



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

## Excerpt from Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus

By Mary Shelley  
1823

*Mary Shelley (1797-1851) was an English novelist, short story writer, and dramatist, best known for her gothic novel, Frankenstein. In the novel, Victor Frankenstein, a brilliant scientist, succeeds in creating life in his laboratory, only to be horrified by his own creation. The novel begins with a series of letters written by an explorer, who eventually brings Frankenstein onto his ship. As you read, take notes on the speaker's feelings about his journey.*

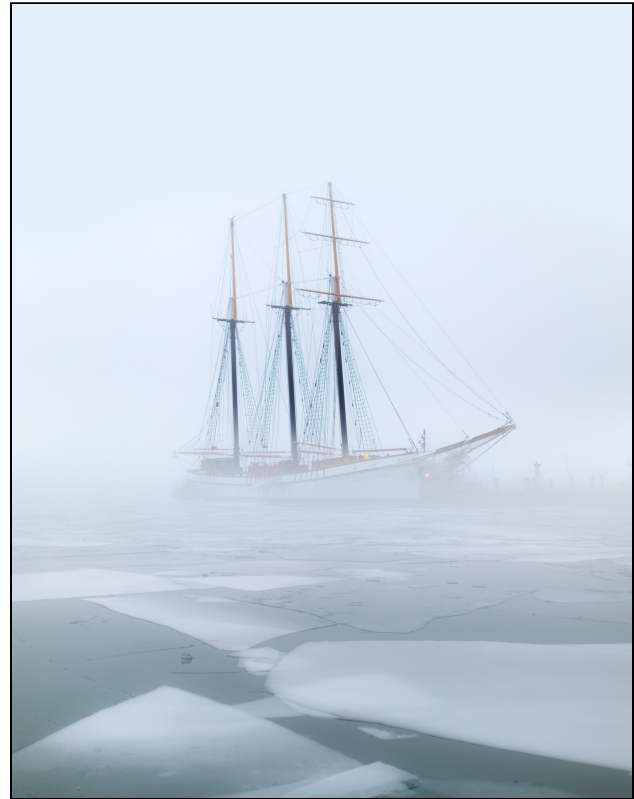
[1] LETTER III.

*To Mrs. Saville, England.*

July 7th, 17—

My dear Sister,

[5] I write a few lines in haste to say that I am safe — and well advanced on my voyage. This letter will reach England by a merchantman<sup>1</sup> now on its homeward voyage from Archangel; more fortunate than I, who may not see my native land, perhaps, for many years. I am, however, in good spirits: my men are bold and apparently firm of purpose, nor do the floating sheets of ice that continually pass us, indicating the dangers of the region towards which we are advancing, appear to dismay them. We have already reached a very high latitude; but it is the height of summer, and although not so warm as in England, the southern gales,<sup>2</sup> which blow us speedily towards those shores which I so ardently desire to attain, breathe a degree of renovating<sup>3</sup> warmth which I had not expected.



*"Foggy Ship" by Filip Mros is licensed under CC0*

No incidents have hitherto befallen us that would make a figure in a letter. One or two stiff gales and the springing of a leak are accidents which experienced navigators scarcely remember to record, and I shall be well content if nothing worse happen to us during our voyage.

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1. a commercial ship
  2. a strong wind
  3. a term that has the archaic meaning "to refresh; reinvigorate"

Adieu,<sup>4</sup> my dear Margaret. Be assured that for my own sake, as well as yours, I will not rashly encounter danger. I will be cool, persevering, and prudent.<sup>5</sup>

But success *shall* crown my endeavours. Wherefore not? Thus far I have gone, tracing a secure way over the pathless seas, the very stars themselves being witnesses and testimonies of my triumph. Why not still proceed over the untamed yet obedient element? What can stop the determined heart and resolved will of man?

My swelling heart involuntarily pours itself out thus. But I must finish. Heaven bless my beloved sister!

[10] R.W.

LETTER IV.

*To Mrs. Saville, England*

August 5th, 17—

So strange an accident has happened to us that I cannot forbear recording it, although it is very probable that you will see me before these papers can come into your possession.

[15] Last Monday (July 31st) we were nearly surrounded by ice, which closed in the ship on all sides, scarcely leaving her the sea-room in which she floated. Our situation was somewhat dangerous, especially as we were compassed round by a very thick fog. We accordingly lay to,<sup>6</sup> hoping that some change would take place in the atmosphere and weather.

About two o'clock the mist cleared away, and we beheld, stretched out in every direction, vast and irregular plains of ice, which seemed to have no end. Some of my comrades groaned, and my own mind began to grow watchful with anxious thoughts, when a strange sight suddenly attracted our attention and diverted our solicitude<sup>7</sup> from our own situation. We perceived a low carriage, fixed on a sledge and drawn by dogs, pass on towards the north, at the distance of half a mile; a being which had the shape of a man, but apparently of gigantic stature, sat in the sledge and guided the dogs. We watched the rapid progress of the traveller with our telescopes until he was lost among the distant inequalities of the ice.

This appearance excited our unqualified<sup>8</sup> wonder. We were, as we believed, many hundred miles from any land; but this apparition<sup>9</sup> seemed to denote that it was not, in reality, so distant as we had supposed. Shut in, however, by ice, it was impossible to follow his track, which we had observed with the greatest attention.

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4. goodbye

5. **Prudent** (*adjective*): acting with or showing care and thought for the future

6. to bring a ship into the wind and keep stationary

7. care or concern for something

8. **Unqualified** (*adjective*): without reservation or limitation; total

9. a ghostlike image of a person

About two hours after this occurrence we heard the ground sea, and before night the ice broke and freed our ship. We, however, lay to until the morning, fearing to encounter in the dark those large loose masses which float about after the breaking up of the ice. I profited of this time to rest for a few hours.

In the morning, however, as soon as it was light, I went upon deck and found all the sailors busy on one side of the vessel, apparently talking to someone in the sea. It was, in fact, a sledge, like that we had seen before, which had drifted towards us in the night on a large fragment of ice. Only one dog remained alive; but there was a human being within it whom the sailors were persuading to enter the vessel.

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## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: The full title of Mary Shelley's novel is *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus*. The subtitle refers to Prometheus, a mythological figure who symbolizes both the nobility of the quest for knowledge and the danger of overreaching in that quest. In the passage from *Frankenstein*, how do the two ideas symbolized by Prometheus interact and build on one another?
  - A. R.W. possesses advanced geographic knowledge as a result of his explorations, but he has sacrificed personal happiness to gain that knowledge.
  - B. R.W. believes firmly in his ability to achieve his goals, but he is challenged by the natural world he seeks to conquer.
  - C. R.W. is extremely educated about his surroundings, but he makes a costly mistake about his location within those surroundings.
  - D. R.W. is the only member of his crew to care about science for its own sake, but he overestimates what science can accomplish.
  
2. PART B: Select the TWO quotations that, taken together, best support the answer to Part A?
  - A. "I am, however, in good spirits: my men are bold, and apparently firm of purpose" (Paragraph 1)
  - B. "I shall be well content if nothing worse happens to us during our voyage." (Paragraph 2)
  - C. "But success shall crown my endeavours." (Paragraph 4)
  - D. "it is very probable that you will see me before these papers can come into your possession." (Paragraph 6)
  - E. "This appearance excited our unqualified wonder." (Paragraph 9)
  - F. "Shut in, however, by ice, it was impossible to follow his track, which we had observed with the greatest attention." (Paragraph 9)
  
3. PART A: Mrs. Saville's brother uses the word "ardently" to describe his desire to reach an unexplored land. What does the word "ardently" mean in this context?
  - A. anxiously
  - B. passionately
  - C. greedily
  - D. religiously
  
4. PART B: Which quotation from the passage best supports the answer to Part A?
  - A. "indicating the dangers of the region towards which we are advancing" (Paragraph 1)
  - B. "for my own sake, all well as yours, I will not rashly encounter." (Paragraph 3)
  - C. "the very stars themselves being witnesses and testimonies" (Paragraph 4)
  - D. "What can stop the determined heart and resolved will of man?" (Paragraph 4)

