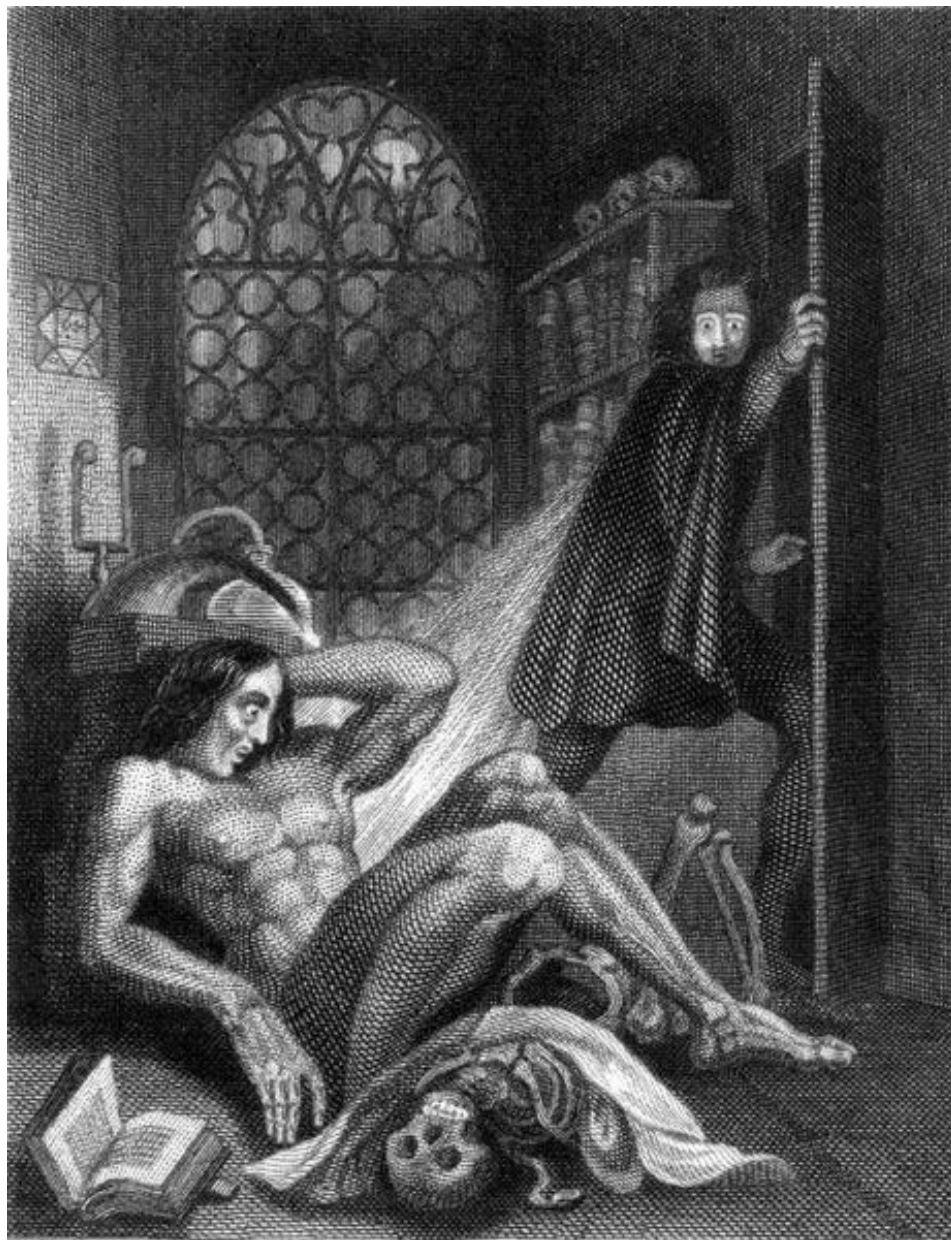


FRANKENSTEIN

Production Packet



Compiled by

Jose Cruz

“Nothing is so painful to the human mind as a great and sudden change.”

— Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The story of Frankenstein was brought to life during a July holiday in Geneva (the place that would become Victor's home) that Mary Shelley spent with her husband Percy in addition to famous poet Lord Byron and their physician friend John Polidori. Confined by stormy weather, a product of the eruption of Mount Tambora that dubbed 1816 as "the Year without a Summer," the literary friends entertained each other by telling ghost stories, challenging one another to produce a tale that was the tops in grotesqueness. That night Shelley had a striking dream wherein she saw a "pale student of the unhallowed arts" constructing a body that was the amalgamation of corpses and then bestowing life upon it. This would later provide the inspiration for her most famous tale of horror and tragedy.

The idea of dreams resurfaces in List's text when Victor describes to Henry the vivid nightmares he had of Elizabeth and his dead mother. We also see real-life resonances of this "dead mother" theme; Shelley's mother, Mary Godwin, died after giving birth to her daughter just as Victor's mother did after his brother William's delivery. This was not the only emotional blow Shelley would suffer. Three of her four children died from illness and her husband Percy drowned during a boating trip, sadly mirroring the disaster that constantly pursues Victor in his story.

The anger and anguish Victor voices over his own mother's death are feelings that Shelley would have been all too familiar with. The concerns of life and death take precedence in the minds of both Shelley the author and her characters. These concerns were augmented by the conferences that Shelley's father William held in his home with the greatest minds of the time regarding the progress of science, religion, and philosophy. It was Shelley's processing of all this that lead to the seeds of the story being planted.

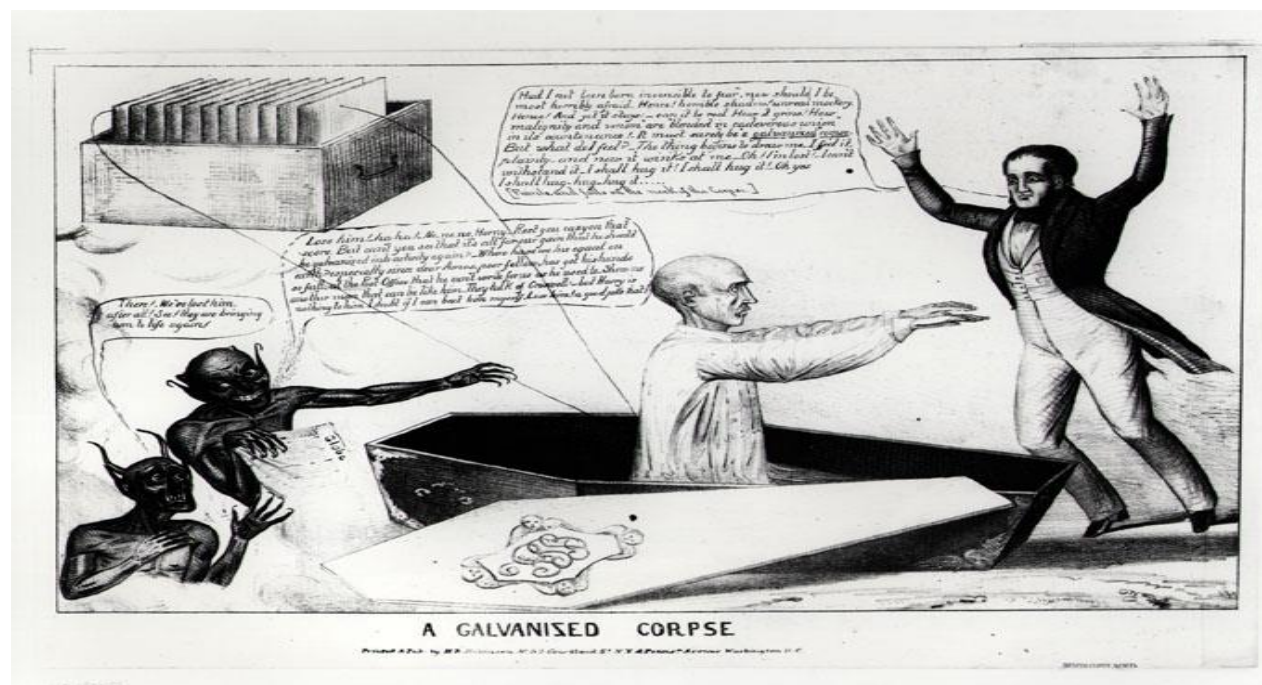


Mary Shelley and her mother Mary Wollstonecraft.

Mary began writing her piece at age nineteen and it was finally published anonymously when she was twenty-one in 1818. The following year Polidori's piece, **The Vampyre**, was published, creating two of the most fixed figures in Gothic literary history who have endured, like their monstrous subjects, as immortal representations of supernatural horror.

One of the topics brought up during the Swiss holiday was galvanism (now known as electrophysiology), the scientific process of animating muscular anatomy through the use of electricity. During this same time, Italian physicist Giovanni Aldini, in his pursuit of finding a way to preserve human life, would hold demonstrations in which he would send currents of electricity through corpses, most famously on the remains of George Forster, a hanged criminal, in 1803.

Another proponent of galvanism was Joseph Constantine Carpue, who was also the first doctor to perform rhinoplastic surgery in England (the combination of the fascination with electricity and the potentials of the human anatomy show shades of Shelley's famous character). The account of Aldini mirrors Victor's own excursions into public charnel houses and the gallows in search of materials for his experiment, as well as prefiguring the crimes of resurrectionists such as Burke and Hare, body snatchers who supplied cadavers from the graveyard to medical professors in the pursuit of advancing knowledge of the human body.



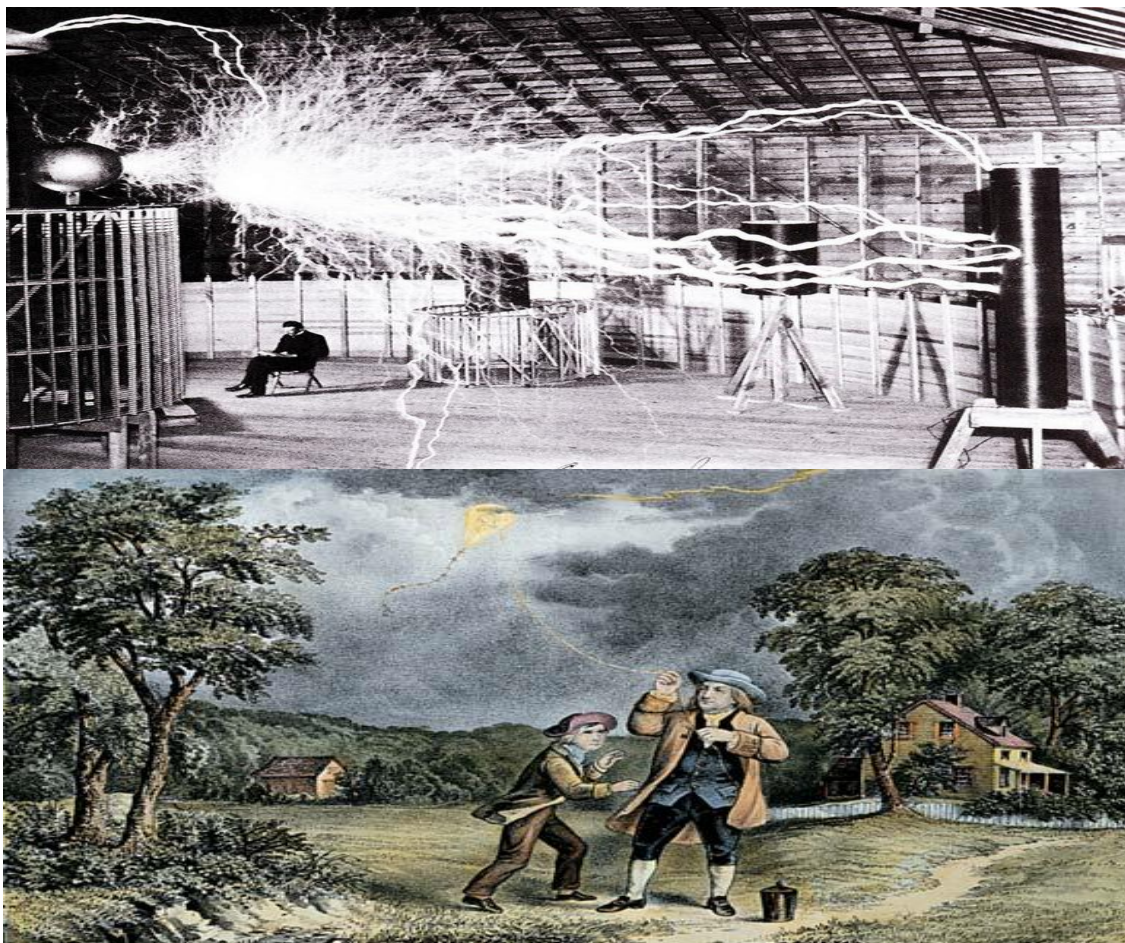
An illustration showing the effects of electric current on a cadaver.



Illustration by Hablot Knight Browne depicting body snatchers John Holmes and Peter Williams.

Though the means of the creature’s “birth” are left fairly vague in Shelley’s work, the idea of animation through electricity, namely lightning, has become nearly synonymous with the Frankenstein story, as it is in List’s adaptation, perhaps first starting with the famous 1931 film starring Boris Karloff. List even has Victor explain the creature’s parentage at one point in a very similar fashion to what Bela Lugosi exclaimed in the 1942 sequel **The Ghost of Frankenstein**: “Your father was Frankenstein, but your mother was the lightning!”

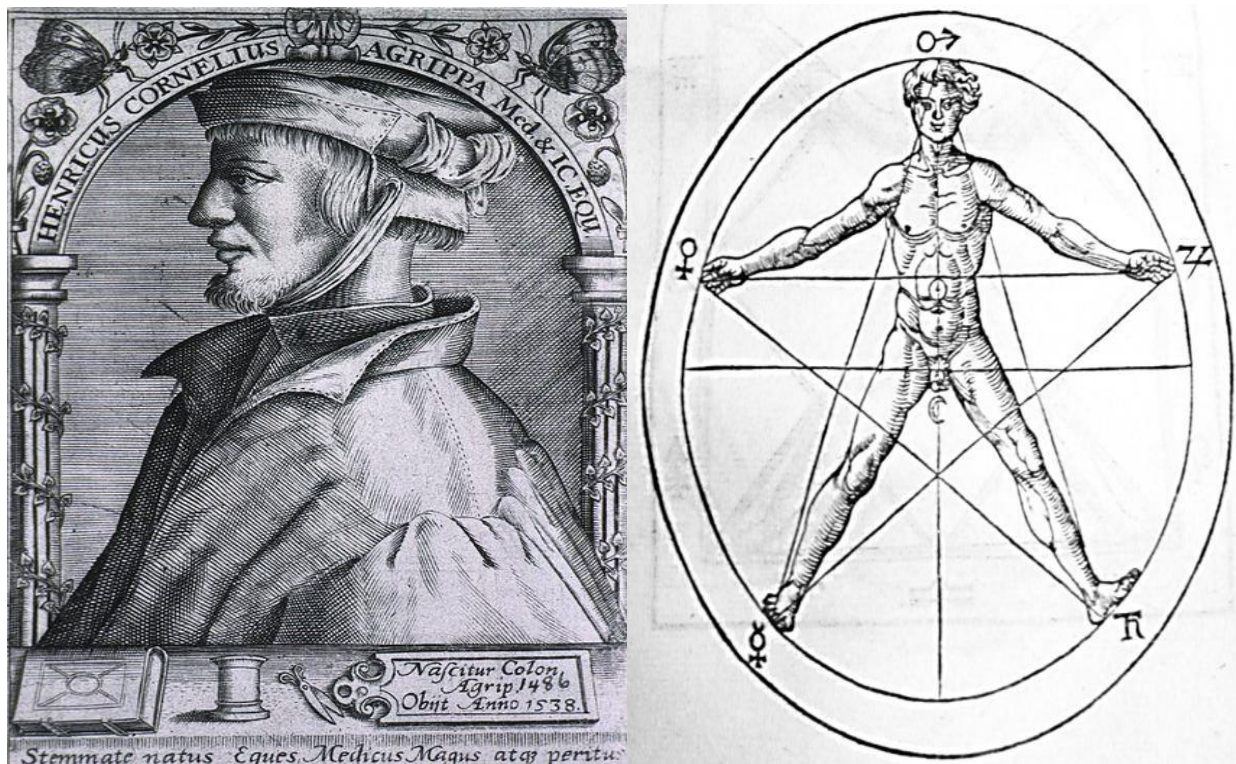
The advances of medicine and the knowledge of human anatomy that grew during the 19th century lead to the second largest expansion in the population of the human race. With these advancements eradicating diseases that had previously acted as the agents of natural selection, it’s not hard to see why Shelley’s novel had such an impact. It begged the question: “With science making health and propagation ever more possible, could it even break the barrier between this life and the next?” This tied in with ideas garnered from both the Enlightenment and Romantic period. The former proposed that society could reach new heights if the leaders of the people used their power and influence; the latter, though, warned of the dangers that could befall if this power was misused. Victor Frankenstein, pure as his intentions are, is the Great Misuser of Romantic thinking.



The experiments of Nikola Tesla (1856-1943) predated and possibly influenced the laboratory effects made famous in adaptations of Shelley's story, though the use of Benjamin Franklin's kites also surface in several versions.

One aspect of the Creature's birth that both Shelley and List allude to in their texts is the alchemical nature of Victor's studies. Frankenstein studies the works of Cornelius Agrippa extensively, a German theologian who dabbled in the occult. Agrippa wrote works that spoke of conjuring demons and the link between ritual magic and religion. These were more scholarly works than mysterious grimoires, but their use was still controversial.

In an ironic turn, Agrippa condemned this thinking later in his life and forsook his "boasting of delusions and phantasms" and claimed anyone who did so would "be destined to the torments of eternal hellfire." This is yet another parallel that comes up in **Frankenstein**, not only in the combining of Romantic and Enlightened thinking as seen in the meshing of magic and science, but in the theme of a driven academic later coming to rue his dabbling in the darker, forbidden side of nature. In an interesting side note, Agrippa also wrote a volume on the virtues and superiority of the female sex, a field that Shelley's own mother Mary championed and wrote extensively in, most prominently in **A Vindication of the Rights of Women** (1792).



Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1535) and an illustration from one of his works on the occult.

Robert Walton, who serves as narrator of the framing story in the novel and the instigator of the greater drama in List's play, is an explorer like Victor, but he seeks to expand the boundaries of man's earthly terrain. Exploration, like the advancements in science, was prominent during this century, as seen in the great campaign made by Lewis and Clark in 1803 in the United States and Sir John Ross attempting to discover a Northwest Passage in 1818, just as Walton does in the play. And, like science, this mapping of the earth's unknown regions seemed to make the world a smaller place to live in with every solution to its great mysteries.

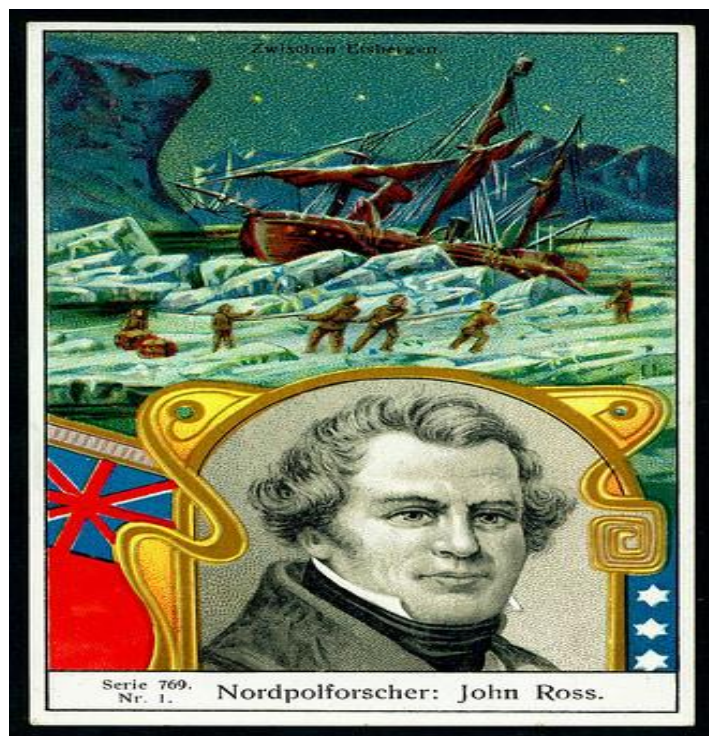


Illustration of John Ross' vessel frozen in the Arctic ice.

Despite some initial negative reviews, Shelley's novel became an immediate favorite with the public and especially the stage, seeing melodramatic adaptations as early as 1823. Stephen King has likened the tale to "a Shakespearean tragedy," but the tale of Frankenstein is really one that is as old as time, one that finds its roots in ancient Greek mythology in the account of Icarus, an ambitious man who attempted to escape the bounds of his society and ignored the warnings of his father not to fly his makeshift wings too close to sun.

Alas, Icarus does just that and his ignorance causes his literal and metaphorical "fall," a descent that arises in text again in none other than John Milton's **Paradise Lost** (1667) in the form of the hubristic Lucifer's plunge into Hell, a character that List has the Creature having much sympathy for and a kinship with in his play.



Lucifer and Icarus after their heavenly fallings.

There is another direct link to mythology that is seen in the subtitle of Shelley's original novel: "The Modern Prometheus." Prometheus was a Greek Titan who stole the use of fire from the gods and gave to the human race in order to enable the progress of civilization. Though his intentions, like Victor's, were good and sought to better humankind, Prometheus was nevertheless punished for his conceit, bound to stone and eviscerated by a bird of prey. The Titan was pinned down in a manner much like Victor is by the Creature, a tortured victim who is forced to have his life torn asunder by a great beast. Here we see just how true Professor Waldman's warning of Victor getting "burned" by his desire for knowledge was from the play.



The bound Prometheus.

But it was in film that Frankenstein and his mad creation made their true landmark upon culture, forever etching the story as the modern parable of misguided men and monstrosity. Its success and popularity on both the stage and screen seem to affirm the idea that **Frankenstein** is at its most powerful when presented in a dramatic medium, a visual journey in which every physical scar and powerful emotion can be taken in by a raptured audience.



The first filmed Frankenstein: Charles Ogle as the Creature in a 1910 one-reeler made by Thomas Edison Studios, another famous dabbler in electricity.

It was in the Universal Studios cycle of films during the 1930s and 1940s that the Monster gained his most memorable guise in the box-headed, bolt-necked conception by make-up artist Jack Pierce. Boris Karloff's portrayal as Frankenstein's creature constructed the famous image of the tall-booted beast, but it also conveyed the intrinsic sadness and tragedy of his plight as he

searched for love and acceptance in the world. The 1935 sequel **Bride of Frankenstein**, in addition to showing the Creature speaking for the first time on film, added a Freudian twist of the screw by having actress Elsa Lanchester not only appear as Mary Shelley herself in an opening prologue, but as the hissing, streak-haired mate of Frankenstein's monster as well.



Elsa Lanchester and Boris Karloff enacting the scene where Frankenstein creates an “Eve” for his “Adam” from *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935).

The world has seen countless adaptations since, ranging from big-budgeted productions (**Mary Shelley's Frankenstein** [1994]) to material that has strayed far from the source (**Frankenstein Conquers the World** [1965], which had the Creature growing into a towering giant after its preserved heart was exposed to the radiation from Hiroshima).

It says a great deal to the timelessness and vitality of Shelley's work that in translations as divergent as these, the central message always remains the same no matter the trappings or details of the plot. In the learned words of Frederic Nietzsche the message is thus: “Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And if you gaze long enough into an abyss, the abyss will gaze back into you.” The tale of Frankenstein allows us to gaze into that abyss, and it's a testament to the story as well as human nature itself that we feel compelled to go back every time and take a long, hard look.



CHARACTERS

Robert Walton: A sailor and explorer attempting to navigate a passage for trade to Asia through the Northern waters. He is driven in his mission, openly acknowledging the mortal toll the voyage has taken but never fully registering it on an emotional or moral level. The “greatness” that such a success would bring him is more important than the lives of others, including his own. Despite this misguided motivation, he is neither entirely callous nor stoic. He takes Victor in and restores him to health. He shows genuine care for the scientist and even wishes to see him recover from his tragic circumstances. Though his ultimate decision is left unsaid, it is clear by the play’s end that Victor’s tale has caused doubt to grow in Walton’s heart in regards to his mission.

Victor Frankenstein: A highly intellectual man who finds himself in the precarious position of creator of life. Victor’s desire to end man’s mortality comes from the sadness and sense of loss he suffered at the passing of his mother. Though he is driven by his emotions to find the elixir of life and is capable of doing so due to his great mind, Victor is nonetheless blind to the greater consequences of his experiment. Still, like Walton, he is not devoid of feelings, as he sincerely loves his family, especially his cherished Elizabeth. The great, grim irony is that Victor takes on his quest to ensure that his loved ones will live forever, but his experiment ends up bringing about the destruction of each of those he loves, one by one. When Elizabeth is killed, his mind breaks and he adopts a new charge: to destroy his Creature no matter what the personal cost is to himself.

Justine Moritz: The dutiful servant of the Frankenstein family. Though she is employed by them as a governess and general housekeeper, she is still treated with the utmost respect and as a member of the family herself. She acts as a mother figure to all of the Frankenstein children in the absence of the late Caroline. The apex of her devotion comes after the Creature has murdered William and framed Justine of the crime. She despairs over the murder of her charge and, although she is not guilty, says that she does not fear her own death, showing the same self-sacrificing traits that any devoted parent would have. After the light of her life has been snuffed out, she sees no reason to go on.

Elizabeth Lavenza: Victor’s adopted cousin and his bride-to-be. Like Justine, Elizabeth has been taken into the family and is adored as much as any blood relation. She loves Victor immensely, but her love is also the source of much inner turmoil for her. She laments his journey to university and the possibility of their feelings going unsaid, but becomes elated when their union becomes official. Like any committed partner, Elizabeth feels the pangs of sadness and guilt that resonate in Victor when the Creature is released upon the world. She desperately wants to please him and she is, as the Creature says, innocence and love personified, incapable of the sins that her husband commits and the one ray of light and hope in his journey into darkness.

Alphonse Frankenstein: Victor's genial elderly father. A true lover of life, Alphonse strives to bring merriment and joy wherever he goes, jovially joking and celebrating his family's successes. His heart is open to all, whether frankly admitting to his son's solemn attitude or consoling Elizabeth during her melancholy times. He is a beacon of warmth and humor cutting through sadness and tragedy, but after William's death Alphonse is shattered, his own good nature swallowed by the overwhelming loss that he feels. In Shelley's novel Alphonse essentially dies from a broken heart; knowing what a kind and caring patriarch he is, it is not hard to imagine this could truly be the cause of the old man's demise.

William Frankenstein: Victor's younger brother. An adventurous and sophisticated young lad, he is the perfect product of the loving family that raised him. He has all the playfulness and boisterousness of a growing boy as well as the refined manner of a young man of the time. His death acts as the first crash of thunder in the gathering storm of the Creature's revenge against Victor. The death of this innocent child indicates that no one is safe from the Creature's wrath and the consequences of Victor's abandonment.

Henry Clerval: The closest friend of Victor and his family. He is the counterbalance to Victor's obsessive and intense nature; Henry is accommodating and light, given to wit as well as bravery when the time calls for it. He is not the traditional "assistant" or "servant" *ala* Ygor that other adaptations have used. He is a well-rounded, nurturing soul who is both Victor's companion and caretaker. Despite the grim nature of his friend's experiments, Henry gives himself over completely to Victor's mission, nary raising a complaint or grievance even as they stitch together body parts. This speaks a great deal to their trusting bond, and when Henry is shot down in cold blood by the Creature he is truly grieved for by his lifelong comrade.

Professor Waldman: An academic at Ingolstadt University. Though he is included in only one scene of List's play, his place in the greater drama is nonetheless important. In his speech he acknowledges both the mad magic of alchemy and the wonders of science, but we find out that Waldman has taken part in a journey very similar to Victor's, again bringing up a parallel character like Walton. Waldman advises his students to approach knowledge with humility and gravity, for he knows all too well of the horrors that can be unleashed if this power is abused. The play hints that the loss of a loved one lead the Professor to conduct experiments like the one Victor wishes to do, but Waldman destroyed his creation when he had the chance. The aged professor is in a way a projection of what Victor might have become had he lived longer and succeeded in the destruction of the Creature but, as we can see, this still would have left him a very haunted man.

The Creature: The product of Frankenstein's experiments, a chaotic assortment of stitched flesh and limbs with a hunger for acceptance. Despite having the Professor's brain, he begins his "life" as virtually a newborn. He wanders about the world in a perplexed state, confused by the great hatred and fear he is met with. It is only after he comes under the care and tutelage of De Lacey that the Creature begins to see himself for what he really is. This reaches its climax when De

Lacey is murdered; the Creature fully understands how cruel and unforgiving the world can be. His heart growing ever darker, the Creature sets out on a campaign of destruction with the intent of bringing his creator down to the depths of despair that he has dwelled in for his whole existence. Although the Creature freely murders and threatens, the question of his “evil” nature is still difficult to address. In a way he is merely a reflection of all the cruelty that he has seen in the human race, a true proponent of the “nurture theory.” But the Creature is above all a sympathetic being, despite his crimes. In the end he only wants the thing that all his warm-blooded contemporaries crave for: love.

De Lacey: A blind hermit. De Lacey takes the Creature into his home and heart after he witnesses him being beaten in the streets. De Lacey instructs the Creature in the fields of literature and communication, and it is here that the Creature learns of his “birth” and the man responsible for it. De Lacey is blind to the Creature’s deformed exterior so he is better equipped to “see” the good that lies in the monster’s heart. He bravely defends his friend when villagers come looking to do harm, proving himself to be the only voice for the Creature’s right to exist in peace as a fellow human being. His death breaks the Creature in the same manner that Elizabeth’s murder does for Victor. And like the other voices of reason in the play, De Lacey’s teachings of love and acceptance become lost in the fury of the Creature’s thirst for vengeance.



THEMES OF THE PLAY

Hubris

Perhaps Victor's greatest sin is his arrogance of the natural order. His ambition overrides his sense of morality and leads him to take the matters of creation into his own hands. List represents Victor's drive in the form of a dream, one in which he is climbing a mountain. (Side note: List name checks the formation as being "Mont Blanc." This is the same mountain that served as the subject of a poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley of the same name wherein the persona of the piece sees Blanc as being a metaphor for the human imagination and its potential to be a force of both benevolence and malevolence). The mountain is a symbol of Victor's mission to touch the heavens; indeed, he wants to become one of the gods with the power to create life. But as seen in the Icarus myth and the plight of Satan from **Paradise Lost**, this ambition leads to Victor falling from his mighty perch. Whereas Icarus drowned and Lucifer found himself in Pandemonium, Victor makes impact with the earth, recalling the immense pain he felt when the same incident happened to him as a child. A direct link to the Prometheus myth is alluded to in the text when Victor claims the Titan's gift of fire kept humanity warm, while Professor Waldman makes the rebuttal that the same gift came with consequences. Walton also shares this same ambition. He presses on through the ice, even after witnessing the death of his men. While his journey is across the ocean, it reflects Victor's ascent of the mountain, and Victor takes the same tact as Waldman and advises the explorer to turn back before it's too late.

Texts

Books of both scientific and religious natures figure in the drama. Victor professes to being an avid reader of Cornelius Agrippa, a theologian who wrote volumes on demonic magic and alchemy. Victor's journal speaks of his scientific experiments, but it becomes more significant to the Creature than its original owner. It is one of the important cogs that figures into the Creature's mission. It teaches him of his abnormal conception and status as a constant outsider of the human race; indeed, the journal acts as the Creature's Book of Genesis. Frequent references and allusions to the Bible and its characters are made in the play, particularly in regards to life, death, and knowledge. Victor compares his mission to Christ leading his followers to resurrection, although the notion of Victor being God and creator to a misshapen "Adam" is made more definite than any allusions to Jesus. The Creature likens himself to both the first man (unjustly cast out of the Eden of human society by his master) and Lucifer as depicted in Milton's **Paradise Lost**. This similarity arises prominently in the second act as the Creature wages a war against his creator as Satan had done against Heaven. The Creature is also related to both Christ and Lazarus, men who came back to life after death. The Creature compares Victor to Adam, as the scientist had eaten the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge in his pursuit of immortality and thus tainted his soul with evil. But this applies to the Creature just as well; having learned of his origins and becoming knowledgeable of his creator, as well as the

unforgiving nature of the world, the Creature allowed evil to enter his heart and lead him to take on his dark mission.

Love

Although it does not take as much precedence as some of the other themes, love is at the center of many motivations in the play. Many of the Creature's actions, for example, are extensions of his desire to discover companionship in the world. This leads him to request a bride from Victor that will share his scarred appearance. Love inspires the Creature the same way that knowledge inspires Victor: both men will not stop before they have appeased their appetites. The irony here is that Victor, a brilliant young man of conventional appearance, is showered in love from his family and fiancée Elizabeth but, although he shares these feelings for them, many times their affections are overshadowed by the pursuit for knowledge he engages in. This brings an additional sting to the Creature's life: the man who brought him into being and cast him into the darkness has all the love in the world and yet he seems to neither learn from nor truly cherish it.

Duality

Throughout the story, many parallels arise between the characters. As noted, both Walton and Waldman share connections with Victor, men of ambition who made great sacrifices to achieve their destinies. Waldman is a projection of Victor's future self, while Walton is at the cusp of his obsession and turned back by Victor before he can pass the point of no return. But the greatest dualism rests between Victor and his Creature. Although the Creature claims that he is Victor's opposite, they are in actuality dark reflections of one another. They are both capable of committing horrible sins (Victor shoots the Creature's mate and the Creature returns the favor on Henry). Though their motivations differ, the two are locked in a self-destructive battle that they wage with equal fervor and obsession. It gets to the point, as in **Animal Farm**, that one is unable to distinguish the men from the monsters. (Side note: This duality theme was deliberately played up in the adaptation produced by the National Theatre where actors Jonny Lee Miller and Benedict Cumberbatch alternated roles of doctor and creature. Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FEakgJj-uA>).

Accountability

As an extension of this duality, Victor and the Creature struggle with accountability. Victor is willing to test the boundaries of nature and morality, but when he sees the horrible product of his experimentations, he shuns the Creature and shirks off any responsibility he has for it. Although Victor does initially attempt to execute the Creature, he allows him to run off into wild world hoping that nature will take its course and the Creature will die alone. Victor keeps his existence a secret and, when confronted by the Creature, detests how the monster refers to him as his father. The Creature does this very same thing when he takes his vengeance upon Frankenstein and his family. He becomes articulate and sophisticated in his thinking, yet he never once considers taking the moral high ground and simply moving on. He sees his murderous ways

simply as a natural reaction to his creator's callousness. He even confesses to Walton that he grieved for the death of the Frankenstein family. But, like his creator, he does nothing to change his course of action and sticks to the wicked path.

Monstrosity

At the heart of the drama lies the theme of monstrosity, the Creature acting as the walking definition of that idea. His outer appearance is frightening and jarring to conventions of beauty and grace; he is the assortment of very human parts but, when those parts are stitched together, they create an ugly façade that inspires fear and anger in those who see it. The Creature's inner nature, at first, does not share these same qualities. He is peaceful and curious. Is he, then, truly a monster? His later acts of destruction, coupled with his unpleasant appearance, would seem to say so, and yet List shows us that these acts are no different than what human beings are capable of. The villagers Karl and Horst murder the blind De Lacey who only wanted to protect the Creature. Though they appear human, would their inner natures qualify them as being monsters? The same can be said for Victor. Does his unmitigated repulsion and animosity towards his creation deem him as the true villain of this story? These questions have no easy answers. Suffice it to say that the misshapen flesh of the Creature represents the monstrous nature that lies hidden underneath the skins of the other characters.



THE PLAYWRIGHT



Bo List has worked as a director, writer, and educator within the theatrical world since 1995 in Kentucky, Tennessee, and New York. He has had four of his written works produced in some form over the past six years. His plays, both short and feature-length, diverge greatly in subject matter and tone, displaying a willingness to take on subjects as varied as a family's concern for their son's sexual inclinations (**Bubbly**) to a darkly comic take on a famous vampire tale (**Dracula... a variation**). Although they may appear vastly different from his adaptation of **Frankenstein**, there are certain dramatic tropes that arise in the various texts that suggest a common interest and link.

For instance, in **Canary Yellow**, a one-act drama, we see Eugenia Larkin leave her home in the South to attend college (the hamlet is populated by mostly uneducated women). This mirrors Victor's own journey to Ingolstadt; desperate to remove themselves from the shackles of their society and fulfill their potentials elsewhere, Victor and Eugenia, though unique in their own motives, both take it upon themselves to better their minds and futures.

List also wrote an adaptation, though very loose, of Bram Stoker's **Dracula**, the ying to **Frankenstein**'s yang within the realm of Gothic fiction. Titled **Dracula... a variation**, this dark spoof made its debut at the famous Edinburgh Fringe Festival. This version of the story saw List establishing his own unique take on the vampire story rather than sticking closely to the narrative as he did for **Frankenstein**. "Dracula was my own weird take on it, where my efforts [with **Frankenstein**] have been to stay true to the spirit, if not the letter, of every moment of the book," List has said. Though List seemed to be more concentrated with making a satirical jab at the underlying sexual context of the Dracula story with his take on that tale, these two works

both have sympathetic “monsters” at the center of their narratives. In List’s play, Dracula is merely a misunderstood romantic who sees his hunger for blood as a curse. The Creature as seen in List’s **Frankenstein** is nearly identical, except that in its case it seeks both a kinship with the greater human race as well as the affection of a romantic companion. They are monsters only in their appearances, but they share very human qualities of passion and desire.

The attention to the details of Shelley’s book and replication of the romanticized language List mentioned in his version shows an adherence and appreciation to the style that the original novel utilized. He has claimed that the reason he chose this route was because he considered Shelley’s novel to be the more “substantial literary work” of the two.

Says the playwright: “Mary Shelley set out to write something very special, not just about a monster — in fact, she was very careful to call him The Creature. She wrote a story in which man tried to be more than man, tried to be the creator of life, and it doesn’t work out when you try to play God.”

List has also delved into the challenge of adapting a novel to the stage. “I’ve tried to stay as faithful as possible [to the novel]. Cracklingly good entertainment as it is, it is still a book - and there is an obligation of any adaptor to make sure that the audience experiences a theatrical event, and not merely a book onstage. So I’ve taken liberties where Shelley was vague (as in the creation scenes, made so iconic in later films) and compressed time when she indulged in too-generous-for-the-stage detail. Plus, the book travels a lot - the Arctic, Geneva, throughout Europe, Scotland, mountains, rivers - - I have tried to keep the action fairly contained in a handful of locations, to give the story some focus and to keep the pace purposeful.”

This is useful advice to keep in mind when staging a production of List’s play; a lot of ground is covered, both dramatically and thematically, but an effort should be made to keep the action fluid and the audience engaged in the emotional plights of the characters. The romantic flourishes in the dialogue should come natural and spoken with all the weight that persons living in that time would instill in it. The literate nature of the work should serve the dramatic arc and the vitality of the characters’ feelings.

List also speaks at length about the complexities of the Creature character: “If anything is surprising to the audience, it may be that the Creature speaks. In the book it is very eloquent - but since the famous Boris Karloff creature does NOT speak... that’s how audiences think of him. More heartbreaking is that the creature is acutely aware of his own deformities and differences and can articulate his loneliness... The Creature is more apparently spiritual in my adaptation. He is influenced a great deal, in the book, by Milton’s **Paradise Lost**. Our audience will not have read it the way that Shelley’s early 1800s audience would have - so I have borrowed some of its themes throughout the play so that the influence can be illustrated. As a result, images and metaphors from the Bible (Adam, Eve, Satan) as imagined by Milton end up being referred to by the Creature - who has as much an existential crisis as Adam himself.”

Again, List puts value on the importance of making the story, despite its age, and the characters within it relatable to modern audiences. He has aimed to take the story's religious allusions and craft them into the universal themes that all audiences can understand and be inspired by: the search for love and acceptance, the folly of man, and others. These combined elements have the potential to transform a timeless tale into an entertaining, engaging, and enlightening piece of theater.



PAST PRODUCTIONS & REVIEWS

Bo List was commissioned to write his adaptation of **Frankenstein** for the Lexington SummerFest. It received its first production in 2011 in the Arboretum Amphitheater to positive reviews. Critic Candace Chaney offered insightful words regarding the play in her write-up of the Lexington staging. She commented on the play's "Shakespearean gravitas," recalling the grand, tragic overtones of the story that other critics have mentioned in the past. Chaney even said that "the brooding 19th-century setting and emotional melodrama made me long to see this play in a black box theater on a cold, rainy winter day. A closer viewing than most seats at The Arboretum will allow would probably be scintillating." The production set for VT's own Pinkerton Theatre opens itself up to this possibility wonderfully; it can provide the immediate intimacy to the drama for the audience while also constructing a gloomy, almost claustrophobic atmosphere befitting of the play's mood.

Chaney also points to the creation scene as being "one of the most dramatic crescendos" she has witnessed in the theater and praises the pyrotechnics and other special effects used on stage. This is helpful in providing a view into audience reception. With this knowledge in mind, potential directors should strive to present a visual spectacle that will enthrall theatregoers and present them with a scene that integrates both technical ingenuity and high thrills. The excitement and urgency felt in the characters at this point should find expression in the physical environment around them.

The central message of the play was what left the largest impression on Chaney. "That so much pain could be felt, and indeed exists in many people's lives..." is the raw impact the play had on this reviewer, further solidifying **Frankenstein**, and by extension List's version, as a tale that is most effective as a parable that engages the human emotions.

Perhaps just as importantly, if not moreso, are several reviews of the production staged at Chicago's City Lit Theater in 2012. Critic Clint May pointed out how the play's depth and style posed a challenge for this particular staging, saying that the play "at times feels rushed, given how much story they must cover... line readings were clumsy and cardboard, as though being read from a teleprompter off stage" and how the cast "seem[ed] mostly lost in 19th century replicated dialogue." These points of criticism reflect the importance of the actors concerning themselves with the expressiveness of the dialogue; because it is a now dated form of speech, the dialogue in the play might initially come off as awkward or stilted when spoken. It would be a better tact to focus on the emotions that fuel the lines. Once this is accomplished, a more complete comprehension of the words themselves, and by extension their natural delivery, could be accomplished.

Fellow Chicagoan Oliver Sava comments that List's "tight, tense narrative" is disserved by "languid direction [that] never captures the story's sense of horror or fear." He brings up examples of the actors, namely those portraying Victor and the Creature, losing or lacking power

in their deliveries, whether it's the former recounting his nightmare or the latter carrying out acts of wanton murder. This may be indicative of the types of traps that performers may fall into when taking part in "period pieces;" it is not enough to wear the time-appropriate costumery or even replicate the speech of a bygone age. Without emotional investment, the action will seem rehearsed and shallow. To allow the audience to experience sympathy and excitement, the actors must display these attributes in their portrayals first.

In addition to its universal messages and power as a timeless parable, the Frankenstein story is given ample amounts of occasions to shock audiences with some of its more ghastly subjects, as noted by Sheridan Road Magazine. "The text's shocking moments of violence" are not ignored, says the critic. "The murder of a beloved child and the demise of the Frankenstein's treasured nanny are blunt and horrific to witness, making the show a perfect fit for the Halloween season." Grim moments in the play such as this work as visual catharsis in the grand Halloween tradition, and the "blood and thunder" aspect of the story is sure to play to the audience's hunger for suspense. There is plenty of room in **Frankenstein** for profundity and tragedy, but there's also opportunity to raise some good old fashioned goosebumps as well.

Taking previous productions of List's adaptation into consideration, along with their respective critiques, would allow future creative teams to utilize their effective strengths while also avoiding some of their missteps.

Lexington, 2011





City Lit Theatre, 2012



VIDEO RECORDINGS

The following clips and videos represent other cinematic and theatrical adaptations of the Frankenstein story. They were chosen as reference because they maintain the same period-piece background that List utilizes in his play. They may be used to form an understanding as to how other artists have visually interpreted the story as well as noting elements that may be integrated into the present production as well.

- **Frankenstein (1910)—Entire Film**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcLxsOJK9bs>

- **Frankenstein (1931)—The Creation Scene**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8H3dFh6GA-A>

- **Bride of Frankenstein (1935)—Blind Man Scene**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xKdtuwTr-iM>

- **The Curse of Frankenstein (1957)—Highlights**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ghAZAs3Qgs>

- **Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1994) —Clips**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pkAiQctFos>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-aCcHvhqFc>

- **Frankenstein (CBS Festival of Lively Arts for Young People)—Part 1**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m3vfbypqrv0>

- **Tallahassee Little Theater's Frankenstein—Trailer**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RIjWgNdjz-I>

- **Country Playhouse's Frankenstein—Trailer**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qq9b6uF7nUU>

- **Frankenstein by Bo List—End of Act One**

<http://vimeo.com/31741140>



MUSIC

These selected tracks were created in the same time period as Shelley's novel in addition to bearing similar stylistic qualities and themes with **Frankenstein** (Berlioz's piece mirroring Justine's execution; Schubert's litany an ode to souls that have passed away; Bach's composition serving as the paradigm of "Gothic music"). These tracks may also be used as incidental music within the drama or during any intermissions and/or preludes to the show.

- **Litanei auf das Fest Aller Seelen—Franz Schubert**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NrqIEwOhrMo>

- **March to the Scaffold—Hector Berlioz**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QwCuFaq2L3U>

- **Mars, the Bringer of War—Gustav Holst**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L0bcRCCg01I>

- **Requiem in C Minor—Luigi Cherubini**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=laO7Zi6Zsm8>

- **Toccatina and Fugue in D Minor—Sebastian Bach**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVJD3dL4diY>



PHOTO GALLERY

The images here share explicit connections with the play's text as well as some of its thematic undertones. They are provided to show both defined aspects of the drama (the setting, the period clothing) in addition to illustrating the various motifs that arise in the story (death, Biblical allusions, etc.).

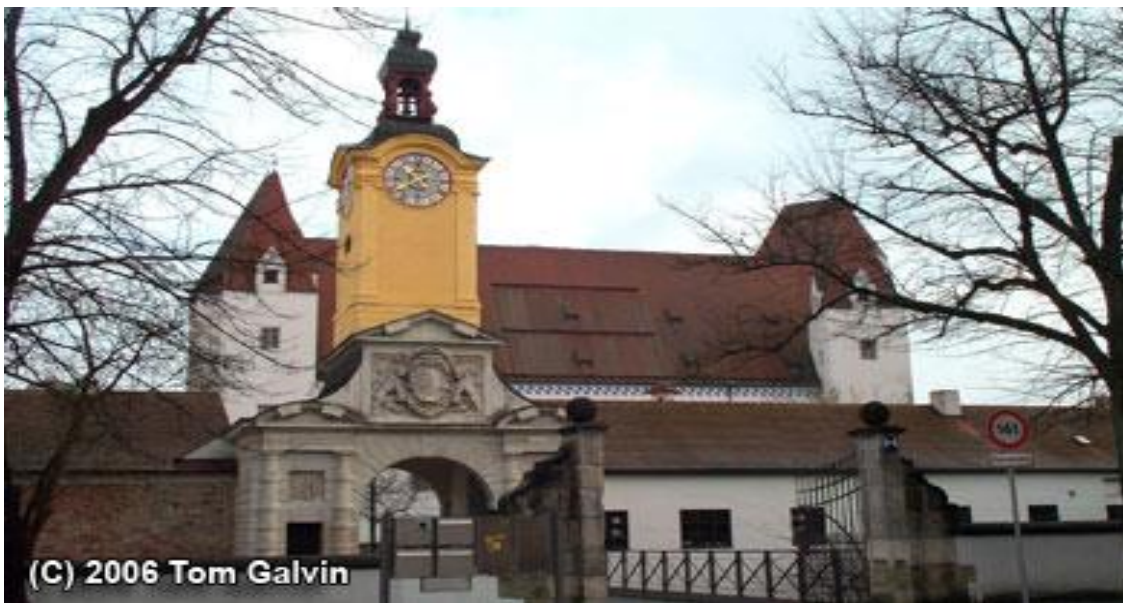
Geneva, Switzerland







Ingolstadt University



(C) 2006 Tom Galvin

The North Pole

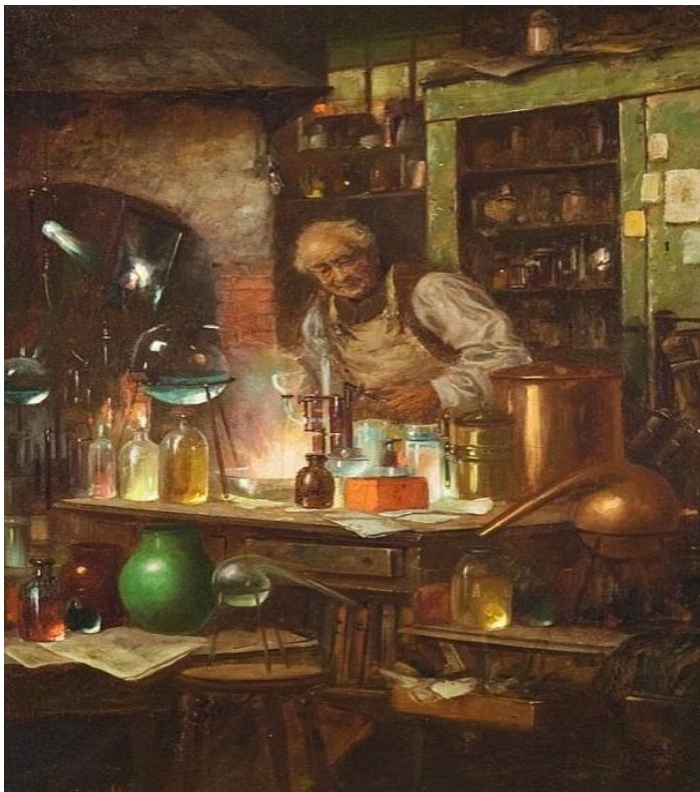


Captain's quarters



19th Century Laboratories





Hut interior

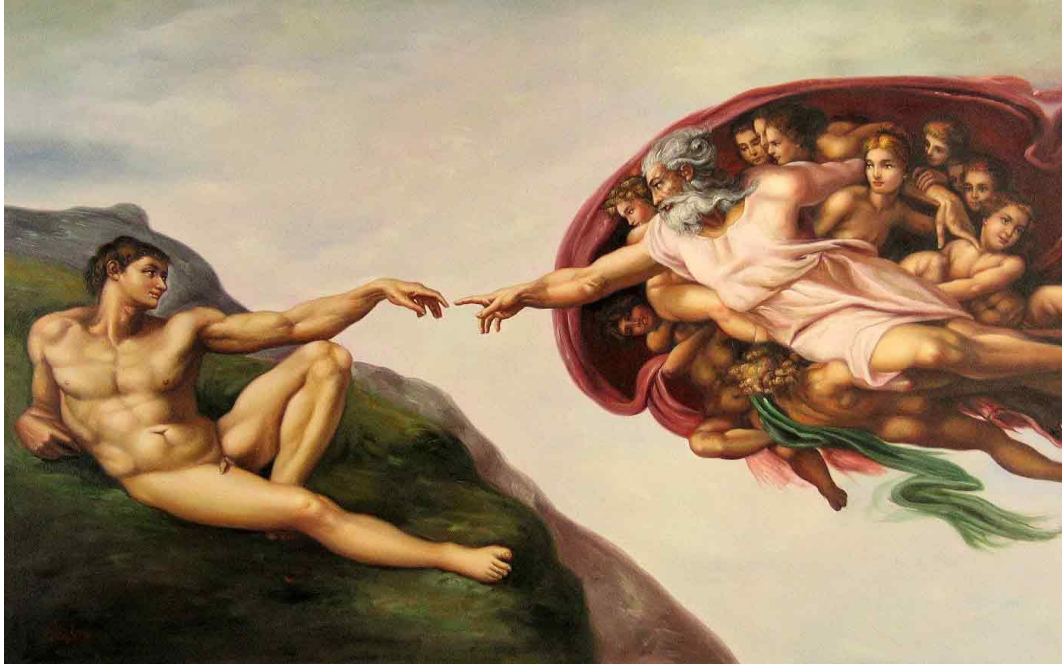
Medical lecture rooms





Physician's medical chest





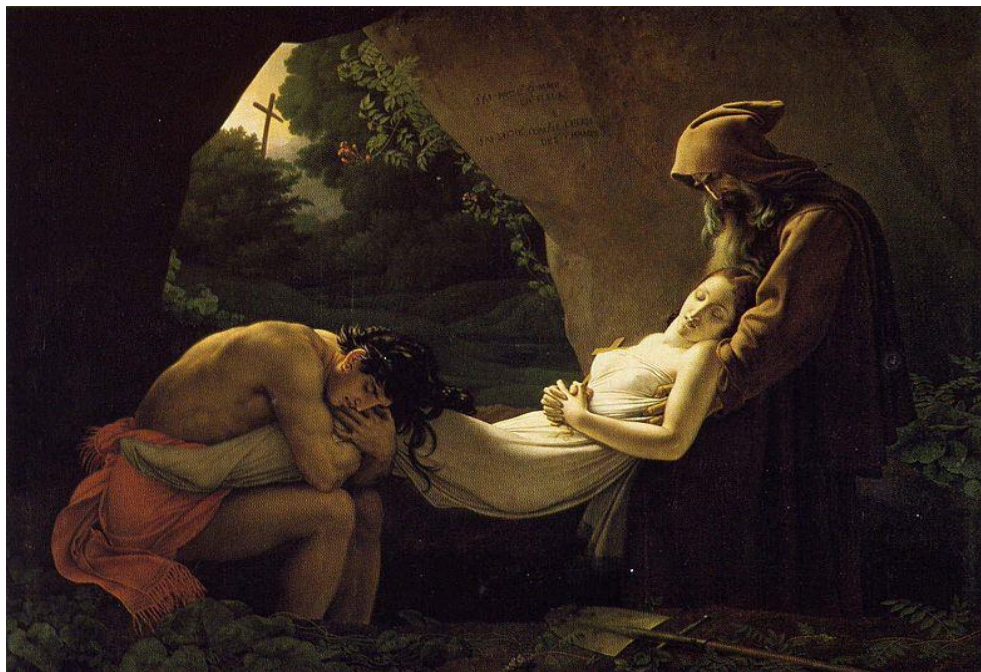
“The Creation of Adam”



“Dutch Boats in a Gale”



“Paradise Lost”



“The Entombment of Atala”



“The Abbey in the Oakwood”



“Sadak in Search of the Waters of Oblivion”



“Wanderer above the Sea of Fog”

19th Century Fashion



Painting of a family game of checkers ("jeu des dames") by French artist Louis-Léopold Boilly, c. 1803.



Rutger Jan Schimmelpenninck and his family, 1801-02.



England, 1812



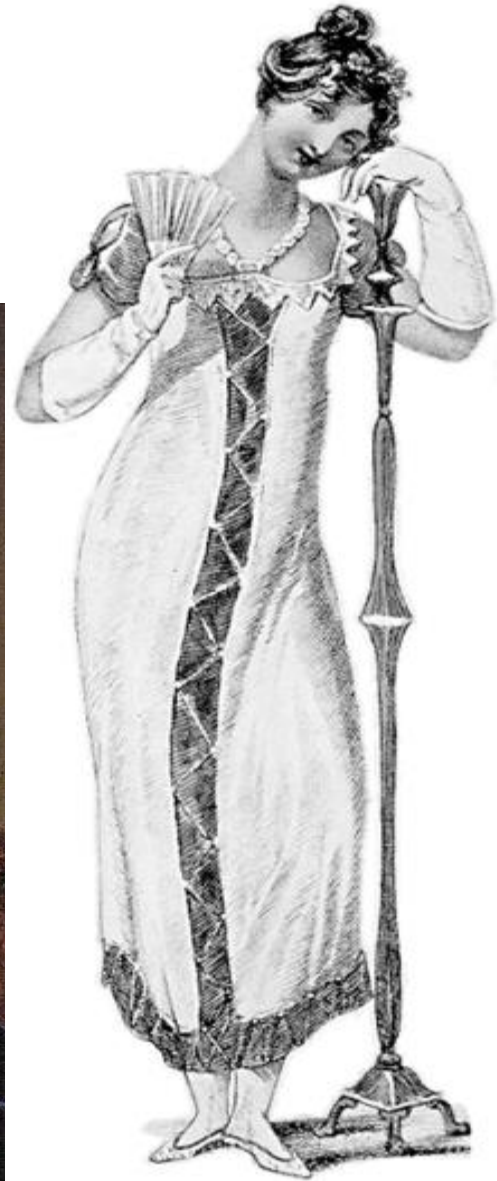
Daniel la Motte, a Baltimore, Maryland merchant and landowner, strikes a romantic pose that displays details of his white waistcoat, frilled shirt, and fall-front breeches with covered buttons at the knee, 1812–13.



Unknown artist wears a double-breasted tail coat with turned-back cuffs and a matching high collar of velvet (or possibly fur). Note that, while the man's obvious wasp-like torso is not overly emphasized in a caricature-like fashion, as was often the case in male fashion plates of the day, there is a definite and deliberate nipping of the waist. It is highly likely that the sitter in this portrait wore some sort of tight-laced corset or similar undergarment. The coat-sleeves are puffed at the shoulder. He wears a white waistcoat, shirt, and cravat, and light-colored pantaloons, 1819.



Left: Comtesse Vilain and her daughter wear their hair parted in the front center with tight ringlets over each ear; back hair is brushed back into a bun. 1816.



Right: 1810 evening gown, shown with elbow-length gloves.



Mrs. Harrison Gray Otis wears a dress with a sheer top layer over a partial lining and a patterned shawl. She wears a gold armband on her left arm. Her hair is styled in loose waves at the temples and over her ears. Massachusetts, 1809.



AUDIENCE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. At almost two hundred years old, Frankenstein is one of the oldest mainstays of our dramatic culture. What keeps drawing us to this story? Why do we return to every adaptation and re-imagining that comes our way?**
- 2. Despite the prevalent themes of monstrosity and evil, are there any true monsters in this play? If so, how do we know?**
- 3. We see the great efforts the characters in the play make to restore life. What lengths would we go to bring back someone we've lost?**
- 4. The play deals with the potentiality of science and experimentation. What benefits have we seen from modern science? Is it possible for it to produce abominations such as the ones seen in the play if placed in the wrong hands?**



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