

The context of Frankenstein » Literary context » The monster's reading: Plutarch, Milton and Goethe

original (<http://m.crossref-it.info/textguide/Frankenstein/7/339>)

When the monster finds the bag of books abandoned in the forest – a convenient coincidence for the purpose of Mary Shelley's story – he gains access to three texts from which he derives his first general understanding of the world. Having acquired language and a sense of human family and communal life from his observation of the de Laceys, he is now in a position to extend that knowledge on a wider historical and cultural basis.

Reasons for choice

The choice of books that he finds is not accidental, and Mary Shelley has selected them for the following reasons:

- to enlighten the monster in very specific ways
- to enrich the thematic content of her novel.

They were among her own favourite reading and, in the case of Goethe and Milton, were texts by writers that meant a good deal to the s in general, especially within the Byron-Shelley circle (see [Author section: The Byron-Shelley circle](http://m.crossref-it.info/textguide/Frankenstein/7/Shelley,-Mary/8) (<http://m.crossref-it.info/textguide/Frankenstein/7/Shelley,-Mary/8>))

From *Plutarch's Lives*, the creature derives what he calls 'high thoughts':

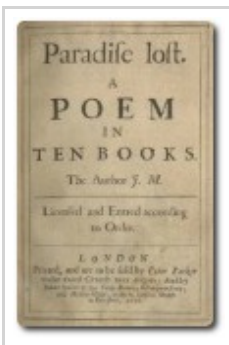
- the subjects of the lives are idealistic men who founded the early classical republics
- he learns about towns and cities where large groups of men and women live together, so he discovers the idea of human society
- he finds out about the vicious behaviour of some men in public and comes to



admire virtuous men and peaceful lawmakers.

The Sorrows of Young Werther by Goethe offers the creature new insights into the world of the feelings:

- its domestic settings appeal to his experience with the de Lacey family
- he sympathises with both the height of the hero's happiness and the depths of his despair
- the novel prompts him to ask questions about his own identity and destiny.



Paradise Lost by Milton arouses his strongest feelings.

- he is fascinated by the story of the at war with his own creations;
- he compares himself unfavourably with , who enjoys the love and protection of his creator
- he also compares himself with , in that he lacks the love that the de Laceys share.

In English Literature, it denotes a period between 1785-1830, when the previous classical or enlightenment traditions and values were overthrown, and a freer, more individual mode of writing emerged.

The Bible describes God as the unique supreme being, creator and ruler of the universe.

Literally, one who makes.

Romantic (<http://m.crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/Romantic>)

According to Genesis (the first book of the Old Testament), Adam is the first human being, made in the image / likeness of God, placed in the Garden of Eden and given dominion over the earth.

The devil; the term 'Satan' actually means 'Enemy' and is often used to refer to the force of evil in the world.