

SCIENTIFIC DESTRUCTION

HOW SCIENTIFIC HUBRIS AND A GOD COMPLEX LED TO THE DEMISE OF THREE BRILLIANT MEN.

INTRODUCTION

Frankenstein

Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus is the story of how a brilliant young man inevitably caused his own destruction by trying to “play god.”

The story begins with Captain Robert Walton near the end of the 18th century in St.

Petersburg, Russia. He intends to hire some hardy Russian men in order to sail to the North Pole. Unfortunately, the boat gets stuck behind impassable ice, hundreds



of miles from land. With nothing else to do, he writes letters to his sister back home in England. Soon, Walton is interrupted by the sight of

a man on the ice, riding dog-sled! The man proceeds to board Walton’s ship and begins to tell the story of his

life growing up in Geneva, and eventually about the mistake he made in creating the monster.

December 6, 2016 Courtney Willis
ENG 2600 – Brittany Stephenson

MARY SHELLEY

Mary Shelley was born in 1797 in London, England. She was the daughter of philosopher and political writer, William Godwin, and famed feminist, Mary Wollstonecraft.

Shelley’s mother unfortunately died shortly after childbirth. Her father later remarried, but Shelley never got along well with her stepmother, and resented her for educating her step siblings but not doing the same for her.

Shelley published her first poem at age 10, and wrote *Frankenstein* at age 18 after a bet with friends, and future husband, on who could write the best horror novel.

FRANKENSTEIN

Victor's Story

Victor grew up in Geneva. His parents adopted a girl named Elizabeth with the intention of having Victor marry her when they were both older. While in college, Victor decided to study natural philosophy and chemistry. He also decided to study alchemy. In roughly two years, Victor had discovered how to bring a body made of human corpses back to life.



Afterwards, he is so horrified by his creation, that he flees and abandons the creature. Victor was so horrified by the creature that his friend,

Henry Clerval was required to nurse him back to health.

Back in Geneva, Victor's younger brother, William, was murdered. The creature is the one who committed the act, but Frankenstein's family servant, Justine, is accused of killing him and executed. Victor was too afraid to stand up for her.

In grief, Frankenstein goes on a trip to the Swiss Alps, but somehow runs into the monster who began to tell him what he had experienced in Victor's absence.

When Frankenstein fled, he found himself alone and hideous. No one, except for one blind old man, would accept him. He revealed himself to the family of the blind man, hoping they

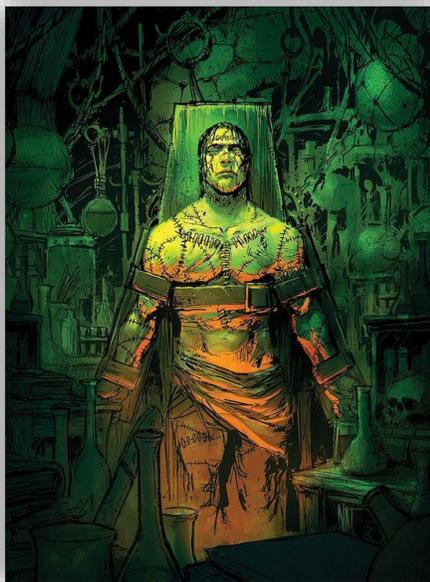


would find compassion and accept them, but they drove him away like all the others. When he ran across William, he killed the boy out of revenge. The creature was angry, alone, and miserable. He then asks Frankenstein to provide him with a female companion.

After much persuading, Victor agreed to do so. He dropped Henry off in Scotland and left for an island in the Orkneys to work. However, right before he was about to finish, he destroyed his work on the female out of fear that the two would create chaos on humanity instead of living quietly together. After witnessing this, the monster

once again seeks revenge. When Frankenstein lands on shore in Ireland, he is accused of murdering Henry, who had been found dead. Although he was acquitted of the crime, he suffered another long illness.

Victor went back to Geneva and prepared to marry Elizabeth, but was worried about the monster who swore to be with him on his wedding night. Victor leaves Elizabeth unguarded, thinking the



monster was coming for him, and Elizabeth is swiftly murdered. Victor's father is

struck with grief and passes away that night.

Alone, and now bent on revenge, Victor chased the monster over every imaginable terrain until he was ragged and near death.

So, Victor finishes telling Walton the story of his life, and dies shortly after. Afterwards, Walton discovers the monster crying over Victor's dead body but whether he was grieving his creator or the loss of a reason to live is unclear. Finally, the monster heads off into the Arctic to die alone.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Frankenstein would likely never have been written had it not been for Mary Shelley's positive literary influences. Her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft authored *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, a feminist tract encouraging women to think and act for themselves. Her father, William was an anarchist and political writer who wrote about standing up to the aristocracy. Even Mary's husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley, was heavily into literature and was himself a poet. Although some found Frankenstein to be grotesque or horrific, Shelley's novel became a huge success.

During the 19th century, when *Frankenstein* was written, the supernatural and romanticism were extremely popular. Mary Shelley's book portrays several of the characteristics of popular writers in the 1800s, and many of those traits are obvious when reading *Frankenstein, a Modern Prometheus*.

THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU

Moreau's Tale

This story begins with the protagonist, an upper class gentleman named Prendick, finding himself shipwrecked in the ocean. A passing ship takes him aboard, and a doctor named Montgomery revives him. He explains to Prendick that they are bound for an unnamed island where he works, and that the animals aboard the ship are traveling with him. Prendick also meets a grotesque, bestial native named M'ling, who appears to be Montgomery's manservant.

When they arrive on the island, however, both the captain of the ship and Doctor Moreau refuse to take Prendick. The crew



pushes him back into the lifeboat from which they rescued him. Seeing that the ship really intended on abandoning him, the islanders took pity on the man and came back for him. Montgomery introduces him to Doctor Moreau, a cold and precise man who conducts research on the island. After unloading the animals from the boat, they decide to house Prendick in an outer room of the enclosure in which they live. Prendick is exceedingly curious about what Moreau researches on the island, especially after locking the inner part of the enclosure with no explanation. At that point, Prendick remembers that he had heard of Moreau, the eminent physiologist in London before a journalist

H.G. WELLS

Full name, Herbert George Wells, born in 1866, H.G. Wells was an English novelist, journalist, sociologist, and historian best known for science fiction novels (though that term wasn't coined until later).

He was the son of domestic servants turned shopkeepers and grew up in poverty. At age 18, he won a scholarship to study biology at the Normal School of Science in South Kensington, London and graduated in 1888.

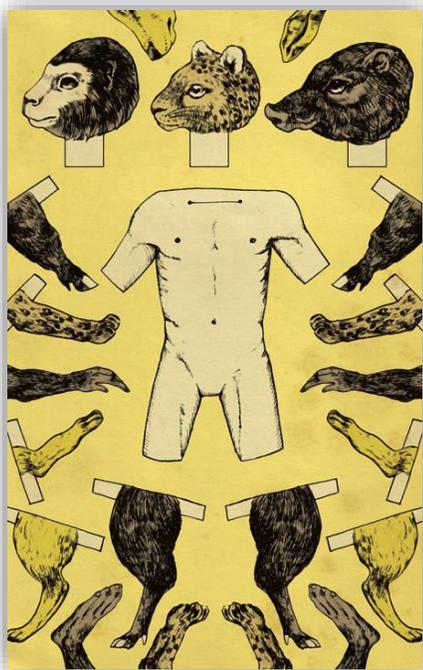
His first marriage, which was short-lived, was to his cousin. He later ran off with a former pupil of his, Amy Catherine, Robbins, in 1895 who became his second wife.

After a long life with plenty of literary success, H.G. Wells died on August 13, 1946.



exposed his gruesome experiments in vivisection.

The next day, Moreau begins working on a puma, and its anguished cries drive Prendick out into the jungle. As he wanders, he comes upon a group of people who seem human but have an unmistakable resemblance to hogs. As he walks back to the enclosure, he suddenly realizes he is being followed. He panics and flees, and in a desperate attempt of defense, he manages to stun his attack – a monstrous hybrid of animal and man. When he returns to the enclosure and questions Montgomery, Montgomery



refuses to be open with him. After failing to get an explanation, Prendick finally gives in and takes a sleeping pill.

Prendick wakes up the next day with the previous night's activities fresh in his mind. Seeing that the inner door has been left unlocked that day, he walks in to find a humanoid form lying in bandages on the table. He believes that Moreau has been vivisecting humans and that he is the next test subject. He flees into the jungle and meet an ape-man who takes him to a colony of similarly half-human, half-man creatures. The leader, a large grey thing named, "the Sayer of the Law," has him recite a strange litany called

the Law that involves prohibitions against bestial behavior and praise for Moreau. Suddenly, Moreau bursts into the colony, but luckily Prendick escapes out the back into the jungle. He makes for the ocean where he plans to drown himself rather than let the insane doctor experiment on him.

Before Prendick reaches the ocean, Moreau and Montgomery confront him and explains that the creatures are animals he has vivisected to resemble humans, and not the other way around. Prendick goes back to the enclosure, and Moreau tells him that he has been on the island for eleven years, striving to make a complete transformation

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

World War I shook Wells' faith in even short-term human progress, and in his following works, he modified his conception of social evolution. This being that man could only progress if he would adapt himself to changing circumstances through knowledge and education. In the case of *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, H.G. Wells' ideas are plain to see and are a product of the time he lived in.

In spite of an awareness of possible world catastrophe, Wells in his lifetime was regarded as the chief literary spokesman of the liberal optimism that preceded world war I. No other writer has caught so vividly the energy of Victorian age, through its adventurousness and its feeling of release from the typical conventions of the time.

from animal to human. Prendick accepts the explanation as it is and begins life on the island.

One day, as he and Montgomery are walking around the island, they come across a half-eaten rabbit. Eating flesh and tasting blood is one of the strongest prohibitions in the Law, so Montgomery and Moreau become very worried. Moreau calls an assembly of the Beast Men. He identifies the Leopard Man as the transgressor (this is the creature who chased Prendick earlier on in the story). The leopard man tries to run away but was cornered by the others. Taking pity on him, Prendick shoots him to spare him from once again being on Moreau's operating table.

As time passed, the grotesqueness of the beast folk became a normality for Prendick. Unfortunately, that feeling was short lived when the puma broke its restraints in the lab and fought to the death with Dr. Moreau. Upset over the death of the doctor, Montgomery falls into a drunken stupor and ends up getting himself into a fight with

the beast folk and dies, leaving Prendick the last human alive on the island.

Prendick decides to stay peacefully with the beast folk until a ship washed ashore. He quickly sets out for sea and is picked up three days into his voyage by another vessel. When he tried to tell the crew the story of the island, they thought he was mad, so he kept the events to himself.

Going back to the "normality" of human society was difficult for Prendick because he was no longer comfortable around other humans.

This was due to the fact that Prendick developed an unreasonable paranoia and suspected all humans of being beast folk and could revert to their violent animalism at any moment. He ends up finding peace living in seclusion studying the stars, far away from society.



ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Stevenson was born on November 13, 1850 in Edinburgh, Scotland to Thomas and Margaret Stevenson. His family's profession was lighthouse design.

At 17, he enrolled at Edinburgh University to study engineering to continue the family business. Lighthouse design did not appeal to him though, so he began to study law. He wrote his first volume of work in 1878.

His first wife was an American woman named Fanny Osbourne who already had two children. The two remained together until Stevenson's death in 1894.



THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE

Jekyll & Hyde's Side

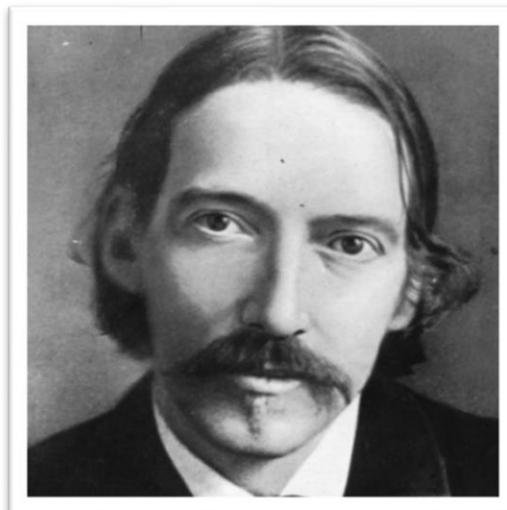
The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

is a classic novel beloved by many since it was published in 1886.

The story begins with a lawyer by the name of Mr. Utterson going for a walk with his friend and relative, Mr. Enfield. They walk past a door, which prompts Mr. Enfield to relay a story of how a brutish man knocked down a little girl, was yelled at, then offered to pay a large sum of money to make amends. The man left and returned with a large check drawn from Dr. Jekyll's bank

account. The nasty man was of course, Mr. Hyde.

Mr. Utterson is Dr. Jekyll's lawyer. It is found out



that in the event of Dr. Jekyll's death or disappearance, his entire estate is to be turned over to Mr. Hyde. Mr. Utterson, who thinks highly of Dr. Jekyll is extremely suspicious of the arrangement and resolves to get to the bottom of the mystery. After tracking down Mr. Hyde, he is suitably impressed with the evil that seems to seep from his pores. He decides to ask Dr. Jekyll about the odd arrangements, but the doctor refuses to comment on them. The matter rests until nearly a year later.

After nearly a year, a prominent politician is beaten to death. Claiming to have witnessed the event, a maid points to Mr. Hyde as the culprit. Everyone tries to hunt down this evil man, but with no success. Meanwhile, Dr. Jekyll is in great health and spirits.

Two months later, both Dr. Lanyon and Dr. Jekyll fall



terribly ill, and claim to have fought with each other. Dr. Lanyon dies, leaving mysterious documents in Mr. Utterson's possession, to be opened only if Dr. Jekyll dies or disappears. Dr. Jekyll



remains in seclusion, despite frequent visits from his lawyer.

Finally, one evening, Dr. Jekyll's butler visits Mr. Utterson at home. He's worried about his master and is convinced of foul play. The butler persuades Mr. Utterson to return to Dr. Jekyll's house, where they break into Dr. Jekyll's laboratory. They find Mr. Hyde dead on the floor, with Dr. Jekyll nowhere to be found.

Mr. Utterson finds several documents left to him, and goes back home to read both Mr. Lanyon's narrative and Dr. Jekyll's narrative,

which it turns out, are two parts of the same story.

At this point, the author tells us what happened at the beginning. We soon discover (through the documents left behind by the dead men), the following:

Using a potion, Dr. Jekyll was able to transform into Mr. Hyde and give into a world of pleasure and self-serving crime. In his narrative, Jekyll writes that Mr. Hyde became ever more powerful and ever harder to control – in essence, becoming the dominant personality.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Robert Louis Stevenson traveled often, and his global wanderings lent themselves well to his brand of fiction. He was often abroad, usually for health reason, and his journeys led to some of his early literary works.

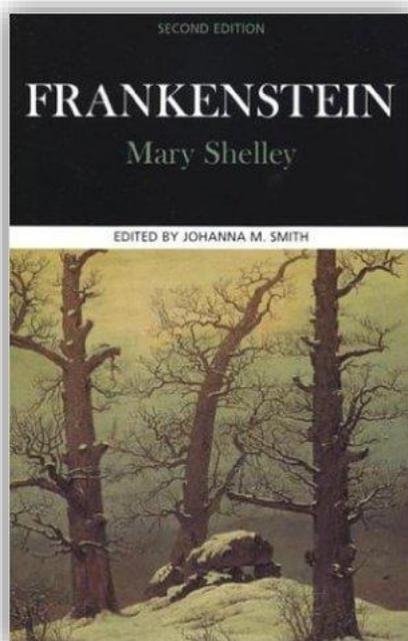
Stevenson's travels provoked him to write many short stories and novels with inspiration driven from around the globe including places like Russia, France, and America, despite being born in Scotland.

THE GOD COMPLEX

This is just one of the many similarities between these three drastically different stories. A god complex is defined by [Wikipedia](#) as having *“an unshakable belief characterized by consistently inflated feelings of personal ability, privilege, or infallibility.”* Although it may not be noticeable at first, all three doctors share this trait.

DEFINITION

“A **god complex** is an unshakable belief characterized by consistently inflated feelings of personal ability, privilege, or infallibility.”



Dr. Frankenstein

Victor was obsessed with assuming the role of a god and creating life, which eventually led to his downfall.

Shelley draws a parallel between her character and the one of Greek myths, Prometheus, who was accused of creating man. This complex may be connected to growing up in a family of wealth, status, and respect.

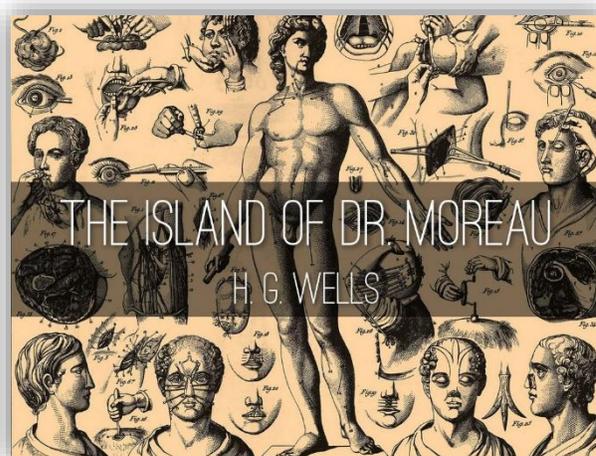
The idea of Prometheus, the Greek god, is introduced within the title, giving the reader an idea into the character of Frankenstein and his god complex.

Prometheus was a god known for his wisdom, so the

irony is prominent. Wisdom and knowledge are often seen as dangerous, a metaphor appropriate for both Frankenstein and Prometheus.

Dr. Moreau

A genius, gifted with a knowledge of science and the skills to back it up, Dr. Moreau became obsessed with his immoral work. Like Frankenstein, this led to his downfall. But unlike Frankenstein, Moreau's reason for creating his "Beast Folk" were not as clear. Moreau had a discussion with Prendick, stating he is seeking the laws of God. He neither hates, nor

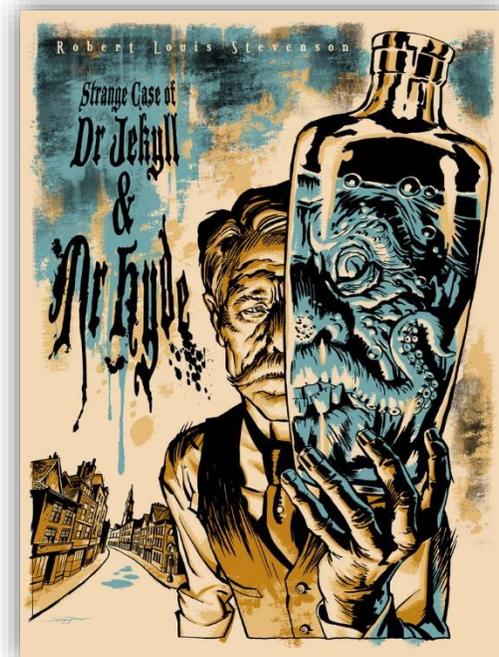


loves the Beast Folk, and is rather indifferent to them. Dr. Moreau would not interact with them except to intervene as their God.

Moreau says, “[...] everything I do that defeats me, makes me dissatisfied, challenges me to further effort. Sometimes I rise above my level, sometimes I fall before it, but always I fall short of the things I dream.” While he may be seeking God’s laws, it seems he’s also trying to reach God’s level, and play a direct influence in evolution.

Dr. Jekyll

Dr. Jekyll is a more interesting case when it comes to having a god complex. Unlike the other two doctors, Jekyll sought to improve on himself rather than others. He wanted to change his own nature in a way that was quite unnatural. He wished to remove all of his bad characteristics, and although he did manage to do *something* to alter his personality, it did not go the way he planned. Dr. Jekyll’s pursuit of a godly personality inevitably led to his downfall, just like Frankenstein and Moreau.



SCIENTIFIC HUBRIS

Hubris is defined by [Wikipedia](#) as a personality quality of extreme or foolish pride or dangerous over-confidence. Hubris often indicates a loss of contact with reality and an overestimation of one’s own competence, accomplishments, or capabilities.

All three of these men: Frankenstein, Moreau, and Jekyll, came from wealthy backgrounds. They were all highly intelligent men, doctors, with both a god complex and scientific hubris. In the end, they all suffered a terrible fate and lost their lives.

Dr. Frankenstein saw the end of his days chasing a monster he created, both figuratively and literally. Dr. Moreau sought to evolve animals into man and was killed by one of his own creations. Dr. Jekyll succumbed to the monster inside himself, Mr. Hyde and also perished.

Their lack of foresight in regards to their actions, and their complete ignorance to what the consequences of their actions could be inevitably killed them all.