Mary Shelley's
Frankenstein
THE WANDERINGS
OF
VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN

Major Geographical Points in the Novel

1. Ingolstadt, Germany
2. Geneva, Switzerland
3. Chamonix, France
4. Strasbourg, France
5. London, England
6. Orkney Islands
7. Ireland
8. Le Havre, France
9. Paris, France
10. Geneva, Switzerland
11. Evian, France
12. Rhone River
13. Mediterranean Sea
14. Black Sea
15. Tartary (indefinite historical region in Asia and Europe; extends from Dnieper River in Russia to the Sea of Japan)
16. Russia
17. Siberia
18. Arctic

Victor's and the monster's wanderings span two continents. Use this map to locate where they are as you read the novel.
Prometheus

[proh • mee’ thuhs]

Genealogy and Background

Prometheus, mythology’s doomed traveler, spent a dismal jail sentence on the fringes of the known world. His name, means “foresight” in contrast to his brother Epimetheus or “hindsight.”

In contrast to Prometheus’s wise manipulation or godly power, Epimetheus, a somewhat oafish dupe of Zeus, was easily fooled by bribes. Prometheus, his antithesis, was endowed with prophetic power.

With the help of Athena and Eros, Prometheus fashioned human forms, which he modeled in the shape of the gods out of material left over from the earth’s formation. He gave human forms an upright position so that they could contemplate the heavens rather than face from which they sprang. Because the animals had used up stingers, hooves, tusks, fins, fur, fangs, claws, shells, wings, and horns, humans lacked an innate protection, so he gave them reason and a thumb by which to manipulate weapons and tools. Thus, Prometheus was the progenitor and benefactor of all human life.

Journey

When Prometheus saw the pathetic humans trying to fend for themselves against savage animals, unpalatable food, and an ill-tempered god, he felt impelled to intervene in the balance of power, an act construed by the gods as the most serious form of blasphemy and hubris. Journeying to Olympus by the dark of the moon with Athena, his cohort, he stole a glowing coal from Apollo’s chariot as punishment for giving man fire. According to Aeschylus’s Prometheus Bound, Zeus thundered:

I shall nail you in bonds of indissoluble bronze on this crag far from men. Here you shall hear no voice of any mortal; here you shall see no form of mortal…. For you, a god, feared not the anger of the gods, but gave honors to mortals beyond what was just. Wherefore you shall mount guard on this unlovely rock, upright, sleepless, not bending the knee.

And so,

Each day, a hellish eagle, the offspring of Typhon and Echidna and Zeus’s personal emblem, pecked out Prometheus’s liver. Each morning, the liver regenerated for another day of torment. Alone in misery, yet adamant in his defiance, Prometheus
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Mary Shelley's life and times</th>
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<tr>
<td>1797</td>
<td>Born 30th August, Somers Town in London, to William and Mary (née Wollstonecraft) Godwin. Her mother dies 10 days later after an acute fever.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1798</td>
<td>William Wordsworth (1770–1850) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) publish <em>Lyrical Ballads</em>, breaking new ground in imaginative literature.</td>
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<td>1801</td>
<td>William Godwin's second marriage, to Mary Jane Clairmont, who already has two children: Charles and Jane (later calling herself Claire).</td>
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<td>1805</td>
<td>Napoleonic Wars, lasting until 1815, cause great hardship and considerable social and political upheaval.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1807</td>
<td>Godwin's extended family move to Holborn, next to his new publishing office, focal point for a radical and artistic circle. Mary hears Coleridge read his <em>Rime of the Ancient Mariner</em>. The poet and artist William Blake (1757–1827) is known to have visited.</td>
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<td>1811</td>
<td>Luddite unrest and riots, symptomatic of increasingly revolutionary feelings across Britain.</td>
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<td>1812</td>
<td>Mary stays with family friends, the Baxters, near Dundee writing later that “the airy flights of my imagination were born and fostered” while there. While back in London, meets Percy Bysshe Shelley for the first time.</td>
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<td>1814</td>
<td>Eloped with Shelley, travels in France and Switzerland.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1816</td>
<td>William born. Mary and Shelley, again with Claire Clairmont, go to Switzerland, living close to Lord Byron's (1788–1824) Villa Diodati where Mary begins writing <em>Frankenstein</em>. Suicides of Fanny Imlay, Mary Wollstonecraft's daughter by a previous liaison with Gilbert Imlay, and Harriet Shelley, Percy's wife. Mary marries Percy Bysshe Shelley: St Mildred's Church, in London.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1817</td>
<td>Mary's first publication: <em>History of a Six-Weeks' Tour</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1818</td>
<td>Extensive travels in Italy. Publication of <em>Frankenstein</em> anonymously. Death of daughter, Clara, in Venice.</td>
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<td>1821</td>
<td>Death of the poet John Keats (1795–1821) at the age of twenty-five.</td>
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<td>1822</td>
<td>Near death of Mary, following a miscarriage. Death of Percy Bysshe Shelley, accidentally drowned at sea.</td>
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<td>1823</td>
<td>Return to London. <em>Vampyr</em> published, and second edition of <em>Frankenstein</em>.</td>
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<td>1826</td>
<td><em>The Last Man</em> published.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1827</td>
<td>Death of William Blake.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td><em>Perkin Warbeck</em> published.</td>
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<td>1832</td>
<td>Reform Act establishes partial extension of the franchise and acknowledges extreme political pressure for change. Percy Florence enters Harrow School.</td>
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<td>1835</td>
<td><em>Lodore</em> published.</td>
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<td>1837</td>
<td><em>Laflinier</em> (her novel) published; Percy Florence enters Trinity College, Cambridge.</td>
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<td>1839</td>
<td>Percy Shelley's <em>Poetical Works</em> published, edited by Mary, soon followed by his <em>Essays and Letters</em>.</td>
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<td>1844</td>
<td><em>Rambles in Germany and Italy</em> published. On death of Sir Timothy Shelley, Percy Florence succeeds to the estate and title of his grandfather.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>Mary Shelley dies, 1st February, at Chester Square, in London. Buried in Bournemouth churchyard between the remains of her father and mother.</td>
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Glossary of Terms

This glossary of terms is based on the Cambridge edition of Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein and has been adapted to meet the needs of a broad cross-section of IHS students. Terms are listed in alphabetical order. Foreign terms are italicized.

Adam’s supplication: from John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*

aiguilles: peaks or summits
Albertus Magnus: a magician who lived from 1193 – 1280
Ancient Mariner: title of an influential poem by Samuel Coleridge, set in Arctic waters, a tale told by compulsion for catharsis
ass and the lap dog: a fable in which an ass is beaten for imitating the friendly lap-dog
beauty of Angelica: Angelica is the heroine in an epic poem of love
cabriole: a small, light carriage
campagne: a cottage
chaise: a small, open carriage
chimerical: fantastic and far-fetched
Columbus and the egg: Columbus uses an egg to prove that anything is easy once someone else shows you how it can be done
Cornelius Agrippa: a writer of the occult
deserts: used to refer to deserted places rather than dry climates
diligences: stage coaches
Dutch school master: in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, who states, "...as I do not know Greek, I do not believe there is any good in it."
elixir of life: a potion for prolonging life indefinitely
Falkland: British official who lived 200 years earlier (Secretary of State to Charles I)
Goring: British general who lived 200 years earlier (Royalist, loyal to Charles I)
Hampden: British politician who lived 200 years earlier
Hindoos: Hindus
“I was like the Arabian...” Sinbad the Sailor in the *Arabian Nights*
maladie du pays: homesickness
manes: evil spirits of the dead
Natural philosophy: a traditional term for science
necessary: predetermined by the laws of cause and effect, central to Godwin’s philosophy
panegyric: formal speech of praise
Paracelsus: Swiss alchemist from 15th century
*Paradise Lost, Plutarch’s Lives, Sorrows of Werter:* all three books were read by Shelley in 1815
parquet: wood flooring composed of small pieces of wood placed in a pattern
philosopher’s stone: believed to convert base metals into gold
the Reuss: the main river of the city of Lucerne, Switzerland
Sanchean phrase: “everything depends upon the beginning!” – from the novel Don Quixote
Schiavi ogno freatenti: literally, “slaves always trembling”– refers to Italian unrest under Austrian rule
Sir Isaac Newton: scientist who discovered the laws of gravity in the 17th century
siroc: a hot, oppressive African wind
syndics: in Geneva, magistrates responsible for the city-state’s government
temperature: means temperament or personality
Tom of Coventry: refers to the legend of Lady Godiva
tyros: novices or beginners
vermicelli: fine strand of pasta; the term is believed to be used in error, with the actual term being vorticella, meaning microscopic life
William Burke, born 1792, first came to Edinburgh from Ireland in disgrace, having deserted his wife and children. He had previously been a soldier, who had had a respectable upbringing and marriage, but once in Scotland he was forced to take whatever work was available. Building, bakery and cobbling became his main occupations - until 1827, when he and his mistress, Helen McDougal, moved into Logs Lodging House.

This was a house that had once belonged to a Mr Log and his wife Margaret. Upon the landlord's death, Margaret Log was comforted by William Hare, an Irish tenant. They soon married and had been running the guesthouse together for a while, still under the name of Logs, when Burke arrived.

Burke and Hare often drank together, attempting to come up with moneymaking schemes. In order to understand the one they eventually stumbled upon, a little background is necessary.

The 19th Century and the Rise of Bodysnatching

In the 19th Century there were enormous advances in the medical world. This was a result of the Renaissance, which had started four hundred years previously, which gave new life to the arts and the sciences. Before then, learning was frowned upon and current ideas accepted. In the field of anatomy, Andreas Vesalius began the revolution, by publishing his De Humani Corporis Fabrica, volumes which made a mockery of the ideas which had prevailed since the Greek times. The field of anatomy opened up, as scientists realised that there was still a lot to discover, and many scholars elected to study it.

In 1827, when Burke and Hare met, the medical profession, especially the anatomists, were hampered by very strict laws concerning human dissection. This was forbidden in all cases except where the body of an executed criminal was donated to the establishment. This was a comparatively rare occurrence, since 'hanging with dissection' was a specific punishment reserved only for murderers, with the requirement that the body never be laid to rest in hollowed ground. The lack of bodies was especially problematic for lecturers, whose demonstrations and classes suffered from not having enough visual aids.

Thus a new market was born out of a demand for dead bodies, and no questions were asked. This led to a lucrative new line of employment for many city dwellers - grave robbing. The graverobbers - also known as resurrectionists for their abilities to raise the dead - were well paid, and some grew highly skilled at snatching bodies from under the noses of watchmen. However, throughout the 19th Century, Britain was still a highly religious country, and most people were repulsed by the concept of graverobbing. In addition to this, there was no law against stealing cadavers, since they were not classed as property. This improved the prospects for graverobbers and so anxious relatives attempted to do all they could to stop their loved ones' bodies disappearing. Many measures were taken to prevent such occurrences. Graveyard walls were raised, and patrols were set up - some cemeteries even installed watchtowers. Individual relatives would take preventative measures as well - paying guards to guard specific graves, making coffins extra secure, some going so far as to install cage-like structures over the graves. As graverobbing became more difficult and more risky, fewer people attempted it. This pushed the price of bodies up higher, and led to two very infamous men trying an altogether different approach to obtaining bodies.

The Bodysnatchers

These two men were, of course, Burke and Hare. They hit upon their scheme almost by chance - one of Hare's tenants, a man known only as Donald, died unexpectedly in bed one winter's night in 1827, while still owing the sum of four pounds - a good deal of money. It is not known which of the two had the idea of making Donald repay the debt posthumously, but Hare was always renowned as the more intelligent of the two. At any rate, it was this idea which led to Burke and Hare placing a weight instead of the body into the coffin, which was laid into the ground with everyone presuming that Donald lay therein, and removing the body to Edinburgh's Medical School. There they met Dr Knox, the foremost lecturer, who purchased the body for around ten pounds.

Having found a willing buyer of dead bodies, Burke and Hare decided that they would go into the business of supplying cadavers to the doctor full time. The current difficulty of graverobbing prompted them to take the next logical step - to
make sure they never get as far as the graveyard. Their strategy was simple - to select a victim, invite them to the lodging house, make available to them a large amount of whisky and wait for them to fall into a stupor. Murder would then be easy - the method favoured being suffocation, since it left no obvious marks on the body. According to his later confessions, Burke was nearly always the murderer, with Hare doing the majority of the planning and the bargaining with the doctor.

Dr Knox kept buying the bodies to dissect in front of his students, but the students started to get suspicious. The amount of bodies was uncommonly great for the period, even taking into consideration the fact that most anatomists were in contact with graverobbers. Additionally, some of the corpses were recognised by those attending the lectures. Although Burke and Hare always chose very poor working class victims, some of these were known to the students - specifically a prostitute named Mary Paterson, and a simple but popular youth known as 'Daft Jamie'. However, Knox denied the resemblances and proceeded to dissect them quickly.

Capture

The last murder committed was that of Mary Docherty, an Irish beggar. Her disappearance was very sudden, with the explanation for it very faltering, and some of the other tenants started to get suspicious. A couple named Gray, who had just arrived, were especially puzzled by the whole event, and on further examination of the building, found her dead body underneath a bed.

They rushed to the police station, but by the time the police arrived the body was gone. However, some neighbours claimed to have seen two men rushing out of the house carrying a large tea-chest. The police, fully aware of the suspicions surrounding Dr Knox's classes, arrived at his laboratory where the body was discovered and identified.

The case provoked a massive outcry, with the public clamouring to have Burke and his mistress, Hare and his wife, and Dr Knox hanged. However, the police had very little evidence of murder - there were no physical signs on Docherty's body as she, in common with most of the other victims, had been smothered, and they didn't want the case to result in lesser charges, or an acquittal. Therefore they made a deal with Hare that, if he were to become a King's Witness and tell all in court, he and his wife would be released, provided Burke was convicted.

The trial, which started on Christmas Eve 1828, lasted only until the next morning. Hare's evidence sent Burke to the gallows, although Burke's mistress received a not proven2 verdict. Before his death, a month later, Burke confessed to 16 murders, but always denied that they ever robbed graves. On the day of his hanging thousands of people of all classes turned out to watch the hated man's execution. When he died the crowd cheered, and when his body was cut down there was a stampede as people tried to reach it. After a period in which it was laid on a slab in a public gallery, so all who desired to do so could see, Burke's fate was to have his own body donated to medical science - it was dissected in a lecture, which drew a full house and it is rumoured that some students stole pieces of his skin, having them made into wallets or covers for pocket books. After this, his skeleton was displayed in the Medical School he had kept so well supplied - the bones are still there today.

Burke also had the dubious honour of extending the English vocabulary. He lent his name to the slang word, 'Burke', meaning 'to suffocate'. Although the phrase has fallen out of use in modern times, at the time it was quite a common term.

Hare was smuggled, alone, out of Edinburgh, and is rumoured to have lived as a beggar for the rest of his life. History has no record of what happened to Margaret Hare, or Helen McDougal, but it mentions that, although he was not formally charged, Dr Knox's career was effectively destroyed - his classes attracted fewer and fewer students, and the public still clamoured for him to be hanged for his involvement in the episode. However, Knox still has many defenders today who claim that the public were sentimental and ignorant in their condemnation of him.

The Anatomy Act

The case of Burke and Hare so shocked decent society that the British parliament was prepared to legalise the dissection of dead bodies in order to stop the black market trade in them. The 1832 Anatomy Act legalised the use of cadavers in the event of the body being unclaimed - this, in effect, meant that anatomists could now buy their bodies from the workhouses. Since there was now an abundant legal source of bodies, the prices fell, and graverobbers found that the risks of their trade were too great compared with the pitiful rewards they now received.

1 Most institutions were only allocated four or five bodies a year.
2 The Scottish legal system has three verdicts - 'guilty', 'not guilty' or 'not proven'.


Titan who lived on earth before humans. His special task was to create humans. This he did from a piece of clay. Like the mythical Prometheus, Victor Frankenstein forms what he hopes will be a beautiful creation. As you read, you must be the judge of the good or evil of Victor's deed and the results.

CHAPTER NOTES AND QUESTIONS

When you start reading the opening section—the letters and the first four chapters—you may find it rough going. This early section lacks the excitement and quick pace of the later chapters. Do not be discouraged. After this you will find that the story moves right along.

Letters 1-4

The novel Frankenstein begins with four letters from an Arctic explorer named Walton to his sister. In the first three letters, Walton writes about the journey he plans, hiring a ship and crew, and how he feels about this terribly dangerous adventure.

In letter four, Walton tells about a mysterious stranger he has rescued from the Arctic ice. The stranger is in a terrible state, both physically and mentally. He promises to tell Walton his story. “Strange and harrowing must be his story ...” Walton writes at the end of letter four. And indeed it is!

St. Petersburg  Russian city, now Leningrad.
Archangel  Seaport in northern Russia on the White Sea.

1. Walton is headed for the North Pole. What kind of environment does he expect to find there? Is he right or wrong? (Compare his description with your knowledge of Arctic geography and climate.)
2. Walton writes to his sister expressing his fears about the journey. What reasons does he give for undertaking the journey in spite of his fears?
3. How does the stranger explain his being out on the ice? Based on what you may already know about the novel, who do you think the stranger is? Whom do you think he means by “one who fled from me”?
4. The stranger’s memories are obviously almost too painful to talk about. What idea does Walton express that upsets the stranger and makes him anxious to tell his story?

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 is the beginning of the stranger’s story. You will learn that the stranger is a Genevese, a person from Geneva, Switzerland, whose name is Victor. As you recall, this stranger had warned Walton, “Prepare to hear of occurrences which are usually deemed marvellous ... my fate is nearly fulfilled ... nothing can alter my destiny.” First you will learn something about Victor and his family. Later you will discover what “marvellous” and terrifying events have brought him to this sad state.

syndic  Judge or government official.
schiavi ognor frementi  The enraged slave or bondsman, who is under the power of another. In this context, perhaps a political prisoner.
chamois  Small antelope, something like a goat.
1. The story of Victor’s parents and his childhood is a much idealized version, almost too good to be true. Give one example of something that seems strange, artificial, or unreal to you.

2. Victor hints at the dreadful events to come, just as he did earlier with “my fate is nearly fulfilled.” Read the last line of the chapter. What event does it seem to foretell or foreshadow?

Chapter 2

Here are more stories of Victor’s perfect childhood. At first he was more fascinated with the ancient science of alchemy than with modern science, then called “natural philosophy.” This obsession, first with alchemy and later with physical science, will finally lead to his undoing. Alchemy had elements of magic and the supernatural. The alchemist had three aims: turning less valuable metals into gold, finding a remedy for all disease, and preparing a substance to give eternal life.

Cornelius Agrippa (1486–1535): German physician who wrote a defense of magic.

chimerical Coming from the imagination; imaginary.

Paracelsus (c. 1493–1541): Swiss physician, chemist, alchemist, and author of several works of magic, including, some say, homunculus, a recipe for growing a little man.

Albertus Magnus (c. 1200–1280): German scientist and philosopher and teacher of St. Thomas Aquinas. According to one legend, he discovered a substance that gave life to a brass statue.

philosopher’s stone A stone that could turn lesser metals into gold.

1. Why did Victor keep on studying Agrippa’s work on magic, even after his father told him to forget about this “sad trash”?

2. Henry and Elizabeth are concerned with goodness and morals. What is Victor’s main concern?

3. A violent change of weather is described here. What is the effect on Victor’s ideas about science?

Chapter 3

We are about to meet young Victor, the university student. Eventually his obsession with science will lead him to undertake a horrible experiment. (One movie that has not been made on this story is Victor Frankenstein Goes to College. If there were such a movie we would learn how Victor is influenced by two of his science professors, how lonely and easily impressed he is. Soon Victor longs to become a scientist, too.) As you read, think about Victor’s fears and feelings.

spoiler Death.

panegyric A speech of elaborate praise.

chimera A dream or illusion.

1. Explain Victor’s mother’s dying wish.

2. Victor visits two of his professors. Compare these two men in terms of their attitude toward Victor and toward what he tells them of his past studies.

3. How does Professor Waldman’s lecture on chemistry, its history and future, influence Victor?

4. Read the whole paragraph that begins, “Such were the professor’s words—....” This paragraph is an ex-
ample of foreshadowing. (See question 2 of Chapter 1.) What does Victor Frankenstein promise himself that he will do? Explain why the author includes this kind of passage here. What does it do in terms of the reader's interest, or need to read on to the end?

Chapter 4

Victor's dedication to science turns into something far more overwhelming. Look for changes in his work and in his personality.

chancel-house Place for bones and bodies of the dead.
animation The act of giving life to something.

1. Pretend you are a fellow student at the university. How would you describe Victor?
2. What discovery does Victor's special "laboratory" work lead to?
3. These chapters are written as if Victor is speaking directly to Walton about what has happened to his life. How did Victor feel about his scientific experiments while he was doing them? How does he seem to feel about them now, as he tells Walton about them?

Chapter 5

In this chapter, Victor creates the monster.

Dante (1265–1321): Italian poet who wrote The Divine Comedy with its descriptions of the creatures of hell.
spectre A spirit or ghost.

1. Turn to the illustration in the front of your book. This picture of the monster first appeared in the 1831 edition of Frankenstein. Does the illustration match the description? How is it similar? How different?
2. Compare these events with Mary Shelley's dream in her introduction. What are the similarities?
3. How did Victor hope the monster would look? How does he describe it as it comes to life? Why do you think his feelings toward it change?
4. If you were Clerval and had just arrived in Ingolstadt, what would you write in your journal about Victor's strange behavior?

Chapter 6

Here, as Victor reads a letter, we learn what has happened at home. Near the end of the chapter, watch for a change in tone. The passage begins "Excellent friend! How sincerely did you love me . . ." Victor is speaking to someone who is not actually with him. The term for this is apostrophe. Also, watch for Mary Shelley's fascination with strange, far-off places, such as the Orient.

fetter A chain or shackle attached to the ankle to restrain movement or prevent escape.

Ariosto (1474–1533): Italian poet. One of his beautiful characters is Angelica.

encomium Warm or high praise.

countenance Something that offers approval; favor.
salubrious Healthful.

1. From reading Elizabeth's newsy letter you meet and learn the story of a friend of the Frankenstein family.
Who is she? Describe her briefly.

2. Why is Victor so uncomfortable when he introduces Clerval to his professors?

3. How does Victor cheer himself up, under Clerval’s guiding hand?

Chapter 7

Another letter brings news of a murder that sends Victor immediately homeward. Watch for the description of a storm.

cabriolet A two-wheeled, one-horse carriage.

1. Clerval’s arrival at Ingolstadt immediately after the monster’s creation is one of many coincidences in the novel. A coincidence is two things that seem to happen by chance but also seem to fit—almost too well. What events in this chapter are a coincidence?

2. Why is Justine accused of the murder? Why is Victor sure she is innocent? What are Victor’s reasons for not telling his family about the one he knows is the murderer?

3. This chapter is full of coincidences. Is the use of this artificial device good or poor writing? Would a modern audience accept this?

Chapter 8

The Frankenstein attend a trial that, to Victor, is a “wretched mockery of justice.” He feels responsible and is tormented by the events. Be thinking about Victor’s feelings and his behavior.

1. If you were a juror at this trial, would you have judged Justine guilty? What evidence or whose testimony, or statement of the facts, impresses you most?

2. Irony is a term sometimes used to describe the contrast between what ought to happen and what does happen. Explain what is ironic about Victor’s situation.

Chapter 9

Victor has anguish talks with his father and Elizabeth and takes a journey to get away from it all.

wreak Cause to happen; bring about; inflict.

aigüilles (French for needles; points) Mountaintops.

1. Irony is sometimes used to describe a situation in which one character knows something another character doesn’t. Both Victor’s father and Elizabeth tell Victor that he seems too upset by William’s and Justine’s deaths. What is ironic about these conversations?

2. Victor compares himself to a wounded deer gazing at its arrow. Explain the comparison.

Chapter 10

Victor wanders through Alpine valleys and mountains. Majestic sights fill him with ecstasy. His joy is short-lived, for here, on a glacier, he meets the monster.

glut To stuff; to fill to the fullest.

maw Stomach, jaws, especially of a greedy animal.
Adam In Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, God's creation, first man.

**fallen angel** Satan, or “archangel” in *Paradise Lost*.

1. Compare Victor’s attitude to the monster’s. Why is each angry and suffering?
2. At first Victor wants to kill the monster, but at last he agrees to listen to the monster’s story. Give three reasons why Victor decides to listen.

**Chapters 11–16**

(Note that all six chapters of the monster’s tale are printed in a different kind of type to make them stand out.)

As the monster begins his tale, you will learn how his life began. While you read, try to remember how you, as a child, first learned about the things the monster describes.

Some critics feel that the monster is an easier character to identify with than Victor. Does the monster seem truly monstrous to you? Be prepared to explain how you feel and what makes you feel that way.

The monster tells his creator about the De Laceys, his cottage “family.” While you read these passages, watch for Mary Shelley’s hidden comments on family life and education. You will also find that the monster mentions the epic poem *Paradise Lost* and other classics that Mary Shelley read as a young woman. These passages concerning the monster’s education contain Mary’s father’s ideas on the ideal education. William Godwin, Mary’s father, was influenced by the Swiss philosopher Rousseau, who felt people could be happy and good in a natural state, outside of society. The monster is getting just this kind of natural, unforced education.

You will probably be aware that coincidence or sheer luck plays a roll here. Watch for instances where “chance” enters the picture. Over and over again the plot shifts with these chance events, including the way the monster’s education proceeds, the monster’s accidentally meeting William and then murdering him, and the way Justine is involved in the crime.

**offal** The waste parts of a butchered animal.

**Pandemonium** The capital of hell as described in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

**hovel** An open, low shed.

**the ass and the lap-dog** A fable in which a donkey tries to get affection by imitating a lap-dog. When it puts its hoof on the master’s cheek, it is punished.

**meed** Reward; what one has earned. (Archaic).

1. The newly-formed monster begins to learn how to survive. What are his successes? His failures?
2. What causes the monster to feel its first overpowering emotion or feeling?
3. Give one example of a coincidence that helps the monster’s education along.
4. “Sorrow only increased with knowledge,” says the monster. What does he learn that makes him sad?
5. Why does the monster seize little William? Why does he kill him? Why does he place the locket where he does?
6. Is the monster truly monstrous? What examples of the monster’s behavior make you feel as you do? Whom do you like or understand better, Victor or the monster? Explain why.
7. On the title page of the novel you will find this:

Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay
To mould me Man, did I solicit thee
From darkness to promote me?
Paradise Lost, X, 743–745

How is this like what the monster says to Victor?
8. What now is Victor’s moral obligation? To help the monster survive and be happy? Or to destroy the monster? Explain your opinion.

Chapter 17

In this chapter the monster makes a surprising request of Victor. Ask yourself: Is the monster’s request fair to humankind?
sirocco (sirocco) A hot, humid wind from the south.
1. The monster offers several arguments on behalf of its request. Which do you think is strongest?
2. Victor reacts on several levels to the monster’s plea. What does his sense of justice tell him? His sense of fear? His sense of guilt?
3. Some eighteenth century philosophers idealized the “noble savage.” It lived in far-off islands or forests and was naturally good until it came in contact with society, which corrupted and rejected it. How is this idea related to Frankenstein?

Chapter 18

Victor’s father wants him to marry Elizabeth. Victor agrees, but first he must carry out a terrible plan that he cannot tell anyone about. Watch for foreshadowing.

1. What does Victor plan to do before marrying Elizabeth? Where does he plan to do this?
2. Where do you think the monster is while Victor is away? Where does Victor think he might be?
3. Victor’s “gush of sorrow” comes near the end of the chapter, just after the poem. Explain his questions. What events-to-come do they seem to foreshadow?

Chapter 19

As he and Clerval reach the British Isles, Frankenstein suffers increasing anguish about his assignment.

1. Compare Frankenstein’s feelings as he works on this project to what he felt as he worked on his first one.
2. Frankenstein says, “I am a blasted tree; the bolt has entered my soul.” Early in the novel, in Chapter 2, he described an oak tree that is struck by lightning. Why is this a good comparison? How does it help you to understand how Victor feels now?

Chapter 20

Victor is at work on his new creation when suddenly—and violently—everything changes. Watch for important plot turns and major changes in Victor’s plans and moods. Prepare for an unexpected twist at the end of the chapter, too.

1. Who appears at the window while Victor is working? What decision does Victor make because of this encounter? What fears help him to make his decision?
2. Before this, the monster called Victor “creator” and pleaded with Victor to make him happy. What is the
monster’s attitude toward Victor now? What threat does he make? What does Victor think he means?

3. Victor has been in a state of deep despair. How and why does his experience at sea change his attitude about life? Do you feel his new attitude will last? Why or why not?

4. Why are the Irish people so hostile to Victor when he reaches shore? What do they think he has done?

Chapter 21

Frankenstein is prevented from leaving Ireland for a reason that stuns him—and us. Note Mary Shelley’s use of elements of the Gothic novel here, including terrifying visions, torture, squalid dungeons, and more.

assizes Court sessions for trials held at certain times.

maladie du pays Homesickness.

laudanum A dangerous drug sometimes used in those days to calm the nerves or lessen pain.

1. When Victor sees the dead body, he reacts violently. “Two I have already destroyed…” What does he mean?

2. Describe his physical and mental reaction.

3. What part does circumstantial evidence play here? How is this like what happened to Justine?

Chapter 23

The honeymoon begins and Frankenstein’s tale to Walton reaches its climax. Read on!

1. Elizabeth realizes Victor’s anxiety, though she does not know what he fears. What single act will destroy their happiness forever?

2. What happens to Victor’s father?

3. How does Victor hope to make the judge believe his story? How does the judge react?

Chapter 24

Victor relates how he pursued the monster and how he finally met Walton. During this final chapter, the narrator changes once more, and we come full circle to the Arctic Ocean and Robert Walton’s letters to his sister. In the letters, Walton finishes the terrible story of Victor Frankenstein. Listen carefully to Victor’s final warning.
Contemporary Criticism

The following selections are taken from the Norton Critical edition of Frankenstein

John Croker, *The Quarterly Review*, January 1818

"Our readers will guess from this summary, what a tissue of horrible and disgusting absurdity this work presents....it is, indeed, '...a tale / Told by an ideot (sic), full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing.'...Our taste and our judgment alike revolt at this kind of writing,...it inculcates no lesson of conduct, manners, or morality; it cannot mend, it will not even amuse its readers....the wearied reader, after a struggle between laughter and loathing, [is] in doubt whether the head or the heart of the author be the most diseased."

Anonymous, *Edinburgh Magazine*, March 1818

"There never was a wilder story imagined, yet,...it has an air of reality to it, by being connected with the favourite projects and passions of the times. The real events of the world have, in our day, too, been of so wondrous and gigantic a kind,...there is much power and beauty, both of thought and expression,...it is somewhat too long, grave and laborious."

Anonymous, *Gentleman's Magazine*, April 1818

"This Tale [Frankenstein] is evidently the production of no ordinary Writer; and, though we are shocked at the idea of the event on which the fiction is founded, many parts of it are strikingly good, and the description of the scenery is excellent."

Anonymous, from *Knight's Quarterly*, Aug. - Nov. 1824

"I think Frankenstein possess extreme power..... Frankenstein is, I think, the best instance of natural passions applied to supernatural events...The most unskilful thing in the book is the extreme ugliness of the being whom Frankenstein creates." The subsequent discussion of the monster on page 199 follows:
The most unskilful thing in the book is the extreme ugliness of the being whom Frankenstein creates. It is not natural, that to save himself additional trouble from the minuteness of the parts, he should create a giant. He must have known the vast danger of forming one of such bodily power, whose mind it would take a considerable time to mould into humanity. Besides, though it is highly natural that the features which had been chosen individually as perfect, and which appeared so even when combined in the lifeless figure, should, on their being rationally and unceremoniously formed, have an incongruous and unartfully aspect; yet, it is not at all probable, that one with Frankenstein's science should have formed a creature of such "appalling hideousness." It is utterly inconceivable also, that he should have let the monster (as he is somewhat unfairly called) escape;—one of the thoughts which must, one would imagine, have been uppermost in his mind during his labours, would have been the instructing his creature intellectually as he had formed him physically.

In the account which the creature gives of his instruction by means of watching the polished cottagers, the hastiness of the composition is the most apparent. Indeed, nothing would require such extreme trouble and carelessness as a correct representation of the mind of one who had (from whatever circumstances) reached maturity without any acquired knowledge. Those things which, from having been known to us before the period to which our remembrances reach, appear to be part of our innate consciousness, would be perfect novelty to such a being. Not only speech would be non-existent but even sight would be imperfect in him. In short, it would require much thought and some physical knowledge, joined (as I before said) to the greatest care, to render such a description at once full and accurate. In Frankenstein what there is of it is sufficiently interesting in itself, but it suggests so frequently how much more it might be wrought out, that it brings strongly into view its own imperfections.

For my own part, I confess that my interest in the book is entirely on the side of the monster. His eloquence and persuasion, of which Frankenstein complains, are so because they are truth. The justice is indisputably on his side, and his sufferings are, to me, touching to the last degree. Are there any sufferings, indeed, so severe as those which arise from the sensation of dereliction, or, (as in this case) of isolation? Even the slightest tinge of those feelings, arising as they often do from trivial circumstances, as from passing a solitary evening in a lone and distant situation—even these, are bitter to a severe degree. What it must be, then,—what it is to feel oneself alone in the world! Fellow-feeling is the deepest of all the needs which Nature has implanted within us. The impulses which lead us to the physical preservation of our life are scarcely stronger than those which impel us to communion with our fellows. Alas! then to have no fellows!—to be, with feelings of kindness and beneficence, the object of scorn and hate to every one whose eyes lighted on us!—to be repaid with blows and wounds for the very benefits we confer!—The poor monster always, for these reasons, touched me to the heart. Frankenstein ought to have reflected on the means of giving happiness to the being of his creation, before he did create him. Instead of that, he heaps on him all sorts of abuse and contumely for his ugliness, which was directly his work, and for his crimes to which his neglect gave rise.
Modern Criticism

The following annotations are for those criticisms found in the Norton Critical Edition of Frankenstein that may be of the most use to IHS students. They are listed in order of appearance in the text.

1) Christopher Small: "[Percy] Shelley and *Frankenstein*" pp. 205 - 208
   This suggests that Victor Frankenstein is modeled after Percy Shelley - interesting reading.

2) George Levine: "*Frankenstein and the Tradition of Realism*" pp. 208 - 214
   This discusses Godwin's rationalist ethics, points out parallel characters, and discusses the presentation of the family unit.

3) Ellen Moers: "Female Gothic: The Monster's Mother" pp. 214 - 224
   This presents the idea that the Gothic novel is a female version of the picaresque novel. It discusses *Frankenstein* as a birth myth and goes into detail regarding Mary Shelley's own experiences.

4) Mary Poovey: "'My Hideous Progeny': The Lady and the Monster" pp. 251 - 261
   This includes Locke, the Enlightenment, the Romantics.

   This selection focuses on Justine and uses her to suggest that, "Had [Mary Shelley] wanted to indict true woman for passive weakness, Mary would have made Justine's fate dependent upon her giving in. Instead, the young woman holds out as long as acquittal remains a possibility....When she asks 'what could I do?' (82), Mary Shelley has made sure that we can only answer, Not enough, poor thing."

   Perhaps the most useful part of this lengthy selection is found on pp. 279-280 where Mellor discusses what causes Victor Frankenstein to destroy the unfinished female creature intended for his monster (p. 279), and the parallel between the description of Elizabeth's death and a painting by Henry Fuseli, believed to be intentional (refer to the footnote in the text, p. 280).
7) Marilyn Butler: "Frankenstein and Radical Science" pp. 302 - 313
   This presents interesting historical background, much of it about the Shelley's friend
   Professor Lawrence's views on "natural man", including a section on "The Wild Boy of
   Aveyron" (p. 308), influences of Rousseau and the observation that, "When it comes to
   parenting, Frankenstein is himself a monster" (p. 311).

8) Lawrence Lipking: "Frankenstein, the True Story; or, Rousseau Judges Jean Jacques"
   pp. 313 - 322
   Lipking spends most of this essay noting that critics disagree on interpretations, and
   should. "Anything goes....No book seems better suited to this free-for-all." He points out
   the current popularity of identifying with the victim (p.320) and notes that Rousseau's
   influence is evident in the central question that, "If nature makes everything good, and
   nature makes man, how does man come to be so unnatural, to love deformity, to make
   everything bad? The answer, of course, is society, whose institutions stifle nature and
   disfigure the humanity formed by the Author of things" (p. 322).
MARY SHELLEY

Frankenstein

Complete, Authoritative Text with
Biographical and Historical Contexts,
Critical History, and Essays from
Five Contemporary Critical Perspectives

EDITED BY

Johanna M. Smith

University of Texas at Arlington

This book, from which the cultural, feminist,
Marxist and psychoanalytical criticisms are
excerpted, is on reserve in the library. The

It includes a more detailed definition of each
type of criticism as well as the full text of
each essay.
Cultural Criticism

and

Frankenstein

WHAT IS CULTURAL CRITICISM?

What do you think of when you think of culture? The opera or ballet? A performance of a Mozart symphony at Lincoln Center, or a Rembrandt show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art? Does the phrase "cultural event" conjure up images of young people in jeans and T-shirts or of people in their sixties dressed formally? Most people hear "culture" and think "High Culture." Consequently, most people, when they first hear of cultural criticism, assume it would be more formal than, well, say, formalism. They suspect it would be "highbrow," in both subject and style.

Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, one of the goals of cultural criticism is to oppose culture with a capital C, in other words, that view of culture which always and only equates it with what we sometimes call "high culture." Cultural critics want to make the term culture refer to popular culture as well as to that culture we associate with the so-called classics. Cultural critics are as likely to write about "Star Trek" as they are to analyze James Joyce's Ulysses.

Thus, she explains Frankenstein's ability to persist in popularity over the centuries, among a range of socioeconomic classes and via a variety of forms, by showing it to be a hybrid form, a variegated thread twisted together of sensational, middle-class sentimental, and philosophical strands. In the process, she provides a strikingly original reading, one that shows not only how a cultural debate lies behind a text but also how it is foregrounded within the text. For she shows that Frankenstein is as much about good and bad education, salutary books, and (Cornelius Agrippa's) corrupting, "sad trash," as it is about ghouls and their horrifying acts.
WHAT IS FEMINIST CRITICISM?

Feminist criticism comes in many forms, and feminist critics have a variety of goals. Some are interested in rediscovering the works of women writers overlooked by a masculine-dominated culture. Others have revisited books by male authors and reviewed them from a woman’s point of view to understand how they both reflect and shape the attitudes that have held women back.

Since the early 1970s three strains of feminist criticism have emerged, strains that can be categorized as French, American, and British. These categories should not be allowed to obscure either the global implications of the women’s movement or the fact that interests and ideas have been shared by feminists from France, Great Britain, and the United States. British and American feminists have examined similar problems while writing about many of the same writers and works, and American feminists have recently become more receptive to French theories about femininity and writing. Historically speaking, however, French, American, and British feminists have examined similar problems from somewhat different perspectives.

French feminists have tended to focus their attention on language.

While it has been customary to refer to an Anglo-American tradition of feminist criticism, British feminists tend to distinguish themselves from what they see as an American overemphasis on texts linking women across boundaries and decades and an underemphasis on popular art and culture. They regard their own critical practice as more political than that of American feminists, whom they have often faulted for being uninterested in historical detail.

A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE
ON FRANKENSTEIN

JOHANNA M. SMITH

“Cooped Up”:
Feminine Domesticity in Frankenstein

It is important to note that Frankenstein was published anonymously, that its woman author kept her identity hidden. Similarly, no women in the novel speak directly: everything we hear from and about them is filtered through the three masculine narrators. In addition, these women seldom venture far from home, while the narrators and most of the other men engage in quests and various public occupations. These facts exemplify the nineteenth century’s emerging doctrine of “separate spheres,” the ideology that split off the (woman’s) domestic sphere from the (man’s) public world and strictly defined the “feminine” and “masculine” traits appropriate to each sphere. My essay will analyze the operations of this ideology in the writing of Frankenstein and in the novel itself.
Marxist Criticism
and
Frankenstein

WHAT IS MARXIST CRITICISM?

To be a modern Marxist literary critic, it is not necessary to be a political revolutionary. Nor is it necessary to like only those literary works with a radical social vision or to dislike books that represent or even reinforce a middle-class, capitalist world view. It is necessary, however, to adopt what most students of literature would consider a radical definition of the purpose and function of literary criticism.

More traditional forms of criticism, according to the Marxist critic Pierre Macherey, “are...out to deliver the text from its own silences by coaxing it into giving up its true, latent, or hidden meaning.” Inevitably, however, non-Marxist criticism “intrude[s] its own discourse between the reader and the text” (qtd. in Bennett 107). Marxist critics, by contrast, do not attempt to discover hidden meanings in texts. Or, if they do, they do so only after seeing the text, first and foremost, as a material product to be understood in broadly historical terms.

The English working class had entered the political stage, but in forms that could only appear monstrous to contemporary observers. The first wave of this movement, from 1811 to 1813, consisted of the mass action of workers bent on resisting the introduction of new technologies, particularly into the textile industry. By reducing the numbers of workers necessary to the production process, new industrial developments added to what was already a crisis of unemployment. This movement amounted to a clandestine army under the command of the mythical General Ludd (in fact, no such leader existed). The “Luddites” sacked factories and smashed the new “labor-saving machines.” As their movement receded in the face of violent repression on the part of the British state, it was quickly succeeded by a wave of popular agitation against high prices and rents. Mass demonstrations were common; violent confrontations with the state only slightly less so. It was a time when talk of the threat or hope of revolution (according to one’s perspective) was common. At the very moment that Frankenstein was published, the British state suspended various civil rights (including that of habeas corpus) in order more effectively to counter the growing combativevity of the unemployed and the working poor.

Mary Shelley’s work is incontestably interwoven in this history: it bears witness to the birth of that monster, simultaneously the object of pity and fear, the industrial working class (Moretti). A dense network of resemblances appears to allow us to identify Frankenstein’s monster with the emergent proletariat. The monster is monstrous by virtue of its being artificial rather than natural; lacking the unity of a natural organism, the monster is a factitious totality assembled from (the parts of) a multitude of different individuals, in particular, the “poor,” the urban mass that, because it is a multitude rather than an individual, is itself as nameless as Frankenstein’s “creation.” It is also significant that the term “creation” is used at all to describe the origins of the monster. For the monster is a product rather than a creation, assembled and joined together not so much by a man (if such were the case the monster might be allotted a place in the order of things) as by science, technology, and industry, whose overarching logic subsumes and subjects even the greatest geniuses.
Psychoanalytic Criticism and Frankenstein

WHAT IS PSYCHOANALYTIC CRITICISM?

It seems natural to think about novels in terms of dreams. Like dreams, novels are fictions, inventions of the mind that, although based on reality, are by definition not literally true. Like a novel, a dream may have some truth to tell, but, like a novel, it may need to be interpreted before that truth can be grasped.

There are other reasons why an analogy between dreams and novels seems natural. We can live vicariously through romantic fictions, much as we can through daydreams. Terrifying novels and nightmares affect us in much the same way, plunging us into an atmosphere that continues to cling, even after the last chapter has been read — or the alarm clock has sounded. Thus it is not surprising to hear someone say that Mary Shelley's Frankenstein is "like a dream." It describes dreams, it frightens like a nightmare, and it is a structure that allows author and reader to explore wishes, fears, and fantasies.

The notion that dreams allow such psychic explorations, of course, like the analogy between literary works and dreams, owes a great deal to the thinking of Sigmund Freud, the famous Austrian psychoanalyst.

Frankenstein, the Monster, and the Imaginary Mother

is the reader who calls Frankenstein a nightmarish tale a Freudian literary critic? And is it even valid to apply concepts advanced in 1900 to a novel written in the first half of the nineteenth century?

To some extent the answer to the first question has to be yes. Freud is one of the reasons it seems "natural" to think of literary works in terms of dreams. We are all Freudians, really, whether or not we have read anything by Freud. At some time or another, most of us have referred to ego, id, complexes, unconscious desires, and sexual repression. The premises of Freud's thought have changed the way the Western world thinks about itself. To a lesser extent, we are all psychoanalytic interpreters as well. Psychoanalytic criticism has influenced the teachers our teachers learned from, the works of scholarship and criticism they read, and the critical and creative writers we read as well.

What Freud did was develop a language that described, a model that explained, a theory that encompassed human psychology. Many of the elements of psychology he sought to describe and explain are present in the literary works of various ages and cultures, from Sophocles' Oedipus Rex to Shakespeare's Hamlet to Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. When the great novel of the twenty-first century is written, many of these same elements of psychology will probably inform its discourse as well.

If, by understanding human psychology according to Freud, we can appreciate literature on a new level, then we should acquaint ourselves with his insights.

Freud's theories are either directly or indirectly concerned with the nature of the unconscious mind. Freud didn't invent the notion of the unconscious; others before him had suggested that even the supposedly " sane" human mind was conscious and rational only at times, and even then at possibly only one level. But Freud went further, suggesting that the powers motivating men and women are mainly and normally unconscious.

Freud, then, powerfully developed an old idea: that the human mind is essentially dual in nature. He called the predominantly rational, irrational, unknown, and unconscious part of the psyche the id, or "it." The ego, or "I," was his term for the predominantly rational, logical, orderly, conscious part. Another aspect of the psyche, which he called the superego, is really a projection of the ego. The superego almost seems to be outside of the self, making moral judgments, telling us to make sacrifices for good causes.

Victor's search for a substitute mother does not take the normative oedipal path. Typically, the son relinquishes his mother and desires a person who resembles her. Margaret Homans argues that in effect the son gives up the physical mother and desires a figurative representation of her, a substitute for her in the realm of language or social relations. Homans goes on to propose that Victor's development is quite typical, because he attempts to recreate his mother in his scientific, intellectual project and thus in the realm of language (Homans 9–10, 101–2, 107).
Frankenstein - Themes

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

Dangerous Knowledge

The pursuit of knowledge is at the heart of Frankenstein, as Victor attempts to surge beyond accepted human limits and access the secret of life. Likewise, Robert Walton attempts to surpass previous human explorations by endeavoring to reach the North Pole. This ruthless pursuit of knowledge, of the light (see “Light and Fire”), proves dangerous, as Victor’s act of creation eventually results in the destruction of everyone dear to him, and Walton finds himself perilously trapped between sheets of ice. Whereas Victor’s obsessive hatred of the monster drives him to his death, Walton ultimately pulls back from his treacherous mission, having learned from Victor’s example how destructive the thirst for knowledge can be.

Sublime Nature

The sublime natural world, embraced by Romanticism (late eighteenth century to mid-nineteenth century) as a source of unrestrained emotional experience for the individual, initially offers characters the possibility of spiritual renewal. Mired in depression and remorse after the deaths of William and Justine, for which he feels responsible, Victor heads to the mountains to lift his spirits. Likewise, after a hellish winter of cold and abandonment, the monster feels his heart lighten as spring arrives. The influence of nature on mood is evident throughout the novel, but for Victor, the natural world’s power to console him wanes when he realizes that the monster will haunt him no matter where he goes. By the end, as Victor chases the monster obsessively, nature, in the form of the Arctic desert, functions simply as the symbolic backdrop for his primal struggle against the monster.

Monstrosity

Obviously, this theme pervades the entire novel, as the monster lies at the center of the action. Eight feet tall and hideously ugly, the monster is rejected by society. However, his monstrosity results not only from his grotesque appearance but also from the unnatural manner of his creation, which involves the secretive animation of a mix of stolen body parts and strange chemicals. He is a product not of collaborative scientific effort but of dark, supernatural workings.

The monster is only the most literal of a number of monstrous entities in the novel, including the knowledge that Victor used to create the monster (see “Dangerous Knowledge”). One can argue that Victor himself is a kind of monster, as his ambition, secrecy, and selfishness alienate him from human society. Ordinary on the outside, he may be the true “monster” inside, as he is eventually consumed by an obsessive hatred of his creation. Finally, many critics have described the novel itself as monstrous, a stitched-together combination of different voices, texts, and tenses (see Texts).
Secrecy

Victor conceives of science as a mystery to be probed; its secrets, once discovered, must be jealously guarded. He considers M. Krempe, the natural philosopher he meets at Ingolstadt, a model scientist: “an uncouth man, but deeply imbued in the secrets of his science.” Victor’s entire obsession with creating life is shrouded in secrecy, and his obsession with destroying the monster remains equally secret until Walton hears his tale. Whereas Victor continues in his secrecy out of shame and guilt, the monster is forced into seclusion by his grotesque appearance. Walton serves as the final confessor for both, and their tragic relationship becomes immortalized in Walton’s letters. In confessing all just before he dies, Victor escapes the stifling secrecy that has ruined his life; likewise, the monster takes advantage of Walton’s presence to forge a human connection, hoping desperately that at last someone will understand, and empathize with, his miserable existence.

Texts

Frankenstein is overflowing with texts: letters, notes, journals, inscriptions, and books fill the novel, sometimes nestled inside each other, other times simply alluded to or quoted. Walton’s letters envelop the entire tale; Victor’s story fits inside Walton’s letters; the monster’s story fits inside Victor’s; and the love story of Felix and Safie and references to Paradise Lost fit inside the monster’s story. This profusion of texts is an important aspect of the narrative structure, as the various writings serve as concrete manifestations of characters’ attitudes and emotions. Language plays an enormous role in the monster’s development. By hearing and watching the peasants, the monster learns to speak and read, which enables him to understand the manner of his creation, as described in Victor’s journal. He later leaves notes for Victor along the chase into the northern ice, inscribing words in trees and on rocks, turning nature itself into a writing surface.
Fear is the real monster in our lives

Douglas J. Green/Guest Columnist

Frankenstein tells the story of the monstrous things we create, and become, when we give into fear.

Her creature is not that lumbering, grunting, brain-damaged movie monster, rather a being blessed with high intelligence and imagination. The speed with which it learns is only surpassed by the speed with which it moves.

The creature does look frightening. But reactions to him are more frightening. When it appears people scramble about screaming and swinging wildly. The more the creature is pushed away, the more terrified and terrifying it becomes. The more terrifying it appears and acts, the more fearful, rage-filled, and revengeful others become. Whatever you do, do not let the monster out.

The monster turns to us, sheer atrocity and savagery. It never even had a chance. It looks like a human creature. It does not care what you do to it. It is the case with all the work of fiction. Even the creature's creator, Dr. Frankenstein, rejects it. When he sees it first, he runs away, hiding in his bedroom, hoping it will simply disappear. Denial, though, is seldom a wise strategy.

Running away from anything or anyone alien, foreign, difficult or scary backfires. Anxiety and apprehension thrive in ignorance and isolation. Cutting oneself off from others and their insights, as Frankenstein did in his work, leaves one in a frightful position. A little knowledge, even highly specialized knowledge, is a dangerous thing.

Like love at first sight, fear at first sight requires investigation and outside verification. Unchallenged perceptions about anything or anyone, including ourselves, can mutate into monsters.

Fear simmers within addictions to drugs, alcohol, food, sex, work. Repressed fear crawls beneath anger, macho politics, intellectual pride, unbridled ambition. It masquerades in name-calling, putdowns, sarcasm, labels, racial, religious and sexual stereotypes.

Unacknowledged fear breeds greed, galloping consumerism, religious fanaticism, scientific dogmatism, political extremism. Ignoring fear only makes things worse.

Victor Frankenstein can no longer deny his monster fears, he seeks to kill what he fears. But fear is woven throughout all emotions. Killing fear always kills much more. In the end, the good doctor turns monstrous and murderous as his creature, destroying himself and all he loves.

When afraid, we hunker down, narrow our vision, assume a bunker mentality. Trusting only the most familiar, anything new or different looks like an enemy. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see what happens next. But it may take a good novelist or monster to show us, rocket scientists included, how it happened.

"Monster" comes from the Latin meaning "omen or divine warnign." Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, subtitled "The Modern Prometheus," warns of the hell we create in refusing to accept our human fears. No wonder she often quotes Paradise Lost.

As with much art, doubt what is left out may be as significant as what is left in. He completely blacked out putting one to imagine other possibilities.

What if the characters had reacted differently seeing the creature? What if they had understood fear as natural, normal, nothing to fear. What if they had known "fear" originally means "to try, risk, lead?" And realized the more one risks and tries to lead through fear, the less frightening it becomes?

What if they had prevented their initial "apprehension" from becoming Frankensteinized, and instead, worked with and through it to arrive at a deeper understanding of what "apprehension" can mean? And what might our world be, if we did the same?

It is a haunting question.

The Rev. Dr. Douglas J. Green is Senior Minister at the First Congregational Church of Illinois, and coordinator of the Tompkins County Religious Workers' reading of Frankenstein.
"The End of Philosophy" By DAVID BROOKS  New York Times  April 7, 2009

Socrates talked. The assumption behind his approach to philosophy, and the approaches of millions of people since, is that moral thinking is mostly a matter of reason and deliberation: Think through moral problems. Find a just principle. Apply it.

One problem with this kind of approach to morality, as Michael Gazzaniga writes in his 2008 book, "Human," is that "it has been hard to find any correlation between moral reasoning and proactive moral behavior, such as helping other people. In fact, in most studies, none has been found."

Today, many psychologists, cognitive scientists and even philosophers embrace a different view of morality. In this view, moral thinking is more like aesthetics. As we look around the world, we are constantly evaluating what we see. Seeing and evaluating are not two separate processes. They are linked and basically simultaneous.

As Steven Quartz of the California Institute of Technology said during a recent discussion of ethics sponsored by the John Templeton Foundation, "Our brain is computing value at every fraction of a second. Everything that we look at, we form an implicit preference. Some of those make it into our awareness; some of them remain at the level of our unconscious, but ... what our brain is for, what our brain has evolved for, is to find what is of value in our environment."

Think of what happens when you put a new food into your mouth. You don’t have to decide if it’s disgusting. You just know. You don’t have to decide if a landscape is beautiful. You just know.

Moral judgments are like that. They are rapid intuitive decisions and involve the emotion-processing parts of the brain. Most of us make snap moral judgments about what feels fair or not, or what feels good or not. We start doing this when we are babies, before we have language. And even as adults, we often can’t explain to ourselves why something feels wrong.

In other words, reasoning comes later and is often guided by the emotions that preceded it. Or as Jonathan Haidt of the University of Virginia memorably wrote, "The emotions are, in fact, in charge of the temple of morality, and ... moral reasoning is really just a servant masquerading as a high priest."

The question then becomes: What shapes moral emotions in the first place? The answer has long been evolution, but in recent years there’s an increasing appreciation that evolution isn’t just about competition. It’s also about cooperation within groups. Like bees, humans have long lived or died based on their ability to divide labor, help each other and stand together in the face of common threats. Many of our moral emotions and intuitions reflect that history. We don’t just care about our individual rights, or even the rights of other individuals. We also care about loyalty, respect, traditions, religions. We are all the descendents of successful cooperators.

The first nice thing about this evolutionary approach to morality is that it emphasizes the social nature of moral intuition. People are not discrete units coolly formulating moral arguments. They link themselves together into communities and networks of mutual influence.

The second nice thing is that it entails a warmer view of human nature. Evolution is always about competition, but for humans, as Darwin speculated, competition among groups has turned us into pretty cooperative, empathetic and altruistic creatures — at least within our families, groups and sometimes nations.
The third nice thing is that it explains the haphazard way most of us lead our lives without destroying dignity and choice. Moral intuitions have primacy, Haidt argues, but they are not dictators. There are times, often the most important moments in our lives, when in fact we do use reason to override moral intuitions, and often those reasons — along with new intuitions — come from our friends.

The rise and now dominance of this emotional approach to morality is an epochal change. It challenges all sorts of traditions. It challenges the bookish way philosophy is conceived by most people. It challenges the Talmudic tradition, with its hyper-rational scrutiny of texts. It challenges the new atheists, who see themselves involved in a war of reason against faith and who have an unwarranted faith in the power of pure reason and in the purity of their own reasoning.

Finally, it should also challenge the very scientists who study morality. They’re good at explaining how people make judgments about harm and fairness, but they still struggle to explain the feelings of awe, transcendence, patriotism, joy and self-sacrifice, which are not ancillary to most people’s moral experiences, but central. The evolutionary approach also leads many scientists to neglect the concept of individual responsibility and makes it hard for them to appreciate that most people struggle toward goodness, not as a means, but as an end in itself.
Where do moral rules come from? From reason, some philosophers say. From God, say believers. Seldom considered is a source now being advocated by some biologists, that of evolution.

At first glance, natural selection and the survival of the fittest may seem to reward only the most selfish values. But for animals that live in groups, selfishness must be strictly curbed or there will be no advantage to social living. Could the behaviors evolved by social animals to make societies work be the foundation from which human morality evolved?

In a series of recent articles and a book, "The Happiness Hypothesis," Jonathan Haidt, a moral psychologist at the University of Virginia, has been constructing a broad evolutionary view of morality that traces its connections both to religion and to politics.

Dr. Haidt (pronounced height) began his research career by probing the emotion of disgust. Testing people's reactions to situations like that of a hungry family that cooked and ate its pet dog after it had become roadkill, he explored the phenomenon of moral dumbfounding — when people feel strongly that something is wrong but cannot explain why.

Dumbfounding led him to view morality as driven by two separate mental systems, one ancient and one modern, though the mind is scarcely aware of the difference. The ancient system, which he calls moral intuition, is based on the emotion-laden moral behaviors that evolved before the development of language. The modern system — he calls it moral judgment — came after language, when people became able to articulate why something was right or wrong.

The emotional responses of moral intuition occur instantaneously — they are primitive gut reactions that evolved to generate split-second decisions and enhance survival in a dangerous world. Moral judgment, on the other hand, comes later, as the conscious mind develops a plausible rationalization for the decision already arrived at through moral intuition.

Moral dumbfounding, in Dr. Haidt's view, occurs when moral judgment fails to come up with a convincing explanation for what moral intuition has decided.

So why has evolution equipped the brain with two moral systems when just one might seem plenty?

"We have a complex animal mind that only recently evolved language and language-based reasoning," Dr. Haidt said. "No way was control of the organism going to be handed over to this novel faculty."

He likens the mind's subterranean moral machinery to an elephant, and conscious moral reasoning to a small rider on the elephant's back. Psychologists and philosophers have long taken a far too narrow view of morality, he believes, because they have focused on the rider and largely ignored the elephant.

Dr. Haidt developed a better sense of the elephant after visiting India at the suggestion of an anthropologist, Richard Shweder. In Bhubaneswar, in the Indian state of Orissa, Dr. Haidt saw that people recognized a much wider moral domain than the issues of harm and justice that are central to Western morality. Indians were concerned with integrating the community through rituals and committed to concepts of religious purity as a way to restrain behavior.

On his return from India, Dr. Haidt combed the literature of anthropology and psychology for ideas about morality throughout the world. He identified five components of morality that were common to most cultures. Some concerned the protection of individuals, others the ties that bind a group together.

Of the moral systems that protect individuals, one is concerned with preventing harm to the person and the other with reciprocity and fairness. Less familiar are the three systems that promote behaviors developed for
strengthening the group. These are loyalty to the in-group, respect for authority and hierarchy, and a sense of purity or sanctity.

The five moral systems, in Dr. Haidt’s view, are innate psychological mechanisms that predispose children to absorb certain virtues. Because these virtues are learned, morality may vary widely from culture to culture, while maintaining its essential role of restraining selfishness. In Western societies, the focus is on protecting individuals by insisting that everyone be treated fairly. Creativity is high, but society is less orderly. In many other societies, selfishness is suppressed “through practices, rituals and stories that help a person play a cooperative role in a larger social entity,” Dr. Haidt said.

He is aware that many people — including “the politically homogeneous discipline of psychology” — equate morality with justice, rights and the welfare of the individual, and dismiss everything else as mere social convention. But many societies around the world do in fact behave as if loyalty, respect for authority and sanctity are moral concepts, Dr. Haidt notes, and this justifies taking a wider view of the moral domain.

The idea that morality and sacredness are intertwined, he said, may now be out of fashion but has a venerable pedigree, tracing back to Emile Durkheim, a founder of sociology.

Dr. Haidt believes that religion has played an important role in human evolution by strengthening and extending the cohesion provided by the moral systems. “If we didn’t have religious minds we would not have stepped through the transition to groupishness,” he said. “We’d still be just small bands roving around.”

Religious behavior may be the result of natural selection, in his view, shaped at a time when early human groups were competing with one another. “Those who found ways to bind themselves together were more successful,” he said.

Dr. Haidt came to recognize the importance of religion by a roundabout route. “I first found divinity in disgust,” he writes in his book “The Happiness Hypothesis.”

The emotion of disgust probably evolved when people became meat eaters and had to learn which foods might be contaminated with bacteria, a problem not presented by plant foods. Disgust was then extended to many other categories, he argues, to people who were unclean, to unacceptable sexual practices and to a wide class of bodily functions and behaviors that were seen as separating humans from animals.

“Imagine visiting a town,” Dr. Haidt writes, “where people wear no clothes, never bathe, have sex ‘doggie style’ in public, and eat raw meat by biting off pieces directly from the carcass.”

He sees the disgust evoked by such a scene as allied to notions of physical and religious purity. Purity is, in his view, a moral system that promotes the goals of controlling selfish desires and acting in a religiously approved way.

Notions of disgust and purity are widespread outside Western cultures. “Educated liberals are the only group to say, ‘I find that disgusting but that doesn’t make it wrong,’” Dr. Haidt said.

Working with a graduate student, Jesse Graham, Dr. Haidt has detected a striking political dimension to morality. He and Mr. Graham asked people to identify their position on a liberal-conservative spectrum and then complete a questionnaire that assessed the importance attached to each of the five moral systems. (The test, called the moral foundations questionnaire, can be taken online, at www.YourMorals.org.)

They found that people who identified themselves as liberals attached great weight to the two moral systems protective of individuals — those of not harming others and of doing as you would be done by. But liberals assigned much less importance to the three moral systems that protect the group, those of loyalty, respect for authority and purity.
Conservatives placed value on all five moral systems but they assigned less weight than liberals to the moralities protective of individuals.

Dr. Haidt believes that many political disagreements between liberals and conservatives may reflect the different emphasis each places on the five moral categories.

Take attitudes to contemporary art and music. Conservatives fear that subversive art will undermine authority, violate the in-group’s traditions and offend canons of purity and sanctity. Liberals, on the other hand, see contemporary art as protecting equality by assailing the establishment, especially if the art is by oppressed groups.

Extreme liberals, Dr. Haidt argues, attach almost no importance to the moral systems that protect the group. Because conservatives do give some weight to individual protections, they often have a better understanding of liberal views than liberals do of conservative attitudes, in his view.

Dr. Haidt, who describes himself as a moderate liberal, says that societies need people with both types of personality. “A liberal morality will encourage much greater creativity but will weaken social structure and deplete social capital,” he said. “I am really glad we have New York and San Francisco — most of our creativity comes out of cities like these. But a nation that was just New York and San Francisco could not survive very long. Conservatives give more to charity and tend to be more supportive of essential institutions like the military and law enforcement.”

Other psychologists have mixed views about Dr. Haidt’s ideas.

Steven Pinker, a cognitive scientist at Harvard, said, “I’m a big fan of Haidt’s work.” He added that the idea of including purity in the moral domain could make psychological sense even if purity had no place in moral reasoning.

But Frans B. M. de Waal, a primatologist at Emory University, said he disagreed with Dr. Haidt’s view that the task of morality is to suppress selfishness. Many animals show empathy and altruistic tendencies but do not have moral systems.

“For me, the moral system is one that resolves the tension between individual and group interests in a way that seems best for the most members of the group, hence promotes a give and take,” Dr. de Waal said.

He said that he also disagreed with Dr. Haidt’s alignment of liberals with individual rights and conservatives with social cohesiveness.

“It is obvious that liberals emphasize the common good — safety laws for coal mines, health care for all, support for the poor — that are not nearly as well recognized by conservatives,” Dr. de Waal said.

That alignment also bothers John T. Jost, a political psychologist at New York University. Dr. Jost said he admired Dr. Haidt as a “very interesting and creative social psychologist” and found his work useful in drawing attention to the strong moral element in political beliefs.

But the fact that liberals and conservatives agree on the first two of Dr. Haidt’s principles — do no harm and do unto others as you would have them do unto you — means that those are good candidates to be moral virtues. The fact that liberals and conservatives disagree on the other three principles “suggests to me that they are not general moral virtues but specific ideological commitments or values,” Dr. Jost said.

In defense of his views, Dr. Haidt said that moral claims could be valid even if not universally acknowledged.

“It is at least possible,” he said, “that conservatives and traditional societies have some moral or sociological insights that secular liberals do not understand.”
ESSAY QUESTIONS for Mary Shelley's novel Frankenstein

Due Monday, March 16

1. John Croker, a contemporary of Mary Shelley, wrote in The Quarterly Review of January 1818 that Frankenstein is "...a tale /Told by an idiot (sic), full of sound and fury,/Signifying nothing.' Our taste and our judgment alike revolt at this kind of writing,...it inculcates no lesson of conduct, manners, or morality; it cannot mend, it will not even amuse its readers....the wearied reader, after a struggle between laughter and loathing, [is] in doubt whether the head or the heart of the author be the most diseased."

What "lesson of conduct, manners, or morality" might the modern reader find in Frankenstein? Choose one lesson you believe the novel conveys and use textual support for your claims. Your thesis statement should state the lesson clearly, and the support from the novel should be evident in multiple places in the work, so that you are able to provide three strong examples in your essay, developing each example in its own paragraph that incorporates quotations from the text smoothly.

2. In M. H. Abrams's Glossary of Literary Terms, Abrams defines "the picaresque narrative...[as] the escapades of an insouciant rascal who lives by his wits, and shows little if any alteration of character through the long succession of his adventures; picaresque fiction is realistic in manner, episodic in structure, and usually satiric in aim" (111). In M. H. Abrams's Glossary of Literary Terms, he defines bildungsroman as "...'novels of education.' The subject of these novels is the development of the protagonist's mind and character, as he passes from childhood through varied experiences — and usually through a spiritual crisis — into maturity and the recognition of his identity and role in the world" (112-113).

To what extent might Frankenstein be considered picaresque, as claimed by critic Ellen Moers in her essay titled, "Female Gothic: The Monster's Mother"? To what extent might the novel be considered a bildungsroman? Make a case for ONE literary label, discounting the other label as part of your argument, as in: Although some might view the novel Frankenstein in this light (choose ONE: picaresque or bildungsroman), the novel is more accurately described as (choose ONE: picaresque or bildungsroman). You must provide support using quotations from the text.

3. Hubris is the tragic flaw that brings about the downfall of many characters in literature. What is the basis for the hubris exhibited by Victor Frankenstein? How do the gods punish him for his hubris? This tale may be considered a tragedy only if Victor Frankenstein has a "moment of truth" where he recognizes that he alone brought about his downfall; is this tale a tragedy? Explain your choice. Set the stage with Aristotle’s definition of tragedy, and then apply each element to Frankenstein as appropriate.

4. Frankenstein is a prime example of the gothic genre of literature, popularized during the Romantic Period. What gothic elements are apparent in this novel, and how are they representative of the Romantic Period? Be sure to incorporate your understanding of the era as a reaction to the Enlightenment, and the relationship of the novel to the Industrial Revolution. Construct your essay
so that you move from the general ideas (context of the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution) to the specific (details from the novel that illustrate the gothic genre).