
KÖNIGS ERLÄUTERUNGEN

Band 363

Textanalyse und Interpretation zu

Mary Shelley

FRANKENSTEIN

Stefan Munaretto

Alle erforderlichen Infos für Abitur, Matura, Klausur und Referat
plus Musteraufgaben mit Lösungsansätzen



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1. DAS WICHTIGSTE AUF EINEN BLICK – SCHNELLÜBERSICHT

Biography:

⇒ S. 12 ff.

- Mary Godwin was born in 1797 in London as the child of two well-known authors. Her mother died only ten days after giving birth.
- In 1814 Mary eloped with her lover and future husband, the Romantic poet Percy Shelley.
- Her famous novel *Frankenstein* was published in 1818.
- She died in London in 1851 and is buried in Bournemouth.

Historical context:

⇒ S. 16 ff.

- *Frankenstein* was written during a period of almost relentless scientific and technological advances.
- Around 1800, anatomy, chemistry and especially the phenomenon of electricity were the fields which contributed the most to the widespread fascination with science.
- Science during the Age of Enlightenment was characterised by competing systems of thought: rational and mechanistic science, the more mystical Romantic science and even the outdated occult sciences.
- Science had a sinister side, too. “Bodysnatchers” supplied medical schools with corpses they stole from graveyards and some scientists attempted to reanimate dead bodies with electric shocks.
- The revolutionary and social turmoil which shaped the decades before *Frankenstein* was written is an important subtext of the novel.
- *Frankenstein* is strongly influenced by the educational ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau who believed that good parenting

requires sympathy and guidance and that the failure to educate children in such a way is a fundamental evil of civilized society.

- Mary Shelley also draws upon her own childhood experiences in a dysfunctional family.

Details and explanations of important works:

- Mary Shelley was a teenage prodigy who remained famous as the author of *Frankenstein* throughout her life but would never write anything remotely successful again. ⇒ S. 40 ff.
- She wrote another six novels and novellas most of which like *Frankenstein* focus on the themes of science, justice and equality, parenting and education.

Origin and sources:

- Mary Godwin got the inspiration to write *Frankenstein* in the summer of 1816 while staying at the Villa Diodati near Geneva. The Romantic poet Lord Byron challenged his guests to write ghost stories. A few days later, Mary had a frightening nightmare which became the spark of life for her story. ⇒ S. 43 ff.

Summary:

- Frankenstein is a gifted and ambitious young scientist who discovers the secret of life and fabricates a creature from parts of dead bodies. But when he finally succeeds in bringing it to life he is so horrified at its hideousness that he runs away and abandons it. The monster longs for sympathy and companionship but is rejected not only by his creator but by society at large because of his appearance. Consumed with hatred he murders Victor's family and friends. Frankenstein chases the monster until he finally gets trapped on floating ice in the Arctic. ⇒ S. 47 ff.

He is rescued by Robert Walton, an explorer, who takes him aboard and listens to his story. Soon after, Frankenstein dies. The monster appears on the ship to bid farewell to his dead creator and appears heartbroken. The whole tale is related in a series of letters Walton writes to his sister in England.

Structure:

⇒ S. 57 ff.

- *Frankenstein* is an epistolary novel, i. e. one that tells its story through the medium of letters. It also makes use of a complex set of embedded narratives with three main voices (Walton, Frankenstein, the creature).
- All three main narrative voices are male; women are only placed on the novel's margins. However, Mary Shelley finds ways to subtly undermine male dominance.
- The reader has reason to suspect that the three main narrators, to varying degrees, are not reliable.
- Shelley uses intertextual references to characterize her protagonists and to provide context and background for the readers to heighten their experience.
- The narrative rests on a number of core values: justice, equality, the need to relate to the suffering of others. Beyond that it raises the reader's awareness of the ambiguity and mutability of the world by enabling different readings of characters and events.

The characters and their constellations:

⇒ S. 69 ff.

- Families are at the heart of *Frankenstein* and that includes Victor and his creature who have a father/son-relationship. Like the creature, many other characters were abandoned by their parents and/or are orphans or semi-orphans. The reasons for Frankenstein's unstable personality go back to his childhood.

- *Frankenstein* can be read on two levels. On the first level, it seems like just another thrilling novel with two-dimensional characters. Here Victor is a mad young scientist who becomes obsessed with creating new life. His self-centredness makes him indifferent towards the ethical and practical consequences of his work, which ultimately leads to his own destruction and death. The artificially created monster is physically and intellectually far superior to normal human beings but is hated and rejected by society because of his ugliness whereafter he becomes evil and a serial killer. The explorer Robert Walton represents Frankenstein's younger self. Like Victor he dreams of earning fame through great scientific achievements and isolates himself from the world. In contrast to Victor, he aborts his mission because he feels responsible for the safety of his crew.
- The psychological complexities of the characters can be found on a level below the surface of the text. Their deeper meaning is hidden in their nightmares, fears, repressed desires and disappointments most of which are caused by the patriarchal organization of the families they grow up in. Alphonse is the supreme authority in the Frankenstein family, while Caroline devotes her life entirely to men (first her father, then Alphonse). Victor and other children are denied the free development of an individual identity and treated at best like „playthings“. As a consequence Frankenstein develops into a narcissist who is also terrified of female sexuality.

Style and language:

- The narrative voices of Walton, Frankenstein and the creature are similar. Their style is characterized by an elaborate vocabulary and syntax and persuasive rhetoric. ⇨ S. 87 ff.

- The narrative is highly metaphorical which is a typical feature of the literary genre parable.
- The novel contains descriptions of the Romantic sublime in nature, e. g. the “awful majesty” of mountain summits. The healing-powers of untamed nature free the characters of pride and arrogance.
- Most of the defining features of Gothic literature can be found in *Frankenstein*. The nightmarish Gothic scenarios are a symbolical expression of the horrors of colonialism in the British Empire.

Approaches to interpretation:

⇒ S. 96 ff.

- *Frankenstein* is a parable of modernity. The novel addresses the question of what it means to be human in the age that began with the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and the French Revolution and continues until our time.
- Shelley maps out a vision of a just and caring society based on fairness and mutual agreements and not on an unequal distribution of wealth and power.
- A just society has its roots in the loving and careful guidance of children. Badly managed education, neglect and lovelessness destroy their innate goodness.
- The novel is a cautionary tale about excessive human ambition and science that is morally vacant.
- Explores the ways in which society demonizes and dehumanizes people who are considered a threat to the dominant social order on the basis of gender, ethnic background, class or sexual orientation.
- Deals with the monster of radical political and technological change that is a characteristic feature of the modern age and periodically disrupts society.

History of reception:

- In the two-hundred years since its publication, *Frankenstein* has never been out of print. It is considered a modern masterpiece. ⇨ S. 116 ff.
- From early on it has taken on a life of its own in pop culture. Most people's idea of the story has been shaped by the countless adaptations to the theatre and film, most of which shed the complexities of Shelley's novel and accentuate the shock effects.

2.1 Biografie



Mary
Wollstonecraft
Shelley
(1797–1851)
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2. MARY SHELLEY: LEBEN UND WERK

2.1 Biografie

JAHR	ORT	EREIGNIS	ALTER
1797	London	Geburt am 30. August als Tochter zweier bekannter Autoren: des Philosophen William Godwin und der Frauenrechtlerin Mary Wollstonecraft. Marys Mutter stirbt bereits am 10. September des Jahres an Kindbettfieber.	
1801	London	Mary bekommt eine Stiefmutter, als William Godwin Mary Jane Vial (auch unter dem Namen Clairmont bekannt) heiratet.	4
1803	London	Mit der Geburt von Marys Halbbruder William leben fünf Kinder bei den Godwins; neben William und Mary noch ihre Halbschwester Fanny Imlay aus einer älteren Beziehung von Mary Wollstonecraft sowie zwei Kinder, die Mary Jane Clairmont mit in die Ehe gebracht hatte.	6
1812	Dundee/ London	Marys Gesundheit war schon seit längerem angegriffen, wozu vermutlich die angespannte Atmosphäre in der komplizierten Godwin-Familie beitrug. Um zu genesen, wird sie im Juni mit dem Schiff nach Dundee in Schottland geschickt, wo sie sich bei Freunden ihres Vaters erholt. Dort bleibt sie bis November. Kurz nach der Rückkehr lernt Mary vermutlich den romantischen Autor Percy Bysshe Shelley und dessen Ehefrau Harriet im Haus ihres Vaters kennen.	15
1813	London/ Dundee	Im Juni reist Mary wieder nach Dundee.	16

2.1 Biografie

JAHR	ORT	EREIGNIS	ALTER
1814	Dundee/ London	Nach der endgültigen Rückkehr aus Schottland im März kommen sich Mary und Percy Shelley näher. Am 28. Juli reißen die beiden, begleitet von Marys Stiefschwester Claire Clairmont, unter abenteuerlichen Umständen aus und reisen sechs Wochen lang durch Frankreich, die Schweiz, Deutschland und Holland. Als das Geld alle ist, fahren sie zurück. Mary ist schwanger. Die drei Rebellen leben in den folgenden Jahren hauptsächlich in London. Sie leiden unter ständiger Geldnot. Marys Vater hat den Kontakt abgebrochen und Percys Vater die Zahlungen an den Sohn eingestellt.	17
1815	London	Am 22. Februar wird die Tochter Clara zwei Monate zu früh geboren. Sie stirbt am 6. März.	18
1816	London/ Genfer See	Am 24. Januar wird Marys zweites Kind geboren, William. Im Mai reisen Mary, Percy, Claire und der kleine William auf den Kontinent. Am Genfer See verbringen sie Zeit mit dem Dichter Lord Byron und dessen Arzt John Polidori. Hier findet Mary die Inspiration für ihren <i>Frankenstein</i> -Roman. Später im Jahr sterben Marys Halbschwester Fanny und Percys Frau Harriet Shelley, beide begehen Selbstmord. Am 30. Dezember heiraten Mary und Percy und versöhnen sich mit Marys Vater.	19
1817	London	Am 2. September wird Marys drittes Kind geboren, eine Tochter namens Clara Everina.	20
1818	Italien	Am 1. Januar erscheint <i>Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus</i> anonym und hat gleich Erfolg. Die Shelleys bereisen ab März Italien. Am 24. September stirbt Clara Everina in Venedig an der Ruhr.	21

2.1 Biografie

JAHR	ORT	EREIGNIS	ALTER
1819	Italien	Am 7. Juni stirbt der kleine William an Malaria. Mary Shelley schreibt den Roman <i>Matilda</i> , der aber zu ihren Lebzeiten nicht veröffentlicht wird. Am 12. November wird der Sohn Percy Florence in Florenz geboren.	22
1820-1822	Italien	Mary arbeitet in Pisa und an anderen Orten an verschiedenen Werken.	23-25
1822	Italien	Am 16. Juni erleidet Mary eine Fehlgeburt, bei der sie beinahe selbst stirbt. Am 1. Juli ertrinkt Percy Shelley bei einem Bootsunfall im Golf von Spezia.	25
1823	Italien/ London	Der Roman <i>Valperga</i> und die Erzählung <i>A Tale of the Passions</i> erscheinen. Mary und Percy Florence treffen im August wieder in England ein. Inzwischen gibt es von <i>Frankenstein</i> eine Übersetzung ins Französische und mehrere Adaptionen für das Theater. Eine zweite Ausgabe von <i>Frankenstein</i> kommt heraus, diesmal unter dem Namen der Autorin.	26
1824	London	Am 19. April stirbt der Freund Lord Byron in Griechenland. Mary übernimmt die Aufgabe, die Werke ihres verstorbenen Mannes herauszugeben. Sie muss diese Arbeit aber vorerst einstellen, weil ihr Schwiegervater droht, ansonsten die Unterhaltszahlungen für seinen Enkel einzustellen.	27
Ab 1824	London	Mary Shelleys literarische Tätigkeit umfasst neben Romanen viele kürzere Texte, u. a. Kurzgeschichten, Reisebeschreibungen, Lebensbeschreibungen und Buchrezensionen.	27