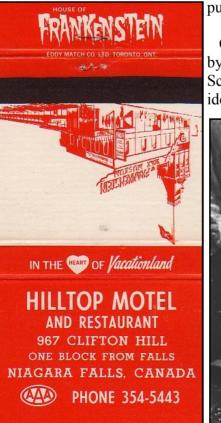"Hollywood did not give birth to *Frankenstein*; Mary Shelley did. More than a century before actor Boris Karloff, helped by make-up artists, made the monster in his image, came Shelley and her creation. In the summer of 1816, nineteen-year-old Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin and her lover, the poet Percy Shelley (whom she married later that year), visited the poet Lord Byron at his villa beside Lake Geneva in Switzerland. Stormy weather frequently forced them indoors, where they and Byron's other guests sometimes read from a volume of ghost stories. One evening, Byron challenged his guests to each write one themselves. Mary's story, inspired by a dream, became *Frankenstein*." *[http://www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/frankenstein/frankhome.html]*

Shelley completed her writing in May 1817, and *Frankenstein* was first published on 1 January 1818 by the small London publishing house of Harding, Mavor & Jones. It was issued anonymously, with a preface written for Mary by Percy Shelley and with a dedication to philosopher William Godwin, her father. It was published in an edition of just 500 copies in three volumes, the standard "triple-decker" format for 19th century first editions. The novel had been previously rejected by Shelley's publisher, and by Byron's publisher.

The second edition of Frankenstein was published on 11 August 1823 in two volumes (by G. and W. B. Whittaker), and this time credited Mary Shelley as the author. On 31 October 1831, the first "popular" edition in one volume appeared, published by Henry Colburn & Richard Bentley. This edition was quite heavily revised by Mary Shelley, and included a new, longer preface by her, presenting a somewhat embellished version of the genesis of the story. This edition tends to be the one most widely read now, although editions containing the original 1818 text are still being published. In fact, many scholars prefer the 1818 edition. They argue that it preserves the spirit of Shelley's original publication

Critical reception of the book was mostly unfavorable, compounded by confused speculation as to the identity of the author. Sir Walter Scott wrote that "upon the whole, the work impresses us with a high idea of the author's original genius and happy power of expression", but most reviewers thought it "a tissue of horrible and disgusting absurdity" (*Quarterly Review*). What is interesting to note about the reviews is that the critics assumed that the anonymous author was a man. Despite the reviews, *Frankenstein* achieved an almost immediate popular success. It became widely known, especially through melodramatic theatrical adaptations — Mary Shelley saw a production of *Presumption; or The Fate of Frankenstein*, a play by Richard Brinsley Peake, in 1823. A French translation appeared as

Frankenstein!

early as 1821 (*Frankenstein: ou le Prométhée Moderne*).

Shelley's *Frankenstein* has been called the first novel of the now-popular mad scientist genre. However, popular culture has changed the naive, well-meaning Victor Frankenstein into more and more of a corrupt character. It has also changed the creature into a more sensational, dehumanized being than was originally portrayed. In the original story, the worst thing that Victor does is to neglect the creature out of fear. He does not intend to create a horror. The creature, even, begins as an innocent, loving being. Not until the world inflicts violence on him does he develop his hatred. Scientific knowledge is highlighted at the end by Victor as potentially evil and dangerously alluring.

Soon after the book was published, however, stage directors began to see the difficulty of bringing the story into a more visual form. In performances beginning in 1823, playwrights began to recognize that to visualize the play, the internal reasonings of the scientist and the creature would have to be cut. The creature became the star of the show, with his more visual and sensational violence. Victor was portrayed as a fool for delving into nature's mysteries. Despite the changes, though, the play was much closer to the original than later films would be. Comic versions also abounded, and a musical burlesque version was produced in London in 1887 called "Frankenstein, or The Vampire's Victim".

Silent films continued the struggle to bring the story alive. Early versions, such as the Edison Company's *Frankenstein* (1910) managed to stick somewhat close to the plot. In 1931, however, James Whale created a film that drastically altered the story. Working at Universal Pictures, Whale introduced to the plot several elements now familiar to a modern audience: the image of "Dr." Frankenstein, whereas earlier he was merely a naive, young student, an Igor-like character (called Fritz in this film) who makes the mistake of bringing his master a criminal's brain while gathering body parts, and a sensational creation scene focusing on electric power rather than chemical processes. (In Shelley's original text, Frankenstein, as the narrator, intentionally omits describing the process by which he brings the creature to life, for fear that someone else may try to repeat the experiment.) In this film, the scientist is an arrogant, intelligent, grown man, rather than a unknowing youngster. Another scientist volunteers to destroy the creature for him, the film never forcing him to take responsibility for his acts. Whale's sequel *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), and later sequels *Son of Frankenstein* (1939), and *Ghost of Frankenstein* (1942) all continued the general theme of sensationalism, horror, and exaggeration, with Dr. Frankenstein and other similar characters growing more and more sinister.

Although later films managed to bring the audience's attention back to the scientist, rather than the monster, they continue to show him as more depraved than the original. Overall, the story of *Frankenstein* that most people know today is more the product of movie studios than of Mary Shelley. Still, these films have provided valuable insights into the nature of film, the evolution of the general populace's view of science, and several interesting interpretations of a classic story. *[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frankenstein]*