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Auszug aus:

Mary Shelley: Frankenstein

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1. DAS WICHTIGSTE AUF EINEN BLICK – SCHNELLÜBERSICHT

Biography:

⇨ S. 12 ff.

- → Mary Godwin was born in 1797 in London as the child of two well-known authors. Her mother died only ten days after giving birth.
- → In 1814 Mary eloped with her lover and future husband, the Romantic poet Percy Shelley.
- → Her famous novel *Frankenstein* was published in 1818.
- → She died in London in 1851 and is buried in Bournemouth.

Historical context:

⇨ S. 16 ff.

- → *Frankenstein* was written during a period of almost relentless scientific and technological advances.
- → Around 1800, anatomy, chemistry and especially the phenomenon of electricity were the fields which contributed the most to the widespread fascination with science.
- → Science during the Age of Enlightenment was characterised by competing systems of thought: rational and mechanistic science, the more mystical Romantic science and even the outdated occult sciences.
- → Science had a sinister side, too. "Bodysnatchers" supplied medical schools with corpses they stole from graveyards and some scientists attempted to reanimate dead bodies with electric shocks.
- → The revolutionary and social turmoil which shaped the decades before *Frankenstein* was written is an important subtext of the novel.
- → *Frankenstein* is strongly influenced by the educational ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau who believed that good parenting

requires sympathy and guidance and that the failure to educate children in such a way is a fundamental evil of civilized society.
→ Mary Shelley also draws upon her own childhood experiences in a dysfunctional family.

Details and explanations of important works:

→ Mary Shelley was a teenage prodigy who remained famous as the author of *Frankenstein* throughout her life but would never write anything remotely successful again. ⇨ S. 40 ff.
→ She wrote another six novels and novellas most of which like *Frankenstein* focus on the themes of science, justice and equality, parenting and education.

Origin and sources:

→ Mary Godwin got the inspiration to write *Frankenstein* in the summer of 1816 while staying at the Villa Diodati near Geneva. The Romantic poet Lord Byron challenged his guests to write ghost stories. A few days later, Mary had a frightening nightmare which became the spark of life for her story. ⇨ S. 43 ff.

Summary:

→ Frankenstein is a gifted and ambitious young scientist who discovers the secret of life and fabricates a creature from parts of dead bodies. But when he finally succeeds in bringing it to life he is so horrified at its hideousness that he runs away and abandons it. The monster longs for sympathy and companionship but is rejected not only by his creator but by society at large because of his appearance. Consumed with hatred he murders Victor's family and friends. Frankenstein chases the monster until he finally gets trapped on floating ice in the Arctic. ⇨ S. 47 ff.

He is rescued by Robert Walton, an explorer, who takes him aboard and listens to his story. Soon after, Frankenstein dies. The monster appears on the ship to bid farewell to his dead creator and appears heartbroken. The whole tale is related in a series of letters Walton writes to his sister in England.

Structure:

⇨ S. 57 ff.

- → *Frankenstein* is an epistolary novel, i. e. one that tells its story through the medium of letters. It also makes use of a complex set of embedded narratives with three main voices (Walton, Frankenstein, the creature).
- → All three main narrative voices are male; women are only placed on the novel's margins. However, Mary Shelley finds ways to subtly undermine male dominance.
- → The reader has reason to suspect that the three main narrators, to varying degrees, are not reliable.
- → Shelley uses intertextual references to characterize her protagonists and to provide context and background for the readers to heighten their experience.
- → The narrative rests on a number of core values: justice, equality, the need to relate to the suffering of others. Beyond that it raises the reader's awareness of the ambiguity and mutability of the world by enabling different readings of characters and events.

The characters and their constellations:

⇨ S. 69 ff.

- → Families are at the heart of *Frankenstein* and that includes Victor and his creature who have a father/son-relationship. Like the creature, many other characters were abandoned by their parents and/or are orphans or semi-orphans. The reasons for Frankenstein's unstable personality go back to his childhood.

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