[Template:About](/wiki/Template:About" \o "Template:About) [Template:Pp-move-indef](/wiki/Template:Pp-move-indef) [Template:EngvarB](/wiki/Template:EngvarB) [Template:Use dmy dates](/wiki/Template:Use_dmy_dates) [Template:Infobox book](/wiki/Template:Infobox_book) ***Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*** is a novel written by the English author [Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley](/wiki/Mary_Wollstonecraft_Shelley) that tells the story of a young science student [Victor Frankenstein](/wiki/Victor_Frankenstein), who creates a grotesque but sentient [creature](/wiki/Frankenstein's_monster) in an unorthodox scientific experiment. Shelley started writing the story when she was 18, and the first edition of the novel was published anonymously in London in 1818, when she was 20. Shelley's name first appeared on the second edition, published in France in 1823.

Shelley traveled through Europe in 1814, journeying along the [River Rhine](/wiki/Rhine) in [Germany](/wiki/Germany) with a stop in [Gernsheim](/wiki/Gernsheim) which is just 17 km (10 mi) away from [Frankenstein Castle](/wiki/Frankenstein_Castle), where, two centuries before, an [alchemist](/wiki/Alchemist) was engaged in experiments.[[1]](#cite_note-1)[[2]](#cite_note-2)[[3]](#cite_note-3) Later, she traveled in the region of [Geneva](/wiki/Geneva) ([Switzerland](/wiki/Switzerland))—where much of the story takes place—and the topic of [galvanism](/wiki/Galvanism) and other similar [occult](/wiki/Occult) ideas were themes of conversation among her companions, particularly her lover and future husband, [Percy Shelley](/wiki/Percy_Shelley). Mary, Percy, [Lord Byron](/wiki/Lord_Byron) and [John Polidori](/wiki/John_Polidori) decided to have a competition to see who could write the best [horror](/wiki/Horror_fiction) story. After thinking for days, Shelley dreamt about a scientist who created life and was horrified by what he had made; her dream later evolved into the novel's story.

*Frankenstein* is infused with elements of the [Gothic novel](/wiki/Gothic_fiction) and the [Romantic](/wiki/Romanticism) movement. At the same time, it is an early example of [science fiction](/wiki/Science_fiction). [Brian Aldiss](/wiki/Brian_Aldiss) has argued that it should be considered the first true science fiction story because, in contrast to 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.[[4]](#cite_note-4) It has had a considerable influence in literature and popular culture and spawned a complete genre of [horror](/wiki/Horror_fiction) stories, films and plays.

Since the novel's publication, the name "Frankenstein" has often been used to refer to the monster itself, as it is in the stage adaptation by [Peggy Webling](/wiki/Peggy_Webling). This usage is sometimes considered erroneous, but usage commentators regard it as well-established and acceptable.[[5]](#cite_note-5)[[6]](#cite_note-6)[[7]](#cite_note-7) In the novel, the monster is identified by words such as "wretch", "creature", "monster", "demon", and "it". Speaking to Victor Frankenstein, the wretch refers to himself as "the Adam of your labours", and elsewhere as someone who "would have" been "your Adam", but is instead "your fallen angel."

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## Summary[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=1)]

[thumb|A variety of different editions](/wiki/File:Editions_of_Frankenstein.jpg)

*Frankenstein* is written in the form of a [frame story](/wiki/Frame_story) that starts with Captain Robert Walton writing letters to his sister. It takes place at an unspecified time in the 18th century, as the letters' dates are given as "17—".

### Captain Walton's introductory frame narrative[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=2)]

The novel *Frankenstein* is written in [epistolary form](/wiki/Epistolary_novel), documenting a fictional correspondence between Captain Robert Walton and his sister, Margaret Walton Saville. Walton is a failed writer who sets out to explore the [North Pole](/wiki/North_Pole) and expand his scientific knowledge in hopes of achieving fame. During the voyage, the crew spots a dog sled driven by a gigantic figure. A few hours later, the crew rescues a nearly frozen and emaciated man named [Victor Frankenstein](/wiki/Victor_Frankenstein). Frankenstein has been in pursuit of the gigantic man observed by Walton's crew. Frankenstein starts to recover from his exertion; he sees in Walton the same over-ambitiousness, and recounts a story of his life's miseries to Walton as a warning. The recounted story serves as the frame for Frankenstein's narrative.

### Victor Frankenstein's narrative[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=3)]

Victor begins by telling of his childhood. Born in [Naples](/wiki/Naples), into a wealthy [Genevan](/wiki/Geneva) family, Victor and his brothers, Ernest and William, all three being sons of Alphonse Frankenstein by the former Caroline Beaufort, are encouraged to seek a greater understanding of the world through science. As a young boy, Victor is obsessed with studying outdated theories that focus on simulating natural wonders. When Victor is five years old, his parents adopt the orphan daughter of an expropriated Italian nobleman, Elizabeth Lavenza, with whom Victor later falls in love. (During this period, Victor's parents, Alphonse and Caroline, take in yet another orphan, Justine Moritz, who becomes William's nanny.)

Weeks before he leaves for the [University of Ingolstadt](/wiki/University_of_Ingolstadt) in Germany, his mother dies of [scarlet fever](/wiki/Scarlet_fever) contracted from treating Elizabeth (who had been infected first but survived), creating further impetus towards his experiments. At university, he excels at chemistry and other sciences, soon developing a secret technique to impart life to non-living matter, which eventually leads to his creation of the Creature.

Because of the difficulty in replicating the minute parts of the human body, Victor makes the Creature large, about [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) in height. Despite his intentions, the beautiful creation of his dreams is instead hideous, with yellow eyes and skin that barely conceals the muscle tissue and blood vessels underneath. Repulsed by his work, Victor flees and dismisses him. Saddened by the rejection, the Creature disappears.

Victor falls ill from the experience and is nursed back to health by his childhood friend, Henry Clerval. After a four-month recovery, he returns home when he learns of the murder of his brother William. Upon arriving in Geneva, Victor sees the Creature (now a Monster) at the crime scene, leading him to believe he (the Monster) is responsible. Justine Moritz, William's nanny, is convicted of the crime after William's locket, which had contained a miniature portrait of Caroline, is found in her pocket. Victor doubts anyone would believe his story, which could stop Justine's hanging.

Ravaged by grief and guilt, Victor retreats into the mountains. The Monster finds him and pleads for Victor to hear his tale. Intelligent and articulate, the Creature says that his encounters with people led to his fear of them, driving him into the wilderness. While living in an abandoned structure connected to a cottage, he grew fond of the family living there. The Creature learned to speak by listening to them and he taught himself to read after discovering a lost satchel of books. When he saw his reflection in a pool, he realized his physical appearance was hideous, and it terrified him as it terrifies normal humans. Nevertheless, he approached the family in hopes of becoming their friend. Initially he was able to befriend the blind father figure of the family, but the rest were frightened and they all fled their home. The Creature then burned the cottage in a fit of rage, and murdered Victor's brother William, framing Justine for the murder.

The Creature demands that Victor create a female companion like himself. He argues that as a living being, he has a right to happiness. The Creature promises that he and his mate will vanish into the South American wilderness, never to reappear, if Victor grants his request.

Fearing for his family, Victor reluctantly agrees. Clerval accompanies him to [England](/wiki/England), but they separate in [Perth](/wiki/Perth,_Scotland), [Scotland](/wiki/Scotland). Victor suspects that the Creature is following him. Working on the female creature on the [Orkney Islands](/wiki/Orkney), he is plagued by premonitions of disaster, particularly the idea that creating a mate for the Creature might lead to the breeding of a race that could plague mankind. He destroys the female creature after he sees the Creature watching through a window. The Creature confronts him, vowing to be with Victor and Elizabeth on their upcoming wedding night. The Creature then kills Clerval, leaving the corpse to be found where Victor lands in [Ireland](/wiki/Ireland). Victor is imprisoned for Clerval's murder and suffers another mental breakdown in prison. After being acquitted, he returns home with his father, who has restored to Elizabeth some of her father's fortune.

In Geneva, Victor is about to marry Elizabeth and prepares to fight the Creature. Believing the Creature threatened his life, the night before their wedding Victor asks Elizabeth to stay in her room while he looks for "the fiend." While Victor searches the house and grounds, the Creature murders Elizabeth. From the window, Victor sees the Creature, who taunts Victor with Elizabeth's corpse. Grief-stricken by the deaths of William, Justine, Clerval, and Elizabeth, Victor's father dies. Seeking revenge, Victor pursues the Creature to the [North Pole](/wiki/North_Pole), but he does not manage to kill his creation.

### Captain Walton's concluding frame narrative[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=4)]

At the end of Victor's narrative, Captain Walton resumes the telling of the story, closing the frame around Victor's reaccounting. A few days after the creature vanishes, the ship becomes trapped in [pack ice](/wiki/Pack_ice) and Walton's crew insists on returning south once it is freed. In spite of a passionate speech from Victor, encouraging the crew to push further north, Walton realizes that he must accede to his men's demands and agrees to head for home. Victor becomes agitated, insisting on continuing to search for the Creature, but is too weak from his exertions and dies shortly thereafter.

Walton discovers the Creature on his ship, mourning over Victor's body. Walton hears the Creature's reasons for his vengeance and expressions of remorse. Victor's death has not brought him peace. Rather, his crimes have increased his misery and alienation, and his words are almost exactly identical to Victor's own in describing himself. The Creature vows to kill himself on his own [funeral pyre](/wiki/Pyre) so that no others will ever know of his existence. Walton watches as he drifts away on an ice raft that is soon lost in darkness, never to be seen again.

## Composition[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=5)]

[right|thumb|Draft of *Frankenstein* ("It was on a dreary night of November that I beheld my man completed ...")](/wiki/Image:FrankensteinDraft.jpg) [Template:QuoteDuring](/wiki/Template:Quote) the rainy summer of 1816, the "[Year Without a Summer](/wiki/Year_Without_a_Summer)", the world was locked in a long cold [volcanic winter](/wiki/Volcanic_winter) caused by the eruption of [Mount Tambora](/wiki/Mount_Tambora) in 1815.[[8]](#cite_note-8) [Mary Shelley](/wiki/Mary_Shelley), aged 18, and her lover (and later husband) [Percy Bysshe Shelley](/wiki/Percy_Bysshe_Shelley), visited [Lord Byron](/wiki/Lord_Byron) at the [Villa Diodati](/wiki/Villa_Diodati) by [Lake Geneva](/wiki/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.

Sitting around a log fire at Byron's villa, the company amused themselves by reading German ghost stories translated into French from the book [*Fantasmagoriana*](/wiki/Fantasmagoriana),[[9]](#cite_note-9) then Byron proposed that they "each write a ghost story".[[10]](#cite_note-10) Unable to think of a story, young Mary became anxious: "*Have you thought of a story?* I was asked each morning, and each morning I was forced to reply with a mortifying negative."[[11]](#cite_note-11) During one evening in the middle of summer, the discussions turned to the nature of the principle of life. "Perhaps a corpse would be re-animated", Mary noted, "[galvanism](/wiki/Galvanism) had given token of such things".[[12]](#cite_note-12) It was after midnight before they retired, and unable to sleep, she became possessed by her imagination as she beheld the *grim terrors* of her "waking dream".[[13]](#cite_note-13) [Template:Quote](/wiki/Template:Quote)

In September 2011, astronomer Donald Olson, after a visit to the Lake Geneva villa the previous year, and inspecting data about the motion of the moon and stars, concluded that her "waking dream" took place "between 2 a.m. and 3 a.m." on 16 June 1816, several days after the initial idea by Lord Byron that they each write a ghost story.[[14]](#cite_note-14) She began writing what she assumed would be a short story. With Percy Shelley's encouragement, she expanded the tale into a full-fledged novel.[[15]](#cite_note-15) She later described that summer in Switzerland as the moment "when I first stepped out from childhood into life".[[16]](#cite_note-16) Shelley wrote the first four chapters in the weeks following the suicide of her half-sister Fanny.[[17]](#cite_note-17) Byron managed to write just a fragment based on the [vampire](/wiki/Vampire) legends he heard while travelling the [Balkans](/wiki/Balkans), and from this [John Polidori](/wiki/John_Polidori) created [*The Vampyre*](/wiki/The_Vampyre) (1819), the progenitor of the romantic vampire literary genre. Thus two legendary horror tales originated from the conclave.

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).[[18]](#cite_note-18) 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](/wiki/Bodleian_Library) in [Oxford](/wiki/Oxford). The Bodleian acquired the papers in 2004, and they belong now to the [Abinger](/wiki/Baron_Abinger) Collection.[[19]](#cite_note-19) In 2008, the Bodleian published a new edition of *Frankenstein*, edited by Charles E. Robinson, that contains comparisons of Mary Shelley's original text with Percy Shelley's additions and interventions alongside.[[20]](#cite_note-20)

## Publication[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=6)]

[left|thumb||](/wiki/File:RothwellMaryShelley.jpg)[Mary Shelley](/wiki/Mary_Shelley) by [Richard Rothwell](/wiki/Richard_Rothwell) (1840–41) Shelley completed her writing in May 1817, and *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* was first published on March 11, 1818 by the small London publishing house Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor, & Jones.[[21]](#cite_note-21)[[22]](#cite_note-22) It was issued anonymously, with a preface written for Mary by [Percy Bysshe Shelley](/wiki/Percy_Bysshe_Shelley) and with a dedication to philosopher [William Godwin](/wiki/William_Godwin), her father. It was published in an edition of just 500 copies in three volumes, the standard "[triple-decker](/wiki/Three-volume_novel)" format for 19th-century first editions.

The second edition of *Frankenstein* was published on August 11, 1822 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](/wiki/Richard_Brinsley_Peake);[[23]](#cite_note-23) this edition credited Mary Shelley as the author.

On October 31, 1831, the first "popular" edition in one volume appeared, published by [Henry Colburn](/wiki/Henry_Colburn) & Richard Bentley.[[24]](#cite_note-24) This edition was heavily revised by Mary Shelley, partially because of pressure to make the story more conservative. It included a new, longer preface by herself, 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.[[25]](#cite_note-25) 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](/wiki/W._W._Norton) Critical edition). [Template:Clear](/wiki/Template:Clear)

## Frankenstein and the Monster[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=7)]

### The creature[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=8)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) [[File:Punch Anti-Irish propaganda (1882) Irish Frankenstein.jpg|thumb|upright|An English editorial cartoonist conceives the Irish [Fenian movement](/wiki/Fenian) as akin to Frankenstein's creature, in the wake of the [Phoenix Park murders](/wiki/Phoenix_Park_murders).   
Illustration from an 1882 issue of [*Punch*](/wiki/Punch_(magazine))[[26]](#cite_note-26)]] Part of Frankenstein's rejection of his creation is the fact that he does not give it a name, which causes a lack of identity. Instead it is referred to by words such as "wretch", "monster", "creature", "demon", "devil", "fiend", and "it". When Frankenstein converses with the creature 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](/wiki/Adam)".[[27]](#cite_note-27) Shelley was referring to the [first man](/wiki/List_of_first_men_or_women_in_mythology_and_religion) in the [Garden of Eden](/wiki/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](/wiki/John_Milton), [*Paradise Lost*](/wiki/Paradise_Lost) (X. 743–5)

Although the monster would be described in later works as a composite of whole body parts grafted together from cadavers and [reanimated](/wiki/Reanimation) by the use of electricity, this description is not entirely consistent with Shelley's work; both the use of electricity and the cobbled-together image of Frankenstein's monster were more the result of [James Whale's](/wiki/James_Whale) popular 1931 [film adaptation of the story](/wiki/Frankenstein_(1931_film)), and other early motion-picture works based upon the creature. In Shelley's original work, Dr. Frankenstein discovers a previously unknown but elemental principle of life, and that insight allows him to develop a method to imbue vitality into inanimate matter, though the exact nature of the process is left largely ambiguous. After a great deal of hesitation in exercising this power, the doctor spends two years painstakingly constructing the creature's body (one anatomical feature at a time, from raw materials supplied by "the dissecting room and the slaughter-house"), which he then brings to life using his unspecified process.

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".[[28]](#cite_note-28) [Edith Wharton's](/wiki/Edith_Wharton) *The Reef* (1916) describes an unruly child as an "infant Frankenstein."[[29]](#cite_note-29) David Lindsay's "The Bridal Ornament", published in *The Rover*, 12 June 1844, mentioned "the maker of poor Frankenstein." After the release of Whale's cinematic *Frankenstein*, the public at large began speaking of the creature itself as "Frankenstein". This also occurs in Frankenstein films, including [*Bride of Frankenstein*](/wiki/Bride_of_Frankenstein) (1935) and several subsequent films, as well as in film titles such as [*Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*](/wiki/Abbott_and_Costello_Meet_Frankenstein). Furthermore, future renditions and adaptations of the story include an evil laboratory assistant Igor/Ygor, who does not actually exist within the original narrative.

### Victor Frankenstein's surname[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=9)]

Mary Shelley maintained that she derived the name *Frankenstein* from a dream-vision. Despite her public claims of originality, however, a number of other sources have been suggested as Shelley's actual inspiration. The German name *Frankenstein* means "stone of the [Franks](/wiki/Franks)", and it is associated with various places in Germany, including [Frankenstein Castle](/wiki/Frankenstein_Castle) (*Burg Frankenstein*) in [Darmstadt](/wiki/Darmstadt), [Hesse](/wiki/Hesse), and Frankenstein Castle in [Frankenstein](/wiki/Frankenstein,_Rhineland-Palatinate), a town in the [Palatinate](/wiki/Palatinate_(region)). There is also a castle called Frankenstein in [Bad Salzungen](/wiki/Bad_Salzungen), Thuringia, and a municipality called [Frankenstein](/wiki/Frankenstein,_Saxony) in Saxony. Until 1945, [Ząbkowice Śląskie](/wiki/Ząbkowice_Śląskie), now a city in [Silesia](/wiki/Silesia), [Poland](/wiki/Poland), was named *Frankenstein* in German, and was the site of a scandal involving gravediggers in 1606, which has been suggested as an inspiration to the author.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed) Finally, the name is borne by the aristocratic [House of Franckenstein](/wiki/House_of_Franckenstein) from [Franconia](/wiki/Franconia).

[Radu Florescu](/wiki/Radu_Florescu) argues that Mary and Percy Shelley visited Frankenstein Castle near Darmstadt in 1814 during their return to England from their elopement to Switzerland. It was at this castle that a notorious alchemist, [Conrad Dippel](/wiki/Johann_Conrad_Dippel), had experimented with human bodies, and Florescu reasons that Mary suppressed mention of her visit in order to maintain her public claim of originality.[[30]](#cite_note-30) A literary essay by A. J. Day supports Florescu's position that Mary Shelley knew of and visited Frankenstein Castle before writing her debut novel.[[31]](#cite_note-31) Day includes details of an alleged description of the Frankenstein castle that exists in Mary Shelley's 'lost' journals. According to Jörg Heléne, the 'lost journals', as well as Florescu's claims, cannot be verified.[[32]](#cite_note-32)

### Victor Frankenstein's given name[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=10)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) A possible interpretation of the name Victor is derived from [*Paradise Lost*](/wiki/Paradise_Lost) by [John Milton](/wiki/John_Milton), a great influence on Shelley (a quotation from *Paradise Lost* is on the opening page of *Frankenstein* and Shelley even has the monster himself read it).[[33]](#cite_note-33)[[34]](#cite_note-34) Milton frequently refers to God as "the Victor" in *Paradise Lost*, and Shelley sees Victor as playing God by creating life. In addition, Shelley's portrayal of the monster owes much to the character of [Satan](/wiki/Satan) in *Paradise Lost*; indeed, the monster says, after reading the epic poem, that he empathizes 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*](/wiki/Original_Poetry_by_Victor_and_Cazire).[[35]](#cite_note-35) 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.[[36]](#cite_note-36) Percy Shelley was the first-born son of a wealthy country squire with strong political connections and a descendant of Sir [Bysshe Shelley](/wiki/Bysshe_Shelley), 1st Baronet of [Castle Goring](/wiki/Castle_Goring), and Richard Fitzalan, 10th [Earl of Arundel](/wiki/Earl_of_Arundel).[[37]](#cite_note-37) Victor's family is one of the most distinguished of that republic and his ancestors were counselors and [syndics](/wiki/Syndic). Percy had a sister named Elizabeth; Victor had an adopted sister named Elizabeth.

On 22 February 1815, Mary Shelley gave birth to a baby two months prematurely, 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.[[38]](#cite_note-38) 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.

### Modern Prometheus[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=11)]

*The Modern Prometheus* is the novel's subtitle (though some modern editions now drop the subtitle, mentioning it only in an introduction).[[39]](#cite_note-39) [Prometheus](/wiki/Prometheus), in later versions of Greek mythology, was the [Titan](/wiki/Titan_(mythology)) who created mankind at the behest of [Zeus](/wiki/Zeus). He made a being in the image of the gods that could have a spirit breathed into it.[[40]](#cite_note-40) 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 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.

[thumb|In 1910,](/wiki/File:Frankenstein1910.jpg) [Edison Studios](/wiki/Edison_Studios) released the [first motion-picture adaptation](/wiki/Frankenstein_(1910_film)) 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.

Some have claimed that Mary Shelley saw Prometheus not as a hero but rather as something of a devil, and blamed him 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).[[41]](#cite_note-41) Byron was particularly attached to the play [*Prometheus Bound*](/wiki/Prometheus_Bound) by [Aeschylus](/wiki/Aeschylus), and Percy Shelley would soon write his own [*Prometheus Unbound*](/wiki/Prometheus_Unbound_(Shelley)) (1820). The term "Modern Prometheus" was actually coined by [Immanuel Kant](/wiki/Immanuel_Kant) in reference to [Benjamin Franklin](/wiki/Benjamin_Franklin) and his experiments with electricity.[[42]](#cite_note-42)

## Shelley's sources[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=12)]

Shelley incorporated a number of different sources into her work, one of which was the [Promethean](/wiki/Prometheus) myth from [Ovid](/wiki/Ovid). The influence of [John Milton's](/wiki/John_Milton) [*Paradise Lost*](/wiki/Paradise_Lost), and [Samuel Taylor Coleridge's](/wiki/Samuel_Taylor_Coleridge) [*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*](/wiki/The_Rime_of_the_Ancient_Mariner), are also clearly evident within the novel. Mary is likely to have acquired some ideas for Frankenstein's character from [Humphry Davy's](/wiki/Humphry_Davy) 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 Frankénsteïn who creates a life-sized automaton.[[43]](#cite_note-43) Within the past thirty years or so, many writers and historians have attempted to associate several then popular natural philosophers (now called physical scientists) with Shelley's work on account of several notable similarities. Two of the most notable natural philosophers among Shelley's contemporaries were [Giovanni Aldini](/wiki/Giovanni_Aldini), who made many public attempts at human reanimation through bio-electric Galvanism in London[[44]](#cite_note-44) and [Johann Konrad Dippel](/wiki/Johann_Konrad_Dippel), who was supposed to have developed chemical means to extend the life span of humans. While Shelley was obviously aware of both these men and their activities, she makes no mention of or reference to them or their experiments in any of her published or released notes.

## Reception[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=13)]

[thumb|upright|Illustration by](/wiki/File:Frontispiece_to_Frankenstein_1831.jpg) [Theodor von Holst](/wiki/Theodor_von_Holst) from the frontispiece of the 1831 edition[[45]](#cite_note-45) The initial critical reception of the book was mostly unfavorable, compounded by confused speculation as to the identity of the author. Sir [Walter Scott](/wiki/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 the [*Quarterly Review*](/wiki/Quarterly_Review) described it "a tissue of horrible and disgusting absurdity".

Mary Shelley had contact with some of the most influential minds of her time. Shelley's father, [William Godwin](/wiki/William_Godwin), was very progressive and encouraged his daughter to participate in the conversations that took place in his home with various scientific minds, many of whom were actively engaged in the study of anatomy. She was familiar with the ideas of using dead bodies for study, the newer theory of using electricity to animate the dead, and the concerns of religion and the general public regarding the morality of tampering with God's work.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)

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 Assemblee 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*](/wiki/Blackwood's_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.[[46]](#cite_note-46) 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).

Despite these initial dismissals, critical reception has been largely positive since the mid-20th century.[[47]](#cite_note-47) Major critics such as M. A. Goldberg and Harold Bloom have praised the "aesthetic and moral" relevance of the novel[[48]](#cite_note-48) and in more recent years the novel has become a popular subject for psychoanalytic and feminist criticism.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed) The novel today is generally considered to be a landmark work of romantic and gothic literature, as well as science fiction.[[49]](#cite_note-49) In his 1981 non-fiction book [Danse Macabre](/wiki/Danse_Macabre_(book)), author [Stephen King](/wiki/Stephen_King) considers Frankenstein's monster (along with [Dracula](/wiki/Dracula) and the [Werewolf](/wiki/Werewolf)) to be an [archetype](/wiki/Archetype) of numerous horrific creations that followed in literature, film, and television, in a role he refers to as "The Thing Without A Name." He considers such contemporary creations as the 1951 film [*The Thing from Another World*](/wiki/The_Thing_from_Another_World) and [The Incredible Hulk](/wiki/The_Incredible_Hulk) as examples of similar monstrosities that have followed in its wake. He views the book as "a Shakespearean tragedy" and argues: "its classical unity is broken only by the author's uncertainty as to where the fatal flaw lies—is it in Victor's hubris (usurping a power that belongs only to God) or in his failure to take responsibility for his creation after endowing it with the life-spark?"[[50]](#cite_note-50) *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.[[51]](#cite_note-51)