

“Misery Has Come Home:” Suicide and Family Connections in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*

Shelby Johnson

Born to well-known parents, married to a radical poet, and acquainted with people who refused to adhere to social norms, Mary Shelley’s life and works have been critiqued and examined by interested academics for decades. Much has been said about her most popular novel, *Frankenstein* (1818). Written at the age of eighteen and published anonymously at the age of twenty, Shelley’s *Frankenstein* examines themes of Godlike knowledge, creation, mental illness, and the opposing powers of life and death. Referencing the groundbreaking science of her day, Shelley draws on what it means to hold the power of life over death, as witnessed in both the reanimation of the creature composed of corpses, and the constant contemplation of suicide by both Victor and his creation. First conceived as part of a challenge to create a ghost story, Shelley’s novel takes on a personal edge as it explores the ghosts of her past in relation to the suicide attempts of her mother, as well as the encounters with suicide within Shelley’s social circle. The novel alternates between the first-person perspectives of Frankenstein and his creation, giving the text an autobiographical approach that appeals to both Shelley’s life and the fictional lives of her characters.

The dual perspectives of Frankenstein and the monster he created offer insight into the deepest recesses of the living mind. Victor Frankenstein and his creation demonstrate what happens when man tries to control the powers of life and death. Fueled with ambition to create “A new species [that] would bless me as its creator” (Shelley 82), Victor sacrifices mental and emotional health in pursuit of his goals. Horrified and disgusted by the creature he had intended to be beautiful, Victor spirals into a psychological collapse from which he never truly recovers. Driven mad by guilt and the desire for revenge, Victor is plagued by thoughts of suicide and finds himself battling with the polarizing power of life and death while the creature, alone and unprepared for the life that he has been thrust into, begs for companionship and salvation from isolation. Unwilling to create such a companion, Victor’s life plunges deeper into despair while the creature kills Victor’s friends and family in retaliation for Victor’s refusal before finally taking his own life.

Through examination of eighteenth-century attitudes toward suicide during the time of Shelley’s writing, alongside an exploration of eighteenth-century resuscitation methods publicized as a way of bringing the dead back to life, this paper will investigate the connection between both the cultural acceptance and Shelley’s personal experiences with suicide in relation to the portrayal of suicide in the novel. In so doing, this paper claims that the motifs of life and death are not merely Gothic tropes in use, but an exploration of the human mind through an expression of autobiographical writing. By examining the correlation between Shelley’s own life and the events of her novel, I argue that the attempted suicide of her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, and the suicides of both Mary Shelley’s half-sister, Fanny Imlay, and her husband’s former wife, Harriet Shelley, are reflected in the attitudes and actions of the characters in ways that neither condemn nor condone the action of taking one’s own life. Instead, I propose that the novel approaches the subject of suicide with sympathy and understanding, suggesting compassion rather than judgement for those who struggle with suicidal ideation.

In order to understand the significance of suicide in *Frankenstein*, we must first examine how self-murder was regarded leading up to the 1818 publication of the novel. Prior to the Enlightenment, acts of suicide were punishable under common law and considered a damnable sin. Historian Michael MacDonald explains, “The guilty were designated as *felones de se*, felons of themselves; the innocent were returned as persons *non compos mentis*, lunatics” (70). This distinction between lunacy and felons of themselves was the only explanation offered in early Britain as to why people committed suicide, and those considered guilty of being *felons de se* were punished after death along with their living family members. MacDonald explains:

Suicide was regarded as a heinous crime in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England, a kind of murder committed at the instigation of the devil. Suicides were tried posthumously, and if they were found to have been sane when they took their lives, they were severely punished. Their moveable property was forfeited to the crown or to the holder of a royal patent; their bodies were buried profanely, interred in a public highway or at a crossroads, pinioned in the grave with a wooden stake. (69)

As seen in the above example regarding the deceased’s property, the living relatives of the deceased were punished as they lost the belongings at times, their only source of income, in addition to losing a loved one to suicide. Before the Enlightenment, the response to suicide was harshly punitive. The punishment of suicide victims was carried out mostly between 1500-1660, before tapering off in favor of labeling the majority of those who committed suicide as insane. As science advanced into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the penal response to suicide decreased as the result of a more secular view of the world. MacDonald observes, “The ruling classes lost faith in the devil’s power to drive people to kill themselves; [and] coroners’ juries gradually ceased punishing men and women who took their own lives” (74). This turn from religious to secular thinking regarding suicide resulted in suicide beginning to be un-

derstood as coming from something related more to emotional anguish than satanic influence and sin.

Along with the rise of understanding mental distress, a popularized view of suicide began to emerge, largely due to the publication of Johann Wolfgang van Goethe’s novel, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. A tragedy, Werther’s novel ends in suicide as he is unable to cope with the devastation he feels when the love of his life marries another. The novel, as MacDonald points out, “excited the admiration—and occasionally the emulation—of writers and romantic youths” (80). This emulation known as “Wertherism” or the “Werther effect” is part of the culture that fueled the romanticism of suicide during the Romantic era that Shelley later found herself writing in. Social researcher Derick Beattie and psychiatrist Dr. Patrick Devitt also commented on the fanaticism caused by Goethe’s work in their study on suicide, noting:

It was widely believed at the time that Goethe’s work led to a wave of young men deciding to end their lives all over Europe. Some men who killed themselves were discovered dressed in the same manner as Goethe’s descriptions of Werther. Others used a similar pistol. Copies of the novel were even found beside a number of suicide victims . . . the copies found at the scenes of these deaths were frequently open to the page at which the suicide occurs. (8)

In short, suicide became fashionable. It was no longer the criminally minded or possessed who killed themselves. It was the emotional and sensitive who were driven to end their own lives.

This drastic shift from insane criminal behavior to idolized sacrifice became a popularized public belief throughout the early nineteenth century. What was once seen as an abomination to God became a trend for those affected by emotions too strong for the world in which they lived. Poems about the beauty of death and the power of emotion began to be published as the romanization of suicide took hold. This trend was usually attributed to the upper class where, as Lisa Lieberman points out:

The mere mention of suicide invited speculation. What secret, what anguish, what previously unsuspected depth of character might have prompted the tragic act? This most private of decisions became, by virtue of its finality, a provocative public statement. (612)

In other words, Lieberman suggests that suicide was no longer a shameful sin to bury privately but a scandalous act that invited speculation. However romanticized the event may have been, the act of suicide still required the family to pay the social ramifications that followed such a public action. Despite the tragedy left in its wake, the publicity and fame now associated with suicide transformed it into a phenomenon within the Romantic era; it became an art belonging to sensitive souls who departed from the harshness of the world in a dramatic style.

As noted above, Mary Shelley was familiar with suicide. While she never knew her mother, she was well aware that as a young woman, her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, had attempted suicide twice. Richard K. Sanderson discusses the methods Wollstonecraft employed in her efforts to end her life. He notes that in her first attempt, “[She] took an overdose of laudanum . . . in the second, she jumped from Putney Bridge into the Thames” (51). Both methods are actions that did not kill Wollstonecraft, but were methods that young Mary Shelley would later see emulated by close acquaintances. Thus, while it was ultimately not suicide that killed Wollstonecraft, the absence and attempts of her mother impacted young Shelley’s life. She visited her mother’s gravestone frequently as a child and came to know the woman who had died giving birth to her only through her works and the stories of those who had known Wollstonecraft while she was living.

Wollstonecraft’s suicide attempts occurred around the same time the public’s view on suicide was beginning to become more lenient. Sanderson goes on to claim that Wollstonecraft’s husband William Godwin considered Wollstonecraft to be “a female Werter” (51). The absence of her mother and her status as a child of a “female Werter” may have been what

contributed to Shelley’s depiction of the self-education of the creature in *Frankenstein*. Devoid of parents, the creature teaches himself to understand speech and human interaction through reading various books he finds. One of the books discovered by the creature is Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Werther*.

Concerning the book, the creature states:

I thought Werter himself a more divine being that I had ever beheld or imagined; . . . The disquisitions upon death and suicide . . . fill[ed] me with wonder . . . I found myself similar, yet at the same time strangely unlike the beings concerning whom I read. (Shelley 153)

The creature’s admiration of and specific reference to Werther is notable considering the scandal Goethe’s novel caused at its publication. While the creature has no intentions of ending his life at this point in the novel, it is worth noting that the foundation of his education begins with the knowledge of suicide’s existence. Like Shelley herself, the creature is introduced not only to the concept of life and death at a very young age, but also to an individual’s power to decide whether one lived or died.

Wollstonecraft’s suicide attempts were not the only encounters with suicide that Shelley experienced in her personal life. Shelley again came in contact with suicide as a young woman when her lover, Percy Shelley, suggested they kill themselves in an act of devotion (Sanderson 51). Mary Shelley’s reaction to Percy’s suggestion is not known. Despite the family connection with suicide and the invitation by Percy, Shelley is not known to have ever attempted suicide herself. While it would continue to be a theme later in her life with the suicide of both her half-sister Fanny Imlay Godwin by laudanum, and of Percy’s pregnant wife, Harriet, by drowning, Shelley’s thoughts on suicide are unknown. There is little to no mention of their deaths in either her letters or her personal journals. However, after the death of her sister Fanny, Shelley’s father, William Godwin, refused to identify or claim the body and it was interred in a pauper’s grave with the explanation that she had died of fever (Sanderson 52). While we do not know why Godwin

refused to claim his daughter's body for certain, it was likely done to avoid the stigma of suicide that persisted despite the development of more accepting attitudes. Surrounded by so much death, it is little wonder why Shelley undertook a novel about resurrecting the dead.

Around the same time as the secularization and popularization of suicide took hold, a new science viewed as having the potential to revive the dead was discovered in Amsterdam. Common as it is now, the possibility of resuscitation was seen as a miracle science and societies that popularized the technique spread all over the European continent and into England. Originally referred to as the Society for the Recovery of Persons Apparently Drowned, the name was changed to the much simpler Humane Society. The original Amsterdam Humane Society founded in 1768 was led by ten directors, including most notably a man by the name of Johann Goll van Frankenstein. As the popularity of resuscitation grew, pamphlets were distributed and classes were held on how to harness this life-restoring power.

In 1774, William Hawes and Thomas Cogan created their own branch in London known as the London Royal Humane Society devoted to studying resuscitation. Strikingly, Mary Shelley's mother was rescued by these new life saving efforts after her attempted suicide at Putney Bridge. Included in a biography of Wollstonecraft's life written by Elizabeth Robins Pennell, a letter Wollstonecraft wrote to her lover Gilbert Imlay contains complaints about the jarring sensation of being resuscitated. Wollstonecraft recalls, "I have only to lament, that, when the bitterness of death was past, I was inhumanly brought back to life and misery . . . If I am condemned to live longer, it is a living death" (242).

While various methods on resuscitation were taught during this time, the new and exciting science of Galvanism believed to cure every ailment through the application of electric shock quickly found its way into the practice of resuscitation. One of the surviving instruction manuals from the Royal Humane Society in London offers a series of four steps on how to revive

a drowned person with step number four claiming: “ELECTRICITY may be early employed, as it will not prevent or obstruct the various means of resuscitation; but on the other hand will render the plan of recovery more expeditiously and certainly efficacious” (Williams 216). While it is never outright mentioned in the text, it is largely assumed that the power with which the fictional Victor Frankenstein bestows life upon his creature is electricity. Shelley alludes to the potential of electricity being the source of the creature’s resurrection in the introduction of the 1831 edition of her novel. She explains, “Perhaps a corpse would be re-animated; galvanism had given token of such things: perhaps the component parts of a creature might be manufactured, brought together, and endued with vital warmth” (Project Gutenberg). Shelley would have been aware of and inspired by the advances of science in her day. Regardless of whether electricity was the source behind the re-animation of the corpse, the similarities between the science of Shelley’s day and the action undertaken by her fictional protagonist create a biographical link that establishes Shelley’s work as a reflection of the events in her life.

An auto-didact, Shelley met many scientists and intellectuals at a young age through her father, William Godwin. Later, when married to Percy Shelley, her interest in the advances of science continued. Taking into account her intellectual background and the similarity in names between the director of the resuscitation society and her novel’s main character, the connection is impossible to ignore. Indeed, in 1791, The Royal Humane Society published a report that seems to echo the sentiment of the fictional Victor Frankenstein’s motivation to resurrect the dead. In an article discussing the history of the Humane Societies, author Carolyn Williams quotes the 1791 report that asks:

HOW MANY GODLIKE SENTIMENTS MUST YOU HAVE BEEN DEPRIVED OF IN WITNESSING THAT THE APPARENTLY DEAD HAVE BEEN RAISED INTO EXISTENCE, AND THE INANIMATE MASS HATH AGAIN BREATHED THE BREATH OF LIFE. (229)

It is this motivation of experiencing the “Godlike sentiments” of restoring life that puts Shelley’s main character on the path to his eventual destruction. When explaining why Victor undertook his experiment to resurrect the dead, he announces, “A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me” (82). By harnessing the power of life and death, Shelley’s character crosses a boundary that was not meant for mortals to encounter and he thus endures an unhappy life that, as Wollstonecraft lamented following her resuscitation, is little more than “a living death.”

One of the most striking things about Victor’s attempts at reanimation is his claim that in the process of collecting work, “I had selected [the] features as beautiful” (85). He wanted a bond with his creation akin to a parent and a child and hoped that in time he might, “renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption” (82). Victor sees his work as having the potential to restore lost loved ones to the human race.

Before departing to begin his own education and foray into the world, Victor’s mother passed from scarlet fever. He laments, “She died calmly; and her countenance expressed affection even in death. I need not describe the feelings of those whose dearest ties are rent by that most irreparable evil, the void that presents itself to the soul” (72). His interest in creating life may have been tied to the potential he saw to return the dead to the land of the living. This motivation frames his response to the creature’s waking moment:

I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! — Great God! . . . I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. (85)

Shocked with the hideous vision of animated flesh, Victor is horrified by the realization that his ability to restore life will only bring back a breathing corpse, not the affectionate countenance of his mother or other deceased loved ones.

Haunted by his actions, Victor’s mental health declines further from a state of obsession to a state of paranoid mania. Encountering his friend Henry Clerval following the reanimation of the creature, Victor finds himself cracking under the pressure of his secret act and overwhelmed with fear of being found out. Upon discovering that his creature has fled his responsibility, and has, in his mind, freed him from his burden, Victor becomes manic. “I jumped over the chairs, clapped my hands, and laughed aloud . . . [Clerval] saw a wildness in my eyes for which he could not account; and my loud, unrestrained heartless laughed, frightened and astonished him” (89). In the text, Victor’s reaction is referred to as a nervous fever, and Victor is nursed back to health by his friend over the course of several months. While still heavily tormented by his actions, Victor soon finds himself “as cheerful as before I was attacked by the fatal passion” (90) and his life moves on, though he admits to not being as psychologically resilient as before the events in his laboratory occurred.

Unfortunately for Victor, and as is true for many that struggle with episodes of mental distress, this calm period in his life does not last. The creature returns, avenging himself by killing Victor’s youngest brother, William. Distraught with grief, Victor’s emotions are further compounded by the trial and execution of Justine, a close family friend, who was accused of the murder of William. Haunted that his creation of life has now resulted in the death of two loved ones, Victor’s mental health lapses, not into a nervous breakdown, but into the depths of suicidal ideation. “I had begun life with benevolent intentions, and thirsted for the moment when I should put them in practice, and make myself useful to my fellow-beings. Now all was blasted” (117). So disturbed is he by the results of his endeavors, Victor sees little point left in living.

Sometimes, after rowing into the middle of the lake, I left the boat to pursue its own course, and gave way to my own miserable reflections. . . . often, I say, I was tempted to plunge into the silent lake, that the waters might close over me and my calamities for ever. (118)

Rather than turn toward grieving family and friends, Victor isolates himself and comes to see death as the only option to end his suffering. Victor finds himself in a spiral of constant mental anguish until he at last acknowledges, “all joy was but a mockery” (166). Victor finds himself trapped completely and irrevocably in the grip of depression.

One of the contributing factors to Victor’s unstable mental health are the methods he employs to control it. Rather than focusing on the life around him, Victor turns inward and refuses to allow the companionship of friends and family to comfort him. The most damning of all his coping mechanisms is revealed in his confession of using laudanum:

Ever since my recovery from the fever I had been in the custom of taking every night a small quantity of laudanum; for it was by means of this drug only that I was enabled to gain the rest necessary for the preservation of life. Oppressed by the reflection of my various misfortunes, I now took a double dose. (207)

Laudanum is a tincture of opium in alcohol. Highly addictive and easy to overdose on, the substance Victor Frankenstein is dependent on is the same drug that both Mary Shelley’s mother and her fiancé attempted to overdose on. In 1816, two years prior to the publication of *Frankenstein*, it was also the drug that Shelley’s half-sister Fanny Imlay used to take her own life. Though he never admits to thinking of using laudanum as a way to commit suicide, Victor does admit that, “At these moments I often endeavored to put an end to the existence I loathed; and it required unceasing attendance and vigilance to restrain me from committing some dreadful act of violence” (206). Living on suicide watch, potentially mad from the use of laudanum, and tormented with grief and despair, Victor Frankenstein’s depressive episodes and suicidal ideation have eaten away at the brilliant scientist he once was and left him a shell of a man.

A year after the publication of *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley’s own son, also named William, died at the age of three. As her fictional character Victor laments over the death of his brother,

"misery has come home" (119). Having been largely quiet on the subject of her mother's absence in life, as well as the suicides of friends and family, Shelley's silence finally breaks, and she acknowledges her grief. In her letters to friends, she recounts: "I never know one moment's ease from the wretchedness & despair that possesses me . . . I feel that I am not fit for anything & therefore not fit to live" (1201-2). While these words are suggestive of her being suicidal, Shelley does not act on her emotions. She ends her letter with the words, "But this is all nothing to anyone but myself" (1202), further isolating herself from those who may try and reach out, precluding further communication on the subject. Three years later in 1822, Shelley again experienced a period of mental distress. As she notes in a letter to her friend Maria Gisborne: "I was not well in body or mind. My nerves were wound up to the utmost irritation, and the sense of misfortune hung over my spirits" (1203). Overwhelmed with despair, Shelley admits, "My only moments of peace were on that unhappy boat, when lying down with my head on his [Percy's] knee I shut my eyes & felt the wind & our swift motion alone" (1203). Of course, this action of being out on a boat as a source of remedy is the same that Victor employs when experiencing moments of depression. It is in this quiet moment on a boat in the middle of the lake that life follows art.

The episodes of mental anguish and depression that Shelley and Victor Frankenstein experience were referred to as states of melancholia as early as the 1500s. By the time of her writing, society having moved on from seeing suicide as the result of satanic influence, began to acknowledge what Philip Barrough, a physician publishing over 250 years earlier in 1560, identified as, "the disease of melancholy," whose sufferers "desire death, and do verie often behight and determine to kill themselves" (46). Whether Shelly was familiar with Barrough or not, her work is part of a movement toward the modern understanding of mental illness. Mary Shelley's novel cultivates a sympathetic if not understanding view on taking one's own life. Painfully aware of her mother's own suicide attempts, as well as the suicides of both her sister and her husband's first wife, Shel-

ley's outlook on suicide is far more compassionate and forward thinking than many of the people of her day.

When read through the lens of early science trying to understand the workings of the human mind and the personal lens of biography, *Frankenstein* becomes a novel about the anguish of death and the suffering experienced by those who are still living. It is not the act of taking one's own life that Shelley focuses on, but the active choice to continue living despite the misfortunes and trials of mortality. As Henry Clerval notes after the murder of Victor's young brother William, "the survivors are the greatest sufferers" (100). The dead do not mourn. Rather, it is the living that are left to pick up the pieces after a loved one passes. It is the survivors that continue on despite how difficult mortal existence can be. Instead of adjudicating whether it is morally right to kill oneself, Shelley's novel explores the human desires and emotions that lead up to the action of suicide, allowing her audience to sympathize with a character whose motivations were just coming to light in the lives of the people of Shelley's day.

Shelley's exploration of suicide and compassionate attitude toward such a taboo subject is still a groundbreaking approach in our day. While we have made progress in regards to understanding the human psyche and the importance of prioritizing mental health, there is still a stigma around depression and suicidal ideation. Shelley's willingness to explore her own grief and personal encounters with suicide in such a public way makes her an ally to those dealing with their own dark moments. In that sense, *Frankenstein* is far more than a forerunner to the science fiction genre or a story about mankind's God complex. It is a novel about the parts of humanity that are often avoided in favor of topics that are less controversial. Shelley's work takes an unflinching look at the complex emotions that make us who we are. The monster created by the scientist Victor Frankenstein is not just a creature made of dead tissue, but a physical compilation of the grief and loss of all those who have lost loved ones and are desperate to bring them back. *Frankenstein's* ultimate message is that although misery does come

home, it does not have to stay. Although Victor’s life and the life of his creature ended in sorrow, we can choose to emulate Shelley and survive while remaining compassionate for those who met their end through suicide.

Works Cited

- Barrough, Philip. "XXVIII Of Melancholy." *The Method of Physick: Containing the Causes, Signes and Cures of Inward Diseases in Man's Body, from the Head to the Foote, Whereunto Is Added, the Forme and Rule of Making Remedies and Medicines*, 6th ed., vol. 1, Printed by Richard Field, 1634, p. 45.
- Beattie, Derek, and Patrick Devitt. "Suicide and the Modern Media: Are We Doing More Harm Than Good?" *Suicide: A Modern Obsession*, Liberties, 2015.
- Lieberman, Lisa. "Romanticism and the Culture of Suicide in Nineteenth-Century France." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 33, no. 3, 1991, pp. 611–629. *JSTOR*.
- MacDonald, Michael. "The Medicalization of Suicide in England: Laymen, Physicians, and Cultural Change, 1500–1870." *The Milbank Quarterly*, vol. 67, 1989, pp. 69–91. *JSTOR*.
- Pennell, Elizabeth Robins. "Imlay's Desertion." *Life of Mary Wollstonecraft*, Roberts Brothers, 1884.
- Sanderson, Richard K. "Glutting the Maw of Death: Suicide and Procreation in 'Frankenstein.'" *South Central Review*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1992, pp. 49–64. *JSTOR*.
- Shelley, Mary. "Frankenstein: or, the Modern Prometheus." *The Project Gutenberg EBook of Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus, by Mary W. Shelley.*, 13 Mar. 2013. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/84/84-h/84-h.htm>. Accessed 20 Apr. 2021
- Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft, et al. *Frankenstein: or, the Modern Prometheus; the 1818 Version*. Broadview Press, 2004.
- Shelley, Mary. "Select Letters." *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature, Volume 4: The Age of Romanticism, Third Edition*, edited by Joseph Black, et al. Broadview, 2018, pp. 1201–1203.
- Williams, Carolyn. "'Inhumanly Brought Back to Life and Misery': Mary Wollstonecraft, *Frankenstein*, and the Royal Humane Society." *Women's Writing*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2001, pp. 213–234.

Mary Shelley - Frankenstein - I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous. Find this Pin and more on Books by Elena Miskinis. Article from kwize.com. Come join our community of over 1 million readers and listeners. Kyle Scott Illustration. Writing Quotes Writing Advice Great Quotes Quotes To Live By Cool Words Wise Words Quote Board Words Worth When I Grow Up. I love that Mary Shelley's mother Mary had a mention because she was also an amazing woman. The artwork worked wonderfully well with the story, and this would be a great book to read around Halloween with your kids. It has that scary edge without being too scary. I also thought it was a fun way to recreate how Frankenstein was created. Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus is an 1818 novel written by English author Mary Shelley. Frankenstein tells the story of Victor Frankenstein, a young scientist who creates a sapient creature in an unorthodox scientific experiment. Shelley started writing the story when she was 18, and the first edition was published anonymously in London on 1 January 1818, when she was 20. Her name first appeared in the second edition, which was published in Paris in 1821. The main events in Mary Shelley's life. Her major novel: Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus. Indice. Mary Shelley: biography. Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus. Mary Shelley's Frankenstein: plot. Main themes. Narrative Technique. In the meantime, Percy Shelley's wife Harriet committed suicide and later he married Mary. The two moved to Italy where Mary gave birth to a son, Percy Florence, their only child to survive infancy. Approfondisci. until it comes in touch with society and is rejected by everybody because of its horrible appearance. Curiosity. Many movies were inspired by Frankenstein's character. One of the most famous - a cult - is a comedy: Frankenstein Junior by Mel Brooks. 3Mary Shelley's Frankenstein: plot. 1, 1818: Mary Shelley's 'Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus' is published anonymously in three volumes. Critics with a psychoanalytical bent have read Frankenstein's monster as a metaphorical figure drawn from Shelley's tragic childhood and scandalous adolescence - for example, as the personification of her guilt over having an indirect hand in the deaths of two people: her own mother, who died in childbirth, and Percy Shelley's first wife, Harriet, who drowned herself after Shelley left her, pregnant and alone, to embark on a European tour with Mary. After all, it was during their European travels, while staying in Geneva with the poet Lord Byron, that Mary Shelley dreamed up Frankenstein in re Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. Off Broadway, Dance Play, Play. Closing Date: Jan. In a program note, Ms. Wolf writes that she wanted to explore the connections between the author and her Monster from a woman's point of view - links that may have been unconscious to Mary but are glaringly clear to Ms. Wolf. Beyond the obvious one, the motherlessness of both Shelley and her monster, those connections are not, alas, clear in Ms. Wolf's text. But Mary Shelley noted that Byron and Percy, a pair of poets, had experienced trouble assembling their tales. Her husband, she wrote, was more apt to embody ideas and sentiments in the radiance of brilliant imagery, and in the music of the most melodious verse that adorns our language, than to invent the machinery of a story.