rigid climate returns many, many times throughout the book. The creation of the Wretch —the final act of Frankenstein's spiraling madness, yet nothing but the beginning of his agony— happens on "a dreary night of November", and his later confrontation with him takes place in the icy Glacier Montanvert, where we finally hear him talk and discover his story.

But listening to the Creature's story does not let us escape cold, since hostile weather is one of his main enemies as he holds onto an old coat and an abandoned fire to fight hypothermia out in the wilds. Moreover, the chill embrace of winter keeps its grasp on a soul-crushed Victor as he is kept in an Irish prison after the death of his good friend Henry Clerval, and it is his only companion in his final, desperate chase after the Monster through the desolate plains of Russia.

It is not a coincidence that the two peaks of tension in the story —the rendezvous on the glacier and the chase through northern Europe— take place in the iciest locations, and every appearance of the Creature is accompanied by some degree of cold. This dichotomy was without a doubt inspired by the frigid climate that had surrounded Shelley for months leading to the writing of *Frankenstein*.

Moreover, weather is ever-present in the minds of the narrators and is deeply tied to their emotions. As Frankenstein describes the months he spent creating the Wretch, he mentions that he was so obsessed with his pursuit of godhood that he became oblivious to the beauty of summer:

«It was a most beautiful season; never did the fields bestow a more plentiful harvest or the vines yield a more luxuriant vintage, but my eyes were insensible to the charms of nature.»

The perception of good weather as a precious gift which brings joy to all of creation is common to all characters, especially the Wretch, who resonates with the passing of seasons and contemplates with joy the miracle of spring. We can presume that Shelley missed the warmer times a lot, and if it wasn't for the eruption these little praises to nature that are scattered throughout the book wouldn't have been there at all.

Now, to reach our conclusion. As we know, the years following Tambora's eruption were, also due to the Napoleonic Wars, the hardest famine the western world ever experienced. At the time, Shelley was surrounded by death and devastation, which certainly influenced the grim tone of *Frankenstein*.

Furthermore, she may have even taken inspiration from what she saw for the *physical descriptions* of death. The symptoms of starvation include getting ill and taking a long time to heal, as well as feeling cold. Both of these are predominant in Frankenstein's slow death towards the end of the book.