

= Maurice ( Shelley ) =

" Maurice , or the Fisher 's Cot " is a children 's story by the Romantic writer Mary Shelley . Written in 1820 for Laurette Tighe , a daughter of friends of Percy and Mary Shelley , Mary Shelley tried to have it published by her father , William Godwin , but he refused . The text was lost until 1997 , when a manuscript copy was discovered in Italy .

" Maurice " tells the story of a boy searching for a home and his encounters with a traveller who turns out to be his long @-@ lost father . The story is narrated in a melancholy tone from several points of view and focuses on the theme of loss , particularly the separation of parents and children . Shelley explored this partly autobiographical theme in other works written at the same time , including her novel Mathilda and her play Proserpine . The story 's straightforward language reflects that of the Romantic poet William Wordsworth , whose works Shelley was reading while she composed " Maurice " .

= = Background = =

In 1814 , the seventeen @-@ year @-@ old Mary Shelley ( Mary Godwin , at the time ) ran off with Percy Bysshe Shelley to continental Europe , accompanied by Claire Clairmont , Mary 's stepsister . After six weeks of travelling , they returned to England but continued to live together . Mary returned pregnant with Percy 's child , but their infant daughter died soon after her premature birth . Percy was alienated from his family and received little financial support from them ; he was therefore harassed by creditors . In 1816 , Mary and Percy had a second child , William . The same year , Claire Clairmont began an affair with the poet Lord Byron , and in January 1817 she had a daughter by him , Allegra . The group spent the summer of 1817 with Byron at Lake Geneva , where Mary Shelley wrote Frankenstein . That fall , Percy 's wife , Harriet , committed suicide , and in December Percy and Mary were married . In September 1817 , Mary and Percy had another child , Clara .

The group traveled to Italy in early 1818 . They first surrendered Allegra to Byron in April , much to Claire 's distress . In August , Percy Shelley took Claire to see Allegra , at her request . Percy arrived in Venice , telling Byron he had the entire family . Mary was thus summoned to Venice to substantiate Percy 's story . However , baby Clara Shelley was sick and traveling made her even more ill . She died shortly after arriving in Venice . In the winter of 1818 , Percy registered a child in Naples to himself and Mary : Elena Adelaide . However , it is unclear who this child 's parents really were .

In 1819 , the group moved to Rome , where Mary and Percy Shelley 's son William died . Mary Shelley had now lost all three of her children and was very depressed . Claire became increasingly concerned about Allegra , as Byron refused to allow her to see their daughter or reveal where she was . Mary , however , became pregnant again , with Percy Florence , and the group traveled from Rome to Pisa and Florence . En route , they became friends with a couple who helped and inspired them : Lady Mountcashell , who as Margaret King had been an eager pupil of Mary Shelley 's mother , Mary Wollstonecraft ; and George William Tighe , the agricultural theorist for whom she had left her husband and children . Both were poets and , like the Shelleys , were republicans and freethinkers . Lady Mountcashell referred to herself as " Mrs. Mason " after a character from Wollstonecraft 's own children 's story Original Stories from Real Life ( 1788 ) . The couple had two children , Anna Laura Georgiana ( called Laurette ) and Nerina , who quickly became attached to Mary and Claire .

After traveling to Florence , Mary Shelley wrote to Lady Mountcashell , praising Laurette 's " simplicity and frankness " . By way of her mother , Laurette inquired after Mary 's health and requested her presence . Mary Shelley invited Laurette to stay with her in Florence two months after the birth of Percy Florence , but the girl 's mother could not bear to part with her . In early 1820 , the group moved to Pisa and Claire became like an elder sister to Laurette , taking her to operas and the Carnival . In the summer , the group moved again , from Pisa to Livorno , and Mary Shelley began researching her historical novel Valperga . Throughout the summer , Claire wrote anxiously to Byron , begging to see Allegra . Believing that the Shelleys were careless parents who were

responsible for the deaths of their children and concerned that the children were not receiving proper religious training , he consistently refused to let Claire see their daughter .

= = Writing and publication = =

Mary Shelley wrote " Maurice " for Laurette Tighe on 10 August 1820 . Shelley 's journal for that day notes : " Thursday 10 ? Write a story for Laurette ? Walk on the mountain ? Le Buche delle Fate [ fairy grottoes or caves ] ? The weather is warm & delightful " . Claire Clairmont and Laurette had spent Laurette 's birthday together in Pisa and the following day on the coast with Mary Shelley ; this excursion may have inspired the story , which may have been a birthday present . Shelley suggested that her father , philosopher William Godwin , publish Maurice as part of his Juvenile Library , but he refused . He may have thought it was too short or that it too closely resembled a story by Caroline Barnard entitled The Fisher @-@ boy of Weymouth that he had just published in 1819 . In his article on " Maurice " , L. Adam Mekler suggests that Godwin may also have rejected the story because of the " strong biographical parallels " with the history of the Shelleys and the Godwins .

The manuscript was lost until Cristina Dazzi discovered it in the summer of 1997 in the home of the Dazzi family , Casa Cini , in San Marcello Pistoiese . She was looking through a box of old papers , searching for " something interesting " to add to an exhibit about the winter of 1827 ? 28 when the poet Giacomo Leopardi had visited and met Lady Mountcashell and her daughter . Excerpts were first published in an Italian book about Lady Mountcashell by Mario Curreli in 1997 . One year later , Percy Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft biographer Claire Tomalin published the entire story , along with a lengthy introduction and a typescript of the manuscript .

= = Plot summary = =

In " Part I " , a traveller arrives in Torquay , Devonshire . He sees a funeral procession passing by and notices a beautiful , distressed young boy taking part . The traveller goes to a local inn , where a countryman tells the story of Maurice and the late @-@ dead Old Barnet . Old Barnet was a fisherman married to Dame Barnet . She had died a little over a year ago and Old Barnet was distraught ; he had no wife to come home to . One day , Maurice showed up and volunteered to help him out around the house while he was out fishing . Poor and sickly , Maurice could not perform difficult tasks , but he was diligent . Old Barnet grew to love Maurice , as did the villagers .

" Part II " opens with Old Barnet 's brother informing Maurice that he must leave the cottage after one week . Maurice spends his days mourning the fisherman . One day the traveller returns to the village and seeks out Maurice ; he stops at the cottage and asks to stay the night . He and Maurice talk and Maurice tells of his plans to leave the cottage and find work on a farm . He also tells the traveller of his poor family and how he does not want to be a bother to them , revealing that his father used to beat him because he did not believe Maurice was really ill . The traveller and Maurice sit together , enjoying nature , and discuss the pleasures of country life and reading . The traveller offers to care for Maurice and to educate him .

The traveller explains in " Part III " how he is the son of an Oxford mathematics professor . When young , he loved to read outdoors and wanted to know how the world worked . He became an architect and travelled throughout Europe . Eventually he married a lovely woman with whom he had a son , Henry . One day the couple left their son with his nurse during an outing and she fell asleep . When they returned , their son was gone , and he could not be found . The traveller spent years searching the countryside for his son ; one day he met the woman , Dame Smithson , who had stolen his son . To please her sailor husband who wanted a child , she lied to him and said she was pregnant . Before his return , she needed a child , so she stole the traveller 's . Unused to the harsh life of a peasant , the child suffered and became sickly . As a result , the woman 's husband disliked him and beat him , believing him to be worthless . Hearing this story , Maurice reveals himself to be the traveller 's son ; he had changed his name to avoid the person he believed to be his cruel father . Overjoyed to be reunited with his son , the traveller buys the cottage for him and they return every

once in a while . Maurice is educated , grows up , and travels widely . He returns to see that the cottage has disintegrated ; he builds a new one for another poor fisherman 's family , beside the lot of the old one .

= = Style , genre , and themes = =

Maurice is divided into three parts , perhaps reflecting the trend for triple @-@ decker novels for adults at the time , and contains multiple narrators . It is written in a melancholy tone , beginning with a funeral and finishing with the decay of the cottage . However , in her review of the Tomalin edition in the New York Times , Marina Warner writes that the story " contains little of the seething originality , moral complexity or sinister Gothic speculativeness of Frankenstein " .

Mary Shelley was reading the poetry of William Wordsworth while she wrote Maurice . Tomalin has argued that " Wordsworth does seem to preside over Maurice , with its clear , straightforward language , and its setting among simple people and poor labourers , and against elemental backgrounds of rocks and trees , cliffs and seashore " .

Maurice 's natural goodness never wavers in the story . Unlike Shelley 's Frankenstein , which suggests that environment determines a person 's morality , Maurice assumes that people can be innately good . Maurice even forgives Dame Smithson , who stole him from his nurse . The story aims to generate sympathy in its readers . In contrast with other children 's stories of its day , it lacks didacticism and draws no clear distinctions between virtue and vice .

Despite the appeal to sympathy , loss is the predominant theme of Maurice : parents lose their child ; a mother yearns for a child to the point that she steals one ; and " Maurice " loses his sense of identity . The overarching themes of the story are Romantic , according to Tomalin : " the vulnerability of childhood , and of parenthood ; displacement , loss , pain , death and rehabilitation ; delight in the natural world ; and the power of time both to heal and to destroy " .

The loss of children , in particular , may have had autobiographical and biographical resonances . Lady Mountcashell had separated from her husband and been forced to give up her children . A court had ruled Percy Bysshe Shelley unfit to raise the children from his marriage to his deceased first wife and placed them in the care of a court @-@ appointed guardian . A third reference may be to the death of three of Mary and Percy 's children . Literary critic A. A. Markley points out that Shelley wrote other works at this time that engaged with the issue of child @-@ parent separation , most notably her novel Mathilda and the children 's drama Proserpine , both of which she worked on in 1820 . Markley explains that Maurice is a reworking of Mathilda , " in which a long deferred reunion of father and child is orchestrated with happy rather than tragic results " . This theme is also explored in Mary Shelley 's short stories " The Mourner " , " The Evil Eye " , and " The Pilgrims " , as well as her novel Lodore ( 1835 ) .

Mekler argues that the story may be a veiled criticism of Mary Shelley 's stepmother , Mary Jane Clairmont . Dame Smithson lies to her husband regarding her children , a possible allusion to the origins of Mary Jane Clairmont 's own first two children and to her " propensity for falsehood " . ( Clairmont represented herself as a widow , with legitimate children , which was not the case . ) Mekler speculates that " in her theft of the first @-@ born son , Dame Smithson replicates in metaphorical fashion Mary Jane 's usurpation of the role as mother of the male heir that had originally belonged to Mary Wollstonecraft " .

= = Reception = =

According to Miranda Seymour , author of a biography of Mary Shelley , while the story itself was " no great work ... the public responded to the discovery with an interest not shown , for example , towards recently found letters of [ Percy ] Shelley and Byron " . She explained this occurred because Mary Shelley is now considered a significant Romantic writer , her works have become increasingly accessible to the public , and her authorship of Frankenstein is often mentioned in the popular press .