



GUTHRIE
THEATER

Wurtele Thrust Stage / Sept. 15 - Oct 27, 2018



Frankenstein - Playing with Fire

by BARBARA FIELD (from the novel by MARY SHELLEY)

directed by ROB MELROSE

PLAY GUIDE

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Play guides are made possible by



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The Guthrie creates transformative theater experiences that ignite the imagination, stir the heart, open the mind and build community through the illumination of our common humanity.

Guthrie Theater Play Guide

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PHOTO: JASON ROJAS AND RYAN COLBERT IN *FRANKENSTEIN - PLAYING WITH FIRE* (DAN NORMAN)

**“If an astonishing power were suddenly placed
in your hands, what would you do with it?”**

– Victor to Krempe in *Frankenstein - Playing with Fire*

About This Guide

This play guide is designed to fuel your curiosity and deepen your understanding of a show’s history, meaning and cultural relevance so you can make the most of your theatergoing experience. You might be reading this because you fell in love with a show you saw at the Guthrie. Maybe you want to read up

on a play before you see it onstage. Or perhaps you’re a fellow theater company doing research for an upcoming production. We’re glad you found your way here, and we encourage you to dig in and mine the depths of this extraordinary story. [G](#)

DIG DEEPER

If you are a theater company and would like more information about this production, contact Dramaturg Carla Steen at carlas@guthrietheater.org.

PHOTO: ELIJAH ALEXANDER, JASON ROJAS, ZACHARY FINE AND RYAN COLBERT IN *FRANKENSTEIN - PLAYING WITH FIRE* (DAN NORMAN)

Synopsis

At the North Pole during the summer solstice, Frankenstein and his Creature meet after a years-long chase. Frankenstein wants to avenge the destruction of his family; the Creature wants to avenge his abandonment. Their temporary and wary truce takes the form of a question-and-answer catechism that encompasses topics people have wrestled with since God created Adam. As Frankenstein marvels at the achievements of his creation and the Creature demands answers from his creator, memories from their disparate pasts are conjured and entwined.

A young, ambitious Victor pursues knowledge and pushes the boundaries of science, ultimately creating and giving life to his Adam, whom he immediately rejects as a monster. Adam doesn't know what it means to be a monster, but his painful education among humanity soon teaches him. Even though he is an outcast, he has an unbreakable connection to Victor that will forever test the bounds of love, responsibility, life and death. [G](#)

SETTING

The North Pole and various stops in a voyage of memory. It is the summer solstice — the last day or the first day, depending on the point of view.

CHARACTERS

Frankenstein, a scientist

Creature, Frankenstein's creation

Victor, a memory of Frankenstein as a young man

Adam, a memory of the newly made Creature

Elizabeth, Victor's betrothed

Krempe, Victor's professor at Ingolstadt

Old Man, a memory from the Creature's past

Initial Responses to *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*

For the past two centuries, Mary Shelley's story of a scientist and his creature has become deeply entrenched in our collective consciousness. So it may be difficult to remember that there was a time when this story was brand new and people were reacting to it for the first time. When the novel was published in 1818, no author was listed, though its dedication to writer William Godwin (Shelley's father) led to wild speculation about its authorship. Some of the early reviews of the novel are excerpted below, providing a glimpse at how the world has changed even as Shelley's novel remains a constant.

[After summarizing the novel's plot]

Our readers will guess from this summary, what a tissue of horrible and disgusting absurdity this work presents. It is piously dedicated to Mr. Godwin and is written in the spirit of his school. The dreams of insanity are embodied in the strong and striking language of the insane, and the author, notwithstanding the rationality of his preface, often leaves us in doubt whether he is not as mad as his hero. ...

But when we have thus admitted that *Frankenstein* has passages which appall the mind and make the flesh creep, we have given it all the praise (if praise it can be called) which we dare to bestow. Our taste and our judgment alike revolt at this kind of writing, and the greater the ability with which it may be executed the worse it is. ... The author has powers, both of conception and language, which employed in a happier direction might, perhaps (we speak

dubiously) give him a name among those whose writings amuse or amend their fellow creatures.

John Wilson Crocker, *Quarterly Review*, January 1818

There never was a wilder story imagined, yet, like most of the fictions of this age, it has an air of reality attached to it, by being connected with the favourite projects and passions of the times. ... We hope yet to have more productions, both from this author and his great model, Mr. Godwin; but they would make a great improvement in their writings, if they would rather study the established order of nature as it appears, both in the world of matter and of mind, than continue to revolt our feelings by hazardous innovations in either of these departments.

Anonymous, *Edinburgh Magazine*, March 1818

An uncouth story, in the taste of the German novelists, trending in some degree on delicacy, setting probability at defiance, and leading to no conclusion either moral or philosophical. In some passages, the writer appears to favour the doctrines of materialism: but a serious examination is scarcely necessary for so excentric [sic] a vagary of the imagination as this tale presents.

Anonymous, *The Monthly Review*, April 1818

It is no slight merit in our eyes that the tale, though wild in incident, is written in plain and forcible English, without exhibiting that mixture of hyperbolic Germanisms with which tales of wonder are usually told, as if

it were necessary that the language should be as extravagant as the fiction. The ideas of the author are always clearly as well as forcibly expressed; and his descriptions of landscape have in them the choice requisites of truth, freshness, precision, and beauty. The self-education of the monster, considering the slender opportunities of acquiring knowledge that he possessed, we have already noticed as improbable and overstrained. ...

We should also be disposed, in support of the principles with which we set out, to question whether the monster, how tall, agile, and strong however, could have perpetrated so much mischief undiscovered; or passed through so many countries without being secured, either on account of his crimes, or for the benefit of some such speculator such as Mr. Polito, who would have been happy to add to his museum so curious a specimen of natural history. ...

Upon the whole, the works impresses us with a high idea of the author's original genius and happy power of expression.

Sir Walter Scott, "Remarks on *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, March 1818

This Tale is evidently the production of no ordinary Writer; and, though we are shocked at the idea of the event on which the fiction is founded, many parts of it are strikingly good, and the description of the scenery is excellent.

Anonymous, *Gentleman's Magazine*, April 1818

The Origin of *Frankenstein - Playing with Fire*



PHOTO: PETER SYVERTSEN, CURZON DOBELL AND JOHN CARROLL LYNCH IN THE 1988 PRODUCTION OF *FRANKENSTEIN - PLAYING WITH FIRE* (MICHAL DANIEL/JOE GIANNETTI)

Garland Wright asked me to prepare an adaptation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* for a national tour that would terminate with a run on the Guthrie's mainstage. After rereading the novel, I was elated and dismayed: The ideas were challenging and important, yet the writing itself failed to move me. I wanted to back out, suggesting that there were a dozen conventional adaptations in existence that might serve. At that point Garland asked me, "What do you see?" "I see two old men sitting on Regency chairs on an ice floe, having the conversation that never appeared in the novel."

To my amazement, Garland encouraged me to write a "response" to the novel. Generous and trusting of him, but I was aware that the national tour had already been sold and that I would have to incorporate some part of the novel to satisfy ticket holders.

I started by asking the questions that I (as the Creature) wanted to ask my creator. "Why did you make me?" "Since you made me, why did you not love me?" "If you could not love me, why didn't you make practical use of me for the good of humanity?"

Mary Shelley had killed her mother — that is, Mary Wollstonecraft had died giving birth to her daughter. And Mary Shelley, herself, had suffered stillborn babies, and she had childbed fever as a teenager. From this pain and sorrow, she made a creative leap in a dream about creating a living being in a laboratory with no harm to the maker. Thus young Victor Frankenstein is given powerful reasons to do the same thing.

I arrived at a play with two man-made creatures, the older one simply called the Creature and the newborn incarnation named Adam.

Likewise, there are two scientists: Frankenstein, the old man, and Victor, the student who creates Adam. Frankenstein has arrived at the top of the world and the end of his life; Victor is his remembered vision of himself at the beginning of his journey.

The show toured for five months, and I was able to fly around the country to watch it with audiences — a luxury few theaters can afford to give writers. I made changes that were included when the play opened at the Guthrie in July 1988.

Playwright Barbara Field, excerpted from her introduction to *Frankenstein - Playing with Fire* as published in *New Classics from the Guthrie Theater: Classical Adaptations for the American Stage* by Barbara Field, Smith & Kraus, 2003

About Novelist Mary Shelley

The only daughter of writers William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley was born in London on August 30, 1797. Her mother died of puerperal fever 11 days later. Godwin eventually remarried, and Mary Jane Clairmont brought two children of her own into the household, which also included Mary's half-sister (Wollstonecraft's older daughter) Fanny Imlay and would eventually include her younger half-brother William Godwin.

In the summer of 1812, Godwin sent Mary to visit a family friend, William Baxter, in Scotland. She grew fond of the whole Baxter family, who provided her with a model of a happy home life that she would portray in her fiction. On her return to London that November, Mary met Godwin's young, wealthy protégé Percy Bysshe Shelley and his wife Harriet. When they met again in May 1814, she thought of him as a budding genius, and for his part, he had grown dissatisfied with his marriage and was taken by Mary in part because she was the daughter of Godwin and Wollstonecraft. By June, they were spending almost every day together, and, accompanied by Mary's stepsister Claire Clairmont, they eloped to France in July.

The couple was shunned by most of their family and friends, as Percy Shelley was still married to Harriet, and they endured some difficult financial and emotional times. Mary became pregnant and gave birth to a girl prematurely in early 1815, but the baby died a few days later. Shortly afterward, Mary recorded in her journal a dream "that my little

baby came to life again — that it had only been cold and that we rubbed it before the fire and it lived."

Their circumstances changed in 1816 with the suicides of Harriet Shelley and Fanny Imlay Godwin. Harriet's death allowed Mary and Percy to marry, but death was much on Mary's mind. Claire became involved in an affair with Lord Byron in the spring of 1816 and persuaded Mary and Percy to go to Switzerland with her to meet Byron. The Shelley party took a house on Lake Geneva near Byron and his friend, Dr. Polidori, and the two groups saw much of each other. When rain drove them indoors, they read a book of ghost stories aloud, which prompted Byron to suggest that they each write their own ghost story. Mary wanted to think of a story that would "make the reader dread to look round, to curdle the blood and quicken the beatings of the heart."

Her inspiration came after a waking dream: "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 working of some powerful engine, show signs of life." She began writing *Frankenstein* the next day, and, with Percy's encouragement, she developed her ghost story into a novel. It was finished in 1817 and published anonymously in January 1818.

Soon after, Mary and Percy again went abroad, where their lives would take a tragic turn. They took their young children, William, born in 1816, and Clara Everina, born in 1817, abroad with them, but both



PHOTO: MARY SHELLEY PORTRAIT BY RICHARD ROTHWELL

would die there — Clara Everina of dysentery in 1818 and William of malaria the following year. In 1819, Percy Florence was born — the only child of Mary and Percy to survive childhood. He died in 1889. In 1822, Mary miscarried during her fifth pregnancy and nearly lost her life. A month later, on July 8, 1822, Percy died by drowning. After her husband's death, Mary returned to England and devoted herself to publicizing his writing and educating Percy Florence. She published her late husband's *Posthumous Poems* (1824) and edited his *Poetical Works* (1839) and prose works.

Mary wrote six other novels, including *Matilda* (1959), *Valperga* (1823), *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck* (1830), *Lodore* (1835) and *Falkner* (1837), as well as a novella, mythological dramas, stories and articles, various travel books and biographical studies. *The Last Man* (1826), an account of the future destruction of the human race by a plague, is often considered her best work. *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* (1817) recounts the continental

tour she and Percy took in 1814 following their elopement and their summer near Geneva in 1816.

Her last book, an account of summer tours on the Continent with Percy Florence and his college friends, was published in 1844. By then her health was failing, and in 1848 she began to suffer the first

symptoms of the brain tumor that eventually killed her. She died in London on February 1, 1851, having asked to be buried with her mother and father. Her son and daughter-in-law had Mary's parents' bodies exhumed and buried them together in the churchyard of St. Peter's Bournemouth in England.

Sourced and adapted from *Concise Dictionary of British Literary Biography*, *Britannica Encyclopædia* and other books about Mary Shelley

Mary Shelley: In Her Own Words

... stay at home & think of my little dead baby — this is foolish I suppose yet whenever I am left alone to my own thoughts & do not read to divert them they always come back to the same point — that I was a mother & am so no longer ...

Mary Shelley, in her journal, March 13, 1815, after the death of her first child

This day promises to be fine & we set out at nine for Montanvert ... we get to the top at twelve and behold *le Mer de Glace*. This is the most desolate place in the world — iced mountains surround it — no sign of vegetation appears except on the place from which we view the scene — we went on the ice — It is traversed by irregular crevices whose sides of ice appear blue while the surface is of a dirty white ...

Mary Shelley, in her journal, July 25, 1816, describing a visit to the glacier where she would set the meeting between Frankenstein and the Creature in her novel

Byron has become one of the people of the grave — that innumerable conclave to which the beings I best loved belong. I knew him in the bright days of youth, when neither care or fear had

visited me: before death had made me feel my mortality and the earth was the scene of my hopes ... Can I forget his attentions & consolations to me during my deepest misery? — Never ... What do I do here? Why am I doomed to live on seeing all expire before me? God grant I may die young ... all my old friends are gone — I have no wish to form new — I cling to the few remaining — but they slide away & my heart fails when I think about how few ties I hold to the world ...

Mary Shelley, in her journal, May 15, 1824, upon learning of the poet Lord Byron's death

He died, and the world showed no outward sign. But his influence over mankind, though slow in growth, is fast augmenting; and, in the ameliorations that have taken place in the political state of his country, we may trace in part the operation of his arduous struggles. His spirit gathers peace in its new state from the sense that, though late, his exertions were not made in vain, and in the progress of the liberty he so fondly loved.

He died, and his place, among those who knew him intimately, has never been filled up. He walked beside them like a spirit of

good to comfort and benefit — to enlighten the darkness of life with irradiations of genius, to cheer it with his sympathy and love. Any one, once attached to Shelley, must feel all other affections, however true and fond, as wasted on barren soil in comparison. It is our best consolation to know that such a pure-minded an exalted being was once among us, and now exists where we hope one day to join him; — although the intolerant, in their blindness, poured down anathemas, the Spirit of Good, who can judge the heart, never rejected him.

Mary Shelley, about Percy Bysshe Shelley in her preface to his *Poetical Works*, edited by Mary and published in 1839

The Publishers of the Standard Novels, in selecting *Frankenstein* for one of their series, expressed a wish that I should furnish them with some account of the origin of the story. I am the more willing to comply, because I shall thus give a general answer to the question, so very frequently asked me — “How I, then a young girl, came to think of, and to dilate upon, so very hideous an idea?” ...

It is not singular that, as the daughter of two persons of

distinguished literary celebrity, I should very early in life have thought of writing. As a child I scribbled; and my favourite pastime, during the hours given me for recreation, was to “write stories.” ...

In the summer of 1816, we visited Switzerland, and became the neighbours of Lord Byron. ... But it proved a wet, ungenial summer, and incessant rain often confined us for days to the house. Some volumes of ghost stories, translated from the German into French, fell into our hands. ... “We will each write a ghost story,” said Lord Byron; and his proposition was acceded to. There were four of us. The noble author began a tale, a fragment of which he printed at the end of his poem of Mazeppa. Shelley, more apt to embody ideas and sentiments in the radiance of brilliant imagery, and in the music of the most melodious verse that adorns our language, than to invent the machinery of a story, commenced one founded on the experiences of his early life. Poor Polidori had some terrible idea about a skull-headed lady. ...

I busied myself to think of a story — a story to rival those which had excited us to this task. One which would speak to the mysterious fears of our nature, and awaken thrilling horror — one to make the reader dread to look round, to curdle the blood and quicken the beatings of the heart. If I did not accomplish these things, my ghost story would be unworthy of its name. I thought and pondered — vainly. I felt that blank incapability of invention which is the greatest misery of authorship, when dull Nothing replies to our anxious invocations.

Many and long were the conversations between Lord Byron

and Shelley, to which I was a devout but nearly silent listener. ... They talked of the experiments of Dr. Darwin (I speak not of what the Doctor really did, or said that he did, but, as more to my purpose, of what was then spoken of as having been done by him), 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.

Night waned upon this talk, and even the witching hour had gone by, before we retired to rest. When I placed my head on my pillow, I did not sleep, nor could I be said to think. My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie. 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 working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half vital motion. Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world. His success would terrify the artist; he would rush away from his odious handy-work, horror-stricken. He would hope that, left to itself, the slight spark of life which he had communicated would fade; that this thing, which had received such imperfect animation, would subside into dead matter; and he might sleep in the belief that the

silence of the grave would quench forever the transient existence of the hideous corpse which he had looked upon as the cradle of life. He sleeps; but he is awakened; he opens his eyes; behold the horrid thing stands at his bedside, opening his curtains, and looking on him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes.

I opened mine in terror. The idea so possessed my mind that a thrill of fear ran through me, and I wished to exchange the ghastly image of my fancy for the realities around. ...

Swift as light and as cheering was the idea that broke in upon me. “I have found it! What terrified me will terrify others; and I need only describe the spectre which had haunted my midnight pillow.” On the morrow I announced that I had thought of a story. I began that day with the words, “It was on a dreary night of November,” making only a transcript of the grim terrors of my waking dream.

And now, once again, I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper. I have an affection for it, for it was the offspring of happy days, when death and grief were but words, which found no true echo in my heart. Its several pages speak of many a walk, many a drive, and many a conversation, when I was not alone; and my companion was one who, in this world, I shall never see more. But this is for myself; my readers have nothing to do with these associations.

Mary Shelley, in her introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*

About Playwright Barbara Field

As literary manager and playwright-in-residence at the Guthrie Theater from 1974 to 1981, Barbara Field created a number of pieces that appeared on its stages, including her translations of *Pantagleize* by Michel de Ghelderode (1977-1978 Season), *Marriage* by Nikolai Gogol (1978-1979 Season) and *Monsieur de Molière* by Mikhail Bulgakov (1979-1980 Season), as well as adaptations from the novel *Camille* by Alexandre Dumas (1980-1981 Season) and a response to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* titled *Frankenstein - Playing with Fire* (1988 national tour, 1988-1989 and 2018-2019 Seasons).

Her adaptation of Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* was commissioned by the Seattle Children's Theatre, played at the Guthrie (1985-1986 Season) and then traveled the country on an eight-month tour. But Field is perhaps best-known to Guthrie audiences for her adaptation of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, which was part of the Guthrie's programming from 1975 to 2009 and continues to be performed at Actors Theatre of Louisville.

For the Seattle Children's Theatre, she adapted Philip Pullman's *I Was a Rat!* and *The Boxcar Children* by Gertrude Chandler Warner. Additional plays for children include *Dreams in the Golden Country* adapted from the book by Kathryn Lasky, which was performed at the Kennedy Center and on a national tour, and *Scaramouche* from a story by Rafael Sabatini, which was performed at Shakespeare Theatre Company in Washington, D.C.

Field's original work includes *Neutral Countries*, which premiered at Actors Theatre of Louisville's Humana Festival in 1983, *Coming of Age* for Indiana Repertory Theatre, *Quality Time* for Pennsylvania Stage Company, *Boundary Waters* for South Coast Repertory and *Off the Ice* for Repertory Theatre of St. Louis. In collaboration with composer Hiram Titus, Field wrote the libretto for their original opera *Rosina*, which was commissioned and produced by the Minnesota Opera, and the book and lyrics for the musical *The Skinflint*, loosely based on Molière's *The Miser*, for Repertory Theatre of St. Louis.

Field is a founding member of the Playwrights' Center in Minneapolis and among her awards are a 1992 Drama-Logue Award for *Boundary Waters*,

Humana's Best American Play Award for *Neutral Countries* and a Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Award for *Great Expectations*.

A book of seven of her plays, *New Classics from the Guthrie Theater: Classical Adaptations for the American Stage*, was published in 2003 by Smith & Kraus. She is also the author of two anthologies: *Collected Plays, Volume One* (2008) and *Collected Plays, Volume Two* (2014).

PHOTO: BARBARA FIELD (MIKE HABERMANN)



People, Places and Things in the Play

blood poisoning

Also known as septicemia, which occurs when bacteria, virus or fungus gets into the bloodstream and the entire immune system becomes activated to fight the infection.

Henry Cavendish

An English chemist and physicist (1731-1810). Among his many fields of research were the properties of gases, synthesis of water, electrical attraction and repulsion, atmospheric air, theory of heat and the density of the Earth.

fibrin

An insoluble protein made from fibrinogen during the clotting of blood. Fibrinogen is a plasma protein produced by the liver.

funicular

Funicular railways use a cable to pull cars along tracks up and down steep hillsides. It combines the technology of the elevator and the train. Funiculars operate cars in pairs, with one car on either side of the topmost pulley, so each car's weight counterbalances the other. The energy created by the car descending is used to pull the opposite car up. A motor that operates the pulley provides just enough force to overcome the difference in weight between the cars and the friction inherent in the system.

galvanism

Named for Italian physicist Luigi Galvani (1737-1798), galvanism was the term used to describe the use of electricity for medical purposes (or at least for moving muscles). In the play, Frankenstein describes experiments on bullfrogs like those conducted by Galvani, who wanted

to learn more about how muscles contract and how "electrical fluid" was involved.

gangrene

The death of an area of living tissue, usually due to lack of blood flow and often accompanied by bacterial infection.

Ingolstadt

A small city on the Danube River in Bavaria in southeast Germany that had a population of approximately 4,500 in 1800. The university in Ingolstadt was founded by Duke Ludwig IX of Bavaria-Landshut in 1472. The university became known as a stronghold in the Counter-Reformation, in no small part because Johannes Eck, Martin Luther's theological nemesis, was a professor at Ingolstadt from 1486 to 1543 as well as dean of the theology faculty and vice-chancellor. Most excitingly, it was at Ingolstadt that the Illuminati was formed. In 1800, the university moved from Ingolstadt to Landshut, ostensibly because the Napoleonic Wars made Ingolstadt, a garrison town, ripe for occupation by French troops.

introibo ad altare dei

Latin for "I will go to the altar of God," quoted from Psalm 43: *Et introibo ad altare Dei, ad Deum qui lætificat juventutem meam* (There I will go up to the altar of God, the giver of triumphant happiness; thou art my own God, with the harp I hymn thy praise).

ischemia

A blockage or obstruction of blood flow, perhaps because of a blood clot or plaque build-up in an artery.

Lavoisier

Antoine-Laurent Lavoisier (1743-1794), a French chemist who helped reform and modernize the field of chemistry. He was executed during the French Revolution, not for his scientific work, but because he had worked as a financier before the Revolution.

necrosis

Localized death of living tissue.

Newton

Isaac Newton (1642-1727), an English physicist and mathematician who invented calculus and discovered the three laws of motion that provided the groundwork for modern physics and led to his law of universal gravitation, which states that the force of attraction between two objects varies depending on the mass of the two objects and the distance separating them.

"Paradise Lost"

John Milton's epic work "Paradise Lost" is woven throughout the story of Frankenstein and his Creature. The famed English poet used conventions from earlier poetic epics such as "The Iliad" and "The Aeneid" to craft his blank verse poem, in which Satan, newly cast into hell, seeks revenge on what he perceives as the tyranny of God by tempting Adam and Eve.

The poem paints a generally sympathetic portrait of Satan; some Romantic poets — including Percy Shelley — even saw Satan as the hero. Mary Shelley was greatly impressed by "Paradise Lost," which her Creature memorizes and uses to learn how to read. She put three lines from the poem, said by Adam and also quoted in Barbara

Field's play, as an epigraph to the 1818 edition of the novel:

*Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay
To mould me man? Did I solicit thee
From darkness to promote me?*

philosopher's stone

A legendary unknown substance sought by alchemists from the Middle Ages to the 1600s for its ability to turn base metals into gold and silver and create the elixir of life. The search for the stone led alchemists to test a number of different substances, which, as a side effect, laid the groundwork for chemistry, pharmacology and metallurgy.

Prometheus

One of the Titans in Greek mythology whose name means "forethinker" or "forethought." Depending on the version of the myth, he is best known for creating the human race out of clay and/or stealing fire from Zeus and giving it to mortals. Zeus' punishment was chaining him to a mountain and having his liver eaten by an eagle each day. In Aeschylus' play *Prometheus Bound*, Prometheus saves humanity by giving them fire and is punished by Zeus, but the play depicts Zeus as a tyrant and Prometheus as a hero to the people, and Aeschylus questions the justice of Prometheus' punishment. The myth of Prometheus recurs in Shelley's writing (hence the novel's subtitle, *The Modern Prometheus*) and the writing of other Romantic writers, including Percy Shelley and Lord Byron.

rigor mortis

The stiffening of the body a few hours after death, when lack of oxygen in the muscles means they can no longer release or separate the filaments that help cause muscle contraction. The muscles remain contracted until decomposition begins.

Count Rumford

Sir Benjamin Thompson (1753–1814), or count von Rumford, an American-born British physicist whose experiments helped to establish the theory that heat is motion. His most famous experiment was to submerge a cannon with a boring tool under water. The boring eventually boiled the water, and Rumford noted that the water would continue to boil — an indication of the presence of heat — as long as the boring continued. He compared the heats of the cannon and material bored away to show there wasn't a material change of matter in the process.

Sorbonne

A college of the University of Paris founded by theologian Robert de Sorbon in 1257, intended for the poorest students who wanted to study theology.

The Sorrows of Young Werther

A 1774 epistolary novel written by German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) when he was 24 years old. Werther is an artistic, sensitive young man staying in a rural village where he meets Lotte at a dance, hits it off and then realizes she's already engaged, so he tries to settle for friendship. His admiration for Lotte grows, and he becomes friends with Albert, her fiancé. Werther thinks Lotte would be happier with himself, but he leaves the village to take a job elsewhere. That appointment provides no satisfaction and eventually Werther lands back in the village near Lotte. Werther's despair and dissatisfaction grows; when Lotte tries to put some reasonable distance between them, he decides to kill himself. He pays her a final visit, forces a kiss and is told not to see her again. He shoots himself with Albert's hunting pistol.

Switzerland

A landlocked nation in Central Europe, neighboring France, Germany, Austria, Liechtenstein and Italy. It's a mountainous country, with the Alps occupying 60 percent of the country and the Jura Mountains (north of Geneva) covering 15 percent. French is the dominant language in the West, where Geneva is located. The country's central location and control of major routes between northern Europe and the Mediterranean make it an important player in international trade. Switzerland is known for being a financial center, as well as for its precision watches, excellent chocolate and neutrality since 1516. In Shelley's novel, Victor Frankenstein introduces himself by saying, "I am by birth a Genevese; and my family is one of the most distinguished of that Republic." Geneva is one of the major cities in Switzerland.

Titan

In Greek mythology, Titans were the immortal children of Uranus and Gaea (heaven and earth). Atlas was a Titan who unsuccessfully warred against Zeus, and as a punishment, he had to hold up the heavens. He is sometimes depicted as holding a globe on his back.

valetudinarian

An invalid or a person concerned with his/her own weak or ill health.

voltaic towers

Named for Alessandro Volta (1745–1827), an Italian physicist who invented the battery, which was also called a voltaic pile or column. It consisted of a stack of alternating silver and zinc (or copper and pewter) disks separated by paper or cloth soaked in saltwater and was capable of producing a reliable, sustained electrical current.

On August 14, 2018, the cast and creative team for *Frankenstein – Playing with Fire* came together for the first day of rehearsal. Director Rob Melrose and members of the creative team described their inspiration and visions for the world of the play. Read on for key excerpts from their comments.

FROM DIRECTOR ROB MELROSE



Frankenstein is considered the first work of science fiction. By employing the cutting-edge science of the day as opposed to magic or the supernatural, Shelley became its founding mother.

Today, *Frankenstein* is known throughout the world and used as a universal metaphor for science gone awry. People know the story even if they have never read the novel or seen a film or theater adaptation. And so the myth lives on.

Almost immediately after its publication, *Frankenstein* found its way into the theater, and it paved the way for a canon of wonderful science fiction plays asking important questions about the technologies that face us: robots in Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.*, cloning in Caryl Churchill's *A Number* and virtual reality in Jennifer Haley's *The Nether*. In the movies, science fiction can wow us with special effects, but in the theater, it appeals to our powers of imagination and asks us to consider the consequences of the monsters we're creating in our laboratories. This marriage of science and theater is something wonderful that Mary Shelley gave us, and it will help us greatly as we face a future with unlimited possibilities.

FROM SCENIC DESIGNER MICHAEL LOCHER



I've thought a lot about why Mary Shelley chose the North Pole as the place where Victor Frankenstein tells his story and ends his life. I hit upon two basic ideas. First, she was writing during a moment

of exploration and great scientific flourishing. In the mid-20th century, the Arctic was like the moon. It's a place where people were taking daring expeditions and learning more about our world. Second, the Arctic is such a mysterious place that it may as well be a different planet. There's both an appeal and a strange menacing poetry in going to die in a place that couldn't be farther from where you began your life.

For the scenic design, I thought about our Arctic landscape as something a bit like a real arctic landscape, with some element suggesting a sheet of ice, tundra or a frozen plain, and other elements suggesting big accumulations of ice. Yet it's also a landscape that is undeniably theatrical: the ice forms are a glistening black charcoal color and the ice is impossibly smooth and shiny. Tearing the world open is this glowing portal, as though the sky is opening up and ready to take Frankenstein in. Through that portal is the vision of an electrical sculpture — a crackling monstrosity. The landscape as a whole suggests the brink of oblivion to a man who has ripped the world open.

FROM COSTUME DESIGNER RAQUEL BARRETO



The period that we're working with is from 1795, from a reference in the script, to the time that Mary Shelley was writing in 1816. That window of 20 years was the base for where the clothes are coming from and the world

they're living in. In addition to a *Frankenstein* that felt immediate, relevant and edgy, we wanted to bring a flair and a grounding in Romanticism to the clothes.

We also wanted the clothes to connect people and tell the story of time passing. In the play, we encounter the Creature early in life as Adam and later in life, and we encounter young Victor and old Frankenstein. Through the clothes and bits of makeup — the stitching scars and tattooing — we'll create the connection between the older and younger selves and see that time has passed. Victor's coat becomes a through line; we know from the story that Adam takes Victor's coat, and in tracing this item from Adam's possession to the Creature's possession, we create a connection between young Adam and the Creature and between young Victor and old Frankenstein.

FROM SOUND DESIGNER/COMPOSER CLIFF CARUTHERS



Sound is going to be a big player in drawing the psychological spaces of the play and pushing the stakes of the dialectic between the Creature and Frankenstein. We're putting microphones on

the cast, which I hope will allow us more room to underscore and push things and raise the stakes of what is happening onstage. Throughout the play, we'll constantly shift through different moods and sounds.

We've currently got some sounds lined up to play with, but I expect things will change and shift quite a lot as rehearsal progresses. The play gives incredible freedom to experiment and try different things, and it's something I'm looking forward to seeing onstage.

PHOTO: ZACHARY FINE, AMELIA PEDLOW, ELIJAH ALEXANDER AND RYAN COLBERT IN *FRANKENSTEIN - PLAYING WITH FIRE* (DAN NORMAN)



For Further Reading and Understanding

EDITIONS OF THE NOVEL AND PLAY

Frankenstein by Mary Shelley, A Norton Critical Edition, with the 1818 text.

Frankenstein by Mary Shelley, A Bantam Classic, with the 1831 text.

The New Annotated Frankenstein by Mary Shelley, edited with a foreword and notes by Leslie S. Klinger and introduction by Guillermo Del Toro, Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017.

Playing with Fire (after Frankenstein) by Barbara Field, in *New Classics from the Guthrie Theater*, Smith & Kraus, 2003.

Playing with Fire (after Frankenstein) by Barbara Field, Dramatist Play Service (acting edition).

BOOKS

Frankenstein: A Cultural History by Susan Tyler Hitchcock, W.W. Norton & Company, 2007.

Frankenstein: How a Monster Became an Icon, edited by Sidney Perkowitz and Eddy von Mueller, Pegasus Books, 2018.

Frankenstein: The First Two Hundred Years by Sir Christopher Frayling, Reel Art Press, 2017.

Making the Monster: The Science Behind Mary Shelley's Frankenstein by Kathryn Harkup, Bloomsbury, 2018.

Mary Shelley by Martin Garrett, The British Library Writers' Lives, Oxford University Press, 2002.

Mary Shelley by Miranda Seymour, Grove Press, 2000.

FILMS

Frankenstein (1931)

Directed by James Whale, adapted by John L. Balderston from the play by Peggy Webling based on Mary Shelley's novel. A loose adaptation of Shelley's novel with many liberties taken in the plot and characters, but this Frankenstein is the one that looms largest in the imagination of many people. Starring Colin Clive, Mae Clarke, John Boles and Boris Karloff. 80 minutes. 1931.

Young Frankenstein

Directed by Mel Brooks, written by Mel Brooks and Gene Wilder. A spoof on the Karloff/Whale *Frankenstein* film that sees the grandson of Victor Frankenstein, Frederick Frankenstein (pronounced FRONK-en-steen), drawn to the family castle in Transylvania where he discovers and replicates his grandfather's experiment. Starring Gene Wilder, Madeline Kahn, Teri Garr, Peter Boyle and Marty Feldman. 106 minutes. 1974.

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein

Directed by Kenneth Branagh, adapted by Steph Lady and Frank Durabont from Mary Shelley's novel. A relatively faithful adaptation of the novel, including the scenes that bookend the novel in the Arctic. Starring Kenneth Branagh, Robert De Niro, Helena Bonham Carter, Tom Hulse and Aiden Quinn. 123 minutes. 1994.

Frankenstein (2007)

Directed and adapted by Jed Mercurio for television. Set slightly in the future, Dr. Victoria Frankenstein leads a university research project that experiments with growing organs from stem

cells. When she introduces the DNA of her dying son to the project, it takes a turn, and she's not the only one interested in the results. Starring Helen McCrory, James Purefoy and Lindsay Duncan. 90 minutes. 2007.

Victor Frankenstein

Directed by Paul McGuigan, written by Max Landis. An adaptation that leans heavily into Victor Frankenstein as a mad, genius medical student and is told from the point of view of Igor, his assistant whom Frankenstein rescues from the circus. Their activities to build a Prometheus are funded by a wealthy patron but draw the attention of an obsessive local police inspector. Starring James McAvoy, Daniel Radcliffe and Andrew Scott. 110 minutes. 2015.

ONLINE

"A female Frankenstein would lead to humanity's extinction, say scientists" by Eva Botkin-Kowacki, *The Christian Science Monitor*, October 28, 2016.

<https://www.csmonitor.com/Science/2016/1028/A-female-Frankenstein-would-lead-to-humanity-s-extinction-say-scientists>

"The Strange and Twisted Life of 'Frankenstein'" by Jill Lepore, *The New Yorker*, February 12 and 19, 2018.

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/02/12/the-strange-and-twisted-life-of-frankenstein>

ONLINE (continued)

“How to make a monster: what’s the science behind Shelley’s *Frankenstein*” by Kathryn Harkup, *The Guardian*, February 22, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/science/blog/2018/feb/22/how-to-make-a-monster-whats-the-science-behind-shelleys-frankenstein>

“The Lessons of *Frankenstein*” by Paul K. Guinnessy, *Physics Today*, March 2, 2018. <https://physicstoday.scitation.org/doi/10.1063/PT.6.3.20180302a/full/>

“Think You Know Your *Frankenstein*? Think Again” by Laura Ferguson, *Tufts Now*, March 20, 2018. <https://now.tufts.edu/articles/think-you-know-your-frankenstein-think-again>

“Why *Frankenstein* Matters 200 Years Later” by Richard C. Sha, Johns Hopkins University Press blog, August 10, 2018. <https://www.press.jhu.edu/news/blog/why-frankenstein-matters-200-years-later>

SUGGESTED READING LISTS FROM SAINT PAUL PUBLIC LIBRARY

Monstrous Fun — *Frankenstein* for Kids

Spooky, creepy, scary-good fun for little ones.

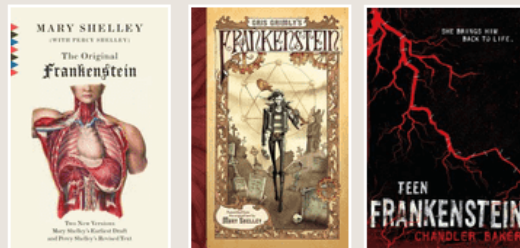
EXPLORE TITLES



A List for Franken-Teens

Handpicked for teens to celebrate the bicentennial of *Frankenstein*.

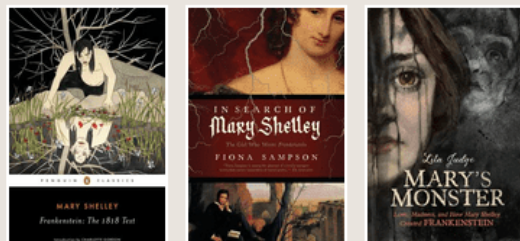
EXPLORE TITLES



The Making of *Frankenstein*

A collection of books on how Mary Shelley’s haunting story became a classic.

EXPLORE TITLES



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