

<http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/SheFran.html>

Shelley and Book Background: Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797-1851) British writer, wife of Percy Bysshe Shelley and daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft, is best known as the author of "Frankenstein" (1818).

- Self-educated writer and student of literature.
- Dads Friends: Charles Lamb, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Percy Bysshe Shelley.
- Mom was famously published: Vindication of the Rights of Women (feminist)
- Romanticism (1798-1832)
 - Grew out of a revolt against the previous age of the Restoration and Enlightenment, aka Neoclassicism for literature.
 - Also political revolt: French Revolution, laissez faire economics, rights of the "common man" come to the fore.
 - Revolutions in science: electricity, biology, greater depth of causes instead of effects,
 - How do science and nature relate to the individual, how is the individual part of nature?
- William Wordsworth – Preface to Lyrical Ballads
 - The spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings...
 - Language of the common man – exaltation of the individual...
 - Experimentation rather than rigid conformity to classic literary forms
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge – the willful suspension of disbelief
- Finding truth in nature and the supernatural:
 - The beauty of nature over the "truth" of government, religion
 - The awesome & terrible power of nature and its unknown supernatural
 - How does man relate and find meaning in nature/supernatural?
 - Hope, dreams, feelings

The Backstory: Writer's create a contest – Shelley thinks of story in a "dream," influenced by conversations with other authors.

Prometheus: was the Titan god of forethought and crafty counsel who was entrusted with the task of moulding mankind out of clay. His attempts to better the lives of his creation brought him into direct conflict with Zeus. Firstly he tricked the gods out of the best portion of the sacrificial feast, acquiring the meat for the feasting of man. Then, when Zeus withheld fire, he stole it from heaven and delivered it to mortal kind hidden inside a fennel-stalk. As punishment for these rebellious acts, Zeus ordered the creation of Pandora (the first woman) as a means to deliver misfortune into the house of man, or as a way to cheat mankind of the company of the good spirits. Prometheus meanwhile, was arrested and bound to a stake on Mount Caucasus where an eagle was set to feed upon his ever-regenerating liver (or, some say, heart). Generations later the great hero Herakles came along and released the old Titan from his torture. (<http://www.theoi.com/Titan/TitanPrometheus.html>)

Psychology: The key to truly unlocking the genius of this book is the underlying psychologies of Victor and his Creature. To this end, we will probably look at two or three psychological theories and see how

our characters can be understood through them. Most of the other characters are archetypes or stock characters, though as such, they do serve a purpose in illustrating other ways of thinking. In some ways, the story leans heavily towards allegory in this way. ***What is Shelley teaching us about human nature? In other words, what are the themes?***

Suspense: The story itself does have suspense and external conflict that will be apparent enough. The real suspense, though, will be found in the unfolding of Victor's inner struggle as well as that of his Creature. ***How does the psychological development and downfall of the characters in this story serve as the tension points of the story? How is this the REAL story of Frankenstein?***

Preface: Is just the backstory.

The Frame Narrative – Victor tells Walton a story which is conveyed by letter to Margaret Saville, Walton's sister. Later, we also get the point of view of the Creature, who also tells the story of another family. ***Why do this?***

The Letters:

I: Walton expresses to his sister his drive to discover amazing things at the North Pole. He also explores his reasons for doing so, what he went through to get to this point, how it defines him. ***Note how this parallels Victor's background in the text itself.***

II: His want of a friend, a like mind and soul. Tells the story of his hired shipmate who exiled himself so that his promised bride could marry the man she really loved. ***How would you characterize Walton? What does his need for a like-mind tell us about human needs?***

III. Just an update from the sea. All is well.

IV. The apparition of a gigantic sledge driver & subsequent rescue of Victor. Getting to know Victor – his countenance and the wonder his creates in Walton – to the point that Walton thinks this may be the friend he has wished for. Here we also find that Walton shares his "quest" for knowledge and Victor decides to warn him of the perils of such pursuit. Victor offers to share his story, ostensibly analogous to Walton's, to serve as empathy and a warning to Walton. ***Note the parallels between Walton and Victor. Why is Shelley doing this?***

Chapter 1: Understanding Victor - Family Background & Childhood

- **EQ: Establish what his childhood says about him.**
 - His family background; the relationship between his parents.
 - What lasting traits will he retain? What kind of person do you expect him to be?
 - His self esteem, what his world view might be
 - His relationship with Elizabeth
- **LISTEN TO HIS LANGUAGE** – the vocabulary, the music of it, the elevated tone
 - This is a reflection of two things: Shelley's voice but more importantly, who Victor is.
 - Look back at the letters:

- Walton's description of Victor's language: *He is so gentle, yet so wise; his mind is so cultivated, and when he speaks, although his words are culled with the choicest art, yet they flow with rapidity and unparalleled eloquence. Find examples of this in Victor's narrative!*
- The difference between Walton's voice and Victor's Voice.

Chapter 2: Understanding Victor – Elizabeth, Henry, and The Power of the Sciences (plural)

- **Elizabeth:** Close relationship and wondrous family life. Elizabeth pursued her interests in beauty and poetry – classic romanticism.
- **Henry:** Also a romantic, pursuing the expression of human greatness and virtue.
 - *What qualities do each character represent in relation to Victor? What do they have in common? How are they different?*
- **Science!** First and foremost, Victor was fascinated not just by science but the grand possibilities of science, the secrets of life and death, the meaning of life.
 - Development of his interest in alchemy, ancient science - father not discouraging him enough
 - His switch to natural philosophy (science) - his wild switch from one pursuit to another
What does this tell us about him?
 - *What do the last two paragraphs mean?*

Chapter 3: Understanding Victor – Death/Grief, Elizabeth, The Furtherance of Science

- **Death of Caroline**
 - Elizabeth: Caroline's desire that she and Victor marry & Elizabeth's grace in response to Caroline's death.
 - Emphasis on his descriptions of grief and death – note the feeling, the language.
 - *What do his descriptions reveal about Victor: his attitude towards death, ability to accept it?*
- **Further Science in College**
 - Krempe tells Victor ancient science is bunk but is such a lout that Victor is still intrigued by it.
 - Waldman gracefully indulges Victor such that he can retain his fascination with the ancients while fully investing in modern science.
 - He calls his day with Waldman that decided his future destiny. *Explain how this might be. What do Victor's meanderings through science allow us to infer about his fate?*