Summary 1, This summary/review begins by explaining a bit of the backstory behind the author of Frankenstein, then explains how the author's writing notes were utilized to represent key themes in her story, as well as touch on political and societal concerns of her time. Even then, the writing stands today:

The story of the events that led Mary Shelley to write her Frankenstein story is now almost as well known as the plot itself. The tale began to take shape in 1816 as a result of ghost-story-telling sessions held among Mary; her husband, British poet Percy Bysshe Shelley; and the self-exiled British poet George Gordon, Lord Byron, when the Shelleys lived in Switzerland.

After several days lacking inspiration, Shelley had her now famous “waking dream,” which she described in a preface to the novel’s third edition in 1831. In part, she wrote, “What terrified me will terrify others, and I need only describe the spectre which had haunted my midnight pillow.”

The work and its monster-hero became such a popular subject for film and stage, in serious, comedic, and parodic productions, that many acquaint themselves with Victor Frankenstein’s monster long before encountering it in Shelley’s book. Many first-time readers discover with a shock that the monster remains unnamed, with his creator bearing the Frankenstein moniker. A second, stronger shock may occur when readers realize that the monster, in great contrast to the bumbling, murderous, wild-eyed, grunting, crazy-stitched object of film, proves the most rational and also the most eloquent of any of the novel’s characters.

The basic plot of the novel remains powerful in its simplicity. Most of it appears in flashback, as a defeated, guilt-ridden Victor Frankenstein relates on his deathbed his tale of horror to a ship’s captain, Robert Walton, the first of the novel’s three narrators. He writes letters that relate his contact with Frankenstein, who hunted his human creation in the Arctic, where Walton and his crew found him. The letters advance the novel’s strongest theme, that of the conflict between science and poetry, or art.

While Frankenstein, once a young Swiss premedical student studying in Geneva, represents science, his beloved cousin Elizabeth Lavenza, who loves poetry, and best friend Henry Clerval, an aficionado of romance and chivalry whose surname describes his clarity of vision, represent art. As the story unfolds, readers learn that Frankenstein sought to create a composite human being from dead body parts. He reasons that those who have died might be restored if the secret to life can be found. Thus his focus is not at first on the generation of life but rather on regeneration.

In what becomes a madness to reach his goal, he isolates himself from Elizabeth and Henry, ignoring their pleas that he abandon the ungodly project that comes to obsess him. Dismayed by the creature, Frankenstein allows him to escape and eventually pursues him after the monster murders several members of Frankenstein’s family, including his beloved younger brother William, which leads to the execution of the Frankenstein family’s maid, an innocent unjustly accused of William’s murder. Frankenstein himself acts as the second narrator, his tale appearing within Walton’s own, while the monster’s third narration appears within Frankenstein’s own.

Shelley’s sophisticated structure emphasized the close connection of points of view and touched on many concerns of her era. At a time when the theory of evolution added to an ongoing debate over the nature and center of life, as well as to a prevailing argument regarding the value of science over religion, the monster’s existence personified the public’s greatest fears. Not only were his physical acts of violence

frightening but also the cause of those acts, his rejection due to his “difference” by all humans he comes into contact with except for a blind man, leading astute readers to question in which being the true monstrous nature lurked.

The monster was not “born” hating others; his hate was taught him by people who refused to see beyond his external appearance to the brilliant warm nature existing just below its surface. While science might be expected to lack compassion, the same could not be said of religion, which should have prepared the public to be more accepting. That the monster possesses a quick intellect and a natural warmth and goodness that is corrupted only by his exposure to humans remains an indictment of shallow social values and a rigid class structure.

Timely political concerns surface as the monster hears lessons from Volney’s Ruins of Empire that relate to the correct division of property and the inherent conflict between the rich and the poor.

The ironic death of Frankenstein, indirectly caused by the life he created, remains part of a cautionary tale that bears just as strong a message against humans acting outside rational boundaries two centuries after Shelley wrote her novel. At its simplest, it is a rebuke of fathers who refuse to take responsibility for their children. At its most complicated, it represents all the ideals of Romanticism and the conflicts inherent to everyday life that continue to haunt the human condition.

Because Mary Shelley became one of the few women of her age to gain eventual fame from her publication, originally published anonymously, feminist critics and others who study women’s literature have continued to study Frankenstein with great interest. Although Shelley’s mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, wrote the most important feminist work prior to the 19th century, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792), and strongly advocated women’s independence, Shelley did not create well-rounded female characters in her book.

Critics explain this by noting she shaped the women surrounding Victor Frankenstein realistically in order to demonstrate the lack of power for women of her age. They also see the monster himself as representative of women, with his marginalization and control by the book’s male protagonist. That he achieves a modicum of intellectual and physical independence, and must move beyond civic law to do so, may represent the fate of women who refused to conform to patriarchy’s strict control.

Shelley’s emphasis of freedom of the imagination through art, while strongly Romanticist in nature, also relates to one of the few types of freedom available to women, who often had to participate in the arts secretly. Like the monster that had no name, Mary Shelley herself remained officially nameless as the author of her classic for five years, until her name appeared in the 1823 second edition.

Summary 2 is a much more personal review that praises the novel using more casual and optimistic wording. It emphasizes the moral of the story and how it serves as an inspiration:

Monsters are amongst my favorite fantasy creatures. And I love reading classics. But when I first read Frankenstein by Mary Shelley, I have to admit – I didn't appreciate it whatsoever. I think a lot of it had to do with my expectations back then. I expected a Hollywood-style monster story and got instead an existential tragedy.

I had never even seen a proper adaptation before. Only short pieces in which a crazy scientist manages to bring a monster to life. The scientist had a vibe of an 18th-century version of Sheldon Cooper on crack. And the monster looked and sounded a lot like Lurch.

That was literally all I knew about this incredibly innovative, imaginative and immersive classic. In fact, Frankenstein is frequently referred to as the world's first science fiction novel.

Apparently, when she was 18, Mary, her husband, the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, their friend Lord Byron and a few other people were traveling Europe. On a boring rainy day, the group decided to pass the time by competing in who can write the creepiest ghost story.

Mary based her story on a nightmare that occurred to her after hearing her husband and Lord Byron talking about the possibility of reanimation and bringing the dead back to life. In the dream, she saw a man creating a horrific creature and regretting it instantly…

Victor Frankenstein is an ambitious, enthusiastic, brilliant young scientist obsessed with uncovering the secrets of life and death. Determined to accomplish what no man had ever done before, he manages to give life to a creature he has created himself using parts of dead bodies.

However, faced with the result of his experiment, he instantly regrets what he's done. The monster looks so grotesque and unnatural – even his creator doesn't want to have anything to do with it.

But, no matter how repelling, the monster has many human characteristics. Including the need for love, friendship and belonging. As well as the impulse to punish rejection with anger and violence.

If you want to get incredibly confused, indecisive about whose side you are on, ultimately realizing you do not have anything to compare this story with to be able to judge the characters correctly – then this book is exactly for you!

As I mentioned, Frankenstein was not at all what I expected. It was much less a fantasy and creating a monster and much more a story about making an irrevocable mistake, learning to live with the guilt and trying to fix what can be fixed.

I loved how strong and resonant the moral of the story was. The consequences were brutal. And on the second read, it was so much easier to appreciate the thought behind this novel. Its uniqueness and foreshadowing. The huge existential questions it covers. Well, touches on, really. But still.

At first, I didn't like how perfect the Frankenstein family was portrayed. But the more I read, the more I appreciated the contrast between their kindness and innocence and the terror of Victor's creation.

Amongst the other things I liked was the writing style. Not the most accessible book I've ever read, you can definitely tell it was written in another century. But it was beautiful and it almost felt like poetry at times, which created a perfect balance to the horrifying events described.

And of course, what I liked the most was the story itself. So original. So imaginative. So thrilling. Unlike anything I've ever read.

Victor's thirst for knowledge was almost palpable. His curiosity, delight in front of the unknown. His first experience with death and sorrow. Frustration when facing an unsolvable riddle. The need to push the boundaries.

Plus the appeal of the supernatural, just all the possibilities it could offer. And also a certain level of serendipity. It all created a compulsive read.

However, the first time I read Frankenstein, I felt like the main story – the story about a man who, in an attempt to create life, created a monster – wasn't given enough space. The book is not very long, and a lot of it goes on descriptions of nature, Frankenstein's relationship with his family and his inner monologues.

I expected a bit more about how he created a monster and how they both dealt with that instead of endless regret monologues. Plus, I assumed Frankenstein had a better, more direct and specific motive for creating the monster than – I really really wanted to know.

All that said, this was a brilliant read that resonated with me and made me think about it often until I finally caved and grabbed it again.

Regret and guilt are at the very center of the book. Lots of deep thoughts to make you question what you thought you knew about life, and creation, and loneliness. About looking for a purpose and not finding one.

Mary Shelley's story of Frankenstein and his monster became one of my favorite stories ever. It was a great pleasure to finally get into the origins of a creature we all have heard of, that became an inspiration for so many movies, art, as well as other stories and characters.

Summary 3 utilizes a lot of quotes and direct examples from the narrative to go through the story step by step in the frame of the reviewer's takeaway of the book, showcasing what specific details and story beats serve in the story and represent different themes:

The story starts in the form of letters from Robert Walton to his sister in England, in which he speaks of his plans to travel to the pole from Russia.

Some months later, in the summer, he writes of his ship being temporarily trapped in ice, of their fleeting glimpse of a distant traveller on a sledge, and, finally, their rescue of a near-frozen stranger.

The stranger is Victor Frankenstein and, being won over by Walton's kindness and seeing something of his own scientific and inquiring nature in the latter, relates his sorry tale, which is told in first person.

A native of Geneva, Victor tells of his parents; how much he, the eldest of 3 boys, was loved; of his parents' taking in of a little orphan girl, Elizabeth, who would become the love of his life; and of Henry, Victor's best friend.

When Victor is 17, after the death of his beloved mother, he reluctantly leaves for university, where 'natural philosophy, and particularly chemistry… became nearly my sole occupation.'

In the space of 2 years, he becomes totally absorbed in the sciences:
'None but those who have experienced them can conceive of the enticements of science… in a scientific pursuit there is continual food for discovery and wonder.'

Even though he contemplates returning to his home, one question holds his attention – 'Whence… did the principle of life proceed?'

The more he seeks to resolve the question, the more obsessed he becomes, giving no thought to any possible consequences.

His obsession leads to '… the creation of a human being… In a solitary chamber… at the top of the house… [where] I kept my workshop of filthy creation…'

Until finally, after nearly 2 years, '… on a dreary night of November… I beheld the accomplishment of my toils… It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes… I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs…'

Having worked almost zealously for so long with little rest and neglecting his health, now that he had finished, '… the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart…'

Victor runs from the thing he's created, and when he eventually returns to his rooms, finds no sign of it.

As he's nursed back to health by his friend, Henry, Victor puts all thought of the creature from his mind.

Victor and Henry make plans to return home, but tragedy strikes Victor's family, and he comes to realise he is not free but remains tied to the being he created and imbued with life.

When Victor finally sees the creature again, he's filled with rage:

‘“… do you dare approach me… Begone, vile insect! or rather, stay, that I may trample you to dust!”’

To which the creature answers, ‘“I expected this reception… All men hate the wretched; how, then, must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things!... You purpose to kill me. How dare you sport thus with life?... Life, although it may only be an accumulation of anguish, is dear to me, and I will defend it… I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. Every where I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend…”’

All he wants from Victor is a mate, one he can be with, after which he and his mate will go somewhere far from people to live out their days undisturbed, in peace.

Although he initially refuses, Victor agrees to create another as he feels some moral duty to do so:
‘His tale, and the feelings he now expressed, proved him to be a creature of fine sensations; and did I not, as his maker, owe him all the portion of happiness that it was in my power to bestow?’

The weight of guilt from the first tragedy that followed from the creation of the monster and all that’s come afterwards, lies heavily on Victor, taking its toll on his health and emotions despite the best efforts of his loved ones to uplift him even as they wonder at his sometimes-erratic behaviour.

As the story progresses, the reader wonders, will Victor make a mate for the creature, or will he finally take responsibility for playing God?

I was pleasantly surprised to find I enjoyed the novel, and I’m impressed that Shelley was only 18 when she began writing it in 1816.

The language and dialogue of ‘Frankenstein’ are obviously of that time and, while modern readers may consider the wordy descriptions excessive, in those days very few people left the place of their birth as it was usually only the wealthy who travelled, and that’s the reason for the amount of rich description in older novels as many had no idea what foreign countries and landscapes looked like.

While reading ‘Frankenstein’, I realised that, while I tend to skim over descriptions in modern novels, even fantasy, I like reading the descriptions in older novels – weird.

My favourite descriptions are those regarding the natural world, and here are a couple of my favourites, the first, a lightning storm:
‘… the thunder burst with a terrific crash… vivid flashes of lightning dazzled my eyes, illuminating the lake, making it appear like a vast sheet of fire… The storm… appeared at once in various parts of the heavens… so beautiful yet terrific… this noble war in the sky…’

Attempting to find some peace from his turbulent emotions, Victor travels alone to the Alpine valleys, surrounded by vast mountains…
‘The ascent is precipitous, but the path is cut into continual and short windings… It is a scene terrifically desolate… the traces of the winter avalanche may be perceived, where trees lie broken and strewed on the ground; some entirely destroyed, others bent, leaning up on the jutting rocks of the mountain, or… upon other trees… I looked on the valley beneath; vast mists were rising from the rivers which ran through it, and curling in thick wreaths around the opposite mountains, whose summits were hid in the uniform clouds…’

While I enjoyed most of the novel, I found the mid-part, where the monster relates his tale to Victor, somewhat tedious and rather contrived.

The pacing of the novel isn't consistent as sometimes, Shelley gets to the point succinctly but, at other times, can go off on some distracted tangent.

It's interesting that 'Frankenstein' is thought of as a horror story when the only horror-box it ticks is the presence of a monster.

The story is more about life and death, and questions if certain things should be undertaken simply because they can be; to quote Ian Malcolm from 'Jurassic Park': "… so preoccupied with whether or not they could, they didn't stop to think if they should."

I like how Shelley has blurred the lines between Victor and his creation, making the reader question who the actual monster is.

The creature, attacked and shunned at every turn, repeatedly referred to as 'monster' and 'fiend' while enduring never-ending suffering, displays more benevolence than his maker.

The educated, highly intelligent Victor, heaps blame on the creature, failing to see that, having given it life, it then became his responsibility.

The tragedies that followed would not have happened if he had not brought the creature to life only to abandon it.

Victor's constant bemoaning of his fate and his depressive state was, I think, a direct result of suppressed guilt and, possibly, cowardice, even though he believed himself guiltless:
'I felt as if I had committed some great crime, the consciousness of which haunted me. I was guiltless, but I had indeed drawn down a horrible curse upon my head, as mortal as that of crime.'

This re-reading of 'Frankenstein' certainly surprised me in that I wasn't expecting so much philosophical debate from so short a novel, all from the mind of a young woman not yet 20.