INTRO TO FRANKENSTEIN

TIMELINE

1797: Mary Godwin (Shelley) born in London to William Godwin, a minister-turned-atheist/writer and Mary Wollstonecraft, a pioneer feminist writer.

1797: Mary’s mother dies of puerperal poisoning shortly after her daughter’s birth. Mary is educated by her father, which is a rare and controversial decision for the time period.

1799: Two years later, her father married M.J. Clairmont, a widow with two daughters.

1813: Percy Bysshe Shelley meets and courts Mary, to the distress of his wife, Harriet.

1814: Mary and Percy run away together, and she gives birth to a premature baby who dies within days. They continue to live in sin together.

1815: Harriet Shelley commits suicide as a response to her husband’s infidelity. Mary and Percy then wed.

1816: Mary, Claire (her stepsister), Percy (who was cheating on Mary with Claire), Lord Byron (who was officially dating Claire), and John Polidori all spend the summer together in Switzerland. It rains a lot that summer; out of boredom, Lord Byron proposes a storytelling contest: who can tell the best “ghost” story? Mary comes up with the idea for Frankenstein as her contribution to the contest.

1818: Frankenstein is published, it is an instant bestseller, and nobody has a clue that it was written by a teenaged girl.

1818: CRITICAL RESPONSES TO THE TEXT:

“Our readers will guess from this summary, what a tissue of horrible and disgusting absurdity this work presents...It cannot be denied that this is nonsense...Our taste and judgment alike revolt at this kind of writing, and the greater the ability with which it may be executed the worse it is—it inculcates no lesson of conduct, manners, or morality; it cannot mend, and will not even amuse its readers, unless their taste have been deplorably vitiated—it fatigues the feelings without interesting the understanding; it gratuitously harasses the heart, and wantonly adds to the store, already too great, of painful sensations...[it leaves] the reader, after a struggle between laughter and loathing, in doubt whether the head or the heart of the author be the most diseased.”

--John Croker, The Quarterly Review

“This is, perhaps, the foulest Toadstool that has yet sprung up from the reeking dunghill of the present times.”

--William Beckford, Gothic author

2008: Frankenstein has never gone out of print. There are currently 94 Frankenstein-related titles on imdb.com, and the Monster is one of the most culturally recognized figures in world history (he is in the top three with Jesus and Ronald McDonald).