**A Guide to the Texts Mary Shelley References in *Frankenstein***

At the time of writing Frankenstein, it was common practice for authors to make references to other pieces of literature which they assumed their readers would have come across. The three major texts which Mary Shelley alludes to are the myth of Prometheus and two long poems: *Paradise Lost* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.

Here are the literary allusions in their entirety:

**Volume one, Chapter two:**

He tried to make us act plays, and to enter into masquerades, in which the characters were drawn from the heroes of Roncesvalles, of the Round Table of King Arthur, and the chivalrous train who shed their blood to redeem the holy sepulchre from the hands of the infidels.

This quote contains two allusions: one is to the medieval French hero and military leader Roland, who died at Roncesvalles, and the second is to King Arthur, the legendary King of Britain, and his Knights of the Round Table. The Romantics enjoyed myths and legends which connected them to Britain’s chivalric past. This references also characterises Henry Clerval, a man who loves ‘chivalry and romance.’

**Volume one, Chapter three:**

I loved my brothers, Elizabeth, and Clerval; these were “old familiar faces;” but I believed myself totally unfitted for the company of strangers.

This is an allusion to the Romantic writer Charles Lamb’s poem “The Old Familiar Faces.”

Chance—or rather the evil influence, the Angel of Destruction, which asserted omnipotent sway over me from the moment I turned my reluctant steps from my father’s door—led me first to M. Krempe, professor of natural philosophy.

The phrase “Angel of Destruction” is an allusion to Milton’s Satan in “Paradise Lost,” who is presented as a fallen archangel of God who pledges to destroy God’s new creation: man. For a full synopsis of “Paradise Lost” click here: <http://www.paradiselost.org/5-sum-short.html>

**Volume one, Chapter four:**

I was like the Arabian who had been buried with the dead, and found a passage to life, aided only by one glimmering, and seemingly ineffectual, light.

This is an allusion to the Arabian sailor Sinbad of *The Thousand and One Nights*.

**Volume one, Chapter five:**

I had gazed on him while unfinished; he was ugly then; but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived.

This is an allusion to Dante Alighieri’s (1265–1321) depiction of the circles of Hell in his long narrative poem “The Divine Comedy.” For a summary of the poem, click here: https://www.enotes.com/topics/divine-comedy

My heart palpitated in the sickness of fear; and I hurried on with irregular steps, not daring to look about me:— Like one who, on a lonely road, Doth walk in fear and dread, And, having once turned round, walks on, And turns no more his head; Because he knows a frightful fiend Doth close behind him tread.

This is an allusion to Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s poem “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” For a summary of the poem, click here: https://www.gradesaver.com/the-rime-of-the-ancient-mariner/study-guide/summary#:~:text=An%20Ancient%20Mariner%2C%20unnaturally%20old,listen%20to%20his%20woeful%20tale.

You may easily believe,” said he, “how great was the difficulty to persuade my father that all necessary knowledge was not comprised in the noble art of bookkeeping; and, indeed, I believe I left him incredulous to the last, for his constant answer to my unwearied entreaties was the same as that of the Dutch schoolmaster in the *Vicar of Wakefield*:—‘I have ten thousand florins a year without Greek, I eat heartily without Greek.’

This is an allusion to the stubborn schoolmaster in Oliver Goldsmith’s novel *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766). For a summary of the novel, click here: <https://www.gradesaver.com/the-vicar-of-wakefield/study-guide/summary>

### **Volume one, Chapter six:**

Justine, you may remember, was a great favourite of yours; and I recollect you once remarked, that if you were in an ill-humour, one glance from Justine could dissipate it, for the same reason that Ariosto gives concerning the beauty of Angelica—she looked so frank-hearted and happy.

This is an allusion to Orlando from Ludovico Ariosto’s epic poem “Orlando Furioso” (1532), who becomes fascinated with the beauty of the married Angelica.

#### Volume one, Chapter seven:

I contemplated the lake: the waters were placid; all around was calm; and the snowy mountains, “the palaces of nature,” were not changed. By degrees the calm and heavenly scene restored me, and I continued my journey towards Geneva.

This is an allusion to the phrase “the palaces of nature,” which is taken from Lord Byron’s narrative poem “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage” (1812). For a summary of the poem, click here: https://www.enotes.com/topics/childe-harolds-pilgrimage

The road ran by the side of the lake, which became narrower as I approached my native town. I discovered more distinctly the black sides of Jura, and the bright summit of Mont Blanc.

Though the reference is to the actual mountain in Europe, these lines also contain an allusion to Percy Bysshe Shelley’s poem “Mont Blanc,” in which the author uses the mountain to represent the actuating power of the universe.

#### Volume Two: Chapter Three

But I was enchanted by the appearance of the hut: here the snow and rain could not penetrate; the ground was dry; and it presented to me then as exquisite and divine a retreat as Pandæmonium appeared to the dæmons of hell after their sufferings in the lake of fire.

This is an allusion to Pandæmonium, the new kingdom Satan and his troops build in Hell in Milton’s “Paradise Lost.” For a full synopsis of “Paradise Lost” click here: <http://www.paradiselost.org/5-sum-short.html>

#### Volume Two: Chapter Four

It was as the ass and the lap-dog; yet surely the gentle ass whose intentions were affectionate, although his manners were rude, deserved better treatment than blows and execration.

This is an allusion to the Aesop fable of the ass and the lapdog, in which the lapdog is rewarded for fawning over its master but the ass is punished for doing so.

#### Volume Two: Chapter seven

‘The path of my departure was free’; and there was none to lament my annihilation.

This is an allusion to Percy Bysshe Shelley’s poem “Mutability,” in which the line “the path of its departure still is free” appears. For a summary of the poem, click here: https://poemanalysis.com/percy-bysshe-shelley/mutability/

I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition; for often, like him, when I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall of envy rose within me.

This is an allusion to Milton’s Satan of “Paradise Lost,” who looks upon Adam and Eve with envy for still having God’s love. For a full synopsis of “Paradise Lost” click here: <http://www.paradiselost.org/5-sum-short.html>

Satan had his companions, fellow-devils, to admire and encourage him; but I am solitary and abhorred.

This is an allusion to Milton’s Satan in “Paradise Lost,” who falls to Hell with his army of rebel angels. For a full synopsis of “Paradise Lost” click here: <http://www.paradiselost.org/5-sum-short.html>

But it was all a dream; no Eve soothed my sorrows, nor shared my thoughts; I was alone. I remembered Adam’s supplication to his Creator.

This is an allusion to Adam’s request to God in Milton’s “Paradise Lost” to make him a companion. For a full synopsis of “Paradise Lost” click here: <http://www.paradiselost.org/5-sum-short.html>

### **Volume Two, Chapter Eight**

I, like the arch-fiend, bore a hell within me; and, finding myself unsympathised with, wished to tear up the trees, spread havoc and destruction around me, and then to have sat down and enjoyed the ruin.

This is an allusion to Satan in Milton’s “Paradise Lost,” who pronounces, “Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell.” For a full synopsis of “Paradise Lost” click here: <http://www.paradiselost.org/5-sum-short.html>

#### Volume Three, Chapter one:

He was a being formed in the ‘very poetry of nature.’

This is an allusion to a quote from the poem “Rimini” by the Romantic poet Leigh Hunt, but it is also a subtle allusion to the work of the Romantic poet William Wordsworth, who was proclaimed the “Poet of Nature” by Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Shelley’s husband.

### **Volume Three, Chapter seven:**

All my speculations and hopes are as nothing; and, like the archangel who aspired to omnipotence, I am chained in an eternal hell.

This is an allusion to Milton’s Satan in “Paradise Lost,” who was condemned to dwell in eternal “adamantine chains” in Hell. For a full synopsis of “Paradise Lost” click here: <http://www.paradiselost.org/5-sum-short.html>

The die is cast; I have consented to return if we are not destroyed.

This is an allusion to Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s poem “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” when the figures Death and Life-in-Death cast dice for the mariner regarding his fate. For a summary of the poem, click here: https://www.gradesaver.com/the-rime-of-the-ancient-mariner/study-guide/summary#:~:text=An%20Ancient%20Mariner%2C%20unnaturally%20old,listen%20to%20his%20woeful%20tale.

Evil henceforth became my good.

This is an allusion to Milton’s Satan in “Paradise Lost,” who declares, “Evil, be thou my good” after he is cast from heaven. For a full synopsis of “Paradise Lost” click here: <http://www.paradiselost.org/5-sum-short.html>

Yet even that enemy of God and man had friends and associates in his desolation; I am alone.

This is an allusion to Milton’s Satan in “Paradise Lost,” who still had the support of a legion of rebel angels who fell along with him as he was cast out of heaven. For a full synopsis of “Paradise Lost” click here: <http://www.paradiselost.org/5-sum-short.html>

There is also some interesting information on allusions here: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zpc8hv4/revision/3> (you need to scroll down).