



A Cold and Stormy Summer: Frankenstein, The Vampyre, and other writings inspired by Geneva, Switzerland in 1816

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, George Gordon Byron, John William Polidori

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This book contains the following:

and both the 1818 and 1831 editions of **Frankenstein**, by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley. From the Introduction: On April 5, 1815, a little-known volcano named Mount Tambora, located on the island of Sumbawa, Indonesia, erupted in a spectacular fashion. The sound of the eruption was heard over 1,500 miles away. During the next 12 days, it is estimated that over 38 cubic miles worth of material was ejected from the volcano. Several tsunamis were generated, reaching up to 13 feet in height. The death toll from the volcanic event was the largest ever recorded: more than 10,000 people died from the eruption itself; an additional 60,000 died when the ash deposits destroyed agriculture over a significant portion of the region. On the opposite side of the globe the effects weren't nearly as deadly, but were striking nonetheless. 1816 has gone down in European/North American history as "The Year without a Summer". In the northeastern United States, a hard frost in May wiped out many of the early crops. A cold front with accompanying frosts blanketed the region in early June, culminating in a June 6th snowfall in Maine and New York. A reddish fog was observed in the region, at times thick enough to allow viewing of sunspots with the naked eye. Ice could be found on lakes and rivers in Pennsylvania into August. The following winter was one of the coldest on record for the region. In Europe, the worst famine of the 19th century occurred in 1816, as grain and potato harvests failed in England, Ireland, and throughout the continent. Demonstrations, rioting, arson and looting occurred as a result. The primary weather in Europe was cool temperatures and heavy rains, with increased thunderstorm activity. These cold temperatures and accompanying storms are what brings these written works together. In the summer of 1816, the renowned poets Lord Byron and Percy Shelley, each as popular as any musician or movie star of the modern era, met in Geneva, Switzerland, where they rented neighboring villas. Byron was joined by his personal physician, John Polidori, and Shelley was accompanied by his mistress, Mary Godwin (later to become Mary Shelley), as well as her stepsister, Claire Clairmont. Due to the weather, the five were often confined to Byron's villa, discussing literature and ideas in front of a warm fireplace. On June 16th, as a strong thunderstorm swept across the area, the discussion turned to horror. Inspired by a volume of German ghost stories titled "Phantasmagoriana" as well as recent scientific reports of the Galvanic response (in which electrical current induces muscle contractions in dead animals), Byron suggested that each of them should create a horror story to share with the group on subsequent evenings. The literary output of this challenge is contained within these pages.

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