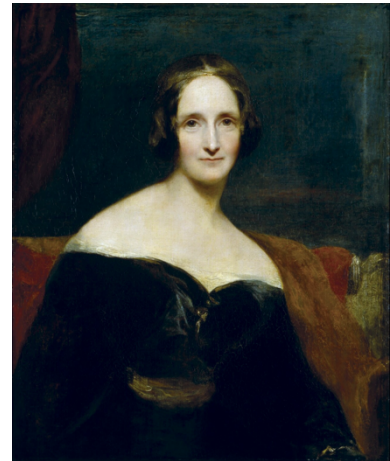


## ***Frankenstein* (by Mary Shelley)**

### ***The life of Mary Shelley***

The author of *Frankenstein* was born in London in 1797. Her parents were Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, two of the most famous radical thinkers of the day. Mary's mother got an infection during childbirth, and died just a few days later. Godwin got married again four years later to Mary Clairmont, but the new stepmother didn't like Mary and ensured that her own daughter, Jane, went to school while Mary did not. Nevertheless, Mary received an excellent education from her father. He also gave her access to his extensive library, encouraged her to write stories and allowed her to be present at the conversations he had with many of the leading intellectuals and poets of the day.



Mary Shelley

One of the young poets who visited Godwin was Percy Bysshe Shelley. His relationship with his wife was failing, and he and Mary fell in love and ran away to France together in 1814, taking Jane Clairmont with them. The next year, Mary gave birth to a baby girl, who died only a few weeks later.



Percy Bysshe Shelley

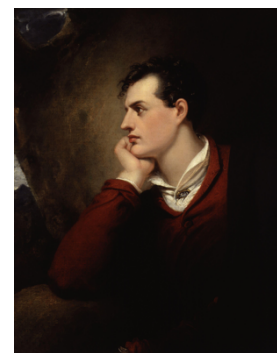
Shelley, Mary and Jane spent the summer of 1816 with Lord Byron on Lake Geneva in Switzerland, where Mary began writing *Frankenstein*. Later the same year, Shelley's wife committed suicide, and Shelley and Mary immediately got married.

In 1818, the same year as the publication of *Frankenstein*, money problems and ill health forced Shelley to leave for Italy with Mary. In 1819 Mary's son Percy Florence Shelley was born. In the summer of 1822 they were staying at Lerici on the north-western coast of Italy. Shelley had sailed to visit Lord Byron in Livorno, but during a storm on the return journey the boat sank and he was drowned.

One year later, Mary returned to England with her son, to whose education she devoted herself. She earned her living through writing, but never again wrote anything as successful as *Frankenstein*. Mary Shelley died of a brain tumour in 1851.

### ***The Making of Frankenstein***

Lord Byron was the most famous poet of his day – and the most scandalous. His behaviour was fiercely criticized by the public when his wife left him after only one year of marriage, and he left England – permanently – in April 1816. His first stop was Switzerland, where in the summer Shelley, Mary and Jane Clairmont came to visit him at the villa Diodati near Geneva. Because of severe weather conditions and almost constant rain during that summer, Byron, Shelley, Mary, Jane and Byron's doctor, John Polidori, were forced to spend most of their time indoors.



Lord Byron

They entertained themselves by reading a collection of German ghost stories, *Fantasmagoriana*. When they got bored with this, Lord Byron suggested a competition: they



The villa Diodati today

should each write a frightening story. It was then that Polidori developed the idea of *The Vampyre*, the first vampire story in English, while the others – except Mary – soon gave up on their original stories.

In her introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, Mary says she had no inspiration for days, until she listened to Byron and Shelley talking about recent scientific experiments of animating frog legs with electricity. She describes how that night, in a state between sleeping and waking, she had a vision of a “pale student ... kneeling beside the thing he had put

together ... the hideous phantasm of a man”; in this kind of dream she saw how “on the working of some powerful engine” the creature started to move: Mary Shelley announced that she had found the idea for her story.

Her husband encouraged Mary to complete the story, and *Frankenstein* was published in 1818. It was an immediate success.

### ***Frankenstein*: The beginning**



#### 1. How is the story introduced?

narrator: tells/warns us that the story is very frightening -> function of "teaser"

#### 2. Collect your impressions on the scene as a whole.

ship is in trouble because of a storm  
action and chaotic  
ship gets stuck in ice



#### 3. Two men:



Captain Walton: What are his aims in life?

he wants to find/reach the northpole -> his name will live forever



the stranger: What does he respond to Walton's aims?

they share a madness -> thinks that he had ambitious, but it didn't turn out well

Film excerpt: *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*. Directed by Kenneth Branagh, 1994.

Text adapted from: Black Cat Readers: *Mary Shelley Frankenstein*. Retold by Maud Jackson, 2008.