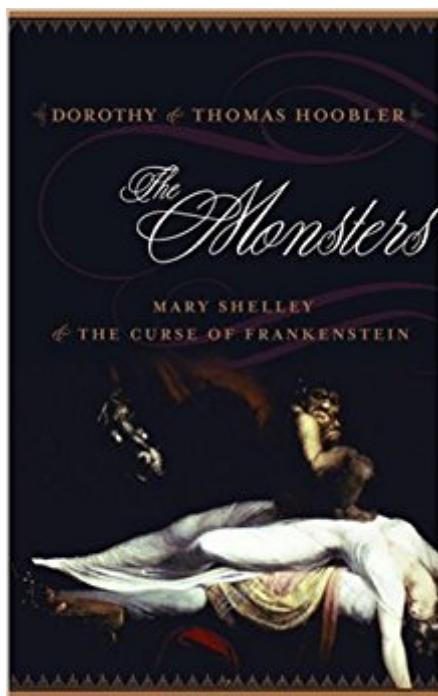


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The Monsters: Mary Shelley And The Curse Of Frankenstein



Synopsis

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Customer Reviews

In this absorbing biography, the Hooblers, historians and children's authors (The American Family Albums), chronicle the turbulent life of Mary Shelley (1797–1851), author of the classic gothic novel, Frankenstein. They open with a moving sketch of the life of her famous mother, feminist rebel writer Mary Wollstonecraft, who died 11 days after giving birth to Mary.

Sixteen-year-old Mary eloped to France, in 1814, with the freethinking Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. Effectively surrounded by egotistical and rapacious "monsters" such as Lord Byron, Mary Shelley, a new mother at 19, penned the tale of Frankenstein in response to a challenge set by Byron to guests at his Swiss villa. The Hooblers amply relate how the themes of Mary Shelley's masterpiece correspond to her life. Portraying Mary Shelley's stoic endurance of trauma and loss—two of her children died early—the Hooblers describe her final misery when Percy Shelley drowned while she was still in her early 20s. Summarizing Mary's other novels and recounting how she championed Shelley's posthumous literary reputation while raising her remaining son to conventional manhood, the Hooblers' well-crafted biography will appeal to all who wish to learn more about the conception of Frankenstein and its enigmatic author. 8 pages of b&w photos. (May 22) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Starred Review Mary Shelley's 1818 novel, *Frankenstein*, is one of the best-known books in history, but many do not know that the lives of its author and those around her were equally as dramatic and tragic as those of the characters in her tale. Mary was the daughter of two famous radical authors, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, who died just 11 days after giving birth to Mary. At only 16, Mary eloped with the charismatic and eccentric Percy Shelley, who was besotted with Mary but already wed to another woman, by whom he had two children. Mary and Percy brought Mary's stepsister, Claire Clairmont, with them, and she not only had an affair with Percy but also pursued Lord Byron, a poet as famous for his stunning good looks as for his verse. This group, along with Byron's emotionally fragile physician, John Polidori, gathered together for a summer in Switzerland, where a challenge Byron threw out inspired Mary to write *Frankenstein*. Though the novel went on to meet with great success, the lives of all the authors would be touched by great tragedy in the following years. The lives of the writers were every bit as exciting as those of the characters they created, and the Hooblers recount the ups and downs in the lives of these Romantic-era geniuses with thrilling, intense prose. As exciting and fast paced as a good novel, this book is an absolute must-read for anyone interested in literary genius and the lives of people gifted with it. Kristine Huntley
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Excellent book to learn more about Mary Shelley, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron, Dr. Polidori and Claire Clairmont. Even though I knew a good amount on Byron and Mary Shelley beforehand, I learned quite a bit more after reading, including fascinating stories about Mary's husband, Percy. There was also a very good section about how Mary came up with the idea for *Frankenstein*, and the ghost story challenge that inspired it. *Frankenstein* lovers and horror enthusiasts alike will enjoy this. I highly recommend this book.

Great book for Mary Shelley, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron, Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, *Frankenstein* and Vampire enthusiasts. Read this for a humanities class. If you are interested in horror and how the genre of gothic horror, romanticism, and other monsters came about, this book - the monsters is a must read. It is an in depth, biography on all of their lives and how *Frankenstein* 1818 and 1831 versions came to be. Learn the true horrors behind it all.

I was a little worried when I bought this book, which had been recommended by a friend, that the writers might delve into the more salacious aspects of these writers/poets...and there was a good lot of room for that with Byron being a factor, but it was very factually presented. It's fascinating to see

the buildup to the narrative of Frankenstein. The authors did an excellent job of weaving together the history to show how Mary's creation evolved. Her parents and her relationship with them. Her many losses of children. Her relationship with others. They did a really thorough platform for the influence of her life in Frankenstein. I'm not a scholar so I can't speak to its historical authenticity, but I was convinced by this...and I'd love to see similar books that delve into the "why" and "how" great classic literature came to be. While I highlighted a ton of this book, I thought this was one of the more interesting quotes: Victor Frankenstein realizes that the creature is his doppelgänger--an insight that seems to have extended to readers and audiences, for today the name "Frankenstein" is popularly applied not only to the creator, but to the monster, who is never named in the book.

Shelley and Byron, in this case, are the "Sheldons," and a personally unlovable pair they prove to be. Genius creates art of deathless beauty, but sometimes these folks are so brilliant that the rest of us appear to them like groping bugs, easily squashed if convenient. Byron & Shelley were a pair of invincible artists, but their personal lives were a shambles. This book was a fascinating description of the dark summer which gave us both Frankenstein and The Vampire. The backstory on this group of artists was as gripping as the main story, but the interpersonal dynamics of this famous houseparty wouldn't be out of place on day time t.v. These artists lived on the edge, testing/breaking every societal limit. Both Byron and Shelley died young, blissfully unscathed. Mary Shelley, like many other intelligent survivors of such a wild scene, was the one who rehabilitated her husband's reputation, glossing over real events so that her husband's work could be found acceptable reading for the sanctimonious late Victorians. Unfortunately, Mary was also left as the person who had to endure the social opprobrium. (I'm following this with a long over-due reading of "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" written by Mary Shelley's "infamous" and utterly brilliant mother.)

It's axiomatic that genius is often characterized by questionable social skills and/or behavior, and it would appear to hold true in the case of Mary Shelley's circle of family and friends. The Hooblers present unflinching portraits of Mary, her husband Percy, father William Godwin and friend, Lord Byron among others. Mary receives the kindest treatment next to her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft (Author of "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman) Both Marys suffer at the hands of the men in their lives, and Mary the younger spends a good deal of time trying to make some sense of that suffering. But the men... they are true pieces of work. They are all selfish, self-centered, arrogant and cruel even in their affections. They seem to have little use for the women in their lives, less for the children they father promiscuously. They live for their "art" and the pleasures it buys them. And in

spite of that art, they are not particularly attractive when viewed through this lens. Of the three most prominent women in the book, Mary's stepsister, Claire Clairmont, is the least talented and the most unpalatable thanks mostly to her single-minded pursuit of Lord Byron and her possible romantic involvement with her sister's husband, Percy Shelley. I picked up the book originally because I have long been fascinated by the events of that "haunted summer" of 1816 when Byron challenged his friends to write a ghost story. The Hooblers present those events as a kind of centerpiece to the larger story of Mary Shelley, beginning with a short but careful examination of her mother's life with an eye to how it affected Mary's life and writing. One is tempted to wonder how Wollstonecraft might have viewed her daughter's elopement with Percy Shelley, and her writing career. As it is her death, not even a fortnight after the birth of her younger daughter, was the first of many losses that informed Mary Shelley's work. And in less than a quarter century, the younger Mary would lose three children, a half-sister, her husband and the love -- such as it was -- of her own father because of her relationship with Shelley. She would be haunted by the suicide of Shelley's first wife, Harriet, and her husband's chronic infidelities, possibly even with Claire. It's no wonder that she produced one of the most memorable horror novels ever penned.

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