

WORLDVIEW GUIDE

FRANKENSTEIN



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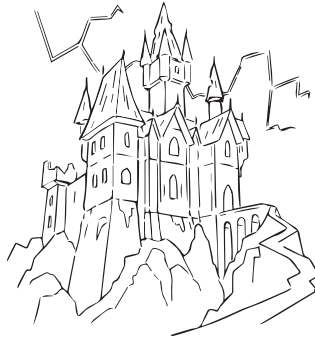
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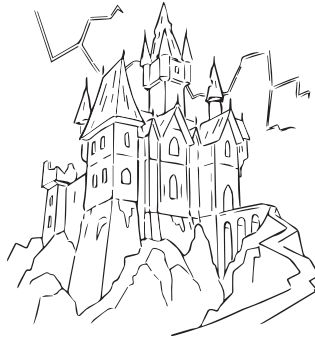


INTRODUCTION

Young Victor Frankenstein leaves his family to attend University with dreams of curing humanity from illnesses like the one that overcame his mother. Possessed by the thrill of uncovering nature's secrets, Victor discovers the *élan vitale*, the secret to generating life. His ambition drives him into a sickly obsession for the next year, rifling through graveyards, carefully crafting a new humanity, an Adam to a new human race—one that would call him their god.

And it works.

Before him, prostrate on a table, lies the fruit of his terrible labor. Everything has gone to plan. That is, until the creature opens his eyes....

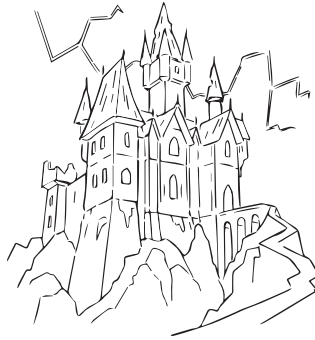


THE WORLD AROUND

Any teacher worth their salt will tell you history is complicated, and nothing gives a better picture of that fact like the world around Mary Shelley's life.

The late 18th century was a time of *Revolution!* and Mary's parents were in the middle of it all in England. Across the Atlantic Sea, the American Revolution's first shot rang out in 1775. Shortly after the end of that war, tensions in France came to a head in the storming of the Bastille. The French Revolution quickly turned into a vicious cycle of bloodletting on the guillotine.

It was in Paris during the Revolution that one journalist, crossing the square in the hunt for her story, slipped and fell in a puddle. She was horrified when she realized that it hadn't been rain or water tossed to clean the street, but a pool of blood. This journalist was Mary Wollstonecraft, the mother of Mary Shelley. Mary Wollstonecraft would contribute much to the intellectual air of the time, and is



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary Shelley's life was a deeply unhappy one. Like her work, it was marked by extreme, untethered passion and turmoil. She was born August 30th, 1797 to social radicals Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin. Her mother died eleven days later due to complications with her delivery. Mary was received by her older sister Fanny (from a previous relationship her mother had had with a soldier), and a little sister Claire would be added less than a year later, after William Godwin's remarriage.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, a married man and disciple of her father's anarchical works, wrote to Godwin about his great influence on his life. Godwin was used to passionate young men eager to apprentice under him, but when Percy made it clear he would like to become a patron, Godwin's posture towards the stranger became very open. In his letters, Godwin would tell Shelley that he and the girls were eager to know more about his past and passions. It



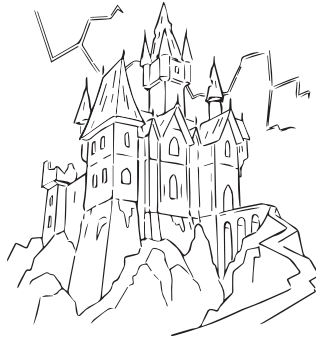
SETTING, CHARACTERS, AND PLOT SUMMARY (600 WORDS)

Setting:

Frankenstein begins and ends in the Arctic Ocean. The plot is mainly centered in Switzerland.

Main Characters:

- **Robert Walton:** An explorer on an expedition in the Arctic tundra. His are the first and last words of the novel in his letters to his sister Margaret. He rescues Victor, who, after learning more about his rescuer, discloses his marvelous cautionary tale.
- **Victor Frankenstein:** Victor is the creator of the monster
- **The Monster:** Victor's regrettable creation, *not* named Frankenstein, despite modern confusion.
- **Elizabeth Lavenza:** Victor's bride
- **William Frankenstein:** Victor's little brother
- **Alphonse Frankenstein:** Victor's father



WORLDVIEW ANALYSIS

Frankenstein, the genesis of the horror genre, began with friends gathered around a campfire telling ghost stories. For a modern generation raised on *Goosebumps* it's a little too good to be true.

The promiscuous crew trying to scare one another senseless consisted of a *who's-who* of the literary scene at the time: Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Polidori, Mary Godwin, and her little sister Claire. Little did they know, the story Mary told that night would far outlive its author.

Two hundred years after publication, Mary's story hasn't slowed a bit. In the introduction to the latest illustrated edition of *Frankenstein*, famous director Guillermo Del Toro says that *Frankenstein* provided his "road to Damascus" moment:

It illuminated the reason I loved monsters, my kinship with them, and showed me how deep, how life-changing a monster parable could be—how it could function as art and how it could reach across

distance and time and become a palliative to solitude and pain.⁵

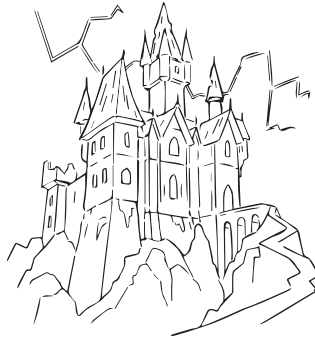
He continues that every time we read her novel,

. . . we try, in return, to help (Mary's) creature stay alive. We strive to turn a curse into a blessing . . . We hope that in some way, somehow, our gratitude, our love, can reach him like a whispered prayer, like a distant song. And we dream that perhaps he can stop—amid the frozen tundra and the screaming wind—and turn his head and look back. At us. And we hope that then he might recognize in our eyes his own yearning. And that perchance we can walk toward each other and find meager warmth in our embrace. And then, if only for a moment, we will not feel alone in the world.⁶

Del Toro and critics like him illustrate how often *Frankenstein* is misread, construing the monster into a mistreated and misunderstood minority. If only Victor and the other characters had exhibited any hospitality or empathy or at the very least provided him a wife, then maybe he'd have been as well adjusted as any person we might know. One only wonders if Del Toro had been there to open the mead hall door and offer that stray pup Grendel a seat with the rest of them with his own cup of mead, *Beowulf* would read differently too.

5. *The New Annotated Frankenstein*, ed. Leslie S. Klinger (New York: W.W. Norton, 2017), xvi.

6. *Ibid.*, xvi-xvii.



21 SIGNIFICANT QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. How do the letter bookends aid the novel?

The opening and closing letters provide the scope of the sandwiched story of Victor Frankenstein. An ambitious man (Walton) rescues a crazed man (Frankenstein) who offers ominous warnings. The crazed man offers his testimony in order that the ambitious man might repent of their shared madness.

2. How are Victor and Robert similar? How are they different?

Upon hearing about Robert's hopes and dreams ("of acquiring knowledge which I sought, for the dominion he should acquire and transmit over the elemental foes of our race," p. 15), Victor's heart sinks. He hears the very same intemperate passion that brought about his ruin. Their difference is primarily