It was a dark and stormy summer at Lord Byron’s Lake Geneva home. Seeking a playful literary distraction for his guests—the soon-to-be-wed Mary and Percy Shelley as well as his physician, John Polidori—Byron challenged them each to pen a horror story to share. The following spring, in May 1817, Mary Shelley finished *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, which many consider the first science fiction novel. It was published anonymously the next year. (For his horror story challenge, Byron himself wrote a bit about the vampire legends he had heard in his travels, inspiring Polidori to later write *The Vam- pyre*, the first book in the romantic vampire genre.)

Shelley had a vivid imagination, but medical science also contributed to her story. A National Library of Medicine exhibition reports: *Scientists and physicians of her time, tantalized by the elusive boundary between life and death, probed it through experiments with lower organisms, human anatomical studies, attempts to resuscitate drowning victims, and experiments using electricity to restore life to the recently dead.*