



The Lady and Her Monsters

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Introduction

The Lady and Her Monsters traces the history and origins of one of the greatest horror stories ever written, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Written with ghoulish flair and style, it recounts the little-known doings of real-life anatomists working in medical schools and darkened laboratories across Europe; the escapades and failed experiments of alchemists traipsing to and fro in Germany and France; and the murderous sprees of men like Burke and Hare, thus providing a picture of all that was occurring at the time *Frankenstein* was written.

Unlike many biographical accounts portraying Mary Shelley as a teenage literary genius visited by sudden inspiration while on the shores of Lake Geneva in 1816, *The Lady and Her Monsters* assures readers that science, history, literature, politics and even climactic changes worked together to mold not only Mary and her cohorts into the people they became, but the literary texts they wrote

afterwards, including *Frankenstein* or, *The Modern Prometheus*.

Questions for Discussion

1. Given the alternative versions to the writing of *Frankenstein*, is there one in particular that seems more plausible to you in having inspired Mary Shelley, or did they all work to form a collective framework?
2. Mary Shelley was a notoriously shy person, so much so, oftentimes that shyness was mistaken for coldness. Did *The Lady and Her Monsters* do anything to dispel that myth? Does she come across as warm, loving, sad, or anything other than rigid?
3. Just as in *Frankenstein*, in *The Lady and her Monsters* the themes of curiosity and drive for knowledge come through. We see doctors and anatomists carving cadavers in search of the life-giving fluid, as well as alchemists performing dangerous experiments in search of the elixir of life, all in an effort to prolong life or better, restore life to the dead. In your opinion, when does the search for knowledge cross over into personal obsession?
4. Tied to the previous question, we also have the theme of moral responsibility. Mary Shelley confronted this question when Victor Frankenstein abandoned his creature, and in *Lady and her Monsters* we are faced with it again when coming across Burke and Hare and Dr. Knox. In your opinion, are we morally responsible for our fellow human beings, even if not bonded by blood?
5. If you were asked to witness one of Giovanni Aldini's galvanizing experiments, would you have done so? Why, or why not? Many of those who attended these experiments were women; why do you think they chose to do so?
6. If you had the power to reanimate the dead, who would you bring back and why?
7. The criminal hangings in London were usually a big event attended by thousands of people: men, women, and children; young and old, rich and poor. Many paid a lot of money to sit upfront. What was the appeal for these people? What did they hope to see?
8. If there is ever a movie version of *The Lady and her Monsters*, who should play the main characters? Why?