
Foreword

... if I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear.

This line is spoken by the hapless creature in Mary Shelley's iconic novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, first published in 1818. Undoubtedly, some people will have shuddered at this harrowing tale, not least because it has been adapted into the medium of horror film, several examples of which have imprinted the idea that *Frankenstein* is a story about a brute and bloodthirsty fiend. However, this was not how Shelley wrote the story. The novel has several speakers and among them the creature is allowed to narrate his tale of being rejected and ostracized by an uncaring and hostile humanity. This agonizing tale has inspired love for the wretched outcast among many generations of readers. No matter what version of the story one may know, the tale of the mad scientist, who gives life a creature made from human corpses, has established itself as one of the enduring cultural myths of the modern world. In 2018, we celebrate the bicentenary of Shelley's influential novel. To mark the occasion, a series of events has been organized around the globe, on the initiative of the Keats-Shelley Association of America. The events will take place under the aegis of the *Frankenreads Project*. At the time this foreword goes to press, 541 events are scheduled to take place in 47 countries.

Shelley's novel is undoubtedly one of the best-known examples of romantic-era writing, and amongst the few books from the period that many readers will know. Today, editions of *Frankenstein* are no longer issued in the original, cumbersome three-volume format, but are made available in inexpensive paperbacks. This has made the original 1818 text accessible to many *con amore* readers. In richly annotated versions, *Frankenstein* also ranks among the novels most frequently taught in English courses around the world. As noted, the story has regularly been adapted for other media, whether the stage, television, cinema, comic book, or computer games. If this has been with varying degrees of success, the figure of Frankenstein's 'monster' is now surely among the best-known characters in the world. In this issue, Lis Møller reviews Geir Uthaug's new book-length overview of romanticism, *Romantikens univers* (2017), in which the author justifiably allots much space to *Frankenstein*. The novel's place in the

canon cannot be contested. The longevity of *Frankenstein* and its more or less uninterrupted influence on popular culture are testament to the novel's enduring appeal.

After two centuries of criticism, the study of *Frankenstein* has itself become a kind of stitched-together entity with numerous competing interpretations that do not seem to diminish with time. However, one overriding reason for the widespread celebrations in 2018 is that successive generations of readers have made the novel's themes bear on debates that happen to be current to them. One strand in the interpretation of the novel is to view it as eerily prescient of issues that we are grappling with in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century society. In addition to this, freak weather conditions caused human and economic catastrophe in the year Mary Shelley wrote the story, which has been extensively discussed in recent years as relevant to contemporary anxieties about climate change. Some of the various interpretations of the novel will briefly be discussed in this foreword, including how modern readers necromantically read Shelley's masterpiece as prescient of issues that are topical today.

To make a beginning on some of the auguries that have been identified in *Frankenstein*, a prominent theme is the creation of a new kind of man. This aspiration forms the backbone of the novel and has been seen as pertinent to modern debates about bioethics. If the stitching together of cadavers collected by Victor Frankenstein may belong solely to the *Schauerroman*, from which Shelley took inspiration, it should not be forgotten that his ambition is to correct mental and physical faults in humans, and that he is driven by the noble hope of overcoming disease and death. This is a goal congruent with the research agendas of modern biosciences. Nonetheless, such meddling with nature comes with a warning, as Shelley shows us. Today, life-saving surgery may be mostly welcomed, but other interventions are looked upon with a jaundiced eye. One example is GMOs, regularly referred to as 'Frankenfood', in reference to Shelley's novel, with the indication this is a monstrous interference in the natural order.

Related to Victor's quest to create a new life is the unnatural circumvention of women and mothers. This has been a focal point in many late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century feminist readings of the novel. It can be said that women are central to Shelley's text precisely because they are overlooked. That is to say, male characters may be front and centre in the plot, but the fact that the usual role played by women in sex, birth, and child rearing is sidestepped is the real focus of the novel. The ambitious Victor offends not only the order of nature but also social codes, and his lack of care for his progeny is what creates the tragedy of the novel. It is Victor's rejection of his creation and the subsequent solitude and isolation that the creature endures that can be said to actuate his murderous tendencies. Furthermore, Victor's final refusal of the creature's request to make a female companion is also related to male fantasies of self-sufficiency. Anne K.

Mellor, one of the foremost feminist readers of the novel, has observed that Victor is disinclined to create a female partner that may have a sense of self and rationale and who may therefore not be controlled (Victor fears ‘a thinking and reasoning animal’ who refuses to ‘comply with a compact made before her creation’ and may ‘turn with disgust’ from the male creature).

Beyond the feminist dimension, the wider political dimension of Shelley’s novel has long been a vexatious question. The author grew up in a radical political milieu and became romantically entangled with a radical activist, and critics have emphasized the heretical and revolutionary streak in the novel. The political aspect is perhaps most clearly seen in the creature’s choice of reading material, which is focused on books containing liberal values and critique of autocratic power. To apply an allegorical reading, Victor Frankenstein can be seen as someone who exploits the bodies of men, like a feudal lord would make use of the peasantry. From the beginning, the creature is treated so appallingly by his master that he becomes reprobate and finally vindictive. One may almost hear an echo of Shelley’s mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, who advanced the opinion in *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* (1794) that ‘[p]eople are rendered ferocious by misery; and misanthropy is ever the offspring of discontent’. Despite Shelley’s clear sympathies with the oppressed, critics have argued that the novel also lays itself open to interpretation as a text sceptical of the Revolution. *Frankenstein* has more than a few times been expounded as an allegory of the French Revolution – good intentions that fall into disarray and become a destructive as well as self-destructive power. Not that Shelley would necessarily have cheered a conservative perspective, but some critics have heard an echo of Edmund Burke’s description of the negative consequences of the French Revolution: ‘a species of political monster, which has always ended by devouring those who have produced it’. Allegorical readings may often spiral out of control, but one should not ignore that the novel was subsequently tapped as a commentary on popular risings.

The British Foreign Secretary, George Canning, spoke in the House of Commons in 1824 on the emancipation of West Indian slaves, on which occasion he warned that ‘to turn him [the slave] loose in the manhood of his physical strength, in the maturity of his physical passion, but in the infancy of his un-instructed reason, would be to raise up a creature resembling the splendid fiction of a recent romance’. Readers of *Punch* magazine would in 1843 have seen a cartoon entitled ‘The Irish Frankenstein’, depicting a fiendish Irishman as a monster in the process of attacking an innocent British man (an allusion to the fear of mob violence following the arrest of the Irish political leader Daniel O’Connell). In 1882, the famous illustrator John Tenniel was behind another cartoon with the same title, this time in referring to renewed fears of Irish rebellion.

Arguably, the subtitle of *Frankenstein* (often overlooked) has certain political resonances. Prometheus was the overambitious creator of Greek legend, who created man out of clay and later stole fire from the gods to give to mankind. For Prometheus's actions Zeus punished him by having an eagle pluck out his liver every night. The symbolic recasting of this myth was low-hanging fruit at a time when the political overreacher was a well-known type. The Prometheus myth was certainly a favourite among romantic-period artists. There is Goethe's poem from 1789, which was translated into several languages; Percy Bysshe Shelley published the closet drama *Prometheus Unbound* (1820); and paintings by Heinrich Füger and Thomas Cole come to mind.

It is unlikely that Shelley blithely referenced the Prometheus myth without awareness of the political interpretations it was given at the time. The analogy was certainly used in connection with Napoleon, who could be said to have lit a spark of hope for a rebirth of Europe. He rose to fame as the republican hero of Europe, which only made the disenchantment so much more palpable when he increasingly assumed the role of tyrant. Ludwig van Beethoven was a one-time admirer of Napoleon's anti-monarchical ideas. Soon after composing his only ballet, *Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus* [The creatures of Prometheus] (1801), Beethoven began work on what is now known as Symphony No. 3 (written 1803–1804). On an extant copy of the music sheets, Beethoven has scratched out two handwritten subtitles: the Italian phrase *Intitolata Bonaparte* [Titled Bonaparte] and the German *Geschrieben auf Bonaparte* [Written for Bonaparte]. Apparently, Beethoven withdrew his support for Napoleon in disgust when he learned that the once great liberator had proclaimed himself 'Emperor of the French'. The news of this power grab was announced to Beethoven by his secretary, Ferdinand Ries, who would later recall that the composer had responded in frustration: 'So he [Napoleon] is no more than a common mortal! Now, too, he will tread under foot all the rights of Man, indulge only his ambition'. Another admirer of Napoleon was the English Lord Byron. In his 'Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte' (1814), he, however, compares the military leader unfavourably to Prometheus, because the older Napoleon is not Promethean enough, deciding to abdicate rather than sacrifice himself for mankind. A few years later, in 1816, Byron wrote the poem 'Prometheus', in which he issues a strident call to keep the rebellious flame burning – perhaps as a response to Napoleon's ignominious retreat and defeat.

In 1816, Byron was also disillusioned with the political stagnation in Britain and the increasingly toxic reaction to his person. He therefore sought temporary refuge in Switzerland, at Villa Diodati, near Lake Geneva. Here, he entertained the company of his personal physician John Polidori, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Godwin (soon to be Mrs Shelley), and her stepsister, Claire Clairmont. Much of the group's summer was spent indoors. In the foreword to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley recalls that it was 'a wet, uncongenial

summer, and incessant rain often confined us for days to the house'. In fact, it was the coldest and wettest Genevan summer since records began in 1753. No less than 130 days of rainfall between April and September would swell the water of the lake so that it flooded the city and some parts could only be reached by boat. Switzerland was particularly hard hit by unusual weather with homes destroyed, fields flooded and livestock drowned. The winds, unusual snowfall and mountain avalanches that year made tourists complain that the picturesque landscapes were unrecognisable. Strange weather phenomena also struck visitors with a sense of awe. In a letter of 1 June 1816, Mary Shelley describes 'a finer storm than I had ever beheld before', and on 13 June the well-travelled Lord Byron witnessed 'the mightiest of the storms' he had ever seen. Unable to venture outside because of the rain, the literary company who gathered at Villa Diodati passed the time with a ghost-story competition. It was out of this competition that the text of *Frankenstein* would emerge, and one may surmise that the weather cannot but have had some influence on Shelley's mood. Few readers have missed that foul weather, thunderstorms and lightning are significant symbols in *Frankenstein*.

1816 is often referred to as the 'Year without a Summer', which was connected with a climate catastrophe – a context not unexpectedly taken up by several critics and historians in recent years. The reason for the lack of sunshine is now linked to the eruption in April 1815 of Mount Tambora, a volcano in what is now Indonesia. The eruption was of an enormous scale, spewing vast amounts of sulphuric acid and ash into the atmosphere (adding to the effect of other eruptions in previous years), preventing light from penetrating the dust cloud that moved across the globe. The knock-on effects of the eruption were decreasing temperatures and abnormal weather conditions. The sudden climate change caused an agricultural shortfall in many countries and, in turn, led to widespread famine in the Northern Hemisphere. The result was the death of thousands, disease, economic collapse, civil unrest, and mass migration. Ironically, 2018 – the year in which we celebrate the bicentenary of a novel born in the 'Year without a Summer' – saw one of the hottest summers on record, causing widespread drought and forest fires.

For teachers of romanticism, the novel *Frankenstein* can become monstrous in itself, threatening to eclipse all other works from the period. This should not, however, keep us from celebrating this spectacular work, which is a true classic. It is a novel that perhaps more than any other in literary history has inspired so many readers' first love-relationship with romanticism. This is not least because *Frankenstein* has proven itself as an eminently renewable resource, whose themes are given new life by reading them into ever new and topical contexts. Just like the creature himself, the novel is a corpse from the past that is reanimated but on such a scale and with such regularity that it has fostered a corpus of

critical readings that refuse to let the novel rest in peace. In this issue of *Romantik: Journal for the Study of Romanticism*, we have made room for other areas that show the variety of topics from the romantic period that also attract the interest of researchers in 2018.

The articles consider the mediation of thoughts and ideas, not only across genres and cultures, but particularly across borders. Tim van Gerven's article on the historical figure of Tordenskjold focuses on the role of literary texts in transforming this navel hero from man to national symbol, exploring dichotomies between history and memory. The fluctuating identities of Tordenskjold are identified and related to the national cultivation of this figure on both sides of the water, with both Denmark and Norway appropriating the man as a cultural symbol. In contrast to Gerven's analysis of how individuals may be written into the history of a national collective, Susanne Bangert's article engages with the landscape artist F. C. Kiærskou, who can be said to have been written out of Danish art history. The article is an analysis of how a painter who enjoyed a fair amount of success during his own lifetime has since been neglected by modern critics and the public. Featured on the front cover of the present volume, Kiærskou's painting *Klippelandskab. Djupadal i Blekinge* [Rocky landscape. Djupadal in Blekinge] was painted in 1855 and purchased the same year (it has been on long-term loan to the Danish Parliament since 2001). Cecilia Wadsö-Lecaros's article on the key role of translation, in relation to the mediation of Reform ideas, shows how translators may steer history in new directions. Lecaros explores the liberty translators had for mixing the ideas of others with their own philanthropic views, thereby not only blurring the limits of what constitutes a translation, but also taking on the roles of instigators of political and ideological change. Philipp Hunnekuhl also explores Anglo-Scandinavian relations, emphasising the recent 'ethical turn' in romantic studies in a cross-cultural literary study of Henry Robinson, Ernst Arndt, and William Wordsworth. Peter Brix Søndergaard explores the origins of romanticism and the dialectic of enlightenment in his analysis of English art in the context of European ideas. Søndergaard provides an interesting characterisation of Millais's art, and he discusses gender and nature alongside the issues of painterly control and escape. Finally, we print an exploration of how romanticism may be viewed as a network of contemporaneous thoughts and opinions across Europe. Uffe Hansen's article on 'the unconscious' is a review of the relation between the un- and the sub-conscious state of mind, reminding us that art is as accidental as it is deliberate in its inspiration and construction. Originally published as a contribution to a series of papers on romanticism (*Litteraturkritik & Romantikstudier*), the article stands out as the most sought-after contribution to the series and has remained a favourite among readers. The translation will give English-speaking audiences a chance to acquaint themselves with the insightful and wide-ranging

article on a central romantic theme. The translation is also a tribute to the author, who sadly passed away in 2016.

Welcome to *Romantik*.

Robert W. Rix, on behalf of the editorial board