

La Mise en Scène

Frankenstein

by Paul Stebbings & Phil Smith

inspired by the novel by Mary Shelley and the Hollywood movie

FRANKENSTEIN is one of the most potent modern myths. The company's new production will explore that myth through a Gothic comedy that mixes popular entertainment with a serious exploration of the darker themes within the myth. Should scientific research be held back by irrational prejudice or religious belief? Is human cloning or stem cell research immoral? Should humanity seek to create artificial life? Can science ever be restrained?

These pressing questions will be explored through a Gothic melodrama that switches from high comedy to spine-tingling terror, from love story to horror story, and from thriller to tragedy as the Monster is revealed in all his lonely suffering.

The play is directed by Paul Stebbings who has explored this style of "serious" Gothic comedy in productions such as THE MURDER OF SHERLOCK HOLMES, CHRISTMAS CAROL and OLIVER TWIST; which have been hugely successful across the globe, winning prizes at the Edinburgh Festival and performing in over thirty countries in Europe and Asia. FRANKENSTEIN will have a full electronic score by noted composer Paul Flush that operates more in the manner of film than theatre. The theatrical style will be highly visual and the pace will be fast and furious. Overall, the production will be accessible to a wide public and aim to reveal why the name 'Frankenstein' resonates in the modern world like few others.

## Les Personnages

### Victor Frankenstein

Born in Geneva, Victor Frankenstein is the eldest son of a respectable family. After a childhood interest in poetry, he turns to science and, as a young man, travels to Ingolstadt in Germany in order to pursue his scientific studies at university. He becomes obsessed with discovering the secrets of creating life from lifeless matter, abandoning his family and friends in pursuit of this goal. His passionate and reckless absorption (he drives himself to nervous exhaustion from which he never entirely recovers) in his scientific research only ends with the creation of the daemon. Only then does he begin to consider the consequences of his actions. Although he tries to flee responsibility for his creation, the monster eventually catches up with him. Victor feels some compassion for the monster's isolation, and initially agrees to create a fellow creature to accompany him: but he abandons the project out of a sense of responsibility for his fellow human beings. He no longer wishes to run the risk of creating another potentially destructive creature. His sense of compassion is eventually replaced by hatred and a burning desire to avenge the friends and family members that the monster has killed.

What does Victor Frankenstein learn from his experiences? Although he often expresses remorse and a sense of guilt, towards the end of his life he is still motivated by a passionate desire for knowledge. Whilst on Walton's ship, he overhears the crew's demands to return home: Victor responds with an impassioned speech in which he accuses the men of cowardice and unmanly behaviour. If they were to abandon their expedition they would return home with a "stigma of disgrace".

### Elizabeth Lavenza Frankenstein

Elizabeth Lavenza, the orphaned child of an Italian nobleman, was adopted by the Frankenstein family when they found her living with a Milanese peasant family. She grows up as Victor's adoptive sister or cousin, but in reality, all the family expect her to become his wife.

The description of Elizabeth as a child gives clear indicators of her character: "this child was thin and very fair. Her hair was the brightest living gold, and despite the poverty of her clothing, seemed to set a crown of distinction on her head. Her brow was clear and ample, her blue eyes cloudless, and her lips and the moulding of her face so expressive of sensibility and sweetness that none could behold her without looking on her as of a distinct species, a being heaven-sent, and bearing a celestial stamp in all her features." (Frankenstein, Volume I, Chapter 1) She is a symbol for goodness and embodies the perfect middle-class young woman. Devoted to Victor and the Frankensteins, she is humble, reassuring and generous. Supportive of Victor even when he shows scant regard for his family, she even writes to release him from their unspoken engagement should he wish to marry elsewhere. She loves poetry and the beauty of the countryside and she is forever loyal to her friends and family. Her attachment to Victor destines her to become one of the monster's innocent victims.

## Henry Clerval

Henry is Victor's only friend who stands by him throughout the novel: nursing him back to health and accompanying him on his travels.

Victor admires Henry's sensibility, enthusiastic imagination and gentility. Henry prefers the study of literature, language and nature to Victor's scientific pursuits. He seems to be the charming, radiant alter ego to Victor's dark obsessive personality. Although Henry too is motivated by a thirst for knowledge and learning, it never interferes with his personal relations or drags him beyond accepted limits. Although close to Victor, he never displays any curiosity as to the source of his sickness or the object of his studies. Henry pays with his life for his loyalty to Victor.

## The Daemon

The monster remains nameless but is referred to variously as the monster, the daemon, the creature, the being, the fiend... Created from various different body parts, collected from dissecting rooms, slaughter-houses, and even from human graves, the monster has yellow skin which "scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing black hair; his teeth of pearly whiteness ; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips." (Frankenstein, Volume I, Chapter 5) The monster is abnormally tall and of superhuman strength.

From the very beginning of his existence, when his creator flees in horror at the sight of him, the monster's appearance leads to his rejection by mankind. His outward form terrifies and consequently he is unable to make any friendly contact: bitter loneliness motivates him to turn towards crime and revenge.

After several rejected attempts at communication with human beings, the monster takes refuge in a shed that backs onto the De Lacey's home; after months spent observing the family from his hiding place, he learns to speak and read their language. These skills bring with them the capacity of reflection, and the monster begins to wonder about the purpose and nature of his existence. The more he learns, the greater his sense of isolation becomes and the more he longs for kindness and the company of fellow beings.

Convinced of the family's goodness, he decides to speak with the old De Lacey, in the hope that his blindness will prevent him from judging according to outward appearances. The other family members return unexpectedly and the monster is chased away. When the monster discovers that the family have moved away from their cottage from fear, he gives in to negative feelings of hatred and revenge. He hunts down his creator, firstly in order to plead for compassion and beg Victor to create a female like himself with whom he may live, and later in order to obtain revenge. By killing Victor's nearest and dearest he aims to cause Victor suffering and torment. Like Victor, he becomes "the slave, not the master, of an impulse which I detested, yet could not disobey" (Frankenstein, Volume III, Chapter 7)

## The De Lacey family (Brother and sister, Felix and Agatha, and their blind, elderly father)

A genteel and respected French family, the De Lacey's were forced to flee Paris after Felix's entanglement with Safie, the daughter of a Turkish merchant. When the latter is taken prisoner by the government for unexplained reasons, Felix helps him escape. His actions lead to the

imprisonment of his family, and ultimately all three are condemned to exile and resulting poverty. While the De Lacey's are forced to take up residence in a small cottage in Germany, the merchant returns to his home country, without keeping his promise to allow the marriage of Felix and Safie. She eventually defies her father and comes to join her lover in his rural exile. It is her French lessons that the monster overhears, allowing him too to learn the language.

Although all the members of the family are presented as naturally "good", generous and refined, their reaction to the monster is no different from that of any other human being. When the monster tries to speak to old De Lacey, begging for his help and protection, the old man's children are horrified on discovering their father in the company of such a creature, and Felix chases him violently from the cottage.

## Le Synopsis

### Scene 1

An introductory lecture by the Science Professor Fleischflayer is interrupted by the student Victor Frankenstein who challenges the Professor's materialist beliefs with his own faith in a human soul. Frankenstein is humiliated by the superior knowledge and wit of the Professor.

### Scene 2

In Professor Fleischflayer's laboratory at Ingolstadt University, the Professor's daughter, Elizabeth, is helped out by Victor Frankenstein, who is attracted to her. Victor tries to 'seduce' Elizabeth away from her father's materialist and unromantic notions - he suspects that she holds such views but is silent about them for her father's sake. An ape gets holds of a bottle of ether and drugs Victor, when he comes round he takes advantage of Elizabeth's concern to profess his love. This is interrupted by the Professor. Victor asks for Elizabeth's hand. As a test and challenge the Professor recruits Victor to help in an experiment - the revival of the ape with electricity. The ape is killed and then revived, but only briefly - insufficient electricity. Elizabeth suggests reviving a cobra. During this attempt the Professor is bitten and dies, passing on his scientific mission to Victor (who is becoming increasingly convinced by the professor's ideas) and Elizabeth. But Elizabeth has been horrified by the experiment, as Victor has been excited by it, and when Victor suggests using electricity to revive her father Elizabeth makes Victor promise to give up such science and find a new a career.

### Scene 3

An atheist student is lynched by a mob of townspeople. Victor - now studying medicine - sees this and later sees the corpse briefly dance when struck by lightning. Victor recruits the gravedigger Igor to seek out corpses to revive the Professor's experiments.

### Scene 4

Elizabeth is in bed. Her dream appears: a strange hybrid figure: dressed in the Professor's tailcoat, the body of the ape, half of his head is cat and out of the top sticks an enormous butterfly wing, one of his arms is the Cobra. Elizabeth gets out of bed and starts to search for Victor.

### Scene 5

In the laboratory Victor is constructing the Monster from dead body parts. He sends Igor of to find a new head. Then exits. Elizabeth appears, worried that Victor has re-started the experiments and is found by Igor who incompetently lets her in. Victor enters, has Elizabeth drugged and put into one of the cages while he continues the Monster's completion and then revival. The monster comes to life, but unexpectedly fixates on Elizabeth. Victor is horrified by the deathliness of his creation – argues with Elizabeth whether to destroy it. Eventually, Igor is left to kill the Monster, but bungles the job and the Monster kills him and escapes. Elizabeth and Victor discover the Monster has gone and vow to destroy it.

### Scene 6

A clothes line. The Monster appears and steals clothes from the line. A Washerwoman appears and sees him. In trying to quieten her, the Monster accidentally crushes her to death and runs off. Victor – seeking the Monster - arrives to discover the Washerwoman dead. A passerby sees Victor with blood on hands and Victor is arrested for murder.

#### Scene 7

In the gaol Victor professes his innocence, but his story of a Monster is not believed.

#### Scene 8

On the edge of the town - the Monster, now clothed gains some solace in the sunlight and the woods. He comes upon the cottage of a Blind Woman and his daughter. When the Monster hears the occupants approaching he hides and watches the gentle routine of the couple, learning from their conversations, hymns and prayers. When the Blind woman is alone the Monster comes out of his hiding place and talks to her, using the language he has overheard. But when the daughter returns she sees the Monster and starts screaming. Trying to quieten her he kills the daughter, running off when he realizes what he has done.

#### Scene 9

Monster runs through forest, pursued by the sounds of the mob.

#### Scene 10

Courtroom. Judge pronounces Victor guilty of murder.

#### Scene 11

Elizabeth has been forcibly removed from the gaol, still protesting Victor's innocence. She becomes aware that the Monster is watching her from the shadows. Elizabeth rails at the Monster and challenges him to kill her. She abuses him for being unable to help his creator. Monster exits.

#### Scene 12

Victor's cell. The gaoler laughs at Victor for his Monster 'story'. The Monster appears and smashes down the doors of the prison, carrying off Victor.

#### Scene 13

Up in the snow covered alps, the Monster and Victor talk. The Monster blames the treatment he has been given by people and the lack of help from his creator as the reasons for his violence. Victor will have none of this and says that responsibility for the crimes lies with the Monster. So, the Monster threatens Elizabeth – offering to leave her and Victor alone only if Victor will make the Monster a living-dead mate. Victor, reluctantly agrees, on condition that the two monsters withdraw from any contact with humans.

#### Scene 14

Back at his home, Victor recruits Elizabeth to making the Monster's mate.

#### Scene 15

Cemetery. Victor and Elizabeth are digging up bodies, but unable to find any usable body parts. A young female mourner approaches and Victor and Elizabeth argue over whether to kill her and use her body. When the mourner seems to escape the Monster emerges from the shadows and kills the young woman. The three run from the cemetery with the corpse, with the townspeople in pursuit.

## Scene 16

The lab. Trying to revive the Monster's 'bride'. Elizabeth is accidentally shot by the mob. Victor revives her instead of the young mourner, but the Monster claims her as his promised bride and the revived Elizabeth expresses her preference for the Monster. They escape as the mob enters with burning torches and Victor perishes in the fire.

## A brief summary of the Life of Mary Shelley

29th March 1797 Mary Wollstonecraft, one of the first feminists, and William Godwin, an influential writer and political journalist marry.

30th August 1797 Their daughter, Mary, is born. Her mother dies ten days later.

The future Mary Shelley will consequently grow up amongst her father's intellectual friends.

28th July 1814 Mary elopes to the Continent with the poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley, who is already married. They return to England in September.

February 1815 Their first child, a daughter, dies in Venice.

January 1816 Mary gives birth to a son, William.

May 1816 The family leaves England for Geneva, where they meet Lord Byron and take up residence near him at Montalègre.

June 1816 Mary begins writing Frankenstein.

December 1816 Percy Shelley's wife, Harriet is found drowned. Percy and Mary marry in London.

May 1817 Frankenstein is completed.

September 1817 Mary gives birth to a daughter, Clara.

November 1817 History Of Six Weeks' Tour, a jointly authored work recording Mary and Percy's travels in Europe is published.

January 1818 Frankenstein is published.

March 1818 The Shelleys leave England for Italy, where they will remain until Shelley's death. They visit Byron in Venice, but baby Clara dies during their stay there.

June 1819 Mary suffers a nervous breakdown after the death of her son William.

November 1819 Mary gives birth to a son, Percy Florence, in the Italian town of Florence. He will be the only one of her children to survive infancy.

October 1821 The Shelleys move to Pisa where they are neighbours to Lord Byron.

July 1822 Percy Bysshe Shelley drowns in the Bay of Spezia near Livorno.

1823 Mary Shelley returns to London determined not to remarry.

Her romance novel set in 14th century, Valperga, is published in February. The second edition of Frankenstein is also published.

1826 The Last Man is published. This novel, set in the 21st century, tells the story of a lone survivor in a world wiped-out by plague.

1830 Publication of Mary's fourth novel, Perkin Warbeck.

1835 Publication of *Lodore*.

1837 *Faulkner*, Mary's last novel is published.

1839 Mary Shelley continues to write short stories for popular periodicals, particularly *The Keepsake*, as well as producing several volumes of *Lives for Lardner's Cabinet Cyclopaedia*.

She prepared the first authoritative edition of Shelley's poems (1839, 4 vols.).

1844 *Rambles in Germany and Italy*, a travel journal recounting her Continental tours with Percy Florence and his friends.

February 1851 Mary Shelley dies in London on 1st February, probably from a brain tumour.

## Auteurs contemporains de Mary Shelley et ses prédécesseurs

1764 The Castle of Otranto, Horace Walpole

1794 Caleb Williams, William Godwin (Mary Shelley's father) The Mysteries of Udolpho, Ann Radcliffe

1796 The Monk, Matthew Gregory Lewis

1797 The Italian; or, The Confessional of the Black Penitents, Ann Radcliffe

1810 Zastrozzi, Percy Bysshe Shelley

1817 Manfred, Lord Byron

1818 Frankenstein ; or the Modern Prometheus, Mary Shelley

1820 Melmoth the Wanderer, Charles Maturin

1839 The Fall of the House of Usher Edgar Allan Poe

1851 Moby Dick, Herman Melville

1860 The Woman in White, Wilkie Collins

1865 Alice in Wonderland, Lewis Carroll

1883 Treasure Island, Robert Louis Stevenson

1886 Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, Robert Louis Stevenson

1887 A Study in Scarlet, (first Sherlock Holmes novel), Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

1890 The Picture of Dorian Gray, Oscar Wilde

1895 The Time Machine, H.G. Wells

1897 Dracula, Bram Stoker

## Les découvertes scientifique du 19ème siècle

Le dix-neuvième siècle était une époque marquée par le triomphe de la raison et de la découverte scientifique. Beaucoup de vieilles croyances et théories furent discréditées grâce aux avancées scientifiques, qui ont permis un regard, une analyse et une annotation toujours plus précises et minutieux de la matière et de la vie. Voici quelques événements importants :

1803-1808 John Dalton développe sa théorie atomique et publie *A New System of Chemical Philosophy*. La théorie de Dalton stipule que tous les gaz sont composés d'atomes, que le poids d'un gaz dépend du poids de ses atomes constituants et que les atomes de même type sont attirés les uns aux autres. Selon Dalton une réaction chimique réunit ou sépare ces particules élémentaires, mais qu'aucune nouvelle matière n'est créée.

1803 Giovanni Aldini, neveu de Luigi Galvani, un italien qui a effectué une série d'expériences anatomiques: *An Account of the late Improvements in Galvanism, with a series of curious and interesting experiments performed before the Commissioners of the French National Institute, and Repeated lately in the Anatomical Theatres of London. To which is added an appendix containing experiments on the body of a malefactor executed at Newgate...*

Galvani a développé techniques qui, grâce à l'application de courants électriques, stimulaient des mouvements musculaires dans les cadavres humains.

1815-22 Lamarck publie *La Philosophie Zoologique*

Lamarck publie *L'Histoire naturelle des animaux sans vertèbres* en sept volumes. Ses travaux ont une forte influence sur le développement des théories d'évolution.

1831 Création de la *British Association for the Advancement of Science*.

1837-38 Le physicien Michael Faraday poursuit ses recherches innovantes dans le domaine de l'électrochimie et de la théorie de l'électricité.

1848 Création de la *American Association for the Advancement of Science*.

1779-1848 Jöns Jakob Berzelius invente une sténographie chimique efficace : l'atome de chaque élément est représenté par la (ou les) première(s) lettre(s) de son nom.

1776-1856 En observant la nature de l'atome, Amedeo Avogadro emploie pour la première fois le terme 'molécule' qui désigne aujourd'hui un groupe d'atomes.

1850s on Pendant la deuxième moitié du 19ème siècle, l'efficacité améliorée des microscopes a permis une élaboration de la théorie cellulaire (qui démontre que toutes les matières vivantes sont constituées de cellules) et la découverte éventuelle du 'chromosome'.

1859 *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* de Charles Darwin paraît à la fin du mois de novembre. Tous les exemplaires de la première édition sont vendus le jour de parution.

1861 Pasteur écrit *Mémoire sur les animalcules vivant sans oxygène libre et déterminant des fermentations*, suite à sa recherche autour de l'existence de micro-organismes présents dans l'air. Le scientifique allemand, Ferdinand Cohn, dénomme ces micro-organismes « bacillus » ou « microbe ». Les découvertes de Pasteur permettent l'invention de la technique de pasteurisation

(opération qui consiste à chauffer le lait à 65 degrés pendant une demi-heure afin de détruire les bacilles en suspension dans l'air) et l'élaboration de vaccins contre des infections bactériennes.

1867 Les travaux de Lister sur l'asepsie donne lieu à la découverte qu'une solution de phénol vaporisée dans l'air peut éliminer les bactéries sans affecter gravement les tissus du corps. L'utilisation de cette technique dans les salles d'opération obtient une baisse spectaculaire des décès postopératoires.

March 1818 The Shelleys leave England for Italy, where they will remain until Shelley's death. They visit Byron in Venice, but baby Clara dies during their stay there.

1873 James Clerck Maxwell publie le célèbre Treatise on Electricity and Magnetism.

1818-89 James Joule developpe une théorie moderne de la chaleur.

1825-93 Jean Martin Charcot crée la célèbre 'Ecole de neurologie de la Salpêtrière'. Ses cours sont suivis par Freud parmi d'autres. Il démontre des liens entre certaines parties du cerveau brain et des difficultés motrices. Il développe l'emploi de l'hypnose comme stratégie de guérison.

## How Frankenstein was written

Mary Shelley began writing Frankenstein in 1816 at the age of 18. She completed the novel almost a year later. She had to wait another eight months before its publication to mixed reviews in 1818. What was to become one of the world's most famous horror stories was conceived by a young girl during a stimulating summer spent amongst a group of intellectual and gifted companions. Mary was staying in Switzerland in the awe-inspiring surroundings of the Alps, in the company of her lover, Percy Shelley and Lord Byron, both "illustrious poets." (The Author's introduction to Frankenstein, written for the 1831 edition).

Following a promising spring, the wet summer of 1816 forced the group to spend much time indoors. They spent their time reading each other German ghost stories in French translation and discussing philosophical doctrines and scientific developments of the day. Mary herself describes some of the different subjects covered: "the nature of the principle of life, and whether there was any probability of its ever being discovered and communicated. They talked of the experiments of Dr Darwin...who preserved a piece of vermicelli in a glass case, till by some extraordinary means it began to move with voluntary motion. Not thus, after all, would life be given. Perhaps a corpse would be re-animated; galvanism had given token of such things: perhaps the component parts of a creature might be manufactured, brought together, and endued with vital warmth."

The reading of ghost stories led Byron to lay down a literary challenge: each of them would write a ghost story. While her male companions promptly began work on creations which ultimately fizzled out, Mary suffered from "writer's block", unable to conjure up a story. Until after an evening spent in particularly animated discussion and unable to fall asleep her semi-conscious brain sent her a terrifying vision: "I saw – with shut eyes, but acute mental vision – I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the workings of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half-vital motion." She quickly understood that this nightmarish vision was to be the source of the story she had been searching for, and already endowed her dream with a moral message: "Frightful it must be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world."

Frankenstein and the Gothic tradition:

Frankenstein was rejected by some authors of the Gothic tradition for its realistic descriptions and fascination with pursuit of science. The traditional Gothic tale featured supernatural forces at work and its hero was inevitably brought to his end by the working of some almighty force. Victor Frankenstein is not the victim of mysterious powers, but rather that of his own scientific "folly". Having himself tried to vie with the gods by creating a living being, he succumbs to the madness of guilt. The novel does however share the Gothic motif of "an anxiety with no possibility of escape".  
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(1) Mario Praz, 'Introductory Essay', Three Gothic Novels, p20

## SYNOPSIS « FRANKENSTEIN »

Dans le laboratoire du professeur Fleischflayer à l'Université d'Ingolstadt, Victor Frankenstein vient en aide à Elizabeth, qui se trouve en difficulté face au singe du laboratoire qui lui a subtilisé une bouteille d'éther. Le singe drogue accidentellement Victor qui profite de la préoccupation d'Elizabeth pour lui confesser son amour. La scène est interrompue par le père de la jeune fille. Victor en profite pour lui demander sa main.

Afin de mettre son futur gendre à l'épreuve, le professeur propose à Victor de l'assister dans une expérience de réanimation des morts par l'électricité. Le singe, tué pour l'expérience, est réanimé mais seulement brièvement à cause du manque de puissance électrique. Elizabeth suggère de renouveler l'expérience sur un petit reptile : le cobra. Mais le professeur se fait mordre accidentellement par l'animal et meurt en suppliant Victor de reprendre la suite de ses expérimentations.

Plus tard, un étudiant athée d'Ingolstadt est poursuivi et lynché par une foule fanatique et ignorante. Victor, passant là par hasard, voit ce cadavre danser brièvement au bout de la corde après avoir été frappé par la foudre. C'est la révélation !

Victor recrute Igor, un fossoyeur, pour l'assister dans son entreprise de construction d'un être vivant à partir d'organes humains. Il réussit à donner vie à une créature mais le monstre semble obnubilé par la belle Elizabeth. Horrifié par l'aspect morbide de sa création Victor demande à Igor de la détruire mais celui-ci échoue et le monstre s'échappe. D'abord, la créature se lie d'amitié avec un aveugle. Tout se passe à merveille jusqu'à ce que sa fille, voyante, le rencontre et prenne peur. Essayant de la faire taire le monstre la tue accidentellement et s'enfuit honteux et désespéré.

Plus tard il décide de retrouver Victor Frankenstein et justifie sa violence par le manque d'attention reçu de la part de son créateur et par la haine reçue de la part des autres humains. Il menace Victor de tuer Elizabeth si celui-ci ne lui fabrique pas une « épouse » mort-vivante comme lui. Dans cette entreprise Elizabeth vient en aide à son mari mais est malencontreusement tuée par la foule qui tente de mettre fin aux expérimentations diaboliques du docteur Frankenstein.

Dans un dernier sursaut de désespoir Victor tente de ramener Elizabeth à la vie mais, maintenant mort-vivante, elle reconnaît le monstre comme étant son fiancé et tous les deux s'échappent et se réfugient dans les montagnes. Victor Frankenstein met alors fin à ses jours au moment où la foule en colère pénètre dans son laboratoire.