

FRANKENSTEIN

Mary Shelley



Edited by Ben Quine
THE WORLD VIEW LIBRARY

MARY SHELLEY
(1797-1851)

FRANKENSTEIN
OR
THE MODERN PROMETHEOUS

THE WORLD VIEW LIBRARY

Edited by Ben Quine

FRANKENSTEIN
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Edited by Ben Quine

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Thank you for choosing the World View Library. We are proud to present the masterpieces of western literature in this new edition.

A few words about the format of this book: the main body of each page presents the original text unaltered in a clear, easy to read format, while the outside margins contain summary headings, definitions, and other helps. Since most of the words in the English language have had multiple definitions over time — and often multiple simultaneously, the definitions given in the margins attempt to capture as closely as possible the meaning intended by the author in the given context. Use these notes as a beginning to your study of this book.

Every great work of art will communicate not just beauty but also ideas about the world we live in. And so, we encourage you to think carefully and ask questions while reading: What ideas are presented in this work? What do the characters and situations say about the nature of man and the universe? Is there a God, according to the text? If so, what is He like? And what happens to man after death?

It is our desire to help bring this classic literature to life, and we hope that the World View Library will lead you to a deeper understanding of the living God and His creation.

BEN QUINE
AUGUST 2007

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Chapter 1

I am by birth a Genevese; and my family is one of the most distinguished of that republic. My ancestors had been for many years counsellors and syndics; and my father had filled several public situations with honour and reputation. He was respected by all who knew him for his integrity and indefatigable attention to public business. He passed his younger days perpetually occupied by the affairs of his country; a variety of circumstances had prevented his marrying early, nor was it until the decline of life that he became a husband and the father of a family.

As the circumstances of his marriage illustrate his character, I cannot refrain from relating them. One of his most intimate friends was a merchant, who, from a flourishing state, fell, through numerous mischances, into poverty. This man, whose name was Beaufort, was of a proud and unbending disposition, and could not bear to live in poverty and oblivion in the same country where he had formerly been distinguished for his rank and magnificence. Having paid his debts, therefore, in the most honourable manner, he retreated with his daughter to the town of Lucerne, where he lived unknown and in wretchedness. My father loved Beaufort with the truest friendship, and was deeply grieved by his retreat in these unfortunate circumstances. He bitterly deplored the false pride which led his friend to a conduct so little worthy of the affection that united them. He lost no time in endeavouring to seek him out, with the hope of persuading him to begin the world again through his credit and assistance.

THE STRANGER'S FAMILY BACKGROUND

syndics: magistrates of Geneva

situations: positions of employment or jobs

indefatigable: untiring

- 10 Geneva, both a republic and the home of Jean Jacques Rousseau, is symbolic of the Enlightenment ideals embraced by Mary Shelley: reason, nature, happiness, progress, and liberty
Schaeffer 121

20

30

inexhaustible stores of affection from a very mine of love to bestow them upon me. My mother's tender caresses, and my father's smile of benevolent pleasure while regarding me, are my first recollections. I was their plaything and their idol, and something better—their child, the innocent and helpless creature bestowed on them by Heaven, whom to bring up to good, and whose future lot it was in their hands to direct to happiness or misery, according as they fulfilled their duties towards me. With this deep consciousness of what they owed towards the being to which they had given life, added to the active spirit of tenderness that animated both, it may be imagined that while during every hour of my infant life I received a lesson of patience, of charity, and of self control, I was so guided by a silken cord that all seemed but one train of enjoyment to me.

For a long time I was their only care. My mother had much desired to have a daughter, but I continued their single offspring. When I was about five years old, while making an excursion beyond the frontiers of Italy, they passed a week on the shores of the Lake of Como. Their benevolent disposition often made them enter the cottages of the poor. This, to my mother, was more than a duty; it was a necessity, a passion—remembering what she had suffered, and how she had been relieved—for her to act in her turn the guardian angel to the afflicted. During one of their walks a poor cot in the foldings of a vale attracted their notice as being singularly disconsolate, while the number of half-clothed children gathered about it spoke of penury in its worst shape. One day, when my father had gone by himself to Milan, my mother, accompanied by me, visited this abode. She found a peasant and his wife, hard working, bent down by care and labour, distributing a scanty meal to five hungry babes. Among these there was one which attracted

HIS PARENTS' CARE FOR THE POOR

Lake Como: lies in northern Italy, twenty-five miles northeast of Milan. The lake has long been famous for its appearance in the writings of such classical writers as Virgil, Pliny, and Claudian.

upen

cot: cottage

foldings: hidden corners

disconsolate: obviously uncomfortable, dismal, gloomy

penury: destitution, severe poverty

Cornelius Agrippa: (1486-1535) a writer of the occult
Stevens 277

The writings Victor studied dealt largely with the search for limitless wealth and unending life. Alchemy was the attempt to turn common metals into gold. The Philosopher's stone was believed to have power to make this transformation. Many writers also sought to find or create the Elixir of Life.

chimerical: wildly fanciful, impossible, imaginary; from Greek mythology, Chimera was a fire-breathing monster, with a lion's head, a goat's body, and a serpents' tail (OEDs)

Paracelsus: Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim (1493-1541); Swiss physician and alchemist

Joseph 235

Albertus Magnus: (1193-1280) magician and follower of Aristotle

110 those facts which led to my predilection for that science. When I was thirteen years of age, we all went on a party of pleasure to the baths near Thonon: the inclemency of the weather obliged us to remain a day confined to the inn. In this house I chanced to find a volume of the works of Cornelius Agrippa. I opened it with apathy; the theory which he attempts to demonstrate, and the wonderful facts which he relates, soon changed this feeling into enthusiasm. A new light seemed to dawn upon my mind; and, bounding with joy, I communicated my discovery to my father. My father looked carelessly at the title page of my book, and said, "Ah! Cornelius Agrippa! My dear Victor, do not waste your time upon this; it is sad trash."

120 If, instead of this remark, my father had taken the pains to explain to me that the principles of Agrippa had been entirely exploded, and that a modern system of science had been introduced, which possessed much greater powers than the ancient, because the powers of the latter were chimerical, while those of the former were real and practical; under such circumstances, I should certainly have thrown Agrippa aside, and have contented my imagination, warmed as it was, by returning with greater ardour to my former studies. It is even possible that the train of my ideas would never have received the fatal impulse that led to my ruin. But the cursory glance my father had taken of my volume by no means assured me that he was acquainted with its contents; and I continued to read with the greatest avidity.

130 When I returned home, my first care was to procure the whole works of this author, and afterwards of Paracelsus and Albertus Magnus. I read and studied the wild fancies of these writers with delight; they appeared to me treasures known to few beside myself.
140 I have described myself as always having been embued

**“I HAD DESIRED IT
WITH AN ARDOUR
THAT FAR EXCEEDED
MODERATION; BUT NOW
THAT I HAD FINISHED,
THE BEAUTY OF THE
DREAM VANISHED, AND
BREATHLESS HORROR
AND DISGUST FILLED
MY HEART.”**

lassitude: exhaustion,
weariness and indifference
tumult: confused noise,
struggle, agitation

“Here, again, Mary Shelley is abreast of the scientific theories of her day, for this semiotics of the face implicitly endorses late eighteenth-century theories that physiognomy and character are closely related. Johann Casper Lavater’s physiognomical theory, for example, held that a person’s inner soul or moral character produces his or her outer appearance, while Spurzheim and Gall’s phrenological theory held that the contours of the skull determines character and moral nature.”

Schor 20-21

bedchamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep. At length lassitude succeeded to the tumult I had before endured; and I threw myself on the bed in my clothes, endeavouring to seek a few moments of forgetfulness. But it was in vain: I slept, indeed, but I was disturbed by the wildest dreams. I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel. I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed: when, by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window shutters, I beheld the wretch — the miserable monster whom I had created. He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me. His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. He might have spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped, and rushed down stairs. I took refuge in the courtyard belonging to the house which I inhabited; where I remained during the rest of the night, walking up and down in the greatest agitation, listening attentively, catching and fearing each sound as if it were to announce the approach of the demoniacal corpse to which I had so miserably given life.

Oh! No mortal could support the horror of that countenance. A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch. I had gazed on him while unfinished; he was ugly then; but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of

motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived.

I passed the night wretchedly. Sometimes my pulse beat so quickly and hardly that I felt the palpitation of every artery; at others, I nearly sank to the ground through languor and extreme weakness. Mingled with this horror, I felt the bitterness of disappointment; dreams that had been my food and pleasant rest for so long a space were now become a hell to me; and the change was so rapid, the overthrow so complete!

Morning, dismal and wet, at length dawned, and discovered to my sleepless and aching eyes the church of Ingolstadt, its white steeple and clock, which indicated the sixth hour. The porter opened the gates of the court, which had that night been my asylum, and I issued into the streets, pacing them with quick steps, as if I sought to avoid the wretch whom I feared every turning of the street would present to my view. I did not dare return to the apartment which I inhabited, but felt impelled to hurry on, although drenched by the rain which poured from a black and comfortless sky.

I continued walking in this manner for some time, endeavouring, by bodily exercise, to ease the load that weighed upon my mind. I traversed the streets, without any clear conception of where I was, or what I was doing. My heart palpitated in the sickness of fear; and I hurried on with irregular steps, not daring to look about me:—

*“Like one who, on a lonely road,
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And, having once turned round, walks on,
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread.”¹*

70 Dante Alligieri (1265-1321) was considered one of the greatest and most imaginative of Renaissance writers. In *The Divine Comedy*, he invented fantastic, colorful images of heaven and hell.

80 **languor:** distress or mental suffering (OED)

asylum: a sanctuary or inviolable place of refuge and protection usually for criminals and debtors, from which they cannot be forcibly removed without sacrilege (OED)

90 **impelled:** driven or forced

¹Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*