



CORE CLASSICS

ABRIDGED FOR YOUNG READERS

Frankenstein

BY MARY SHELLEY

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Frankenstein

or, the Modern Prometheus

by

Mary Shelley

CORE CLASSICS®

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INTRODUCTION

1831 EDITION

In selecting *Frankenstein* for publication, my publisher expressed a wish that I would give some account of the origin of the story. I am the more willing to do so, because in this way I shall also give a general answer to the question, so frequently asked me—*how was it that I, then a young girl, came to think of, and to expand upon, so very hideous an idea?*

It is not surprising that, as the daughter of two distinguished writers, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, I should very early in life have thought of writing. As a child I scribbled, and my favorite pastime, in my free time, was to “write stories.” Writing was a great pleasure to me, but an even greater pleasure was the formation of “castles in the air.” I loved to indulge myself in daydreams. I spent many hours following out trains of thought and working out imaginary incidents. My dreams were more fantastic and more agreeable than my writings. In the latter I was a close imitator—

William Godwin: a radical philosopher and novelist, 1756-1836

Mary Woolstonecraft: an early feminist and political writer, 1759-1797, author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) and *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792).

seeking to do things others had done rather than putting down the suggestions of my own mind. What I wrote was intended at least for one other reader—my childhood companion and friend, but my dreams were all my own. I accounted for them to nobody; they were my retreat when annoyed and my greatest pleasure when free.

I lived mostly in the country as a girl, and I spent a good deal of time in Scotland. I made occasional visits to the more picturesque parts, but my usual residence was on the blank and dreary northern shores of the Tay, near Dundee. Blank and dreary I call them now, but they were not so to me then. They were a shelter for freedom and the pleasant region where I could connect with the creatures of my imagination. I wrote then—but in a most commonplace style. It was beneath the trees of the grounds belonging to our house, or on the bleak sides of the woodless mountains nearby, that my true compositions, the airy flights of my imagination, were born and fostered. I did not make myself the heroine of my tales. My own life seemed too ordinary to make a good story. I did not think that I would ever experience romantic worries or wonderful events, but I was not confined to my own identity, and I could fill the hours with creations far more interesting to me, at that age,

than my own sensations.

After this my life became busier, and reality tended to displace fiction. My husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley, however, was from the first, very anxious that I should prove myself worthy of my literary parentage and achieve some fame as a writer. But for a long time I did nothing. I was busy travelling and taking care of a family. I did spend many hours improving my mind by reading and discussing things with my husband, but I accomplished very little with my pen.

In the summer of 1816, we visited Switzerland, where we were neighbors of Lord Byron. At first we spent many pleasant hours on Lake Geneva, or wandering on its shores. Lord Byron, who was writing the third canto of *Child Harold's Pilgrimage*, was the only one among us who put his thoughts upon paper. We had the pleasure of reading his verses as he wrote them.

Percy Bysshe Shelley: English Romantic poet, 1792-1822, noted for his radicalism. Some lines from his poetry are included in the novel that follows.

Lord Byron: English Romantic poet, 1788-1824, very popular and quite scandalous – so much so that he was forced to leave England and lived most of his adult life in Europe.

Child Harold's Pilgrimage: a mostly autobiographical poem; the first two cantos (parts) made Byron famous; later cantos added to his celebrity.

Unfortunately, it turned out to be a wet, unpleasant summer, and rainstorms often confined us to the house for several days at a time. Some volumes of ghost stories fell into our hands. There was the tale of the Inconstant Lover, who, when he went to embrace his lover, found himself instead in the arms of the pale ghost of her whom he had deserted. There was the tale of the sinful founder of his race, whose miserable fate it was to give the kiss of death to all the younger sons of his fated house, just when they reached the age of promise. Eternal sorrow sat upon his face as he bent down and kissed the forehead of the boys, who from that hour withered like flowers snapped from the stem. I have not seen these stories since then, but their events are as fresh in my mind as if I had read them yesterday.

“We will each write a ghost story,” said Lord Byron, and his proposal was accepted. There were four of us. Byron began a tale, a fragment of which he printed at the end of his poem, *Mazeppa*. My husband began a story based on the experiences of his early life. Our friend John William Polidori wrote a story about a vampire.

Polidori's story, *The Vampyre*, published in 1819, was the first vampire tale published in England.