



During a globally gloomy summer (caused by a volcanic eruption), a group of young authors vacationing together in the countryside laid out a literary challenge: who among them could write **the most terrifying horror story**?

Among those present was a teenage Mary Shelley. Over the next few months, she created what many consider to be the **world's first science fiction novel**.

Written over two hundred years ago at the height of the Romantic movement (which highly valued nature, emotion, and the potency of art), many gothic elements also characterize the text: creepy settings, vague anxieties, grotesque imagery, and a fear of annihilation.

What you see in pop culture — especially during this time of year — may evoke a green and groaning zombie, but that's not Mary Shelley's monster. In fact, the title doesn't refer to the nameless creature at all: Frankenstein is actually **the name of the creature's maker**.

The novel traces Victor Frankenstein's damned quest to impart and sustain life. Upon the successful completion of his experiment, however, he's horrified at the result. Space and time aren't enough to banish the abandoned offspring, and much of the narrative recounts the chilling struggle between creator and creature. This conflict between the pair is so intense that the two figures have almost merged in our collective imagination.

I require that each student obtain a copy of the novel (either one of my lender copies available upon request or a copy purchased from a bookstore) for their own individual study since personalized in-text annotations can be such a help in boosting comprehension, retention of details, and analysis of the bigger ideas. Students, you'll need your copy with you in class by the due date posted on next week's schedule board.

Though there are many different printed editions available of Frankenstein, there are two distinct versions of the story: the original 1818 version that Shelley completed when she was nineteen and the revised 1831 version. We'll be studying the latter this quarter. While Chapter 2 of the 1818 version begins "When I had attained the age of seventeen," if you're looking inside a copy of the 1831 version, Chapter 2 should begin with the words "**We were brought up together**": take note of this if you go shopping in a physical bookstore! (If you're looking online for a copy, the Dover Thrift edition is available on Amazon for under six bucks.)

