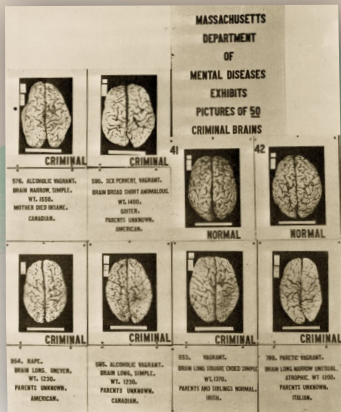


Boundary CROSSING 1931

FRANKENSTEIN:

PENETRATING *the* SECRETS *of* NATURE

The myth of Frankenstein continued to resonate into the 20th century. Although many welcomed changes caused by scientific advances, some worried about society's ability to retain control of technologies that challenged their understanding of what it means to be human.



In her novel, Mary Shelley's monster turns to violence after he is abandoned. In the 1931 film, the monster is violent because he received the brain of a criminal. During the early 20th century, researchers looked for physical markers of criminality in the brain and other parts of the body.

Massachusetts department of mental diseases exhibits pictures of 50 criminal brains, 1921

Courtesy Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Archives

Contemporary scientific advances raise difficult ethical and policy questions. Although the scientist Victor Frankenstein failed to take responsibility for his misbegotten monster, Mary Shelley has for two centuries offered the Promethean possibility that humanity could make responsible choices.

Dolly, the world's first adult sheep clone, 1997

Courtesy Science Source Images, © 2012 Photo Researchers, Inc. All Rights Reserved

IN *FRANKENSTEIN*;

or, The Modern Prometheus, novelist Mary Shelley used the scientific advances of her era and the controversies surrounding them as a metaphor for issues of unchecked power and self-serving ambition, and their effect on the human community.

More than a simple parable of science gone mad, *Frankenstein* uses scientific themes as a framework for exploring larger political issues of power, responsibility, and justice in society.

NIH National Library of Medicine



The National Library of Medicine produced this exhibition.

CURATED BY: SUSAN LEDERER, PHD

DESIGNED BY: HEALYKOHLER DESIGN

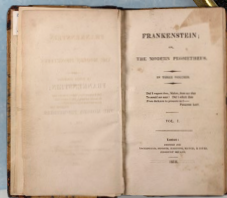
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The BIRTH of FRANKENSTEIN

In 1816, Mary Godwin and her lover, the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, summered in Switzerland. Together they visited with Lord Byron who was staying nearby. One night, Byron suggested that they take part in a competition to write a terrifying tale.

Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus, Mary Shelley, 1818

Courtesy Singer-Mendenhall Collection, Annenberg Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Pennsylvania



Portrait of Mary Shelley, Reginald Easton, c. 1851-1893

Courtesy of The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford

An EXTRAORDINARY LIFE



Mary Wollstonecraft, John Opie, c. 1797
Courtesy © National Portrait Gallery, London

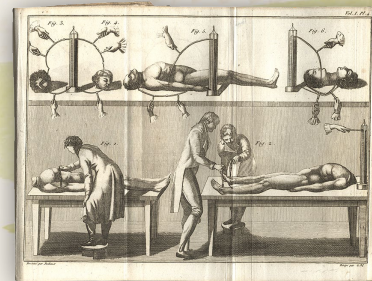


William Godwin, James Northcote, 1802
Courtesy © National Portrait Gallery, London

Mary Shelley's education stressed the development of the imagination; she was introduced to great works of literature, history, mythology, and studied French and Latin. Her parents, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, were noted progressive thinkers and political theorists.

Boundary CROSSING 1818

Mary Shelley, like many of her contemporaries, was fascinated by the boundary between the living and the dead and the scientific search for the principle of life. In her novel, the protagonist, Victor Frankenstein makes references to the power of electricity and his infusion of "a spark of being into the lifeless thing."

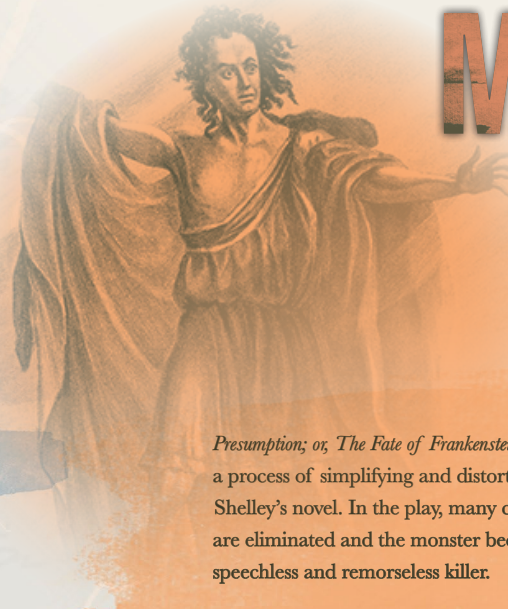


Italian physician Giovanni Aldini administered electricity to the bodies of decapitated animals and humans and produced twitching and other physical movements. Audiences believed these movements signaled the potential of this radical new technology.

Illustration from *Essai Théorique et Expérimentale sur le Galvanisme, tome premier* (Theoretical and Practical Essay on Galvanism, first volume), Giovanni Aldini, 1804

Courtesy © National Portrait Gallery, London

The TRANSFORMATION of a MONSTER



From its first appearance in 1818, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* both fascinated and repelled audiences. Her story, moreover, attracted other creative artists, who freely adapted the novel for audiences in England, America, and Europe.

Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein began a process of simplifying and distorting Mary Shelley's novel. In the play, many characters are eliminated and the monster becomes a speechless and remorseless killer.

T. P. Cooke as the monster in *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein*, Thomas Charles Wageman (artist) and Nathaniel Whittock (lithographer)

Courtesy The Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and His Circle, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations