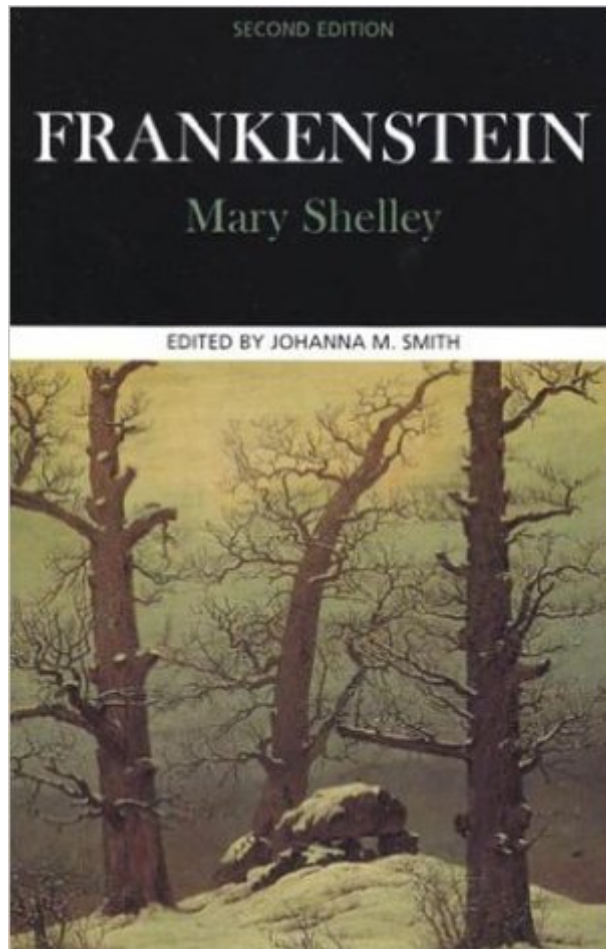


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Frankenstein (Case Studies In Contemporary Criticism)



Synopsis

This revision of a widely adopted critical edition presents the 1831 text of Mary Shelley's English Romantic novel along with critical essays that introduce students to Frankenstein from contemporary psychoanalytic, Marxist, feminist, gender, and cultural studies perspectives. An additional essay demonstrates how various critical perspectives can be combined. In the second edition, 3 of the 6 essays are new. The text and essays are complemented by contextual documents, introductions (with bibliographies), and a glossary of critical and theoretical terms.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Most editions of Mary Shelley's landmark book available today follow the heavily revised 1831 version. The impulse behind this trend is an honorable one (to present what is seemingly an author's "final revision"), but the 1818 version is preferable for many reasons. Looking back on her creation in later life, Shelley felt obliged to alter the book's focus in significant ways, adding what critic Marilyn Butler accurately describes as "long passages in which her main narrator, [Victor] Frankenstein, expresses religious remorse for making a creature..." The author sought to make the 1831 edition less controversial and thereby more palatable to the tastes of the reading public. The 1818 version is closer to Mary Shelley's original intentions, though it too, unfortunately, was filtered through the sensibilities of her husband, the poet Percy Shelley, who took many of his wife's rather straightforward passages and rendered them into his own more ornate and Ciceronian style. Still, the 1818 version remains more vital, more original, and less constrained by what the author

believed would be acceptable to readers in 1830s England.

Much like Bram Stoker's "Dracula", Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" is a story we all think we know, but really don't. Very few films have consciously attempted to follow the novel too closely (which shouldn't detract from the excellent James Whale/Boris Karloff film, or its masterpiece-sequel, "The Bride of Frankenstein"). Thus, everything popular culture "knows" about "Frankenstein" does not originate from literature, but from films. This is a shame, in a way, because the novel itself is, if not the progenitor, an early vessel of so many archetypes found science fiction and horror. The basic plot remained intact when transferred to other media. Swiss medical student Victor Frankenstein discovers the secret of life (which he never reveals, lest someone repeat the mistake). He then puts together a body, essentially a man, from various corpses. He then becomes horrified by the creature he has built, and abandons. The creature, suffering a great deal of neglect and abuse, still manages to get a thorough education, and learns of his lineage. After murdering Victor's younger brother, and framing the family maid, the creature tells his (admittedly) sad tale to his "father", and then demands a mate. Victor, in a panic, agrees, then thinks better of it at the last moment, destroying the new bride. In retaliation, the creature murders all of Victor's loved ones (including his wife), and leads Victor on a merry chase across the world. Most probably know that Mary Shelley wrote this book in response to a challenge issued by Lord Byron, during a vacation at Lake Geneva. (Along with this story came John Polidori's "The Vampyre", the first English vampire novel.) Most probably also know that Shelley went on to write other works of imaginative gothic fiction. Still, her modern reputation rests with this book. As stated, numerous archetypes (themes, plot lines, characters) are present here. The basic fear of what evil technology may bring along with the good is a central theme, as is the warning against playing God. So is the implicit admonition to be responsible in all things, be it during innovation or being a parent. The creature is, for all intents and purposes, an android-everyone from Gort to C-3PO owe their existence to the Frankenstein monster. And the monster that slays all but one protagonist is a staple of horror, be it traditional monster movies, like "Alien", or more realistic slasher movies like "Halloween". But, as I noted at the beginning of this review, certain of these elements have been lost in most interpretations. The creature is actually intelligent, and well-spoken, quite different from the inarticulate grunts or slow, half-sentences of the movies. Further, while the films have made lightening a staple of the creature's creation, Shelley never really explains the process. Finally, one of the staples of the films is the explanation for the creature's "evil" nature. Often, the problem lies with the brain used, which almost invariably is a criminal brain, or is damaged before implantation. In the book, the creature is really a child that's

horribly neglected, but with the strength and intelligence to strike back: id without superego, and without restraints. Thus, "Frankenstein" will be a new experience for readers who know the source exclusively from the films. Unlike "Dracula", there aren't any moments where a reader might look up and suddenly realize how quiet it is in the house, or how dark it's gotten outside. In that regard, "Frankenstein" has not aged particularly well. Throughout, however, it is a moving, disturbing, depressing, but also a touching and beautiful tale. Those qualities have withstood the test of time. While it is not always a rollicking adventure, it is a rewarding read.

I got the free Kindle edition from the link on the page for the Norton Critical Edition of the 1818 text. Mary Shelley made many significant edits to the book for the 1831 edition. I assumed it was the same edition because the link was from the same page. I didn't realize it was different until I went to write my assigned essay and went online to search for page numbers for the passages I wanted to quote. Many of the quotes I wanted to use don't even appear in the original version. This is a very important distinction, and I wish it had been labeled correctly so I would not have had to waste so much time looking for online versions of the correct text in order to replace the quotes I could not use from the later version. This edition is fine if you just want to read the book, but if you're reading it for school, you have more than likely been assigned the 1818 version, which is very different. The Kindle edition is also lacking in any kind of Kindle formatting, making it a hassle to find locations in the book.

This "enriched classics" is a bowdlerized version of Mary Shelley's original text. It eliminates passages, changes the diction, abridges the chapters, and changes the entire structure of the novel. Our school bought this edition thinking that the additional notes would be helpful to students studying the text, but there was no indication at all on 's website that this version had been substantially altered by the editors. The book is so bowdlerized that our school bought an entire new set of texts for the students at a considerable financial loss for the school. **WHATEVER YOU DO, BUY SOME OTHER VERSION OF FRANKENSTEIN. THIS ONE IS A MONSTER CREATED BY SOMEONE WHO HAS NO RESPECT FOR THE AUTHOR. BANTAM, PUFFIN, OXFORD -- THEY ARE ALL FINE.** Irene Nicastro, English teacher, The American School of The Hague.

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