Mother of Frankenstein A2+

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Portrait de l'écrivain britannique Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797_1851) peinture de Richard
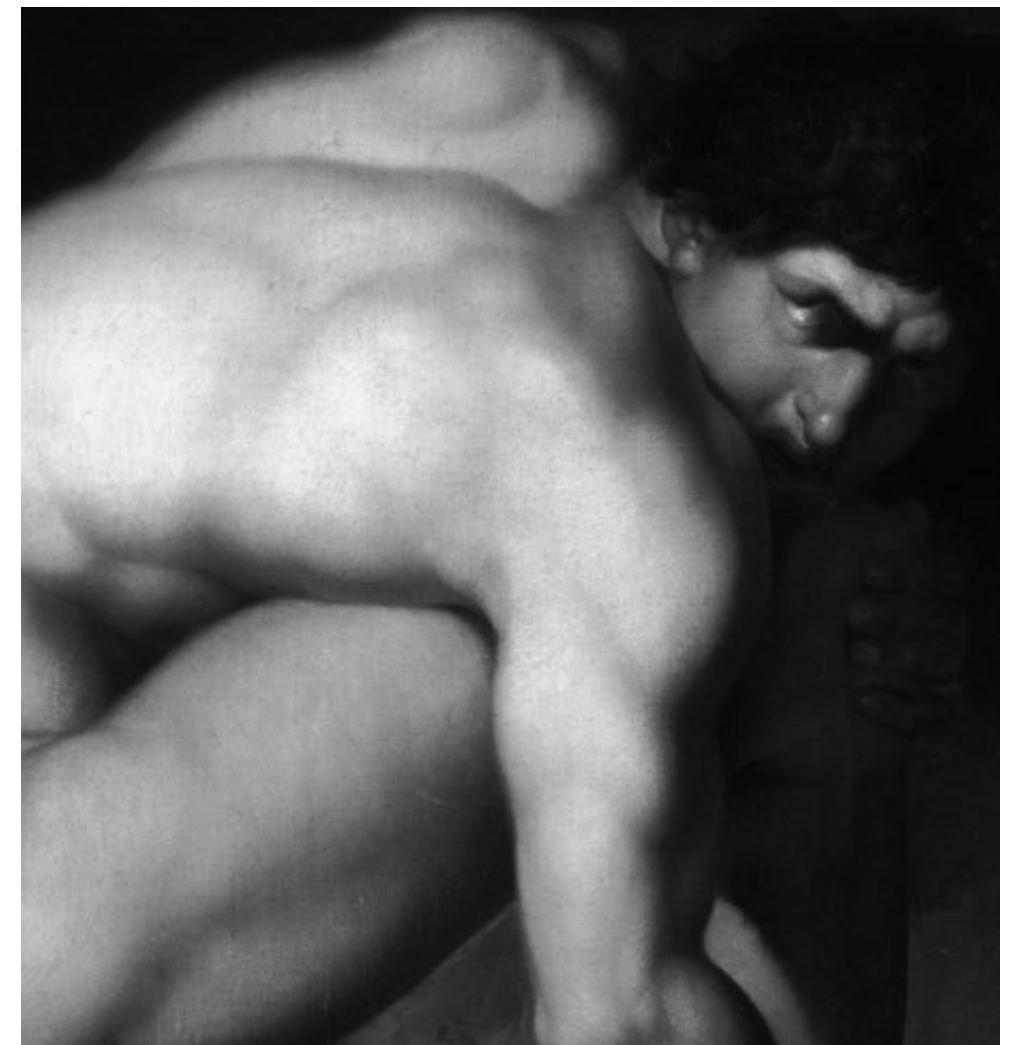Rothwell, 1840 environ National Portrait Gallery Londres

Two hundred years ago, *Frankenstein* was published. The story and its characters have become part of our culture, recognised around the world by people who have never read the book, or heard of Mary Shelley, the unusual young woman who wrote it.

Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* when she was only 18. It was just one element of her unconventional life.

Mary Shelley was the daughter of two writers and political thinkers, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. Her mother, an early feminist, died when Mary was 11 days old.

Mary knew many of her father's literary friends, and when she was 16, she ran away with the Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. Shelley was married, and Mary had two children with him before his wife committed suicide and Mary and Percy married.

In 1816, the couple were in Switzerland with the poet Lord Byron. The weather was bad, and the group passed their time reading ghost stories. Byron suggested they have

MARY SHELLEY
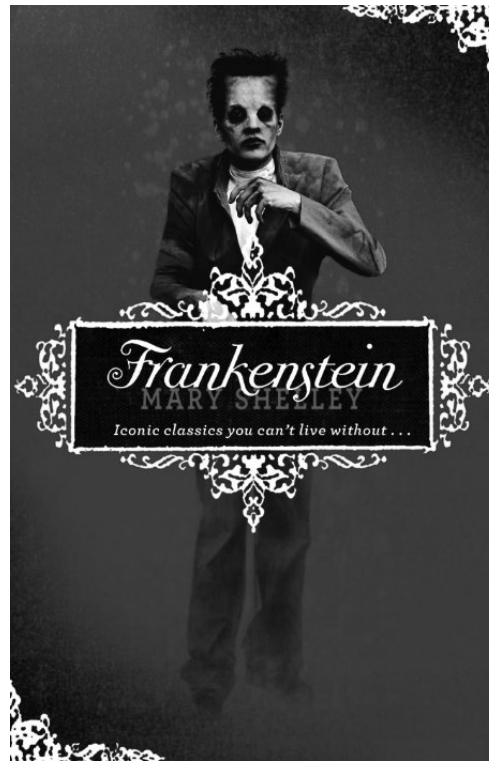
Frankenstein

PENGUIN CLASSICS

a competition to write ghost stories. Mary's was the most successful, and the others encouraged her to transform it into a novel.

Dr Frankenstein and Mr Monster

Frankenstein was published in 1818, and it was an immediate success. The public was intrigued with the story of a scientist who creates a human-like creature, but can't control it. The creature wants to be loved but it is so horrible and unnatural that it inspires terror. In frustration, it becomes violent.
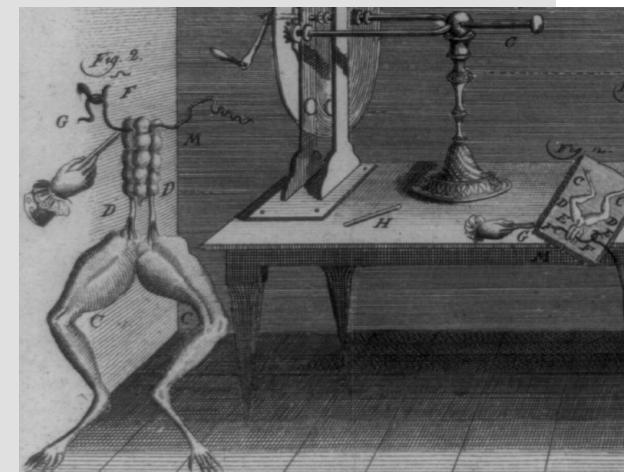

It was typical of public fears at a time when technology was advancing very quickly. From the beginning, there were many theatre adaptations and when cinema began in the 1900s, *Frankenstein* became a favourite theme. People often think "Frankenstein" is the name of the monster. In reality, it is the name of its creator, Dr Frankenstein. He never gives the creature a name, he just calls it "a daemon" or "my creation".

Mary Shelley continued to write, but *Frankenstein* is her most famous book. There was a lot of tragedy in her life. Four of her five children died when they were babies. In 1822, Percy Bysshe Shelley died in a boat accident. Mary was just 25. She never remarried, but devoted her life to writing and to her surviving son: Percy.

What Inspired *Frankenstein*

Mary Shelley was very interested in science. At the time when she wrote *Frankenstein*, she, Percy Shelley and Byron were discussing galvanism: Italian physicist Galvani had discovered that if you applied electricity to a dead frog, its legs moved.

Electricity was still a mystery to most people in 1816. It seemed magical, it could do anything. Galvani believed he had discovered "animal electricity", a mysterious substance. Mary Shelley dreamed about a scientist who created a creature from parts of corpses, and reanimated it.

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Frankenstein became a favourite theme.

Pyramide Distribution

The humorous musical comedy *Young Frankenstein*, by Mel Brooks, at the Garrick Theatre in London is very popular.

Elle Fanning plays Mary Shelley in a new film coming out in August.

Manuel Harlan