



MARY SHELLEY



- Born: 30th August 1797
- Died: 1st February 1851 (aged 53)
- Mary Shelley was a London-born English novelist, well known for her most famous horror novel, *Frankenstein*, published in 1818.

EARLY LIFE

Originally named Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, Mary Shelley was born in London to William Godwin (a philosopher and journalist) and Mary Wollstonecraft (a writer and feminist). Unfortunately, Shelley did not get the chance to fully know her mother since she died during childbirth and Mary's father was left to raise Shelley and her half-sister on his own. William remarried Mary Clairmont a few years later in 1801, but Shelley did not bond well with her stepmother. Though her new stepsister was sent to school, Shelley's stepmother saw no reason to educate Mary and so she instead learnt much from her father's books. She also learnt a great deal from her father's friends such as the famous writer William Wordsworth. Shelley used writing as a creative outlet to help her deal with her challenging home life, and in 1807, at a very young age, she published her first poem, *Mounseer Nongtongpaw*.

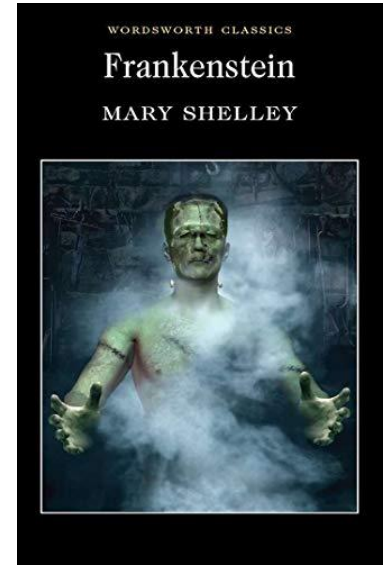
ADULT LIFE

In 1814, Mary Shelley began a relationship with writer and poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, one of her father's older students. Though they had little money, they travelled Europe and stayed near friend and famous poet Lord Byron. With her father's eventual blessing, the Mary and Percy got married in 1816. The pair continued to inspire each other's writing, with *Frankenstein* becoming one of the most successful novels of 1818. Tragically, the couple lost two of their children at a very young age, with only one son surviving to adulthood. Furthermore, in 1822, Percy unfortunately drowned during a sailing trip with a friend.

MAIN ACHIEVEMENT



Mary had finished her first version of *Frankenstein* when she was only 19 years of age and originally published the novel anonymously (not identifying the author by name). *Frankenstein* tells the story of a young scientist who experiments with the scientific and moral difficulties of creating life. The ideas for *Frankenstein* had come through the time of her European travels when the Shelleys were in Switzerland with fellow writers Jane Clairmont, Lord Byron and John Polidori. Whilst entertaining themselves at night, due to the rainy weather, they all read, invented and shared horror stories. Mary's story came to her one night, and she took down her jottings to later build it into what is arguably now one of the most famous horror stories of all time. Interestingly, both Percy and Mary were firm vegetarians and her beliefs were hinted at through her novel since Frankenstein's 'monster' was also vegetarian.



LATER LIFE

Although her life had been plagued with tragedy, Mary Shelley continued to work hard whilst looking after her son. She would escape into her writing, pouring her heart and mind into publishing numerous creative pieces, including popular novels *Valperga* and *The Last Man*. She also continued to promote her late husband's poetry, giving him his own lasting legacy in literary history.

Mary Shelley passed away, aged 53, in 1851, but her novels have continued to be published by her family, even after her death. Her legacy lives on through her most famous novel *Frankenstein*. The story has been recreated many times within a variety of well-known, successful films (including the 1994 version starring Kenneth Branagh, Robert De Niro and Helena Bonham Carter). Additionally, its main character, the 'monster', has become an icon of popular culture, being used over and over again in modern writing, directing and other horror franchise. Even though, in the original story, it is the scientist who is named Dr Frankenstein, the name has since been attributed to the monster itself in modern popular culture.

FIND OUT MORE...

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mary-Wollstonecraft-Shelley>

<https://kids.britannica.com/students/article/Mary-Wollstonecraft-Shelley/336363>

https://kids.kiddle.co/Mary_Shelley

For a simple summary of the original story, click the following link:

<https://kidskonnnect.com/social-studies/frankenstein/>

EXAMPLE QUESTIONS:

1. When was Mary born?
2. Name one of her father's famous writer friends.
3. Who did Mary marry?
4. How had the ideas for *Frankenstein* come to Mary?
5. Which character in the original story was actually named 'Frankenstein'?

