

Conception

Susan Tyler Hitchcock

Susan Tyler Hitchcock is a book editor for the National Geographic Society and has written more than thirteen books. In this

excerpt from *Frankenstein: A Cultural History* (2007), Hitchcock describes two of the leading literary figures of their day — Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley — and the challenge they took part in during the summer of 1816. The two men — accompanied by Byron’s physician, John Polidori; Shelley’s young lover, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, and their newborn son; and Mary’s stepsister Claire Clairmont — had settled in Geneva that summer. The weather was unusually cold and rainy, probably the result of a volcanic eruption in far-off Indonesia. But the time, place, climate, and personal relationships of the companions made possible the creation of not one but two famous monster stories, neither by the famous poets: *Frankenstein* by Mary Godwin (later Mary Shelley) and *The Vampyre* by John Polidori.

Archetypes make their way into the conscious part of the mind seemingly from the outside and of their own accord. They are autonomous, sometimes forcing themselves in overpoweringly. They have a numinous quality; that is, they have an aura of divinity which is mysterious or terrifying. They are from the unknown.

— WILSON M. HUDSON, *Folklorist*

It would have been naive to think it was possible to have prevented this.

— IAN WILMUT, *Embryologist Responsible for Dolly, the Cloned Sheep*

The weather was strange all summer long in 1816. Twice in April the year before, Indonesia’s Mount Tamboro had erupted—the largest volcanic eruption in history—spewing masses of dust into the atmosphere, which lingered and dimmed the sun’s rays throughout the northern latitudes. Temperatures stayed at record lows. In New England killing frosts occurred all summer. In Europe crops—deprived of light and bogged down with too much rain—did not ripen. Grain prices doubled. In India food shortages triggered a famine, which very likely led to the cholera epidemic that spread west during the next two decades, infecting thousands in Europe and North America. Fierce storms of hail, thunder, and lightning swept through many regions. It was a dreary season indeed.

“An almost perpetual rain confines us principally to the house,” wrote eighteen-year-old Mary Godwin to her half sister Fanny. “The thunder

storms that visit us are grander and more terrific than I have ever seen before." She wrote from a house on the eastern bank of Lake Geneva, into which she had just moved with three fellow travelers: Percy Bysshe Shelley, her twenty-three-year-old lover; Claire Clairmont, her stepsister, also eighteen; and little William, the infant son born to her and Shelley in January. Nearly five months old, the baby—"Willmouse," as they called him—would have been smiling and reaching out to grasp a finger offered to him. One calm evening when they had first arrived, just the three of them—father, mother, child—had gone out on the lake in a little skiff at twilight. They skimmed noiselessly across the lake's glassy surface, watching the sun sink behind the dark frown of the Jura Mountains. Since then, though, storms had moved in. They did at least provide entertainment. "We watch them as they approach," Mary wrote Fanny,

observing the lightning play among the clouds in various parts of the heavens. . . . One night we enjoyed a finer storm than I had ever before beheld. The lake was lit up—the pines on Jura made visible, and all the scene illuminated for an instant, when a pitchy blackness succeeded, and the thunder came in frightful bursts over our heads amid the darkness.

Beyond the weather there was an excitement simply in being in Geneva, the intellectual birthplace of the French and American Revolutions. Mary described in her letter to Fanny the obelisk just outside the city, built in honor of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, once banished from his city but now recognized as an intellectual hero. Rousseau had declared that the imperfections and suffering in human life arose not from nature but from society. Human beings had only to free themselves from social oppression and prejudice in order to regain their native joy and liberty. A shared commitment to that idea had bonded her mother and father in an all-too-brief partnership; had drawn the young poet Percy Bysshe Shelley to her father, William Godwin, the radical philosopher he most revered; and had flamed the passion between herself and Shelley from the moment they met.

That first meeting had taken place in 1814, when she was sixteen and he was twenty-one. Now, two years later, they were making a household together. She could find pleasure simply in that: In those two years they had been such wanderers. First this odd threesome, she and Shelley and Claire, had sneaked out of London on a dark night in July 1814 and trekked through France and Germany on barely any money. Three months later they returned to London and found themselves roundly shunned. Shelley was, after all, married to another and father to a child. That No-



Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley, author of *Frankenstein*, circa 1840.

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vember, Harriet Shelley had given birth to a second child. Now, in the summer of 1816, the legal Mrs. Shelley was raising lanthe and Charles—a girl aged three, a boy eighteen months—on her own. Shelley rationalized his behavior with a philosophy of free love. “Love,” he would write, “differs from gold and clay:/That to divide is not to take away.” His passions—Mary, liberty, poetry, atheism—meant more to him than his responsibility for an estranged and earthly family.

Life with Mary, however, soon developed its own earthly obligations. 5 She had become pregnant during the 1814 escapade and stayed wretchedly sick through it all. In those times, and especially in Mary’s own experience, birth and death mingled inextricably. Her own mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, had never risen from bed after giving birth to her. An infection developed, the fever never ceased, and Wollstonecraft died ten days after childbirth. Fear certainly exacerbated young Mary Godwin’s condition. On February 22, 1815, a daughter was born prematurely, “unexpectedly alive, but still not expected to live,” as Shelley wrote in a

journal. One week later parents, baby, and Claire moved from one end of London to the other, from Pimlico to Hans Place. "A bustle of moving," Mary wrote in her journal on March 2. Four days later she wrote: "find my baby dead . . . a miserable day." She managed to write a letter to a friend: "It was perfectly well when I went to bed—I awoke in the night to give it suck[.] It appeared to be *sleeping* so quietly that I would not awake it—it was dead then but we did not find *that* out till morning—from its appearance it evidently [*sic*] died of convulsions." The child was never given a name.

Meanwhile Harriet Shelley pleaded for help for her two children from the fathers of both her husband and his runaway lover. Timothy Shelley, a baronet of ample means, felt fury over family shame more than anything else and clamped down viciously on his son's access to any inheritance. William Godwin, now remarried, no longer enjoyed popularity as a radical author. He and his wife barely made ends meet by running a bookshop and publishing books for children. They shared the baronet's parental outrage, however, and Godwin turned Shelley's kidnapping, as he termed it, of his daughter and stepdaughter into an opportunity for a gentlemanly sort of blackmail. By the summer of 1816, to meet the demands of Harriet Shelley and William Godwin, not to mention his own household obligations, Percy Bysshe Shelley was negotiating with moneylenders and solicitors for post-obit bonds—loans against his future estate.

Mary, Percy, and Claire moved restlessly, often hiding from creditors, Shelley all the while corresponding frantically with William Godwin about money. On January 25, 1816, though, at the end of a letter full of logistics concerning loans and payments, Shelley wrote: "Mrs. Godwin will probably be glad to hear that Mary has safely recovered from a very favorable confinement, & that her child is well." Mary Godwin and Percy Bysshe Shelley, unmarried, welcomed a son into the world. In a decision rife with contradictions, they named him William, after her father.

As if that weren't enough, now, in the cold and rainy summer of 1816, there was a new secret to keep from the Godwins.

Claire Clairmont—Mary's stepsister, the daughter of the second Mrs. Godwin—had been the one who selected Geneva as the destination of their upstart band. She was chasing after the outlandish yet irresistibly popular poet George Gordon, Lord Byron. Some speculate that early on Claire, as well as Mary, had had her eyes on Percy Bysshe Shelley. But by 1816 she was feeling like the odd woman out and, presented with the opportunity to meet the notoriously libertine Byron, Claire Clairmont had plotted—and pounced. Exploiting a tenuous personal connection, she approached Lord Byron. "An utter stranger takes the liberty of addressing you," her first letter to him began. It grew more

presumptuous with every paragraph: "It may seem a strange assertion, but it is not the less true that I place my happiness in your hands." Rebuffed, Claire wrote again, explaining that she had drafted a play and sought Byron's advice on her composition. "You think it impertinent that I intrude on you," she wrote. "Remember that I have confided to you the most important secrets. I have withheld nothing." Slyly she implied submission even before he pursued her.

Claire was an annoying distraction during a troubled period of Byron's life. He had married Annabella Milbanke in January 1815, but the marriage swiftly self-destructed, despite the birth of a daughter, Ada. The new wife and mother could not ignore Byron's fascination with his half sister, Augusta, and she had heard rumors of his sexual relations with men. She hired a doctor to investigate his mental condition. Byron was diagnosed sane. If he wasn't insane, he was immoral and dangerous, Annabella reasoned, and presented him with separation papers. Evidences of his incest and sodomy were whispered, even published, throughout Britain. "He is completely lost in the opinion of the world," wrote one London socialite. Byron decided to leave England. He would travel to Switzerland, birthplace of the Enlightenment, tolerant of iconoclasts like Rousseau—and himself.

So when Claire's letters began appearing, Byron was not in a particularly amorous mood. Sometime in late April, though, Claire's plot achieved consummation. As Byron wrote a friend some months later, "A man is a man, and if a girl of eighteen comes prancing to you at all hours there is but one way." It was a heartless fling, Byron said later: "I never loved nor pretended to love her." He probably thought he would shake her loose once he departed from England, but Claire Clairmont did not let go. Learning where Byron was going, she persuaded her friends to head for Geneva, too.

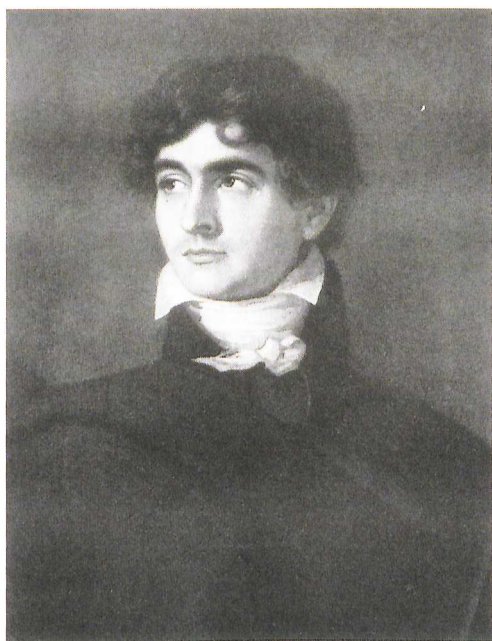
Diodati Escapades

According to Byron's physician and traveling companion, John William Polidori, the Shelley party first encountered Lord Byron on May 27, 1816. "Getting out [of a boat]," wrote Polidori in his diary, "L.B. met M. Wollstonecraft Godwin, her sister, and Percy Shelley." Byron's fame made the younger poet somewhat diffident, yet Byron hosted Shelley for dinner that very night. Polidori described him as "bashful, shy, consumptive, twenty-six: separated from his wife; keeps the two daughters of Godwin, who practise his theories; one L.B's." He got Shelley's age wrong by two years but immediately grasped the dynamics between Claire and Byron.

The scene was set for the momentous summer of 1816. Byron rented the Villa Diodati, an elegant estate house above Lake Geneva. John Milton himself, the author of *Paradise Lost*, had stayed in the house in 1638, while visiting the uncle of his dear friend Charles Diodati. Byron must have enjoyed communing with such an eminent forebear. Shelley, Mary, and Claire rented a humbler house down the hill, closer to the lake's edge, and visited Villa Diodati often. One wonders whether Mary ever brought her baby with her into that environment, electric with testosterone and nerves. She hired a Swiss nursemaid, but she still must have felt torn between her duties as a mother and her fascination with her poet friends. Sometimes fierce lightning storms broke open the skies above Villa Diodati. Together with the storms, sharp wit and intellectual sparring may have kept her at the villa longer than she planned.

They spoke of literature, debating the virtues of the writers of the time. Robert Southey, then Britain's poet laureate, had published *Thalaba the Destroyer* and *The Curse of Kehama*, passionate epics set in mysterious Eastern realms and peopled by unknown deities. Shelley so respected these poems that he used them as models, but Byron mocked them for their pageantry and melodrama. William Wordsworth presented an entirely different aesthetic, finding poetry in the language of the common folk—shepherds, idiots, children. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poems evoked powers unseen and unnamed. Meanwhile Walter Scott, already revered for poems that sang of his native Scotland, was suspected of being the author of *Waverley*. What a shock if it were true—that a popular poet would descend to write a novel, a new and not altogether respected literary form.

No poet of any renown would write a novel; no elevated person would stoop to read one. Yet in the wee hours of the night, their tongues un-leashed by sherry or other elixirs, those present at the Villa Diodati might admit a fascination with an occasional Gothic romance, Mrs. Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* or Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk*, perhaps. Set in a dimly imagined past, these popular books of the time pitted established strictures against native human desire, raising the very questions that radical philosophers had been asking about convention and society. Ghosts and spirits haunted the churchyards, vaults, and abbeys; gore, horror, lust, and crime oozed onto the printed page. There was something in the human imagination that made such stories irresistibly fascinating.



John Polidori, Lord Byron's physician and author of *The Vampyre*, circa 1820.

Hulton Archive/Getty Images

Electrifying Science

Poetry was much on the minds of those gathered at the Villa Diodati, but science charged the conversation as well. Polidori, after all, had been trained in medicine, and Shelley had intended to become a doctor when he entered Oxford in 1810. A friend described his college quarters as cluttered with chemistry flasks and retorts.⁹ Early-nineteenth-century advances in science opened up realms of thought as fantastic as any coming from the imagination of a poet. In fact, to some, philosophy, poetry, and science converged to promise revolutionary changes in human knowledge and worldview.

Erasmus Darwin, for example, grandfather to Charles, had proffered an early theory of evolution. "Organic life beneath the shoreless

retorts: a vessel, commonly a glass bulb with a long neck bent downward, used for distilling or decomposing substances by heat.

waves / Was born and nurs'd in ocean's pearly caves," he wrote in his epic poem *The Temple of Nature; or, the Origin of Society*, published in 1803. As Darwin described it, life forms "new powers acquire, and larger limbs assume / Whence countless groups of vegetation spring, / And breathing realms of fin, and feet, and wing." Notions of evolving life forms led logically back to questions about the origin of life itself. Joseph Priestley, discoverer of oxygen, used mold on vegetables to demonstrate the spontaneous generation of life. Darwin saw similar things going on in aging wheat-flour slurry: "In paste composed of flour and water, which has been suffered to become acescent [to sour], the animalcules called eels, vibrio anguillula, are seen in great abundance." The eggs of such creatures could not possibly "float in the atmosphere, and pass through the sealed glass phial," Darwin reasoned, so they must come into being "by a spontaneous vital process." Evolution and spontaneous generation may be concepts difficult to accept, Darwin granted, but "all new discoveries, as of the magnetic needle, and coated electric jar, and Galvanic pile" seemed just as incredible.

Once Benjamin Franklin and others had managed to harness naturally occurring electricity, experimenters went to work on devices to collect, control, and generate electrical power. The galvanic pile, as Darwin called it—precursor of the electric battery—was named for the Italian scientist Luigi Galvani, whose famous experiments of the 1790s tested the effect of electrical current on the bodies of animals. When a charged metal rod caused disembodied frog leg muscles to move, Galvani glimpsed that electricity motivated living nerve and muscle. His work advanced understanding of what was called "animal electricity," soon renamed "galvanism." By 1802 the *Journal of Natural Philosophy* announced that "the production of the galvanic fluid, or electricity, by the direct or independent energy of life in animals, can no longer be doubted." Galvani's nephew, Luigi Aldini, toured Europe during the first years of the nineteenth century, demonstrating how electrical charges could move not only the legs of frogs but also the eyes and tongues of severed ox heads as well.

In a famous presentation to the president of the Royal College of Surgeons, Aldini demonstrated galvanism with the body of a recently executed murderer. Aldini connected wires from a massive battery of copper and zinc to the corpse's head and anus. As an eyewitness described it:

On the first application of the process to the face, the jaw of the deceased criminal began to quiver, the adjoining muscles were horribly contorted, and one eye was actually opened. In the subsequent part of the process, the right hand was raised and clenched, and the legs and thighs were set in motion. It appeared to

the uninformed part of the by-standers as if the wretched man was on the eve of being restored to life.

London newspapers reported the phenomenon, and Aldini mounted 20 shows for the public. Even the Prince Regent attended one. It did not seem farfetched to consider this newly entrapped natural force, electricity, the quintessential force of life. "Galvanism had given token of such things," Mary Godwin wrote as she later recalled how discussions at Villa Diodati of these scientific marvels had filled her with ideas. "Perhaps the component parts of a creature might be manufactured, brought together, and endued [*sic*] with vital warmth."

The Challenge

Poetry and science, Gothic horror and reanimation—those topics tingled in the Geneva air that summer of 1816. Somebody pulled out a collection of tales of the supernatural, *Phantasmagoriana*, which became one evening's entertainment. The book had been translated from German into French in 1812 and subtitled *Recueil d'histoires d'apparitions, de spectres, revenans, fantomes, &c. traduit de l'allemande, par un amateur*—"a collection of stories about apparitions, specters, dreams, phantoms, etc., translated from the German by an amateur." The book must have enjoyed popularity at the time, because an English edition came into print in 1813, with the simple title *Tales of the Dead*. The group at Villa Diodati read the stories to one another from the French edition.

"Poetry and science, Gothic horror and reanimation — those topics tingled in the Geneva air that summer of 1816."

"There was the History of the Inconstant Lover," Mary later recalled—its French title "*La Morte Fiancée*"—which told of an Italian courtier in love with a woman whose identical twin had died mysteriously the year before. "There was the tale of the sinful founder of his race," as she called "*Les Portraits de Famille*," in which ancient portraits hanging on cold stone walls assumed supernatural powers. "I have not seen these stories since then," she wrote in 1831, "but their incidents are as fresh in my mind as if I had read them yesterday."

After listening to a few of these tales, chilling yet clumsily written, Byron challenged his companions. Any one of them could do better. "We will each write a ghost story," said Lord Byron; and his proposition was acceded to," Mary Shelley recounted in 1831. "There were four of us," she begins, although there were five. The one she left out was Claire

Clairmont—maybe Claire was not present, or she simply chose not to write, or maybe Mary was deliberately ignoring her stepsister. Byron only started a story, “a fragment of which he printed at the end of his poem of *Mazeppa*,” Mary reported—a two-thousand-word passage that introduces two Englishmen in a Greek landscape: Augustus Darvell, celebrated, mysterious, and haunted by “some peculiar circumstances in his private history”; and the story’s narrator, younger, ingenuous, and mesmerized by Darvell. “This is the end of my journey,” Darvell whispers. He has led his young friend into an old Muslim cemetery, full of fallen turban-topped tombstones. He hands him a ring engraved with Arabic characters, with strict instructions to fling it into Eleusinian springs after he dies. A stork alights on a nearby tombstone, a snake writhing in her beak. As she flies away, Darvell breathes his last. The narrator buries him in an ancient grave. “Between astonishment and grief, I was tearless,” he says—and at that, Byron abandoned the story.

Percy Shelley appears not to have composed even a fragment in response to the challenge. His wife’s explanation, written after his death, was that storytelling was just not his style. Spirits did seem to haunt him—in 1813 he had fled a Welsh cottage, convinced that a ghost had fired a gun at him—but grotesques were not the stuff of his poetry in 1816. Shelley, she wrote, was “more apt to embody ideas and sentiments in the radiance of brilliant imagery, and in the music of the most melodious verse that adorns our language, than to invent the machinery of a story.” Ironically, therefore, Byron and Shelley—the two poets destined for the highest echelons of English Romantic literature—fizzled out in response to the ghost-story challenge, but their two companions wrote pieces that would evolve into the two greatest horror stories of modern times.

John Polidori was inspired to write two works, both published three years later. One was a short novel, *Ernestus Berchtold*, little known by anyone but professors of English today. The other, he freely admitted, began with Byron’s unfinished story. “A noble author having determined to descend from his lofty range, gave up a few hours to a tale of terror, and wrote the fragment published at the end of *Mazeppa*,” Polidori explained. “Upon this foundation I built the *Vampyre*,” as he titled his story. “In the course of three mornings, I produced that tale.”²⁵

Like Byron’s fragment, Polidori’s *Vampyre* tells the tale of two Englishmen—Aubrey, a young gentleman, orphaned and innocent, and Lord Strongmore, a shadowy nobleman “more remarkable for his singularities, than for his rank.” Strongmore suggests, much to Aubrey’s amazement, that the two tour the Continent together. Repelled by Strongmore’s appetite for sex and gambling, Aubrey takes off on his own and falls in love

with Ianthe, a Greek country maid, who soon turns up dead, her throat pierced with “marks of teeth having opened the vein of the neck.” “A Vampire! a Vampire!” the villagers all cry. The assailant turns out to be Lord Strongmore, who next sets his sights on Aubrey’s own sister. Aubrey warns his family and mysteriously dies at midnight, leaving others to discover that “Lord Strongmore had disappeared, and Aubrey’s sister had glutted the thirst of a VAMPYRE!” The story, borrowed from a poet and written by a man of little talent, would in a few years burst back on the literary scene and then proliferate through the nineteenth century, influencing Bram Stoker as he wrote *Dracula*, the vampire classic, in 1897. Thus on the same night in Geneva in 1816 were born the world’s two most famous monsters.

While vampires populated Polidori’s imagination, Mary Godwin worried that hers seemed so vacant. “I busied myself *to think of a story*,—a story to rival those which had excited us to this task,” she wrote fifteen years later. Conscious exertion seemed to get her nowhere. “I felt that blank incapability of invention which is the greatest misery of authorship, when dull Nothing replies to our anxious invocations. *Have you thought of a story?* I was asked each morning, and each morning I was forced to reply with a mortifying negative.” Her mind remained as if a blank slate, and discussions between Byron and Shelley concerning “various philosophical doctrines” including “the nature of the principle of life” made impressions on it. They cited examples; they speculated as to extremes—sometimes the discussion was detailed and technical, sometimes visionary. Details of Aldini’s galvanic demonstrations may have mingled with descriptions of gruesome phantasms or translucent^o fairies.

With such ideas swirling in her head, Mary Godwin went to bed. “I did not sleep, nor could I be said to think,” she recalled. A story presented itself, as she described it, the life force less in her than in the visions appearing to her.

My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie. I saw—with shut eyes, but acute mental vision,—I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half vital motion.

To enter the original moment of the creation of Frankenstein’s monster, strip away all the modern imagery created to portray it. No more white

translucent: clear, transparent.

lab coat, no more electrical coils and transformers, not even a dank stone tower. The author herself gives us very little: a "pale student," "kneeling" on the floor; beside him, "the thing he had put together"—a "hideous phantasm," "some powerful engine" whose force only made him "stir."

Granted, these few words are themselves just garments wrapped by the author around wordless moments of inspiration. It is as if she, one with her character, had gazed for the first time upon "the horrid thing" standing at the bedside, staring at her with its "yellow, watery, but speculative eyes"—for, at the moment that she glimpsed this kernel of her story, she opened her own eyes "with terror," seeking the comfort of the outside world.

The idea so possessed my mind, that a thrill of fear ran through me, and I wished to exchange the ghastly image of my fancy for the realities around. I see them still; the very room, the dark parquet, the closed shutters, with the moonlight struggling through, and the sense I had that the glassy lake and white high Alps were beyond. I could not so easily get rid of my hideous phantom; still it haunted me. I must try to think of something else. I recurred to my ghost story,—my tiresome unlucky ghost story! O! if I could only contrive one which would frighten my reader as I myself had been frightened that night!

Soon the two thoughts merged into one: her waking dream was her ghost story. "On the morrow I announced that I had *thought of a story*," Mary later recalled. "I began that day with the words, *It was on a dreary night of November*, making only a transcript of the grim terrors of my waking dream."

Mary Godwin Shelley's account of the genesis of her novel, written for its 1831 edition, may contain a few fabrications, a few exaggerations, a few skewed memories. But it is still the most reliable rendition we have of how the story of Frankenstein began, and therefore a good starting point.

Understanding the Text

1. This article begins with two quotations. What is the significance of the quotations to the text and to each other?
2. How is the relationship between Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Godwin complicated by issues on both sides?
3. Identify some of the details of Lord Byron's history as detailed in this passage. In what ways did he come to embody the Romantic hero?

Reflection and Response

4. Hitchcock writes, “No poet of any renown would write a novel; no elevated person would stoop to read one” (par. 15). In what ways are certain styles or genres of art connected with class consciousness? What specific styles or genres of art today are affected by awareness of social class, and how is such art restricted or liberated by that?
5. Hitchcock takes some time to document the lives and celebrity of Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley. In particular, both Byron and Shelley were notorious for their lifestyles, rejecting social conventions and morality, living only for their art. To what extent does the lack of social conventions allow and inspire artists to be more creative? Consider this question in light of the fact that in the challenge, Shelley and Byron were not successful, and Mary Godwin and John Polidori were.

Making Connections

6. Mary Godwin Shelley later wrote about how difficult it was “to think of a story” (par. 27). Instead, the idea of *Frankenstein* came to her in a dream. What kinds of connections are there between dreaming and the creative imagination? Reread the excerpt from Shelley’s *Frankenstein* that describes the creation of the monster (p. 20) and argue whether the scene has dreamlike qualities or not.
7. Hitchcock cites the work of Luigi Galvani, who sent electric charges through the bodies of dead frogs to watch their muscles move. How did scientific experiments and advances shape the environment in which Mary Godwin Shelley created the story *Frankenstein*? How do current developments, such as the creation of genetically modified organisms or other advances in medical technology, create the conditions in which scientists or doctors act like God? Are developments in medical technology as threatening today as they were in Shelley’s time? Why or why not?