Origins

The Scientific Revolution

Scientific Revolution

❖ From the Renaissance through the 18th century, developments in mathematics, physics, astronomy, biology, and chemistry change the way we view our place in the universe

❖ Copernicus (1473-1543)

   ❖ *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres* —a heliocentric universe

❖ Galileo (1564-1642)

   ❖ *Two Chief World Systems*—a telescopic universe

❖ Isaac Newton (1642-1721)

   ❖ *Principia*—a modern universe

Mary Shelley
Grandmother of Sci-Fi

- ❖ Born 1797 in London
  - ❖ Product of the Scientific Revolution

- ❖ Daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft
  - ❖ Writer and Early Feminist

- ❖ Wife of Percy Bysshe Shelley (1816-22)
  - ❖ Romantic Poet and Real Pain in the Butt
  - ❖ Eloped at age 16
  - ❖ Shelley was married with children
  - ❖ Married at age 19
  - ❖ Published at age 20

The Book

❖ Written in Geneva on a "dark and stormy night"
  ❖ 1816: Year Without a Summer
    ❖ Eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia
  ❖ Lord Byron's Summer Estate
    ❖ Mary, Percy, Claire Clairmont, John Polidori, and Byron
  ❖ The result of a ghost story challenge
❖ 1818: Published anonymously
❖ 1821: Published under her own name

The Book

- ❖ Epistolary: A novel in letters
  - ❖ Letters from Walton, a sea captain and explorer bound for the North Pole, to his sister Margaret, as he recounts the terrifying tale of a man discovered adrift at sea
- ❖ Introduces:
  - ❖ "Mad scientist" subgenre
    - ❖ Genius with a god-complex, who fails to recognize his limits
  - ❖ "Alien" as antagonist
    - ❖ View of mankind from an outside perspective

The Genre

❖ Born of the Gothic-Romantic Tradition

  ❖ Gothic novels emphasize mystery and horror: shadowy forests, creepy castles, haunted houses, and dark forces

 ❖ Romantic novels emphasize the power of nature and the human spirit

The Genre

❖ Shelley, however, introduces science, rather than the supernatural, as the primary plot device

❖ Explores what it means to be human through newly understood scientific and psychological models

  ❖ Radical departure from the dominant Judeo-Christian model by which we understood humanity at this time

❖ First fully realized "science fiction" novel

The Real "Frankenstein"
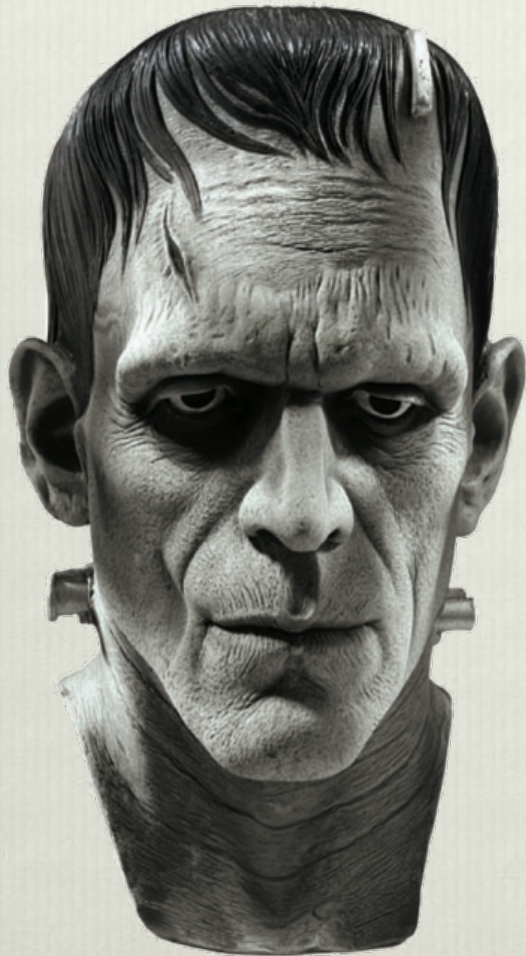
- ❖ The Monster
  - ❖ No Name
  - ❖ Yellow Skin
  - ❖ Lustrous Hair
  - ❖ Swift and Athletic
  - ❖ Intelligent and Articulate
  - ❖ "Noble Outcast"
    - ❖ Both product and victim of society

The Real "Monster"

❖ Victor Frankenstein

  ❖ Curious and brilliant student of "natural philosophy" (science)

  ❖ Not "mad" but misguided

  ❖ Represents the ego of mankind

  ❖ We are Victor

The Real Message

- ❖ Ambition and Arrogance
  - ❖ Knowledge vs. Wisdom
  - ❖ Morals, Ethics, Ego, Remorse

- ❖ Identity and "Otherness"
  - ❖ Nature vs. Nurture
  - ❖ Fate vs. Free Will
  - ❖ Family, Society, Alienation, and Love

- ❖ Nature of Humanity
  - ❖ Love and Revenge
  - ❖ Cruelty and Kindness

Characters

❖ **Walton**: Explorer who rescues Victor and commits his story to paper in a series of letters to his sister in England

❖ **Victor Frankenstein**: Curious and brilliant student of natural philosophy

❖ **Monster**: Hideous-looking creature of Victor's creation

❖ **Elizabeth**: Victor's adopted sister and eventual wife

❖ **Henry Clerval**: Victor's best friend from childhood

Letters I-IV
Walton

❖ **Letter 1**: Walton in Petersburg, assembling a crew to make his way to North Pole, and conflicted feelings of joy, fear, fame, fortune, usefulness

❖ **Letter 2**: Lonely, desirous of a like-minded companion

❖ **Letter 3**: Walton's voyage begins: "What can stop the determined heart and resolved will of man?"

❖ **Letter 4**: A search for knowledge, a kindred spirit, and a cautionary tale begins

Chapters 1-2
Nature vs. Nurture

❖ An Ideal Childhood

    ❖ "…their child, the innocent and helpless creature… whose future was in their hands to direct to happiness or misery."

❖ A Love of "Natural Philosophy"

    ❖ Victor's fascination with the "laws of nature" and indifference to the the "laws of man"

Chapters 3-5
God Complex

- ❖ A Destiny Determined
  - ❖ Off to Ingolstadt
  - ❖ "…this enlightened and scientific age…"
  - ❖ Immortality and Power: Old Masters vs. New Masters

- ❖ An Undertaking of Ego
  - ❖ "…if cowardice and carelessness did not restrain…"

- ❖ An Act of Creation
  - ❖ "…the accomplishment of my toils"
  - ❖ "…one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me"

Chapters 6-8
Law of Unintended Consequences

- ❖ A Year Passes

  - ❖ A letter from Elizabeth about Justine

  - ❖ Victor introduces Clerval to professors

  - ❖ Victor leaves science and slowly recovers his health

- ❖ A Return Home

  - ❖ A letter from his father, a murder committed, a woman accused, a monster returns, a confession withheld

- ❖ A Nightmare Begins

  - ❖ A trial held, a confession made, an execution carried out

Chapters 9-10
Fate vs. Free Will

❖ Who to Blame?

  ❖ Guilt and shame replace shock and fear

  ❖ "I, not in deed, but in effect, was the true murderer."

❖ Worst Father-Son Relationship Ever

  ❖ "Alas! Why does man boast of sensibilities superior to those of apparent in the brute?"

  ❖ "Wandering spirits… allow me this faint happiness, or take me, as your companion, away from the joys of life."

  ❖ A "devil" speaks and a "father" listens

  ❖ Who is to blame: Creator or Creation?

Chapter 11-12
A Monster's Tale

❖ A Birth Story

  ❖ Child Development 101

    ❖ Abandoned by father, feared by society, attacked by society

    ❖ Loss of Innocence

❖ A Family Story

  ❖ Moral Development 101

    ❖ Love, Respect, Sacrifice, Generosity, Empathy, Friendship

  ❖ "I had admired the perfect forms of my cottagers—their grace, beauty, and delicate complexions: but how was I terrified, when I viewed myself in a transparent pool!"

  ❖ Recognition of Self, of "Otherness"—a True "Alien"

Chapter 13-14
A Monster's Tale

❖ Irony of Humanity

   ❖ "I shall relate events, that impressed me with feelings which, from what I had been, have made me who I am."

❖ Bittersweet Nature of Knowledge

   ❖ "When I looked around, I saw and heard none like me. Was I then a monster?"

   ❖ Truly **Alien**ated

❖ History of Two Lovers… or a History of Humanity

   ❖ Xenophobia, Oppression, and Prejudice

   ❖ Love, Kindness, and Hope

Chapter 15-16
A Monster's Tale

❖ Adam without Eve

   ❖ Nature vs. Nurture

   ❖ "Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come?"

   ❖ "My heart beat quick; this was the hour and moment of trial, which would decide my hopes or realise my fears."

❖ Adam without Eden

   ❖ "Unfeeling, heartless creator! You had endowed me with perceptions and passions, and then cast me abroad an object for the scorn and horror of mankind."

Chapter 17
A Promise Made

- ❖ "Shall I create another like yourself…?"
  - ❖ Identity
- ❖ "I am malicious because I am miserable."
  - ❖ Nature vs. Nurture
- ❖ "Shall I respect man, when he condemns me?"
  - ❖ Prejudice
- ❖ "If I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear."
  - ❖ Fate vs. Free Will
- ❖ "I shall feel… linked to the chain of existence and events, from which I am now excluded."
  - ❖ Individual and Society

Chapter 18-20
A Promise Broken

❖ A Future Full of Hope

    ❖ Love and Friendship

❖ The Work of God?

    ❖ A remote island, a makeshift laboratory, a secret project

❖ A Creation Destroyed

    ❖ To what is Victor's obligation: his creation or society?

    ❖ "I shall be with you on your wedding night."

    ❖ Another murder—and Victor is the suspect!

Chapter 21-23
A Red Wedding

- ❖ Ireland
  - ❖ Victim #3
  - ❖ "Doomed to live"—both creator and creation
  - ❖ Another Trial

- ❖ A Promise of Marriage
  - ❖ A Fate Sealed

- ❖ A Shrill and Dreadful Scream
  - ❖ Victim #4
  - ❖ Victim #5

Chapter 24
Paradise Lost

- ❖ Revenge
  - ❖ "And now my wanderings began, which are to cease but with life."
  - ❖ "Miserable wretch! you have determined to live, and I am satisfied."

- ❖ Remorse
  - ❖ "Like the archangel who aspired to omnipotence, I am chained in an eternal hell."
  - ❖ A scene of "uncommon interest"
  - ❖ "Seek happiness in tranquility, and avoid ambition"
  - ❖ "Lost in darkness and distance"

Final Thoughts

❖ "…still I desired love and fellowship, and I was still spurned. Was there no injustice in this? Am I to be thought the only criminal, when all of humankind sinned against me?"

❖ Who deserves our sympathy?

❖ Who was in the wrong?

❖ What does this say about us?

    ❖ Which is worse: Absence of Society or Intrusion of Society