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THE MODERN PROMETHEUS

(WHAT'S IN A NAME?)

◀ Boris Karloff gave the monster the face most people associate with the name Frankenstein.

The first step towards fully understanding and appreciating Mary Shelley's classic novel is to focus on its title: *Frankenstein: or, the Modern Prometheus*. The full title makes it clear that the book is not about a 'monster', but rather about a scientific experiment with unexpected and terrible consequences.

However, for most people, the novel's title is *Frankenstein*, and that very name conjures up a picture of a disgusting, evil monster, not its creator, the scientist, Victor Frankenstein.

This misinterpretation of the name is not only due to a misreading of the title. Popular films and media adaptations have played a large part in creating the monster myth around Frankenstein.

This is so very different from Mary Shelley's creation, who educates himself by reading books such as Milton's *Paradise Lost* and other classics of western literature.

Despite his frightening appearance, the creature that Victor Frankenstein brought to life is highly sensitive and deeply intellectual, and is morally much more deserving of our sympathy than its irresponsible creator.

- **clay:** earth; mud
- **conjures up:** makes appear in the mind (as if by magic)
- **consequences:** results (that last in time)
- **context:** situation; background
- **deserving of:** that should be given



Prometheus is one of the most important and best-known figures in Greek mythology. He rebelled against Zeus, the king of the gods, stole fire from him and gave it to man. According to many legends, he also created man out of clay, hence the comparison to Victor Frankenstein.

The difficult relationship between the scientist and his creature can only be fully understood in the larger context of Romantic literature and its mythology. By going against the divine secrets of human life, Victor Frankenstein is seen as a modern Prometheus. Just like Prometheus went beyond the limits of the divine, making man from clay and then stealing creative fire from heaven to give to his creation, Victor Frankenstein breaks the barrier that separates man from God by bringing back life after death and making a new creature.

- **due to:** because of
- **hence:** for this reason
- **misinterpretation:** incorrect comprehension
- **sympathy:** understanding (usually of someone's problems)
- **unexpected:** surprising

Frankenstein

or, the Modern Prometheus

Victor
Frankenstein

The monster





Robert Walton


Henry Clerval




Elizabeth



William
Frankenstein



Victor Frankenstein
(as a boy)



Justine

BEFORE READING

1 What do you know about the novel *Frankenstein*? Tick (✓) true (T) or false (F).

- | | T | F |
|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a The novel is a horror story. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b Frankenstein is the name of the monster. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c The author was a woman. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d The story has a happy ending. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e Part of the story takes place at the North Pole. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

2 Match the sentences to the characters. Then listen and check.

- a A science student who creates a monster as an experiment.
- b An explorer who travels to the North Pole on a ship.
- c A girl who grows up with Victor Frankenstein's family.
- d A boy who has blond hair and blue eyes.
- e A very large man, who has superhuman powers.
- f Victor Frankenstein's good friend, who loves anything medieval, especially King Arthur.



Victor Frankenstein



The monster



Elizabeth



Henry Clerval



Robert Walton



William Frankenstein



3 Look at the picture of Frankenstein and his monster. Read the passage then answer the questions.


Finally, one dark November night, I completed my work. I collected my instruments and gave life to the being that lay at my feet. By the light of the candle, I saw the eyes of the creature open; it breathed hard, then made quick movements of its legs and arms.



How can I describe my emotions when I saw this disaster that, with such endless work and care, I had tried to create? I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful? Great God! His yellow skin only just covered the muscles and veins beneath. He had shiny black hair; his teeth were pearly white. But these good features only made a more unpleasant contrast with his watery eyes, lined face and straight black lips.

- a When did Frankenstein complete his work?
- b What colour was the creature's skin?
- c Did Frankenstein think the monster was beautiful?
- d What were the monster's good features?
- e What were his bad features?
- f Find the words in the text that mean the following.
 - 1 tools
 - 2 wrinkled
 - 3 feelings
 - 4 chosen
- g Which of these words does Frankenstein NOT use to describe his creation here? Tick (✓).
 - being
 - creature
 - disaster
 - monster

Chapter 1

 My name is Victor Frankenstein, and I am from Geneva. My father was a rich businessman and well-known in Switzerland. He married a poor woman, much younger than him. They travelled around Europe a lot, and I was born in Naples.

My mother often visited poor people to help them. Once, near Lake Como, she visited a family with five hungry children. One little girl was slim and fair, different from the others. When my mother asked about her, the woman of the house said she was an orphan[•], and that her parents had been rich. My parents agreed to take her and bring her up with their own family.

The girl's name was Elizabeth, and she became my best friend. She was interested in poetry and nature, while I studied the physical secrets of the world and how things worked. On the birth of my youngest brother, when I was seven, my parents stopped travelling and returned to Geneva, living in our town house and a country house by the lake.

My other close friend was Henry Clerval, the son of a merchant[•]. Henry loved anything medieval[•], especially King Arthur and his knights. He often tried to make us act plays and become characters from the medieval world of chivalry[•]. Henry was interested in morals[•] and heroes, and he wanted to become one when he grew up. We had a happy childhood. Elizabeth was good and kind, and she watched over us with her soft smile and beautiful eyes.


- **chivalry**: the good behaviour of knights
- **medieval**: of the Middle Ages
- **merchant**: businessman who sells goods in large quantities
- **morals**: codes of good behaviour
- **orphan**: child whose parents are dead



Despite my happy and carefree• childhood, I was always eager• to learn about other things. It was the secrets of heaven and earth that I wanted to learn about. When I was thirteen, I found a volume of the works of Cornelius Agrippa. This opened up a whole new world for me, and I was very happy.

AGRIPPA

WEB Research Cornelius Agrippa.

 Discuss your findings in small groups.

My father told me not to waste my time reading such books and did not explain anything to me. So I read on alone, following what I read from a child's point of view, not properly understanding, but still curious to learn.

This continued until a few years later when I saw the effects of a thunderstorm. A flash of lightning had completely destroyed a tree, and a learned• guest staying with our family told us all about a theory• he had formed on the subject of electricity and galvanism•. These subjects were new and interesting for me and, pushing my years of studying Agrippa to one side, I immediately threw myself into the study of mathematics and science.

This was perhaps the last time that my “guardian angel” tried to protect me from the storm that even then was waiting to fall on me.

- **carefree:** without worries
- **galvanism:** movement made by an electric current

- **learned:** clever; knowing lots
- **theory:** idea
- **was eager:** wanted

AFTER READING VOCABULARY

1 Use five of the words in the box to complete the sentences.

reward chivalry barn hideous soaked
decay glacier melting

- a In the Middle Ages, was the code of behavior followed by knights.
- b Frankenstein spent days and nights in tombs watching the of human bodies.
- c 'I am sorry that one whom we loved and trusted should us in this way.'
- d 'I knew that my appearance was the main cause of people's horror.'
- e A is a slowly moving mass of ice.

2  In pairs, write three sentences with the words left out in Exercise 1.

3 For each of the sentences, write a new sentence as similar as possible in meaning to the original one, but using the words given in capitals; do not change these words in any way.

- a His appearance was different from any I had ever seen before.

NEVER

.....

- b No one was like me.

DIFFERENT

.....

- c As there was little to do in the winter, the man read to Agatha.

MUCH

.....

P B1 Preliminary English Test Reading Part 5

1 Complete the sentences below by choosing the correct answer.

- 1** I wanted to produce a new that would bless me as its creator.
A specification B specimen C specify D species
- 2** Walton wanted to find a way the North Pole and into the Pacific Ocean.
A into B out C from D across
- 3** Henry loved medieval, especially King Arthur and his knights.
A the B all C anything D any
- 4** I decided to make my own creation. It two and a half metres tall.
A would be B is going to be C will be D were
- 5** I rushed out of the room and on my bed.
A lay B lied C laid D lie
- 6** 'How thin and pale you are, as you had been up for several nights.'
A when B like C if D whether
- 7** 'I wish you three months ago, and found us all happy.'
A were coming B had come C came D have come
- 8** I thought of how I could introduce myself to them. I decided it would be to enter the cottage when the blind old man was alone.
A most B well C fine D best
- 9** I feared the monster would do some more evil. I a feeling he had not finished.
A had B get C felt D knew
- 10** Previously, I had stolen food, but after that I lived what I could find from the woods.
A for B on C with D by