

# Principles of Literary Study

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March 29, 2023. Shelley (4).

## review

- ▶ intertextuality
  - ▶ Romanticism is something the novel *cites*
- ▶ the end of the female creature
  - ▶ Frankenstein's excess (of reasons, of "passion")
  - ▶ is that *all* a female can be?
- ▶ Victor and the creature on the wedding night
  - ▶ his blindness, his deferral
  - ▶ nothing closeted here, but something is fraught
- ▶ closure: we wanted it

who speaks?

- ▶ in the 1818 preface?

who speaks?

- ▶ in the 1818 preface?
- ▶ in the 1831 preface?

versions

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- ▶ 1818 1st ed. (anon)
- ▶ 1823 2nd ed.
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- 
- ▶ Which is the real *Frankenstein*?

## but which really?

- ▶ 1816 “I had *thought of a story*”
- ▶ 1816–18 drafts
- ▶ 1818 1st ed. (anon)
- ▶ 1823 2nd ed.
- ▶ 1823 Richard Brinsley Peake, *Presumption: or, The Fate of Frankenstein*
- ▶ 1823 Milner, *Frankenstein; or, The Demon of Switzerland* (play)
- ▶ 1831 3rd ed.
- ▶ 1931 *Frankenstein*, dir. James Whale
- ▶ 1974 *Young Frankenstein*, dir. Mel Brooks
- ▶ etc.



Mellor on the versions

## Mellor on the versions

In the 1818 version, Victor Frankenstein possessed free will; he could have abandoned his quest for the “principle of life”....But in the 1831 edition, he is the pawn of forces beyond his knowledge or control....

Mary Shelley replaces her earlier organic conception of nature with a mechanistic one....Victor's downfall is caused not so much by his egotistical “presumption and rash ignorance” as by bad influences. (36)

but that's not all

Even the first published text of *Frankenstein* has moved away from Mary Shelley's original style and conception, insofar as we can determine these (32)

Percy also introduced all the references to Victor Frankenstein as the "author" of the Creature (33)

Percy changed the last line of the novel (33)

Percy's preference for more learned, polysyllabic terms was obsessive (34)

## exploring variants

- ▶ Using Appendix B, compare the 1818 and 1831 versions of Frankenstein's early upbringing (19–24; 181–87); locate and interpret one difference (Mellor and Poovey give clues).

## Poovey: discussion

- ▶ Locate statements of Poovey's *motive* and *thesis*.

## motive

Because her works demonstrate the difficulties that the conflicting expectations of this transitional period posed for a woman writer, Mary Shelley emerges as an important figure. (332)

## thesis (triple)

1. Shelley explodes the foundations of Romantic optimism by demonstrating that the egotistical energies necessary to self-assertion...inevitably imperil the self-denying energies of love.
2. By dramatizing herself...as the victim of forces beyond her control, she...sanctions the very self-expression she professes to regret.
3. Taken together, the two editions of *Frankenstein* provide a case s[t]udy in the tensions inherent in the feminine adaptation of the Romantic “egotistical sublime.” (332–33)

next

- ▶ Embedding exercise due tomorrow
- ▶ James, “The Middle Years” (Canvas)
  - ▶ print out for discussion