

Mary
Wollstonecraft
Godwin Shelley:
her life and
literary work



Her parents:
Mary Wollstonecraft
&
William Godwin

Her mother:

Mary Wolstonecraft

- noted feminist
- wrote *Vindication of the Rights of Women*
- had an affair with an American (Gilbert Imlay) and had a daughter with him -- Fanny Imlay



- daughter Mary born Aug. 30, 1797
- died 11 days after Mary was born; from complications arising from Mary's birth

Her father:

William Godwin

- wrote several novels and treatises, including *Enquiry Concerning the Nature of Political Justice*
- was a philosopher
- remarried: Mary Jane Clairmont; not his intellectual equal, but a good housekeeper; she was a widow with several children



Attitudes of her parents:

- they lived together (unmarried) for quite a while since they believed marriage was an outdated institution
- they married once Mary became pregnant; they understood the need for legitimacy for the child
- her father published a memoir of his wife after her death and made these details public (it's 1798!)
- because of her famous parents, and their beliefs, Mary was stigmatized from birth

Mary's childhood:

- her father considered all babies as having potential waiting to be developed
- she was treated as a remarkable individual
- there were high expectations for her from the start
- her father took her almost every day to her mother's grave; Mary learned how to spell her own name by tracing her mother's name on the gravestone
- Charles Lamb and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (both famous poets) were frequent visitors to the house, as was Percy Bysshe Shelley

Percy Bysshe Shelley

- at the age of 19, meets Harriet Westbrook and falls in love; the two elope
- after the birth of their 1st child, Percy realizes family life ties him down; Harriet's sister comes to stay with them and take care of Harriet.
- Percy becomes a friend of William Godwin; he and Harriet visit the Godwin household in late October, 1812 (Mary is away visiting relatives).
- Fanny becomes infatuated with Percy.

Percy Bysshe Shelley

- June 1814, Percy visits the Godwins and meets Mary; he also develops a relationship with Jane Clairmont (Mary's step-sister).
- After 10 days, Percy confesses his love for Mary to her father, who throws him out of the house and confines Mary and Jane inside.
- On July 13th, Percy tells Harriet that he can feel nothing more than a brotherly affection for her; he is in love with Mary Godwin.
- (Harriet writes a letter to William telling him she thinks this is just a “passing fancy.”)

Mary's feelings?

"This book is sacred to me and as no other creature shall ever look into it, I may write what I please. Yet what shall I write? That I love the author beyond all power of expression and that I am parted from him. Dearest and only love, by that love we have promised to each other although I may not be yours I can never be another's."

- inscribed into her copy of *Queen Mab*, a book written by Percy, and given to her by him

Timeline of events

- On July 28, 1814; Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Godwin run away together
- At the time, Harriet is pregnant with Percy's second child.
- by February, 1815, Mary is carrying Percy's child; at 7 months along, the baby comes early and dies 2 weeks later.

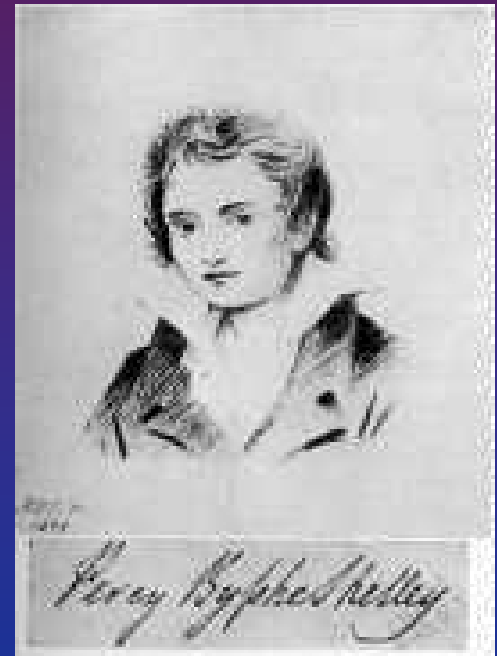
From a letter to T.J. Hogg, a friend of Mary's

“My dearest Hogg, my baby is dead -- will you come to see me as soon as you can -- I wish to see you -- It was perfectly well when I went to bed -- I awoke in the night to give it suck it appeared to be sleeping so quietly that I would not wake it -- it was dead then but we did not find that out till morning -- from its appearance it evidently died from convulsions. Will you come -- you are so calm a creature and Shelley is afraid of a fever from the milk -- for I am no longer a mother now.”

- January, 1816 - they have a son and name him William after her father
- ironically, William, Sr. will not speak to them; he is furious that they are living together without the benefit of marriage



Artist unknown



Artist: Mary W.
Shelley

Summer 1816

Percy and Mary visit Villa
Diodati, the home of Lord
Byron



Also visiting at this
time is John Polidori,
and Mary's step-
sister, Claire
Clairmont

From a letter to her half-sister Fanny, dated June 1, 1816:

“The thunderstorms that visit us are grander and more terrific than I have ever seen before. We watch them as they approach from the opposite side of the lake, observing the lightning play among the clouds in various parts of the heavens, and dart in jagged figures upon the heights of Jura, dark with the shadows of overhanging cloud, while the sun is shining cheerily upon us. One night we enjoyed a finer storm than I had ever before beheld. The lake was lit up -- the pines on Jura made visible, and all the scene illuminated for an instant, when pitch blackness succeeded, and the thunder came in frightful bursts over our heads amid the darkness.”

June 16, 1816

- After reading ghost stories all night, Byron challenges them to each write their own story.
- Only Mary and John Polidori actually complete their pieces (Polidori's is called *The Vampyre: A Tale*).
- Mary initially has writer's block, which is broken by a dream a night later; she dreams of a monster who comes to stand by her bed. The short story she writes for her friends will eventually become better known as *Frankenstein*.

Timeline continued:

October 1816 -- Fanny Imlay commits suicide. Her note to the family states,

“I have long determined that the best thing I could do was to put an end to the existence of a being whose birth was unfortunate, and whose life has only been a series of pain to those persons who have hurt their health in endeavoring to promote her welfare.

Perhaps to hear of my death will give you pain, but you will soon have the blessing of forgetting that such a creature existed as . . .(Fanny)

Timeline continued:

December 1816 -- Harriet drowns herself when she realizes Percy is never coming back to her.

December 1816 -- Percy and Mary marry. William Godwin now acknowledges them.

May 1817 -- Mary publishes Frankenstein anonymously; she is 19 years old.

September 1817 -- Percy and Mary have a daughter, Clara

September 1818 -- Clara dies.

Timeline continued:

June 7, 1819 -- William dies of malaria.

September 1819 -- Percy Florence born

Summer 1822 -- Percy Bysshe Shelley goes boating on the lake with several of his friends. He drowns when the boat capsizes.



At Shelly's cremation, Mary reached into the fire and pulled out Percy's heart. She kept it all her life.



At the time of Percy's death, she was 25 years old.

- Mary continued to write after Percy's death, but Frankenstein remains her most famous work.
- She supported her father and son with her writing, although society in England shunned her because of her relationship with Percy.
- In 1845, at the age of 48, she became an invalid, and died in 1851 of a brain tumor.



•Ironically, the Great Exhibition opened in London the same year she died. This exhibition glorified scientific technology , which she had warned against in Frankenstein.

The life of *Frankenstein*

- 1823 - first stage version of Frankenstein is produced
- 1831- Frankenstein is republished (it is never out of print from then on).
- 1910 - Thomas Edison makes the first silent movie version





1931 film stars

Boris Karloff as the
most famous
incarnation of the
monster



Elsa Lanchester Film
Set Bride Of
Frankenstein, The
(1935)

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MPTV.net



Abbot & Costello poster: <http://www.nostalgia.com>

Young Frankenstein

spoof of the 1934 version; used most of the same lab props; starred Gene Wilder as Frankenstein and Peter Boyle as the monster.





1994 version

Kenneth
Branagh stars
as Frankenstein;
Robert DeNero
as the monster.