

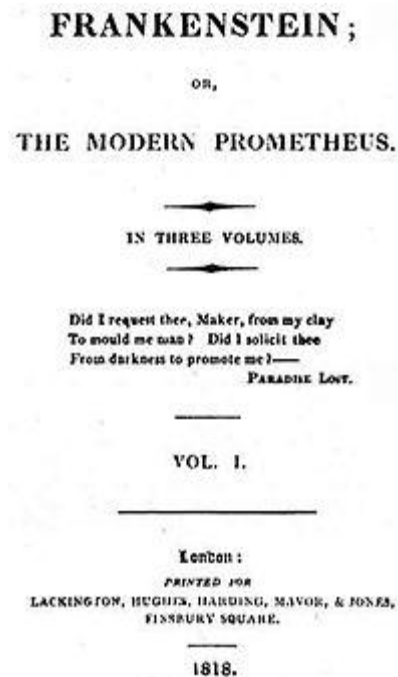
Frankenstein

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This article is about the novel. For the characters, see [Victor Frankenstein](#) or [Frankenstein's monster](#). For other uses, see [Frankenstein \(disambiguation\)](#).

Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus



Volume I, first edition

Author(s)	Mary Shelley
Country	United Kingdom
Language	English
Genre(s)	Horror , Gothic , Romance , science fiction
Publisher	Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor & Jones
Publication date	1 January 1818
Pages	280

Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus is a [novel](#) written by [Mary Shelley](#) about a [monster](#) produced by an unorthodox scientific experiment. Shelley started writing the story when she was eighteen, and the novel was published when she was twenty-one. The first edition was published anonymously in London in 1818. Shelley's name appears on the second edition, published in France in 1823.

Shelley had travelled the region in which the story takes place, and the topics of [galvanism](#) and other similar occult ideas were themes of conversation among her companions, particularly her future husband, Percy. The storyline emerged from a dream. Mary, Percy, [Lord Byron](#), and [John Polidori](#) decided to have a competition to see who could write the best [horror](#) story. After thinking for weeks about what her possible storyline could be, Shelley dreamt about a scientist who created life and was horrified by what he had made. She then wrote *Frankenstein*.

Frankenstein is infused with some elements of the [Gothic novel](#) and the [Romantic](#) movement and is also considered to be one of the earliest examples of [science fiction](#). [Brian Aldiss](#) has argued that it should be considered the first true science fiction story, because unlike in previous stories with fantastical elements resembling those of later science fiction, the central character "makes a deliberate decision" and "turns to modern experiments in the laboratory" to achieve fantastic results.^[1] The story is partially based on [Giovanni Aldini](#)'s electrical experiments on dead and (sometimes) living animals and was also a warning against the expansion of modern humans in the [Industrial Revolution](#), alluded to in its [subtitle](#), *The Modern Prometheus*. It has had a considerable influence across [literature](#) and [popular culture](#) and spawned a complete genre of [horror](#) stories and films.

The name "Frankenstein" is often incorrectly used to refer to the monster itself. In the novel, the monster is identified via words such as "creature," "monster", "fiend", "wretch", "vile insect", "daemon", and "it"; The monster refers to himself speaking to Dr. Frankenstein as "the Adam of your labors", and elsewhere as someone who "would have" been "your Adam", but is instead your "fallen angel."

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[\[edit\]](#) Summary

In Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*, the reader is addressed by several storytellers whose perspectives on the issues at hand vary by their personal involvement and bias, leaving the reader to become yet another lens through which the truth of the matter must be filtered in order to reveal reliable material. *Frankenstein* is written in the form of a frame story that starts with Captain Robert Walton writing letters to his sister.

[\[edit\]](#) Captain Walton's introductory frame narrative

The novel *Frankenstein* is written in [epistolary form](#), documenting a correspondence between *Captain Robert Walton* and his sister, *Margaret Walton Saville*. Walton is a failed writer who sets out to explore the [North Pole](#) and expand his scientific knowledge in hopes of achieving fame. The ship then becomes trapped in ice, and, one day, the crew sees a [dog sled](#) in the distance, where there is an indistinct feature of a large man. A few hours later, the crew finds a nearly frozen and emaciated man named [Victor Frankenstein](#), who is in desperate need of sustenance. Frankenstein has been in pursuit of the gigantic man observed by Walton's crew until almost all of his dogs except one died. He has broken apart his dog sled to make oars and rowed an ice-raft toward the vessel. Frankenstein starts to recover from his exertion and then recounts a story of his life's miseries to Walton. He explains how his obsession for wisdom led him to this predicament. Before he begins his narrative, he makes Walton promise to capture the monster. In telling his story to the captain, he finds peace within himself.

[\[edit\]](#) Victor Frankenstein's narrative

Victor begins by telling of his childhood. Born into a wealthy family in [Geneva](#), he is encouraged to seek a greater understanding of the world around him through science. He grows up in a safe environment, surrounded by loving family and friends. When he is around 4 years old, his parents adopt *Elizabeth Lavenza*, an orphan whose mother has just died. (She is their niece and Victor's cousin in the first edition, but this is not established in the second edition.) Victor has a possessive infatuation with Elizabeth. He has two younger brothers: *Ernest* and *William*, the latter seventeen years younger than he. Ernest however, was six years younger than Victor.

As a young boy, Victor is obsessed with studying outdated theories of science that focus on achieving natural wonders, at times to his father's disdain. In particular, he studies the works of [Cornelius Agrippa](#), [Paracelsus](#) and [Albertus Magnus](#). He plans to attend the [University of Ingolstadt](#) in Germany. A week before his planned departure, his mother dies, after nursing his beloved Elizabeth, who has been ill with [scarlet fever](#). The whole family is aggrieved, and Frankenstein sees the mother's death as his life's first misfortune. At university, he excels at chemistry and other sciences, and, after studying [galvanism](#), a phenomenon discovered in the 1790s, develops a secret technique to imbue inanimate bodies with life.

While the exact details of the monster's construction are left ambiguous, Victor explains "I collected bones from charnel-houses and disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame."^[2] Another statement, "The dissecting-room and the slaughter-house furnished many of my materials", suggests that some elements of Frankenstein's creation may not be from human bodies. Frankenstein finds himself forced to make the

creature much larger than a normal man — he estimates it to be about eight feet tall — because of the difficulty in replicating the minute parts of the human body. His creation, which he has hoped would be beautiful, is instead hideous to his eyes, with dull yellow eyes, and a withered, translucent, yellowish skin that barely conceals the muscular system and blood vessels. After bringing his creation to life, Victor is repulsed by his work: "I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart."^[3] Victor flees, hoping to forget what he has created, and attempts to live a normal life. His abandonment leaves the monster confused, angry, and afraid.

After his quiet, secretive and exhausting efforts to create a living human being, Victor becomes ill. He is nursed back to health by his childhood friend, *Henry Clerval*. It takes him four months to recover from his illness. He determines that he should return home when his five-year-old brother, William, is found murdered. Elizabeth blames herself for William's death because she has allowed him to have access to his mother's locket, which she believes has caused a thief to murder William and steal the locket. William's nanny, *Justine*, is hanged for the murder based on the discovery of Victor's mother's locket in her pocket, and her confessing out of fear of not receiving absolution from a priest, though she regrets it. The locket was later revealed to have been placed there by Victor's creation.

When Victor learns of his brother's death, he returns to Geneva to be with his family. He sees the monster in the woods where his brother has been murdered, and becomes certain that his monster is the killer. Ravaged by his grief and self-reproach to have created the being that has caused so much destruction, he retreats into the mountains to find peace. After some time in solitude, the monster approaches him. Initially furious and intent on killing the creature, Victor attempts to attack it.

The monster, far larger and more agile than its creator, eludes him and allows him to compose himself. Intelligent and articulate, it tells Victor of its encounters with people, and how it had become afraid of them and spent a year living near a cottage, observing the *De Lacey* family living there. The *De Lacey*s had originally been wealthy, but have been forced into exile when *Felix De Lacey* rescued the father of his beloved, an Arabian girl named *Safie*. This man, a Turkish merchant who was wrongfully accused of a crime and sentenced to death, once rescued, agreed to allow Felix to marry Safie. Ultimately, though, he was unable to stand the idea of his daughter marrying a Christian and fled with her. Safie has returned to Switzerland, to be with her love Felix DeLacey, and eager for the freedom of European women.

Through observing the *De Lacey* family, the monster has become educated and self-aware. It had also discovered a lost satchel of books and learned to read. Seeing its reflection in a pool, it realized that its physical appearance is hideous compared to the humans it watches. The monster compares itself to [Lucifer](#) from [Paradise Lost](#), one of the books it has read. In its [loneliness](#), it sought to befriend the *De Lacey*s. It presented itself first to the aged father of the family, who is blind and cannot see its deformity, and was received with kindness and hospitality. Unfortunately, the others of the family were horrified by its appearance and reacted viciously out of fear, with violence against it. Because of this interaction, the *De Lacey*s fled their home. The Creature in a fit of rage torches the house and watches as it burns to the ground. This is the Creature's first act of destruction.

In its travels some time later, the monster saw a young girl tumble into a stream and rescued her from drowning. A man, seeing it with the child in its arms, pursued it and fired a gun, wounding it. The monster has now sworn to have vengeance on all humanity, and especially on its creator.

The monster, traveling to Geneva, met a little boy — Victor's brother William — in the woods outside the town of [Plainpalais](#). It hoped that the child would be a companion for it, because he appeared to potentially be unaffected by the perception older people had of its hideousness. So it planned to abduct him: "Boy, you will never see your father again; you must come with me." Horrified, the boy shouted insults and revealed himself as a Frankenstein: "Hideous monster! let me go. My papa is a syndic - - he is M. Frankenstein - he will punish you. You dare not keep me." The creature grabbed the boy by the throat to silence him. When it discovered that it had accidentally strangled its victim, it took this as its first act of vengeance against its creator. It removed a locket from the boy's body and placed it in the folds of the dress of a young woman — William's nanny, Justine — who had been sleeping in a barn nearby, assuming she would be accused of the murder. Frankenstein is present at Justine's trial and even speaks on her behalf but he knows that he is responsible for William's death, because the monster is his creation. But he is too afraid to confess about the Creature out of fear that everyone will think he is crazy, so Justine is found guilty and is wrongly executed.

The monster concludes its story with a demand that Frankenstein create for it a female companion like itself, on the basis that it is lonely since nobody will accept it. It argues that as a living thing, it has a right to happiness and that Victor, as its creator, has a duty to obey it. It promises that if Victor grants its request, it and its mate will vanish into the wilderness of South America uninhabited by man, never to reappear. Victor at first refuses, but the monster replies with the demand, "You are my creator, but I am your master. Obey!"

Fearing for his family, Victor reluctantly agrees and travels to England to do his work. He is accompanied by Clerval, but they separate in Scotland. Through their travels, Victor suspects that the monster is following him. Working on a second being on the [Orkney Islands](#), he is plagued by premonitions of what his work might wreak, particularly as creating a mate for the creature might lead to an entire race of monsters that could plague mankind for millennia to come. He destroys the unfinished example after he sees the monster looking through the window. The monster witnesses this and, confronting Victor, vows that it will have its revenge on Victor's upcoming wedding night. Victor sails far out to sea to dispose of the parts of the unfinished example, and remains adrift and alone. Meanwhile, the monster murders Clerval and leaves the corpse on an Irish beach, coincidentally near where Victor finds himself washed up after an unintentionally long voyage. Arriving in Ireland, Victor is imprisoned for the murder of Clerval, and becomes seriously ill, suffering another mental breakdown in prison. After being acquitted, and with his health renewed, he returns home with his father.

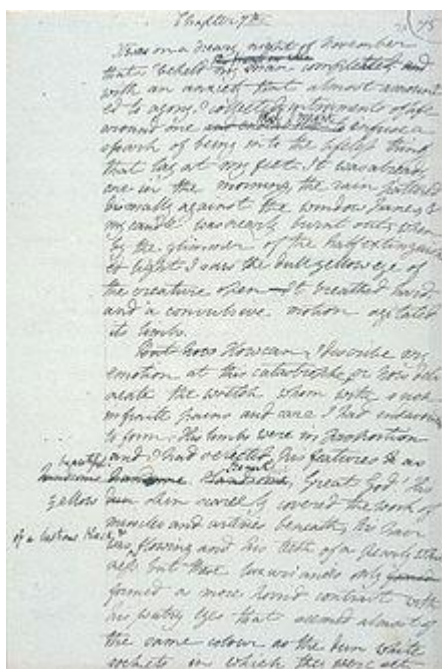
Once home, Victor marries his cousin Elizabeth and prepares for a fight to the death with the monster. Wrongly believing the monster's vowed revenge meant his own death, he asks Elizabeth to retire to her room for the night while he goes looking for the fiend. He searches the house and grounds, but doesn't find it. The enemy murders the secluded Elizabeth — as Victor has destroyed its mate — instead. Victor sees the monster at the window pointing at the corpse. Grief-stricken by the deaths of William, Justine, Clerval, and now Elizabeth,


Victor's father dies. Victor vows to pursue the monster until one of them annihilates the other. After months of pursuit, the two end up in the Arctic Circle, near the North Pole.

[[edit](#)] Captain Walton's concluding frame narrative

At the end of Victor's narrative, Captain Walton resumes the telling of the story. A few days after the vanishing of the creature, the ship becomes entombed in ice and Walton's crew insists on returning south once they are freed. In spite of a passionate speech from Frankenstein, encouraging the crew to push further north, Walton realizes that he must relent to his men's demands and agrees to head for home. Frankenstein dies shortly thereafter, and Walton discovers the monster on his ship, mourning over Frankenstein's body. Walton hears the monster's adamant justification for its vengeance as well as expressions of remorse. Frankenstein's death has not brought it peace. Rather, its crimes have increased its misery and alienation; it has found only its own emotional ruin in the destruction of its creator. It vows to exterminate itself on its own [funeral pyre](#) so that no others will ever know of its existence. Walton watches as it drifts away on an ice raft that is soon lost in darkness.

[[edit](#)] Composition



 Draft of *Frankenstein* ("It was on a dreary night of November that I beheld my man completed ...")

How I, then a young girl, came to think of, and to dilate upon, so very hideous an idea?^[4]

During the rainy summer of 1816, the "[Year Without a Summer](#)", the world was locked in a long cold [volcanic winter](#) caused by the eruption of [Mount Tambora](#) in 1815.^[5] [Mary Shelley](#), aged 18, and her lover (and later husband) [Percy Bysshe Shelley](#), visited [Lord Byron](#) at the [Villa Diodati](#) by [Lake Geneva](#) in Switzerland. The weather was consistently too cold and dreary that summer to enjoy the outdoor holiday activities they had planned, so the group retired indoors until dawn.

Among other subjects, the conversation turned to [galvanism](#) and the feasibility of returning a corpse or assembled body parts to life, and to the experiments of the 18th-century [natural philosopher](#) and poet [Erasmus Darwin](#), who was said to have animated dead matter.^[6] Sitting around a log fire at Byron's villa, the company also amused themselves by reading German ghost stories, prompting Byron to suggest they each write their own [supernatural](#) tale. Shortly afterward, in a waking dream, Mary Shelley conceived the idea for *Frankenstein*:

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. Frightful *must* it be; for *SUPREMELY* frightful would be the effect of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world.^[7]

She began writing what she assumed would be a short story. With Percy Shelley's encouragement, she expanded this tale into a full-fledged novel.^[8] She later described that summer in Switzerland as the moment "when I first stepped out from childhood into life".^[9] Shelley wrote the first four chapters in the weeks following the suicide of her half-sister Fanny.^[10] Byron managed to write just a fragment based on the [vampire](#) legends he heard while travelling the [Balkans](#), and from this [John Polidori](#) created *The Vampyre* (1819), the progenitor of the romantic vampire literary genre. Thus, two legendary horror tales originated from this one circumstance.

The group talked about Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment ideas as well. Shelley believed the Enlightenment idea that society could progress and grow if political leaders used their powers responsibly; however, she also believed the Romantic ideal that misused power could destroy society (Bennett 36-42).^[11]

Mary's and Percy Bysshe Shelley's manuscripts for the first three-volume edition in 1818 (written 1816–1817), as well as Mary Shelley's fair copy for her publisher, are now housed in the [Bodleian Library](#) in [Oxford](#). The Bodleian acquired the papers in 2004, and they belong now to the [Abinger](#) Collection.^[12] On 1 October 2008, the Bodleian published a new edition of *Frankenstein* which contains comparisons of Mary Shelley's original text with Percy Shelley's additions and interventions alongside. The new edition is edited by Charles E. Robinson: *The Original Frankenstein* ([ISBN 978-1851243969](#)).^[13]

In September 2011 the astronomer Donald Olson, inspecting data about the motion of the moon and stars, concluded that the original conversation, and the waking dream, took place on the night of 16 June 1816.^[14]

[\[edit\]](#) Publication



 [Mary Shelley](#) by [Richard Rothwell](#) (1840–41)

Mary Shelley completed her writing in May 1817, and *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* was first published on 1 January 1818 by the small London publishing house of Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor, & Jones.^{[15][16]} It was issued anonymously, with a preface written for Mary by [Percy Bysshe Shelley](#) and with a dedication to philosopher [William Godwin](#), her father. It was published in an edition of just 500 copies in three volumes, the standard "[triple-decker](#)" format for 19th century first editions. The novel had been previously rejected by Percy Bysshe Shelley's publisher, Charles Ollier and by Byron's publisher [John Murray](#).^[citation needed]

The second edition of *Frankenstein* was published on 11 August 1823 in two volumes (by G. and W. B. Whittaker) following the success of the stage play *Presumption; or, the Fate of Frankenstein* by [Richard Brinsley Peake](#),^[17] this edition credited Mary Shelley as the author.

On 31 October 1831, the first "popular" edition in one volume appeared, published by [Henry Colburn](#) & Richard Bentley.^[18] This edition was heavily revised by Mary Shelley, partially because of pressure to make the story more conservative, and included a new, longer preface by her, presenting a somewhat embellished version of the genesis of the story. This edition tends to be the one most widely read now, although editions containing the original 1818 text are still published.^[19] Many scholars prefer the 1818 text, arguing that it preserves the spirit of Shelley's original publication (see Anne K. Mellor's "Choosing a Text of Frankenstein to Teach" in the [W.W. Norton](#) Critical edition).

[\[edit\]](#) Name origins

[\[edit\]](#) The monster

Main article: [Frankenstein's monster](#)



An English editorial cartoonist conceived the Irish as akin to Frankenstein's monster. Illustration from an 1843 issue of [Punch](#).^[20]

Part of Frankenstein's rejection of his creation is the fact that he does not give it a name, which gives it a lack of identity. Instead it is referred to by words such as "monster", "demon", "devil", "fiend", "wretch" and "it". When Frankenstein converses with the monster in Chapter 10, he addresses it as "vile insect", "abhorred monster", "fiend", "wretched devil" and "abhorred devil".

During a telling of Frankenstein, Shelley referred to the creature as "[Adam](#)".^[21] Shelley was referring to the [first man](#) in the [Garden of Eden](#), as in her epigraph:

Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay
To mould Me man? Did I solicit thee
From darkness to promote me?
[John Milton](#), [Paradise Lost](#) (X.743–5)

The creature has often been mistakenly called "Frankenstein". In 1908 one author said "It is strange to note how well-nigh universally the term "Frankenstein" is misused, even by intelligent people, as describing some hideous monster...".^[22] [Edith Wharton](#)'s *The Reef* (1916) describes an unruly child as an "infant Frankenstein."^[23] David Lindsay's "The Bridal Ornament", published in *The Rover*, 12 June 1844, mentioned "the maker of poor Frankenstein." After the release of [James Whale](#)'s popular 1931 film *Frankenstein*, the public at large began speaking of the monster itself as "Frankenstein". A reference to this occurs in *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) and in several subsequent films in the series, as well as in film titles such as *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*.

[\[edit\]](#) Victor Frankenstein's surname

Mary Shelley maintained that she derived the name "Frankenstein" from a dream-vision. Despite her public claims of originality, the significance of the name has been a source of speculation. Literally, in German, the name Frankenstein means "stone of the [Franks](#), Franks' stone." The name is associated with various places in Germany, such as [Castle Frankenstein](#) (*Burg Frankenstein*) in [Mühlthal](#), [Hesse](#), or Castle Frankenstein in [Frankenstein, Palatinate](#). There is also a castle called Frankenstein in [Bad Salzungen](#), [Thuringia](#). Furthermore, there is

a municipality called [Frankenstein](#) in [Saxony](#), and before 1946, [Ząbkowice Śląskie](#), a city in [Silesia](#), Poland, was known as *Frankenstein in Schlesien*.

More recently, [Radu Florescu](#), in his book *In Search of Frankenstein*, argued that Mary and Percy Shelley visited Castle Frankenstein on their way to Switzerland, near Darmstadt along the [Rhine](#), where a notorious alchemist named [Konrad Dippel](#) had experimented with human bodies, but that Mary suppressed mentioning this visit, to maintain her public claim of originality. A recent literary essay^[24] by A.J. Day supports Florescu's position that Mary Shelley knew of, and visited Castle Frankenstein^[25] before writing her debut novel. Day includes details of an alleged description of the Frankenstein castle that exists in Mary Shelley's 'lost' journals. However, this theory is not without critics; Frankenstein expert [Leonard Wolf](#) calls it an "unconvincing...conspiracy theory."^[26] According to Jörg Heléne, the 'lost journals' as well as Florescu's claims could not be verified.^[27]

[\[edit\]](#) Victor Frankenstein's given name

Main article: [Victor Frankenstein](#)

A possible interpretation of the name Victor derives from *Paradise Lost* by [John Milton](#), a great influence on Shelley (a quotation from *Paradise Lost* is on the opening page of *Frankenstein* and Shelley even allows the monster himself to read it).^{[28][29]} Milton frequently refers to God as "the Victor" in *Paradise Lost*, and Shelley sees Victor as playing God by creating life. In addition to this, Shelley's portrayal of the monster owes much to the character of [Satan](#) in *Paradise Lost*; indeed, the monster says, after reading the epic poem, that he empathises with Satan's role in the story.

There are many similarities between Victor and Percy Shelley, Mary's husband. Victor was a pen name of Percy Shelley's, as in the collection of poetry he wrote with his sister Elizabeth, *Original Poetry by Victor and Cazire*.^[30] There is speculation that one of Mary Shelley's models for Victor Frankenstein was Percy, who at Eton had "experimented with electricity and magnetism as well as with gunpowder and numerous chemical reactions", and whose rooms at Oxford were filled with scientific equipment.^[31] Percy Shelley was the first-born son of a wealthy country squire with strong political connections and a descendant of Sir [Bysshe Shelley](#), 1st Baronet of [Castle Goring](#), and Richard Fitzalan, 10th [Earl of Arundel](#).^[32] Victor's family is one of the most distinguished of that republic and his ancestors were counsellors and syndics. Percy had a sister named Elizabeth. Victor had an adopted sister, named Elizabeth. On 22 February 1815, Mary Shelley delivered a two-month premature baby and the baby died two weeks later. Percy did not care about the condition of this premature infant and left with Claire, Mary's stepsister, for a lurid affair.^[33] When Victor saw the creature come to life he fled the apartment, though the newborn creature approached him, as a child would a parent. The question of Victor's responsibility to the creature is one of the main themes of the book.

[\[edit\]](#) Modern Prometheus

The Modern Prometheus is the novel's subtitle (though some modern publishings of the work now drop the subtitle, mentioning it only in an introduction). [Prometheus](#), in later versions of Greek mythology, was the [Titan](#) who created mankind. A task given to him by Zeus, he was to create a being with clay and water in the image of the gods that could have a spirit breathed into it.^[34] Prometheus taught man to hunt, read, and heal their sick, but after he

tricked Zeus into accepting poor-quality offerings from humans, Zeus kept fire from mankind. Prometheus being the creator, took back the fire from Zeus to give to man. When [Zeus](#) discovered this, he sentenced Prometheus to be eternally punished by fixing him to a rock of Caucasus, where each day an eagle would peck out his liver, only for the liver to regrow the next day because of his immortality as a god. He was intended to suffer alone for all of eternity, but eventually Heracles (Hercules) released him.

Prometheus was also a myth told in Latin but was a very different story. In this version Prometheus makes man from clay and water, again a very relevant theme to Frankenstein as Victor rebels against the laws of nature (how life is naturally made) and as a result is punished by his creation.



In 1910, [Edison Studios](#) released the [first motion-picture adaptation](#) of Shelley's story.

The Titan in the Greek mythology of Prometheus parallels Victor Frankenstein. Victor's work by creating man by new means reflects the same innovative work of the Titan in creating humans. Victor, in a way, stole the secret of creation from God just as the Titan stole fire from heaven to give to man. Both the Titan and Victor are punished for their actions. Victor is reprimanded by suffering the loss of those close to him and the dread of being killed himself by his creation. That situation could have possibly been resolved early on by Victor letting his creation into his life. It seemed that his family had the potential for taking the monster in and making him a part of their lives.

Some have claimed that for Mary Shelley, Prometheus was not a hero but rather something of a devil, whom she blamed for bringing fire to man and thereby seducing the human race to the vice of eating meat (fire brought cooking which brought hunting and killing).^[35] Support for this claim may be reflected in Chapter 17 of the novel, where the "monster" speaks to Victor Frankenstein: "My food is not that of man; I do not destroy the lamb and the kid to glut my appetite; acorns and berries afford me sufficient nourishment." For Romantic Era artists in general, Prometheus' gift to man echoed the two great utopian promises of the 18th century: the [Industrial Revolution](#) and the [French Revolution](#), containing both great promise and potentially unknown horrors.


Byron was particularly attached to the play [Prometheus Bound](#) by [Aeschylus](#), and Percy Shelley would soon write his own [Prometheus Unbound](#) (1820). The term "Modern Prometheus" was actually coined by [Immanuel Kant](#), referring to [Benjamin Franklin](#) and his then recent experiments with [electricity](#).^[36]

[[edit](#)] Shelley's sources

Shelley incorporated a number of different sources into her work, one of which was the [Promethean](#) myth from [Ovid](#). The influence of [John Milton's](#) *Paradise Lost*, and [Samuel Taylor Coleridge's](#) *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, are also clearly evident within the novel. Also, both Shelleys had read [William Thomas Beckford's](#) Gothic novel *Vathek*.^{[[citation needed](#)]} *Frankenstein* also contains multiple references to her mother, [Mary Wollstonecraft](#), and her major work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* which discusses the lack of equal education for males and females. The inclusion of her mother's ideas in her work is also related to the theme of creation and motherhood in the novel. Mary is likely to have acquired some ideas for Frankenstein's character from [Humphry Davy's](#) book *Elements of Chemical Philosophy* in which he had written that "science has...bestowed upon man powers which may be called creative; which have enabled him to change and modify the beings around him...". References to the French Revolution run through the novel; a possible source may lie in François-Félix Nogaret's *Le Miroir des événemens actuels, ou la Belle au plus offrant* (1790): a political parable about scientific progress featuring an inventor named Frankenstein who creates a life-sized automaton.^{[[37](#)]}

[\[edit\]](#) Reception



 Illustration by [Theodor von Holst](#) from the frontispiece of the [1831](#) edition^{[[38](#)]}

Initial critical reception of the book mostly was unfavourable, compounded by confused speculation as to the identity of the author. Sir [Walter Scott](#) wrote that "upon the whole, the work impresses us with a high idea of the author's original genius and happy power of expression", but most reviewers thought it "a tissue of horrible and disgusting absurdity" (*Quarterly Review*).

Despite the reviews, *Frankenstein* achieved an almost immediate popular success. It became widely known especially through melodramatic theatrical adaptations — Mary Shelley saw a production of *Presumption; or The Fate of Frankenstein*, a play by Richard Brinsley Peake, in 1823. A French translation appeared as early as 1821 (*Frankenstein: ou le Prométhée Moderne*, translated by Jules Saladin).

Frankenstein has been both well-received and disregarded since its anonymous publication in 1818. Critical reviews of that time demonstrate these two views. The Belle Assemblée described the novel as "very bold fiction" (139). The *Quarterly Review* stated "that the author has the power of both conception and language" (185). Sir Walter Scott, writing in

[Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine](#) congratulated "the author's original genius and happy power of expression" (620), although he is less convinced about the way in which the monster gains knowledge about the world and language.^[39] The Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany hoped to see "more productions from this author" (253).

In two other reviews where the author is known as the daughter of William Godwin, the criticism of the novel makes reference to the feminine nature of Mary Shelley. The British Critic attacks the novel's flaws as the fault of the author: "The writer of it is, we understand, a female; this is an aggravation of that which is the prevailing fault of the novel; but if our authoress can forget the gentleness of her sex, it is no reason why we should; and we shall therefore dismiss the novel without further comment" (438). The Literary Panorama and National Register attacks the novel as a "feeble imitation of Mr. Godwin's novels" produced by the "daughter of a celebrated living novelist" (414).

Frankenstein discussed controversial topics and touched on religious ideas. Victor Frankenstein plays God when he creates a new being. Frankenstein deals with Christian and Metaphysical themes. The importance of Paradise Lost and the creature's belief that it is "a true history" brings a religious tone to the novel.^[40]

Despite these initial dismissals, critical reception has been largely positive since the mid-20th century.^[41] Major critics such as M. A. Goldberg and Harold Bloom have praised the "aesthetic and moral" relevance of the novel^[42] and in more recent years the novel has become a popular subject for psychoanalytic and feminist criticism. The novel today is generally considered to be a landmark work of romantic and gothic literature, as well as science fiction.^[43]

[\[edit\]](#) Derivative works

There are numerous novels retelling or continuing the story of Frankenstein and his monster.

For more details on derivative works, see [Frankenstein in popular culture](#).

[\[edit\]](#) Films, plays and television



 A promotional photo of [Boris Karloff](#) as Frankenstein's monster

- 1826: [Henry M. Milner](#)'s adaptation, *The Man and The Monster; or The Fate of Frankenstein* opened on 3 July at the [Royal Coburg Theatre](#), London.^[44]
- 1910: [Edison Studios](#) produced the first *Frankenstein* film, directed by [J. Searle Dawley](#).
- 1915: *Life Without Soul*, the second adaption of Mary Shelley's novel, was released. No known copy of the film has survived, but un-reliable sources claim that the film has been in an anonymous private collection since at least 2004.
- 1931: *Frankenstein* became a Universal film, directed by [James Whale](#), starring [Colin Clive](#), [Mae Clarke](#), [John Boles](#) and [Boris Karloff](#) as the monster.
- 1935: [James Whale](#) directed the sequel *Bride of Frankenstein*, starring [Boris Karloff](#) as the monster once more. This incorporated the novel's plot motif of Doctor Frankenstein creating a bride for the monster omitted from Whale's earlier film. There were two more sequels, prior to the Universal "monster rally" films combining multiple monsters from various movie series or film franchises.
- 1942-1948: Universal did "monster rally" films featuring Frankenstein's Monster, Dracula and the Wolf-Man. Included would be *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*, *House of Frankenstein*, *House of Dracula* and *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*.
- 1957-1974: [Hammer Films](#) in England did a string of Frankenstein films starring [Peter Cushing](#), including *The Curse of Frankenstein*, *The Revenge of Frankenstein* and *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed*. Co-starring in these films were [Christopher Lee](#), [Hazel Court](#), [Veronica Carlson](#) and [Simon Ward](#). Another Hammer film, *The Horror of Frankenstein*, starred [Ralph Bates](#) as the main character, Victor Frankenstein.
- 1965: Toho Studios created the film *Frankenstein Conquers the World* or *Frankenstein vs. Baragon*, followed by somewhat of a sequel *War of the Gargantuas*. This was Toho's ending of the Frankenstein franchise.
- 1973: The TV film *Frankenstein: The True Story* appeared on American TV. The English made movie starred [Leonard Whiting](#), [Michael Sarrazin](#), [James Mason](#), and [Jane Seymour](#).
- 1981: A Broadway adaptation by Victor Gialanella played for one performance (after 29 previews) and was considered the most expensive flop ever produced to that date.^[45]
- 1992: *Frankenstein* became a Turner Network Television film directed by [David Wickes](#), starring [Patrick Bergin](#) and [Randy Quaid](#). [John Mills](#) made a final screen appearance.
- 1994: *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* appeared in theaters, directed by and starring [Kenneth Branagh](#), with [Robert De Niro](#) and [Helena Bonham Carter](#).
- 2009: *Splice (film)*, is a Frankenstein adaptation by [Vincenzo Natali](#) and starring [Adrien Brody](#) and [Sarah Polley](#).
- 2011: The [National Theatre](#), London, presents a [stage version](#) of Frankenstein, running until May 2, 2011. The play was written by [Nick Dear](#) and directed by [Danny Boyle](#). [Jonny Lee Miller](#) and [Benedict Cumberbatch](#) alternate the roles of Frankenstein and the Creature. The [National Theatre](#) broadcasted live performances of the play worldwide (at 13:00 and 19:30) on March 17.

Free adaptations

- 1967: *I'm Sorry the Bridge Is Out, You'll Have to Spend the Night* and its sequel, *Frankenstein Unbound (Another Monster Musical)*, are a pair of [musical comedies](#)

written by [Bobby Pickett](#) and [Sheldon Allman](#). The casts of both feature several classic horror characters including Dr. Frankenstein and his monster.

- 1973: [The Rocky Horror Show](#), is a [British horror comedy stage musical](#) written by [Richard O'Brian](#) in which Dr. Frank N. Furter has created a creature (Rocky), to satisfy his (pro)creative drives. Elements are similar to [I'm Sorry the Bridge Is Out, You'll Have to Spend the Night](#).
- 1973: [Frankenstein: The True Story](#) has the monster be originally very handsome but become progressively uglier as the story progresses. It incorporates many elements from the Hammer horror series.
- 1973: [Andy Warhol's Frankenstein](#). usually, the doctor is a man whose dedication to science takes him too far, but here his interest is to rule the world by creating a new species that will obey him and do his bidding.
- 1974: [Young Frankenstein](#). Directed by Mel Brooks, this sequel-spoof is frequently listed as one of the best comedies ever made. It reuses many props from James Whale's 1931 *Frankenstein* and is shot in black-and-white with 1930s-style credits.
- 1975: [The Rocky Horror Picture Show](#) is the [1975 film](#) adaptation of the British [rock musical stageplay](#), [The Rocky Horror Show](#) (1973), written by [Richard O'Brien](#).
- 1985: [The Bride](#). Specifically, a remake of 1935's *The Bride of Frankenstein* which incorporated the novel's bride-motif omitted from the 1931 film.
- 1990: [Frankenstein Unbound](#). Combines a time-travel story with the story of Shelley's novel. Scientist Joe Buchanan accidentally creates a time-rift which takes him back to the events of the novel. Filmed as a low-budget independent film in 1990, based on a novel published in 1973 by [Brian Aldiss](#). This novel bears no relation to the 1967 stage musical with the same name listed above.
- 1991: *Frankenstein: The College Years*, directed by Tom Shadyac, is another sequel-spoof in which Frankenstein's monster is revived by college students.
- 1995: [Monster Mash](#) is a film adaptation of *I'm Sorry the Bridge Is Out, You'll Have to Spend the Night* starring Bobby Pickett as Dr. Frankenstein. The film also features [Candace Cameron Bure](#), [Anthony Crivello](#) and [Mink Stole](#).
- 2011: [Frankenstein: Day of the Beast](#) is an independent horror film based loosely on the original book.

[\[edit\]](#) See also



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- [Frankenstein argument](#)
- [Frankenstein complex](#)
- [Frankenstein's monster](#)
- [Frankenstein in popular culture](#)
- [Homunculus](#)
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- [List of dreams](#)
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