

Intermediate



B2 (Vantage)

R A I N B O W S

Frankenstein

Mary Shelley



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Mary Shelley

Frankenstein

Adaptation, dossiers and activities
by Maria Luisa Sillitti



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Frankenstein

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The author

Mary Shelley



Mary Shelley (b. Aug. 30, 1797, London – d. Feb. 1, 1851, London) was the only daughter of well-known parents: William Godwin (1756-1836) – a philosopher, political theorist, novelist and publisher who introduced her to eminent intellectuals and encouraged her youthful efforts as a writer – and of Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), a writer and early feminist thinker. Ten days after Mary's birth, her mother died. Two years later her father married Mrs Jane Clairmont. She and one of her daughters, Jane Claire, were to be the cause of Mary Shelley's sufferings and troubles for many years of her life. Godwin's house was visited by some of the most famous writers of the day; one of these was Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822). The poet was immediately attracted by the beautiful young intellectual, Mary Godwin. In July 1814 the couple eloped¹ to France. Mary, Shelley and Jane Claire travelled through France and Switzerland but financial problems obliged them to come back to England. In February 1815, Mary gave birth to a baby girl who died a few days later. The couple were married in 1816, after Shelley's first wife had committed suicide. Later Shelley rented² a house on the banks of Lake Geneva near Villa Diodati, lived in by Byron (1788-1824) himself. It was at Villa Diodati that the talks leading³ to the writing of *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus* (1818) took place. In the introduction to her best known work, Mary Shelley gives her own account⁴ of *Frankenstein's* origin. It seems that a number of things, like the reading of ghost stories, theories about the reanimation of corpses or the creation of life, her anxiety about her role as a mother, and the memories of her sense of guilt and loss⁵ at the death of her own mother came together at that point in her life, creating the waking dream or nightmare that so terrified her.

Mary Shelley wrote several other novels, such as *Valperga* (1823), *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck* (1830), *Lodore* (1835), and *Falkner* (1837), but *The Last Man* (1826), an account of the future destruction of the human race by a plague, is still ranked as her best novel. Her travel book *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* (1817) recounts the continental tour she and Shelley took in 1814 following their elopement and then recounts their summer near Geneva in 1816. After her husband's death in 1822, she returned to England and devoted herself to publicising Shelley's writings and to educating their only surviving child, Percy Florence Shelley. She died at the age of 53.

1. *elope*: fuggire insieme (di due innamorati).

2. *rent*: affittare.

3. *lead*: condurre, portare.

4. *account*: resoconto.

5. *loss*: perdita.



BEFORE READING

1 Scan the following five letters and find:

a. Robert Walton's age.

.....

b. The month when Robert rescued a man at sea.

.....

c. The name of Robert Walton's sister.

.....

2 Do the initials of her name (M. W. S.) remind you of anything?

.....

3 What is the function of the letters? Choose among the following.

- To create an atmosphere of intimacy between narrator and readers.
- To give details about events and places.
- To present the sequences of thoughts and feelings almost moment by moment.
- To convey more information and more varied viewpoints.

4 Imagine you were leaving by sea to discover new routes, what would you need to do? Think of Christopher Columbus.

First

.....

Then

.....

After that

.....

Finally

.....

Frankenstein

Letters



LETTER ONE

To Mrs Saville, England

St. Petersburg, Dec. 11th. 17--

Dear Margaret,

First of all I want to assure you of my good health.

I am in Petersburg now and walking in the streets I feel a cold northern breeze upon my cheeks¹ that fills me with pleasure. This breeze, blowing from the regions I am approaching, gives me a foretaste² of those icy places that I consider, in my imagination, as the region of beauty and delight. Don't worry about me because I have been waiting for this enterprise³ for a long time. You may remember how eager⁴ I was as a child to read the accounts of voyages towards the North Pole and how much I regretted⁵ it when I learnt that my father's death had prevented me from embarking on a seafaring⁶ life.

I have begun this voyage with the enthusiasm of a child and I'm sure it will bring benefit to all mankind by discovering a faster passage to those icy countries to reach which, at present, so long a time is required.

Farewell, my dear sister, if I fail, you will see me back soon, or never.

Your affectionate brother, Robert Walton

1. *cheek*: guancia.

2. *foretaste*: assaggio.

3. *enterprise*: impresa.

4. *eager*: ansioso.

5. *regret*: dispiacersi.

6. *seafaring*: da marinaio.



"I am in Petersburg now and walking in the streets..."

LETTER TWO

To Mrs Saville, England

Archangel, March 28th, 17--

The day of my departure is approaching. I have hired⁷ a ship and I am choosing my sailors.

My spirit is still high but should I become discouraged there are no friends to sustain me. I really miss⁸ a person whose tastes are like mine, whose eyes would reply to mine to approve or to disapprove of my plans. I am too impulsive and impatient, I greatly need a friend who has enough affection for me to regulate my mind.

But what is worse is that I feel that my education has been neglected. For the first fourteen years of my life I read nothing but our Uncle Thomas' books of voyages, later I became interested in the most famous poets of our country but soon I felt the necessity of learning other languages. Now that I am twenty-eight I realise I am more illiterate than a young boy, even though I have thought more and have been cultivating great dreams. Anyway I don't want to complain⁹ too much, the men I am recruiting are brave¹⁰ and glory-seeking¹¹. The master is well-mannered and he is well beloved by everybody for his mild¹² temperament.

Dear sister, your letters fill me with joy every time, don't stop writing to me.

Your affectionate brother, Robert Walton

LETTER THREE

To Mrs Saville, England

July 7th, 17--

Dear Sister,

A very strange accident has happened to us.

Last week, while sailing northwards, we were in a quite dangerous situation. Our ship was surrounded by ice and a very thick¹³ fog,

→

7. *hire*: noleggiare.

8. *miss*: sentire la mancanza.

9. *complain*: lamentarsi

10. *brave*: coraggioso.

11. *glory-seeking*: in cerca di gloria.

12. *mild*: mite.

13. *thick*: spesso.

Frankenstein

when a huge¹⁴ being, which had the shape of a man, appeared out of the mist¹⁵ on a sledge¹⁶ drawn by dogs. We tried to follow the fast passing of the traveller with our telescopes but he was swallowed¹⁷ by the fog. The following morning I found all the sailors on the deck¹⁸ leaning out¹⁹ of the vessel apparently talking to someone in the sea. It was, in fact, a sledge on a large piece of ice, and there was a human being on it.

He was nearly frozen. We brought him on board and wrapped²⁰ him up in blankets²¹. He was still alive. When I asked him why he had come to these distant places braving such danger he replied: "To seek one who fled from me". We told him about the sledge we had seen the day before and he asked us a lot of questions concerning the route the daemon, as he called him, had pursued²².

Heaven bless my beloved sister!

Robert Walton

LETTER FOUR

To Mrs Saville, England

August 5th, 17--

The rescued²³ man is still with us, yet we do not know anything about him. His health is still bad. At times he does not even look as if he is breathing. At others it seems he is recovering²⁴ faster than we might expect. Anyway, he is almost always silent and feels at ease²⁵ only when I enter his cabin. In spite of his present appearance he must have been a noble creature as he is still attractive and amiable. I begin to love him like a brother. I am very eager to know what drove him to the frozen North Pole.

Robert Walton

14. *huge*: enorme.

15. *mist*: foshia.

16. *sledge*: slitta.

17. *swallow*: ingoiare.

18. *deck*: ponte.

19. *lean out*: sporgersi.

20. *wrap*: avvolgere.

21. *blanket*: coperta.

22. *pursue*: inseguire.

23. *rescue*: portare in salvo.

24. *recover*: riprendersi, guarire.

25. *at ease*: a suo agio.

Frankenstein

LETTER FIVE

To Mrs Saville, England

August 13th, 17--

Today the unknown man has spoken for the first time. His name is Victor Frankenstein. He told me he was chasing²⁶ a mysterious creature he calls the killer. He suffers deeply in telling his misfortunes, so he often stops and cries bitterly. Many of my questions still remain without an answer.

R. W.

26. *chase*: inseguire, seguire.

North-West Passage by John Everett Millais (~1855).



“... by discovering a faster passage to those icy countries ...”