

Let's Help a Sister Out

Revising Mary Shelley's Writing

The world in which Mary Shelley lived and wrote was very different than our own. Because writers were often paid by the word rather than the entire work, an inflated style developed, fed as well by an audience's need for vivid detail. Today, we praise and encourage brevity and conciseness, but the same cannot be said of the Romantic writers of the early 1800s. The difficulty we have in reading her is that she often seems to say too much and overwrite a description.

With that in mind, your task will be to edit some selected sentences of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in order to make them easier on the ear and the understanding. I don't want you to turn the text into a street talk, abbreviated description, but rather update it for the modern reader to be able to understand the point. One of her great attributes is her vocabulary, so try not to remove that strength.

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.



My children, she said, my firmest hopes of future happiness were placed on the prospect of your union. This expectation will now be the consolation of your father. Elizabeth, my love, you must supply my place to my younger children. Alas! I regret that I am taken from you; and, happy and beloved as I have been.



I doubted at first whether I should attempt the creation of a being like myself, or one of simpler organization; but my imagination was too much exalted by my first success to permit me to doubt of my ability to give life to an animal as complex and wonderful as man. The materials at present within my command hardly appeared adequate to so arduous an undertaking, but I doubted not that I should ultimately succeed.



Devil, I exclaimed, do you dare approach me? And do not you fear the fierce vengeance of my arm wreaked on your miserable head? Begone, vile insect! Or rather, stay, that I may trample you to dust! And, oh! That I could, with the extinction of your miserable existence, restore those victims whom you have so diabolically murdered!



At these moments I wept bitterly and wished that peace would revisit my mind only that I might afford them consolation and happiness. But that could not be. Remorse extinguished every hope. I had been the author of unalterable evils, and I lived in daily fear lest the monster whom I had created should perpetrate some new wickedness.

