Mary Shelley and her Daemons

Biography

Letters on the Origins of *Frankenstein*

1831 Preface by M. W. Shelly

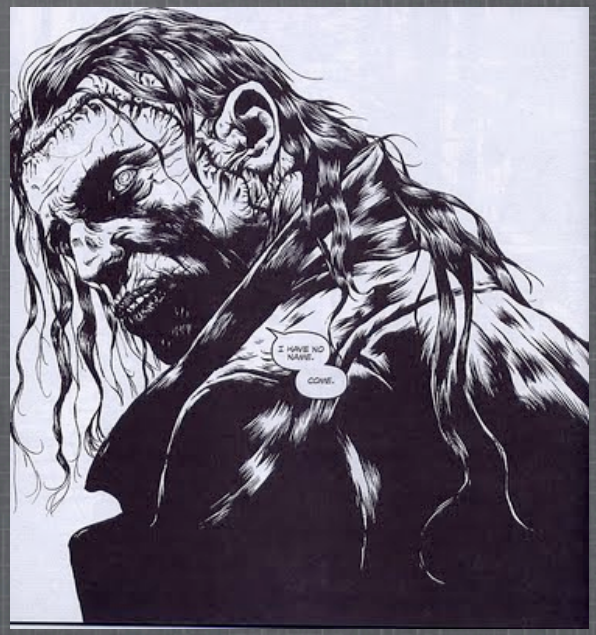
The 4 Big Myths of *Frankenstein*

VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN

Myth #1:
Frankenstein is not the name of a monster, it is the name of a scientist that created the monster.

HALLOWEEN MONSTER

Myth #2:
The original Frankestein's monster has yellowish skin, long dark hair, and not bolts in his neck; however, he IS massive



GRRRR...

Myth #3:
The monster of the novel is agile, strong, NOT afraid of fire, and can speak eloquently.

AUTHOR:

Myth #4:
***Frankenstein*, perhaps the most iconic monster story of all time, was NOT written by a man.**

MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN

- Driving Questions:
  - How is the Frankenstein story of the novel different from the modern day myth; why has the story evolved so much?
  - How does Mary Shelley integrate her own fears into the novel to make it more than a mere ghost story?
  - Is Frankenstein's monster human? Why or why not?

THE "BIRTH" OF FRANKENSTEIN

- About the Author
- An epic ghost story contest
- Approaches for analysis
  - Biographical
    Feminist
    Mythological
- Common Themes
  - Light/Dark

    Parenthood

    Femininity vs. Masculinity

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley

- Born Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin
  - Father: William Godwin
  - Mother: Mary Wollstonecraft
- M. W. G.'s mother (M. W.) died 11 days after giving birth
- Mary raised with her half sister Fanny Imlay *(see Letter)*

Growing up Godwin

- Mary's early years appeared happy with her father, who provided her with an informal education
- William Godwin, in deep debt, married Mary Jane Clairemont; Mary and her step mother did not get along
- William Godwin managed to pay his debts by borrowing more, and by turning to philosophical devotes

- Born (Aug. 1797) and raised in Somers Town, a central district in London, England

Percy Shelley and a life of scandal

- In 1814, Mary Godwin began a romantic affair with one her father's followers: Percy Bysshe Shelley - rich, married, 22 y/o
- The two traveled Europe together along with Mary's stepsister, Claire Clairemont
- When they returned from traveling, Mary was pregnant with Percy's baby; they faced social ostracism
- They traveled together, losing their first child soon after birth; Mary and Percy would lose 3 of their 4 children, all at young ages
- Mary and Percy were married late in 1816 - after the summer spent in Geneva, and after Percy's first wife had committed suicide (while pregnant with P.'s 3rd child)

Who's Who in Mary Shelley's World

- Father: William Godwin
- 1756 - 1836
- Famous political philosopher
- Remarried when Mary was 4
- Known as a political radical; advocated for anarchism

Who's Who in Mary Shelley's World

- Mother: Mary Wollstonecraft
- 1759 - 1797
- Famous feminist author; enlightenment thinker
- Best known for *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*
- Also known, in her time, for a series of ill-fated affairs
- Had a daughter, Fanny, who would be Mary's half sister

"My own sex, I hope, will excuse me, if I treat them like rational creatures, instead of flattering their fascinating graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone."

Who's Who in Mary Shelley's World

- Husband: Percy Bysshe Shelley
- Young, educated, aristocratic English poet; one of the most famous of the Romantic period
- Known for epic poems like: *Mont Blanc, Prometheus Unbound, Ode to the West Wind*
- Was married when he started affair with Mary
- Died in a sailing accident at 30

Who's Who in Mary Shelley's World

- Lord George Gordon Byron
- Part of Romantic period; friend and co-traveler of Shelleys
- Famous not just for his poetry, but for his life of excess: huge debts, scandalous love affairs
- "Mad, bad, and dangerous to know."
- Known for epic narrative poems like *Child Herald* and *Don Juan*

Travels to Geneva

- The Shelley / Byron crew decides to travel to Geneva in the summer of 1816
- Mary and Percy's affair is made public
- Mary (in letters) seems very unimpressed with Geneva
- A rainy summer = lots of time inside reading, listening to ghost stories

Geneva as Mary Shelley would have experienced it

Coming up with the idea...

- Mary spent most of the summer preoccupied with pregnancy and motherhood
- Shelley and Byron would talk about science/philosophy; she would listen quietly
- According to Polidori: one night, there was a story so scary that P. Shelley had to leave the room; it was soon after that Byron suggested they have a ghost story competition
- At first, Mary had a severe case of writer's block
- One night, she has a vivid nightmare about a frenzied scientist creating a huge monster that then waits over him while he sleeps
- She wakes up the morning after the dream, horrified and shaken, but with a realization: she has an idea! She makes the announcement that morning

Biographical Criticism: Motherhood

- Mary Shelley's idea for Frankenstein was born out of her fears of becoming a mother
- While pregnant, she was having nightmares about monsters
- In her diary, she found herself asking questions like:
  ~ *Could I still love my baby if it was ugly?*
  ~ *Could my baby ever want to kill me?*
  ~ *Could I ever want to kill my baby?*

Preface to 1831 version

- Mary notes that she grew up thinking of stories; she always had a wild imagination
- Also notes that Byron inspired her as he wrote all the time, was always sharing stories; when the ghost story competition came along, he was one of the only other ones to write one
- When she finally gets an idea for the story, she starts at Ch. 5 with, "It was a dreary night..."
- References made in preface:
  - Literary:
    - *Hamlet*
    - *Romeo & Juliet*
  - Mythological:
    - Prometheus
    - Ganesha
  - Scientific:
    - Dr. Darwin (Not Charles)
    - Galvan (Electricity / Galvanization)

CHAPTER BY CHAPTER

- Ch. 1-3: Backstory about Victor Frankenstein's life
- Ch. 4: Victor becomes obsessed with science / with the idea of giving life to a human form
- Ch. 5: The monster comes to life, and Victor rejects it; Clerval arrives and nurses Victor back to health
- Ch. 6: Victor gets a letter from home (Geneva) and it lifts his spirits; a family friend, Justine, is visiting

Beware: for I am fearless, and therefore powerful!

- Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch. 20