

Timeline of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's Life

August 1797

Mary's birth: Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin is born in London. She is the only child of feminist writer Mary Wollstonecraft (who dies 10 days after her birth) and the radical political philosopher William Godwin.

1801

A new step-family: William Godwin marries a widow named Mary Jane Clairmont, who moves in with her two children, Charles and Claire.

Meets Percy Bysshe-Shelley: We do not know whether Mary first meets Percy Bysshe Shelley in November 1812 or March 1814. Shelley is a young poet who admires Mary's father. He is five years older than Mary and already married to Harriet Westbrook. Mary and Percy Shelley soon fall in love.



Portrait of Mary Shelley by Reginald Easton, 1851-1893. Bodleian Libraries.



Portrait of Percy Bysshe Shelley by Malcolm Stewart, 'after Clint', 1900. Bodleian Libraries.

June 1814

Elopes with Shelley: 16-year-old Mary runs off with Percy Shelley to Europe. Her step-sister Claire Clairmont goes with them, despite her mother's rage. Mary Godwin becomes pregnant almost immediately. William Godwin is furious and refuses to see his daughter for over two years.

August 1814

Returns to England: Mary and Percy run out of money after a summer of travel in Europe, and Percy must keep changing address to avoid debt-collectors.

February 1815

1st baby: Mary gives birth to the couple's first child, Clara. The baby is premature and dies after a few days. Mary's diary recounts a dream where the baby came back to life when warmed by the fire.

January 1816

2nd baby: Mary Godwin gives birth to the couple's second child, William, nicknamed Willmouse.

June 1816

Mary begins *Frankenstein*: The Shelleys take a summer holiday in Switzerland with Lord Byron and his pregnant lover Claire Clairmont. Byron suggests a ghost story contest and Mary starts the tale that becomes *Frankenstein*.

July 1816

Visit to the Alps: Mary visits the Mer de Glace (Sea of Ice) glacier on top of Mont Blanc with Shelley, and later uses it as the setting for a pivotal scene in *Frankenstein*.

October 1816

Half-sister dies: Mary's half-sister Fanny Imlay commits suicide by laudanum overdose aged 22.

December 1816

Shelley's wife dies, so Mary and Shelley can now marry: Shelley's 21-year-old wife Harriet Westbrook is found dead in London's Serpentine River. She was pregnant with her third child, which was probably illegitimate. 15 days after discovering that Percy's wife has died, Percy and Mary get married in London. She is pregnant with their third child, and reconciles with her father.

May 1817

Mary finishes writing *Frankenstein*

September 1817

3rd baby: Mary Shelley gives birth to her third child, Clara Everina. The baby dies of dysentery in Italy after three weeks.

November 1817

Travel writing: Mary and Percy write a Romantic travel narrative, *History of a Six Weeks' Tour*, based on letters, poems, and journals from their European travels in 1814 and 1816. It is published in November 1817 and will be Mary's first published work.

January 1818

***Frankenstein* is published:** *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* is published in three volumes with a print run of 500. Mary is 20 and is not named as the author, and some readers assume that it is Percy's work. Analysis of the manuscript shows that Percy Shelley contributed around 6% of the text: 4,000 out of 72,000 words. The book is advertised in newspapers but does not sell very well and reviews are mixed.

June 1819

Son dies: Mary's 3-year-old son William dies of malaria in Italy. The Shelleys now have no living children, though Mary is pregnant with their fourth.

August 1819

Starts 2nd novel: Mary begins writing her second novel *The Fields of Fancy*, later retitled as *Mathilda*, about a father's incestuous love for his daughter. It is not published until 140 years later.

November 1819

4th baby: Mary Shelley gives birth to the couple's son Percy Florence, their only child who will survive infancy.

June 1822

Miscarriage: Mary almost dies due to a miscarriage, but Shelley nurses her and prepares ice baths to stop the bleeding.

July 1822

Percy Bysshe-Shelley dies: Percy Shelley, aged 29, drowns in the Gulf of Spezia while sailing. Widowed at 25, with a toddler son, Mary keeps his burnt heart wrapped in silk in her writing case and decides to earn a living by publishing her own writings and those of her dead husband.

February 1823

Mary publishes *Valperga*: Mary completes her historical novel, *Valperga*, set in medieval Italy but addressing contemporary issues.

August 1823

2nd edition of *Frankenstein*: The second edition of *Frankenstein* is published, edited by William Godwin. This time, Mary W. Shelley is acknowledged as the author. This edition is usually not used as an authoritative text, due to William's editorial changes. Mary also sees the first play adaptation of her work, *Presumption; or The Fate of Frankenstein*, at the English Opera House. Mary did not receive any royalties from the play but its popularity probably increased sales of the second edition.

June 1824

Shelley's poems halted: Mary publishes her late husband's poems but is forced to stop sales when her father-in-law threatens to cut off his £100 per year support to her and her son.

February 1826

Mary publishes *The Last Man*: Mary's post-apocalyptic futuristic plague novel, *The Last Man*, set in the late 21st century, contains fictionalised versions of the deaths of Percy Shelley and Lord Byron and questions their Romantic political ideals. It receives very poor reviews.

October 1831

3rd edition of *Frankenstein*: Mary publishes a third, revised edition of *Frankenstein*, which removes the division into three volumes. Critics debate whether Mary's edits make the narrative less radical, in response to earlier reviewers. This edition is the text used by most schools.

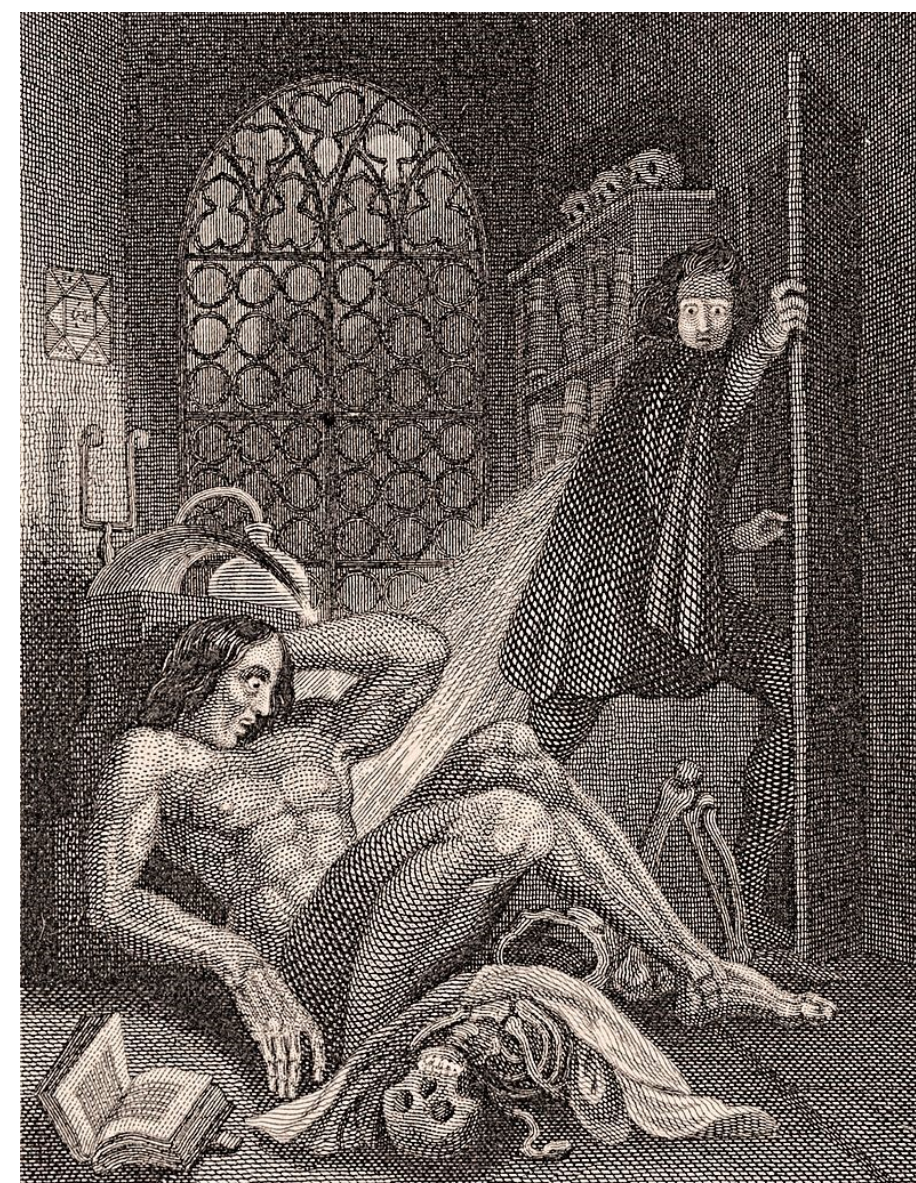
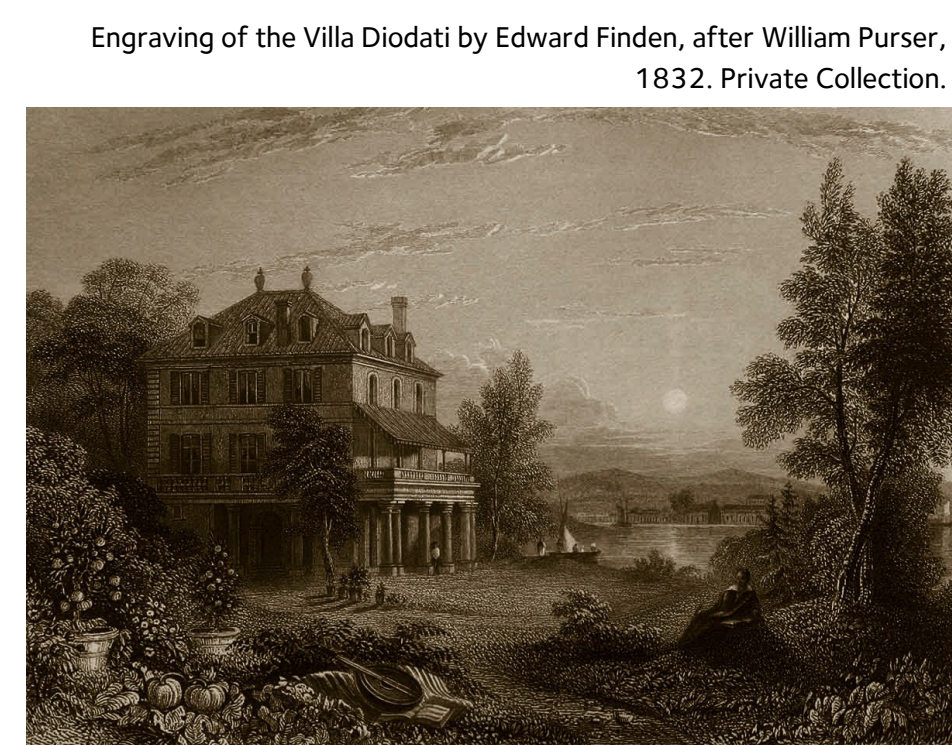


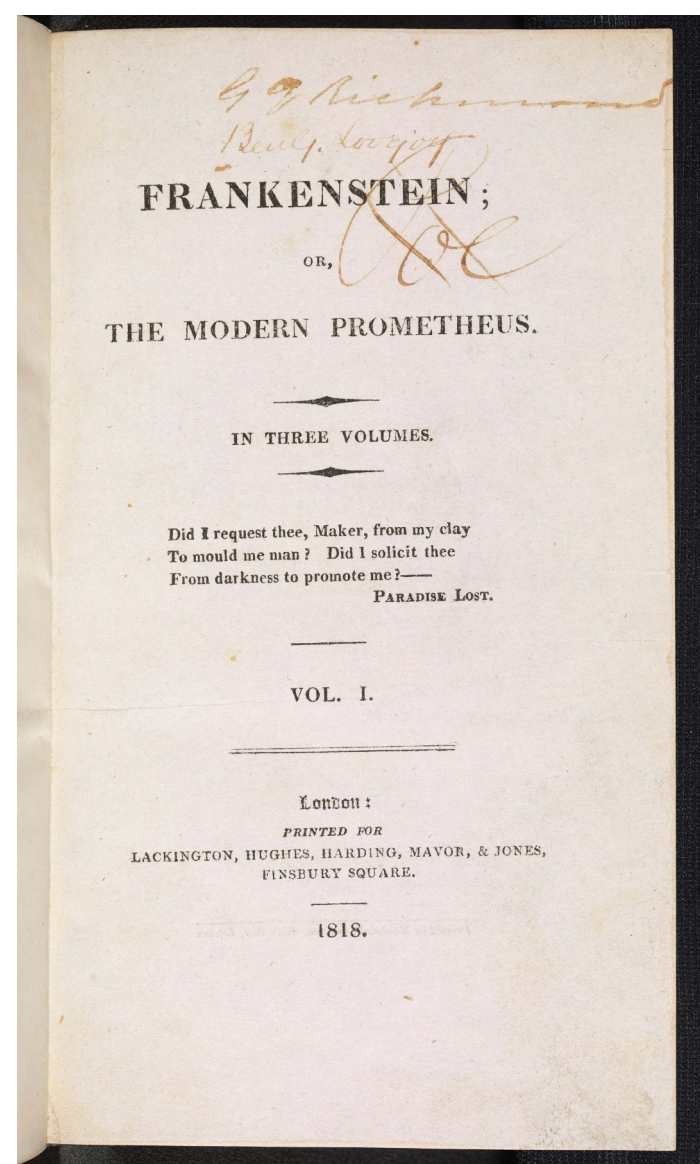
Illustration from the revised edition of *Frankenstein*, London, 1831.

February 1851

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley dies: Mary dies aged 53 in London after a long illness, possibly caused by a brain tumour.



Engraving of the Villa Diodati by Edward Finden, after William Purser, 1832. Private Collection.



Title page of the first edition of *Frankenstein*, Bodleian Libraries.



The Funeral of Shelley, by Louis Edouard Fournier, 1889.



Playbill from the 1823 production of 'Presumption! or the Fate of Frankenstein', based on Mary Shelley's novel. Bodleian Libraries.

Portrait of Mary Shelley by Richard Rothwell, 1840. © National Portrait Gallery.

