

Frankenstein Context

1797: Parents

Mary Wollstonecraft, a prominent feminist writer, and William Godwin, a philosopher and political writer, became the parents of Mary Shelley; tragically, Mary's mother passed away shortly after her birth.

1814: Leaving England

At 17, Mary embarked on a journey out of England with the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, sparking a scandal due to Percy's existing marriage.

Early 19th Century: War in Europe

The early 19th century saw Europe in political turmoil and war; Mary's travels with Percy exposed her to societal unrest, providing a backdrop for her later work, "Frankenstein."

1816: Societal Expectations

Mary's unconventional relationship with Percy challenged societal norms, as the couple chose to live together before marriage, leading to judgment and ostracism from both their families and society.

1816: Lord Byron

During the summer, Mary, Percy, and Lord Byron gathered near Lake Geneva; Lord Byron's proposal of a ghost story competition ignited Mary's imagination, leading to the creation of her iconic novel, "Frankenstein."

1822: Percy Bysshe Shelley

The relationship with Percy was marked by passion and tragedy, including the death of their first child, the suicide of Percy's first wife, and Percy's untimely demise in a sailing accident.

1816: Weather in Geneva

The gloomy weather of the "Year Without a Summer" in 1816, caused by the eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia, confined Mary and her companions indoors, fostering the atmospheric conditions that inspired "Frankenstein."

1851: Death

Mary Shelley, having experienced personal tragedy, including the loss of several children in infancy, succumbed to a suspected brain tumor in 1851, leaving behind a lasting legacy as the author of one of the most enduring works of science fiction.

Loss and Grief:

Mary Shelley's life was marked by personal tragedies, including the death of her mother shortly after her birth, the loss of several children in infancy, and the death of her husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley. These experiences of profound loss and grief are reflected in the theme of creation and loss in "Frankenstein." The creature, abandoned by its creator, grapples with loneliness and rejection, mirroring Mary's own experiences of losing loved ones.

Unconventional Relationships:

Mary's unconventional relationship with Percy, which challenged societal norms of the time, is echoed in the novel. Victor Frankenstein's creation of the creature without traditional methods and his refusal to follow societal norms reflects Mary's own defiance of conventions. The novel explores the consequences of defying established norms and the alienation that can result from unconventional choices.

3. The Year Without a Summer:

The gloomy weather during the "Year Without a Summer" in 1816, caused by the volcanic eruption of Mount Tambora, is mirrored in the bleak and ominous atmosphere of "Frankenstein." The novel's setting, with its desolate landscapes and harsh conditions, is influenced by the gloomy weather that confined Mary and her companions indoors during their time at Lake Geneva. This atmospheric backdrop contributes to the eerie and gothic tone of the novel.

4. Intellectual and Artistic Influences:

Mary Shelley's exposure to the intellectual and artistic circles of her time, including her interactions with Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron, played a crucial role in the genesis of "Frankenstein." Lord Byron's proposal of a ghost story competition directly led to the creation of the novel. The intellectual and creative exchange among these influential figures inspired Mary to craft a narrative that went beyond traditional Gothic horror and delved into philosophical and ethical questions surrounding scientific discovery and its consequences.

5. Feminist Perspective:

Mary Wollstonecraft's pioneering work in feminist philosophy, as well as Mary Shelley's own experiences and views on women's rights, are reflected in the novel. The character of Elizabeth Lavenza, Victor's adopted sister and love interest, can be seen as a representation of societal expectations placed on women. The novel explores themes of female agency, vulnerability, and the consequences of societal expectations on women's lives.