

Frankenstein on Stage: Galvanizing the Myth and Evolving the Creature

BY

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Abstract

In 2011 the National Theatre produced *Frankenstein*, a new adaptation written by Nick Dear and directed by Danny Boyle. The production was a huge success, despite that the story of Frankenstein is nearly two hundred years old. This thesis aims to explain why Frankenstein continues to intrigue audiences by examining the 2011 *Frankenstein* and understanding the history and mythology that have shaped it. A comparative analysis of several Frankenstein dramatizations demonstrates the establishment of recurring patterns in adaptations and the malleability of Mary Shelley's original story. Investigating the mythology of Frankenstein illustrates that the choices made by playwrights and screenwriters reflect cultural ideologies and social anxiety about the fear of progress. The 2011 production exemplifies the endurance and relevance of Frankenstein, clarifying why the story will continue to be dramatized for years to come.

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Introduction

At first there is only darkness. The sound of a loud heartbeat fills the theatre. In a flash of light there is a glimpse of what appears to be a naked man suspended from the ceiling. Before the eyes can make sense of what they are seeing, the stage goes dark again. There is another flash of light. The man-like creature groans painfully as he struggles to free himself. He finally succeeds and he falls to the floor. He appears unable to stand. Blood seeps from his multiple sutures. He cowers on the floor. Then, it is dark again. The London audience anxiously waits for another flash of light to witness the Creature come to life in the National Theatre's *Frankenstein*.

Nearly two hundred years after Mary Shelley first anonymously published her novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, playwright Nick Dear and director Danny Boyle created a new adaptation of *Frankenstein* for the National Theatre in 2011.¹ Despite countless film and stage dramatizations of *Frankenstein*, the production created a “high-decibel buzz” that led to advanced ticket sellouts.² Critics unanimously praised the show, claiming it achieved the “truly spectacular” by taking the familiar *Frankenstein* tale and making “the old story seem fresh.”³ In their reviews critics have not forgotten Shelley or the play's obligation to her characters and story. Shelley crafted an engrossing novel composed of rich characters, spectacular events, and philosophical questions about what it means to be human. Yet, the story of *Frankenstein*, much like the Creature itself, has taken on a life of its own. Mary Shelley wrote, “And now, once again, I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper” in an introduction to her 1831 text, years after she saw the novel capture the public's imagination in numerous stage adaptations.⁴ Little could she know that by 2011 her story would continue to “go forth and prosper” in a highly celebrated fashion.

There is something particular about the story of Frankenstein. Playwrights and screenwriters claim that their adaptations are based on Shelley's novel. However, early adaptations immediately diverged from the novel and created unique patterns that recur throughout the history of dramatizations. The 2011 production owes as much to previous Frankenstein plays and films as it does to Shelley's novel. Many writers label Frankenstein a modern myth despite its contemporary and literary origin. Yet, the story endures and is continually used to represent the dangers of progress, making it difficult to consider the story anything less than a myth. Frankenstein and his Creature are recognizable and familiar. The attention and acclaim given to the 2011 production prove that the characters still have the capability to fascinate us. These considerations raise challenging questions. How did the history of dramatizations shape the 2011 play? How is Frankenstein a myth, and why is the myth still meaningful to us? How did Nick Dear and Danny Boyle successfully give new life to an old story? I address all of these questions in my thesis, but my focus is directed on how dramatizations have constructed and utilized the mythology of Frankenstein, making the story consistently socially relevant. The purpose of my thesis is to prove how Nick Dear and Danny Boyle revived Frankenstein by mutually revering and resisting patterns from the history of dramatizations, preserving the story's mythology, and reconfiguring the Creature. Other writers such as Chris Baldick, Jon Turney, George Levine, Susan Tyler Hitchcock, Paul O'Flinn and Albert J. Lavalley have examined Frankenstein's endurance, mythology, and the history of dramatizations. I utilize their work in my analysis, but I offer a new perspective that explores how the recent 2011 adaptation is influenced by past dramatizations and the mythology of Frankenstein. In acknowledging how the mythology and history continue to shape adaptations, I

will illustrate why we return to Frankenstein for dramatizations and why the story continues to capture our imagination in unprecedented ways.

The long and varied history of play and film adaptations exemplifies the endurance of Frankenstein. As early as 1826 there were over fifteen different melodramatic stage adaptations of Shelley's novel performed in England and France, at least one of which Shelley attended.⁵ The adaptations contrasted in which aspects they preserved from the novel and showed original interpretations of dynamics within the story. Chapter One explores the establishment and repetition of patterns in Frankenstein's history of dramatizations. A synopsis and analysis of Shelley's novel will highlight aspects of the story that have been consistently used and avoided in theatrical productions. Beginning in 1823 with Richard Brinsley Peake's *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein*, it became apparent that aspects of the novel had to be omitted, simplified, and exaggerated for the story to work as a play. The characterizations of Dr. Frankenstein and the Creature, the depictions of the creation of the Creature, and the relationships Dr. Frankenstein has with the Creature and his loved ones consistently alters between the many adaptations. From Peake's *Presumption* to Dear's 2011 *Frankenstein* the story has been performed as a melodrama, parody, horror film, and gothic drama. The results are mixed and provide a vibrant, if not uneven, history of Frankenstein in performance.

One of the difficulties in writing about Frankenstein is choosing which sources to include for consideration. Donald F. Glut's *The Frankenstein Catalog* demonstrates the problem of delimiting resources as he lists nearly one hundred Frankenstein stage adaptations.⁶ I follow the lead of Steven Earl Forry in his book *Hideous Progenies*. Forry's book includes important dramatizations of Frankenstein with a focused perspective. Many of the early Frankenstein plays that Forry examines are difficult to find in print and rarely have an accompanying analysis,

dictating my interest in using them as plays for comparison. Any consideration of Frankenstein also requires the examination of cinematic representations. Film dramatizations have significantly contributed to the mythology of Frankenstein and influenced choices made by Boyle and Dear. The breadth of the dramatizations I discuss limits the amount of detail each adaptation is given. I will aim to illustrate overarching trends across several adaptations, noting significant similarities and differences. Pertinent to my decision about which plays and films I discuss is the consideration of popularity, originality, and date written. The Frankenstein dramatizations I have selected do not provide a complete history, but they represent major developments in adapting the story, while emphasizing the changing characterizations of Dr. Frankenstein and the Creature. I am especially intrigued by how the Creature in Shelley's novel has evolved from a reasoning and thinking character, to a chasing monster in melodramas, to a child-like giant in films, and back to a highly articulate and empathetic character in Dear's script. Paralleling the evolution of the Creature is the character of Dr. Frankenstein. In dramatizations Frankenstein appears as the heroic protector, the evil scientist, the guilty young man, or a hybrid of all three. The comparison of dramatizations, including the analysis of both characters and recurring patterns, reveals how the history of Frankenstein in performance has undeniably shaped Dear's script.

The history of dramatizations has also influenced and contributed to the developing mythology of Frankenstein. Chris Baldick, in *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-Century Writing*, argues that the "series of adaptations, allusions, accretions, analogues, parodies, and plain misreadings which follows upon Mary Shelley's novel is not just a supplementary component of the myth; it *is* the myth."⁷ In Chapter Two I compare Baldick's argument of how Frankenstein is a myth in relation to Lévi-Strauss's assessment of what

qualifies as a myth. Through the comparison the story of Frankenstein meets certain criteria pertaining to classic myths but also redefines myth in a modern, literate age. Shelley's full title for her novel, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, hints at the mythology embedded in the original story. Parallels of Frankenstein to the Prometheus myth and the Genesis creation myth are abundant. Dr. Frankenstein is compared to the clever Prometheus because he 'steals' the gift of life from God. In several adaptations the Creature is compared to Adam in Genesis, who was also given life but quickly abandoned by his creator. Yet, the comparisons to earlier myths fail to explain how Frankenstein has formed its own mythology with its own distinct structure.

I investigate Frankenstein's unique mythology by exploring how society altered the story, primarily through dramatizations, and permitted it to become a myth. Using Roland Barthes's *Mythologies*, my examination of how Frankenstein reflects cultural ideologies reveals why the story continues to have meaning as a myth. Applying analysis from Noël Carroll and Jon Turney in their discussion of horror, Frankenstein, and ideology, it is evident why the Creature and Dr. Frankenstein transform over time. The story of Frankenstein consistently reflects social anxieties and mirrors a hope for returning to normative conditions through the demise or punishment of the Creature and Dr. Frankenstein. Furthermore, exploring the mythology of Frankenstein clarifies how deeply rooted the story has become in our language and ideas. The very word Frankenstein conjures distinct images: the mad scientist, the strange laboratory where life is given, the unstoppable Monster, and a path of destruction where fears of science and technological progress are based. Frankenstein's popularity and its inclusion in recognizable vernacular exemplifies why the story is identified as a modern myth. Anne K. Mellor in "Making A Monster" writes, "So deeply does it probe the collective culture psyche of the modern era that

it deserves to be called a myth, on a par with the most telling stories of Greek and Norse gods and goddesses.”⁸ The myth of Frankenstein, in many ways, is a myth of our own making.

As a modern myth Frankenstein is imbued with expectations. In a distinct way the public reveres the myth of Frankenstein, evident in its placement within popular culture and as identifiable iconography. Playwrights and screenwriters preserve the appreciation by discovering ways for the story to reflect contemporary tastes and current ideologies. Rewriting and restaging Frankenstein challenges what the audience has to come to know and expect from the myth. Dear and Boyle attempted a daring endeavor in reframing the Frankenstein story, predominantly by making the Creature the central character. Despite the risky reconfiguration Dear and Boyle succeeded with their *Frankenstein*, confirmed by the glowing reviews, receptive audiences, and the newfound interest in Shelley’s tale of horror.

In Chapter Three an in-depth evaluation of the 2011 *Frankenstein* script explains how Dear modified the myth with an unconventional perspective. Not having seen the production, I evaluate the play based on Dear’s script, critical responses, material provided by the National Theatre, and the multiple written and recorded interviews Dear and Boyle gave. Dear and Boyle developed the script for fifteen years. Many definitive decisions were made in order to push the story into unknown territory. There had to be something new to offer to those overly familiar with the classic story. Dear constructed his script with a modern outlook and an ending Paul Taylor in *The Independence* calls an “existential stalemate.”⁹ Gone is the easy vilification of the Creature. Instead the audience is privy to observing the transformation of the Creature into a functioning human being in a way unseen before. The Creature’s evolution is radical compared to many previous productions. Though he appears as articulate as he is in Shelley’s novel, the Creature in Dear’s play also evolves in emotional development and his capacity to love. His

transformation from the naïve, hopeful Creature who questions the ways in which humanity operates to the dark, cynical monstrosity capable of murder is sufficiently disturbing as the audience has had the rare opportunity to empathize with the character.

Theological questions are crucial to Dear's script. The ideas of Adam and God shape the debates between the inquisitive Creature and his imprudent creator. Elizabeth and Dr. Frankenstein are two young people at odds rather than in love. Their frustrated relationship is accentuated by the Creature's own ability and desire to love. The script has moments of comic relief, portrayed by the seemingly uneducated villagers and indicative of many earlier dramatizations of Frankenstein. Dr. Frankenstein appears rather late in the play, and the audience meets a young man who dreamed of possibilities rather than entertained realities. Frankenstein's creation is an act of hubris, evidently more immature than mad or calculated. The final scene shows a striking departure from previous dramatizations that reflect an uncertainty about the world and the state of life in England in 2011.

In Chapter Three I also explore the successful reception of the 2011 production that has been attributed to Danny Boyle's direction. Boyle's return to the stage, after winning an Academy Award for directing, created a large amount of press and interest about how his cinematic sensibilities would reencounter the theatre. Interested in the verbal component of Frankenstein, he wanted the visual style of the play to accompany and not overpower the Creature's story. Nevertheless, the production presented a spectacle of sound and images that left critics impressed. Boyle directed his actors, Jonny Lee Miller and Benedict Cumberbatch, to alternate roles of the Creature and Dr. Frankenstein throughout the production run. Boyle was determined that his stage adaptation would establish its own identity separate from the novel and dominating screen dramatizations. With Dear's script and Boyle's distinctive way of playing

with the intermingled duality of the Creature and Dr. Frankenstein by alternating roles, Frankenstein's return to the stage was a triumphant achievement. The lasting result was the creation of a Creature unlike any before as he talked, thought, loved, and killed with rationality, sensitivity, and desire. The Creature was fully human once again.

Dear and Boyle's successful production proves the dust has not yet settled on Frankenstein. Shelley's story has resonance today. A modern adaptation can draw crowds of people just as Peake's *Presumption* did in 1823. The 2011 production was not a flawless success because many critics had problems with Dear's script. Yet, unlike many other plays, the dialogue of a Frankenstein adaptation is never as important as the composition of how the events, characters, special effects, spectacle, and style of the play merge to create a riveting piece of theatre. Frankenstein reminds us in the theatre that sometimes the answer to the question of "how" the story is told is fundamentally crucial.

It is not a fluke that Dear and Boyle found success with Frankenstein. In acknowledging what previous dramatizations had attempted, Dear and Boyle crafted their *Frankenstein* with creative insight. They revitalized the story by honoring its history as a dramatization and borrowing from that history. However, Dear and Boyle approached the material with originality by streamlining the narrative, centralizing the Creature, and alternating roles. In understanding the social relevance of Frankenstein, Dear's script contributes to an evolving mythology of Frankenstein by finding contemporary significance within the story. The result was an entertaining, modern play for enthusiastic audiences. Nearly two hundred years after the debut of Shelley's novel, the 2011 production resurrected Frankenstein, indebted to but rising above the story's own performance history and mythology. As the house lights dimmed at London's

National Theatre, and the audience sat in darkness, the story of Frankenstein proves that it can still excite us with the sound of a heartbeat and a flash of light.

¹ To avoid confusion I follow Susan Tyler Hitchcock's method of italicization. When referencing specific adaptations or Shelley's novel the word Frankenstein will be italicized. In references to the story or myth of Frankenstein the word will not be italicized. When addressing the character of Frankenstein I will refer to the character as Dr. Frankenstein, unless it is otherwise evident.

² Ben Brantley, "It's (Gasp) Alive, Not to Mention Peeved," *New York Times*, February 24, 2011, accessed January 26, 2012, <http://theater.nytimes.com/2011/02/26/theater/reviews/26franken.html>.

³ Charles Spencer, "Danny Boyle's *Frankenstein*, National Theatre, review," *The Telegraph*, February 23, 2011, accessed June 29, 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/8343592/Danny-Boyles-Frankenstein-National-Theatre-review.html>.

⁴ Mary Shelley, "Introduction" to *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus* (1831), in *Frankenstein: Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism*, ed. Johanna M. Smith (Boston: Bedford/St Martin's, 2000), 25.

⁵ Fred Botting, introduction to *Frankenstein: Mary Shelley*, ed. Fred Botting (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 3.

⁶ Donald F. Glut, *The Frankenstein Catalog* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1984). Glut's book is likely the most complete catalog of materials about or related to Frankenstein. His catalog includes nearly 2,666 listed sources of recordings, films, plays, television shows, cartoons, and comics.

⁷ Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-century Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 4.

⁸ Anne K. Mellor, "Making a Monster," in *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein: Updated Edition*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 2007), 43.

⁹ Paul Taylor, "First Night: *Frankenstein*, Olivier Theatre, London," *The Independent*, February 24, 2011, accessed June 29, 2011, www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/first-night-frankenstein-olivier-theatre-london-2223984.html.

Chapter One: Frankenstein on Stage and in Film

The ghost story contest that occurred between Mary Shelley, Percy Shelley, and Lord Byron in June of 1816 at the Villa Diodati is usually mentioned in introductions to Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*. Mary Shelley's idea for her ghost story, which came to her in a dream after listening to conversations between her husband and Lord Byron about science, is an unusual beginning for such an often-discussed piece of literature.¹ However, as the following chapter analyzes various stage and screen adaptations, the unforeseen inception of Shelley's novel is worth remembering. At the time she wrote her novel Shelley was married to the Romantic poet Percy Shelley and daughter of the political philosopher William Godwin and feminist philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft. It is not surprising that Mary Shelley would write a novel, given her family's literary talents. Yet, neither she nor any others could anticipate the enduring life of the horror story she dreamt of one evening. Shelley's novel parallels her own Dr. Frankenstein's ambitious creation. After all, Frankenstein did not envision his creation living beyond his private walls, taking on an unimaginable and powerful existence. Though "the idea of an entirely man-made monster is Mary Shelley's own," the perpetuation of her story is attributed to the many writers who adapted her novel for the stage and screen.²

Mary Shelley's story has inspired and influenced countless adaptations. In the following chapter I navigate through the history of Frankenstein adaptations, demonstrating the malleability of Shelley's story. Before comparing the many dramatizations I will briefly summarize and analyze Shelley's novel. It is crucial to understand the presentation of the characters and events as they are in Shelley's *Frankenstein* in order to comprehend how playwrights and screenwriters have altered the story. As I examine several significant dramatizations I will focus on the depiction of the Creature and Dr. Frankenstein, the dynamics

of their relationship with each other and the world, and the recurrence of key patterns and subplots in adaptations. I group the selected dramatizations in chronological or stylistic categories, representing significant trends in adapting Frankenstein. The first category is comprised of early play adaptations of the 1820s, including Richard Brinsley Peake's *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein* and Henry M. Milner's *Frankenstein; or, The Man and the Monster*. These melodramatic adaptations silenced the Monster and imposed moral themes within the story. The second cycle of dramatizations I discuss includes burlesques and parodies. I analyze the 1849 play *Frankenstein; or, The Model Man* and the 1974 film *Young Frankenstein*. By disregarding a strict chronological treatment of dramatizations within this group, I am able to investigate the phenomenon of comedy in Frankenstein across mediums and time. The third category includes successful film adaptations. The Edison Film Company's 1910 *Frankenstein*, Universal Studios' 1931 *Frankenstein* and 1935 *Bride of Frankenstein*, and Hammer Film Productions' 1957 *The Curse of Frankenstein* repeated patterns established in earlier play adaptations, such as keeping the Monster silent. However, the medium of film introduced Frankenstein to more people and made it difficult for future dramatizations to rival their interpretations. The fourth category of dramatizations includes innovative stage adaptations by The Living Theatre and by Clive Barker. The Living Theatre's 1966 *Frankenstein* and Barker's 1982 *Frankenstein in Love* are drastic departures from previous adaptations. Both plays illuminate the flexibility of Frankenstein as source material. Despite such dramatic conceptualizations, in the last half of the twentieth century dramatizations also showed a desire to return to Shelley's novel. The fifth category includes Victor Gialanella's 1981 *Frankenstein* and Kenneth Branagh's 1994 film, *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*. Both dramatizations follow Shelley's structure and characterizations closer than past adaptations, but they include unique

additions of their own. These five categories are not rigid, because adaptations may inevitably fall somewhere in between each time period and style. At times I compare adaptations from various categories to illustrate the cyclical nature of Frankenstein adaptations. The categories are an organizational tool to clarify the differences and similarities between Frankenstein stage and screen adaptations and Shelley's novel.

Over the past two hundred years, writers and literary theorists have analyzed Shelley's novel frequently. In Harold Bloom's examination of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* he writes, "it is only a strong, flawed novel with frequent clumsiness in its narrative and characterization," but it possesses "one of the most vivid versions we have of the Romantic mythology of the self."³ What interests me in Bloom's statement is the use of the word "vivid." Where Shelley's novel may fail in technique and consistency, she makes up for in a story that is vivid, experimental, and exceptionally imaginative. The vibrancy of Shelley's novel has enabled the story to be embodied and performed. Shelley writes in the introduction to her 1831 text, "I busied myself *to think of a story*...one to make the reader dread to look round, to curdle the blood, and quicken the beatings of the heart."⁴ Shelley succeeded in this endeavor, and the lively responses she wanted to provoke from her readers illustrate why the story is well suited for dramatization.

To understand how Shelley's novel could evoke terrified responses and spawn dozens of dramatizations, it is useful to review the basic story line of *Frankenstein*. Shelley begins her novel with a ship captain, Robert Walton, who is sailing with his crew in the dangerous Arctic Sea. Walton comes across Victor Frankenstein, near death and alone in the Arctic wilderness. Frankenstein finds refuge on Walton's ship and tells the captain about the Creature he is pursuing across the ice-covered land. Frankenstein recounts his childhood, surrounded by his family, his friend, Henry Clerval, and his future bride, Elizabeth. Frankenstein also describes his

youthful obsession with science and creating life. In his pursuit of knowledge, Frankenstein successfully animated life in a Creature. Frightened by the monster's appearance, Frankenstein flees his laboratory, falls ill, and returns home. Returning home he learns a young woman, Justine, is accused of murdering his younger brother, William. The Creature appears and confesses to the murder of William. Confronting Frankenstein, the Creature asks his creator for a companion. The Creature tells Frankenstein of his abandonment, his struggles in living alone, and the brief kindness he received from an old blind man, De Lacey. Hearing the Creature's story, Frankenstein agrees to create a companion. Frankenstein nearly completes the second creature when it occurs to him that if he is successful both creatures could inflict harm. Frankenstein destroys the companion, and the Creature promises to seek revenge. The Creature kills Frankenstein's friend, Henry, and Frankenstein is charged with the murder. Once cleared, Frankenstein returns home to finally marry Elizabeth. The night of the wedding, the Creature finds Elizabeth alone and kills the young woman. Frankenstein's father is unable to bear the grief and dies a few days later. Frankenstein vows to hunt down the Creature. His long pursuit leads him to the Arctic Circle. Unsuccessful in his hunt, the exhausted Frankenstein dies on Walton's ship. Walton finds the Creature standing over the body of his creator, mourning Frankenstein's death. The Creature reveals his deep self-hatred and plans his own death in the icy wilderness. Walton is left alone, and starts the long journey back home.

For those familiar with dramatizations of Frankenstein it comes as a surprise that the novel follows the three narrators of Frankenstein, the Creature, and Walton. Robert Walton, the young captain who leads his crew and ship into the uncharted regions of the Arctic sea, is absent in almost every dramatization I have analyzed. In the novel, it is through Walton the reader first meets Victor Frankenstein. Paul O'Flinn describes the narratives of Walton and Frankenstein as

“present[ing] two models of scientific progress.”⁵ Whereas Frankenstein dies in the pursuit of chasing his ‘discovery,’ Walton survives. O’Flinn argues the contrast between the two men lies in the fact that Walton’s ambition to discover unknown regions of the world is curtailed by the democratic presence of his crew. Walton can never forget that failure will cost the lives of other men.⁶ Frankenstein, working independently and in secrecy, has no one to stop his unrelenting determination to succeed. In losing Walton the comparison of different models of progress is absent. Morality can quickly be applied to the story of Frankenstein: man should have limitations in pursuit of knowledge or he will suffer. As Walton listens to Frankenstein’s story, he develops a great affection for the man, stating, “I have longed for a friend; I have sought one who would sympathize with and love me. Behold, on these desert seas I have such a one.”⁷ Walton humanizes Frankenstein and makes him relatable and sympathetic. Albert J. Lavalley in “The Stage and Film Children of *Frankenstein*: A Survey,” clarifies that without Walton the audience is left with a Frankenstein who inevitably relates to no one, and is interminably isolated as “[He] has no real bond with his creation.”⁸ Omitting Walton shapes the characterization of Frankenstein in adaptations differently from the novel. Audiences miss the sympathetic perspective of Walton, who understands why Frankenstein made his Creature and the guilt he feels about the Creature’s destruction.

In Shelley’s novel Frankenstein’s narration begins with him recalling, “No creature could have more tender parents than mine” (Shelley, 19). He recalls his affection for a young Elizabeth and his close friendship with Henry Clerval. Frankenstein’s increasing interest in science and alchemy progresses rationally in a quest to discover where “did the principle of life proceed?” (33). Victor recounts to Walton how he became obsessed with understanding the phenomenon, until “from the midst of darkness a sudden light broke in upon me...I succeeded in discovering

the cause of generation and life” (34). Dr. Frankenstein’s interest in science, rooted in Shelley’s novel and threaded through the countless adaptations, positions the novel in a modern context, an issue that will be explored further when discussing Frankenstein’s mythology. Dr. Frankenstein’s pursuit of scientific inquiry marks a historical moment of emerging modernity that Shelley capitalizes on, including the rise of “scientific and technological progress, of the industrial revolution, of the sweeping economic and social changes brought about by capitalism.”⁹ The modernity of Frankenstein surfaces through dramatizations, particularly in relation to theology vs. secularism and science vs. ethics/moral considerations. Moreover, in the presentation of Frankenstein’s childhood, his emotional attachments, and a hunger for knowledge, Shelley’s novel sets high stakes for what Frankenstein could lose in his pursuit of science. If his experiment fails, the hours he spent away from his family are meaningless and his self-constructed credibility as a man of science will be weakened. Yet in his success everything Frankenstein loves is destroyed. Shelley’s *Frankenstein* portrays Victor Frankenstein as “a highly idealistic and naïve youth in the conventional Romantic mode.”¹⁰ Driven to discover the secrets of life he fails to envisage the consequences of his actions. After experiencing the destruction of his creation, Frankenstein tells Walton, “Learn from me, if not from my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge” (Shelley, 35).

Victor Frankenstein becomes increasingly aware of the danger he has imposed on his family, tragically confirmed by their deaths. Seldom in dramatizations does Frankenstein appear as cognizant or as accountable for his actions as he does in Shelley’s novel. Frankenstein knows that his Creature killed William, but he silently stands by when Justine is executed. His guilt is insurmountable. Frankenstein describes the “weight of despair and remorse pressed on [his] heart” and that “solitude was [his] only consolation” (69). Frankenstein isolates himself to self-

flagellate. Elizabeth pleads for his return. Frankenstein's genuine love for Elizabeth convinces him to proceed with their wedding. The climatic and deadly wedding night becomes a frequently used plot point in almost every dramatization. With the Creature's murder of Henry and Elizabeth, and Victor's father's death, Frankenstein vows to retaliate and is "possessed by a maddening rage" (168). Victor pursues the Creature for months in hope of killing the monster. Only in Shelley's novel does the reader perceive the depth and intensity of "the inner torments of the scientist," as Frankenstein holds himself responsible for the many lives lost.¹¹ The mediums of stage and screen do not allow the time to offer similar insight into the complexity of Frankenstein's turmoil.

Many adaptations begin with the creation scene, losing the prior explanation as to why Frankenstein took interest in such a project. The comparison of creation scenes in adaptations will illustrate the dramatic and spectacular possibilities in staging the scene. The novel keeps the creation description brief and ambiguous. Marilyn Butler says Shelley was a populist concerning scientific ideas, and that she had "to use what the public knew."¹² It is speculated Frankenstein uses Galvani-like methods for animation.¹³ However, the reader only learns that Frankenstein collects "the instruments of life around [him], that [he] might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing," and then sees the "the dull yellow eye of the creature open" (Shelley, 38-39). Victor instantly feels repulsed by the reality of the hideous creature before him. His immediate reaction of disgust and horror, as if he is awakened abruptly the second the Creature's eye opens, becomes a recurring pattern in many adaptations.¹⁴ Harold Bloom assesses that Dr. Frankenstein's incompetence was not in his ability to successfully create a man, but in "his own moral error, his failure to love; he *abhorred his creature*, became terrified, and fled his responsibilities."¹⁵

The Creature is left alone in the laboratory. Shelley describes a creation of “yellow skin...hair...of a lustrous black...his teeth of a pearly whiteness” and having a “gigantic stature” (Shelley, 39 and 56). The Creature appears as a savage adult, yet behaves as helpless as a child and is left to fend for himself. When the Creature reencounters Frankenstein he tells him of the brutal alienation he felt, “half-frightened as it were instinctively, finding myself so desolate” (80). The Creature ambles through the wilderness, learning to trust his awakening senses, discovering how to live, and terrifying those who stumble across his path. In adaptations from the 1820s, early films, and Branagh’s 1994 film these scenes of discovery are wonderfully charming and effectively simple. The Creature evokes audience sympathy as he struggles to make sense of the world he is confronted with. It is a strange and fascinating dichotomy to see an adult of such proportion and appearance act like a fledgling.

The Creature is chased from villages and attacked by those frightened by his appearance until he comes across the blind man De Lacey and his family.¹⁶ Pinning his hopes on acceptance by De Lacey, the Creature approaches the man when he is alone. De Lacey kindly offers to assist the Creature. De Lacey’s son returns, and fearing for his father beats the Creature away. The Creature responds as his “heart sunk within [him] as with bitter sickness” (Shelley, 110). Rejected by humanity again the Creature angrily seeks his creator to discover why he was made and to make one final demand. The De Lacey subplot, much like Frankenstein’s wedding night, appears consistently through various dramatizations. In many ways De Lacey is the Creature’s Walton; the character offers the audience a chance to empathize with the Creature with the kind perspective De Lacey possesses.

The Creature pleads for Frankenstein to create him a companion stating, “Oh! my creator, make me happy; let me feel gratitude towards you for one benefit” (120). Frankenstein is

astonished that the Creature he has abandoned can think and talk. Yet, Frankenstein reluctantly agrees to build a second creature. Realizing the possible danger of his decision, Victor destroys the companion before animation. The Creature yells at Frankenstein: “Slave, I before reasoned with you, but you have proved yourself unworthy of my condescension... You are my creator, but I am your master;--obey!” (140). The Creature sets off in a rage. Victor’s loved ones are murdered, and Victor pursues the Creature until his own death. In the last moments of Shelley’s book the Creature stands over Frankenstein’s body telling Walton of his own horrific evolution. He says, “I cannot believe that I am he whose thoughts were once filled with sublime and transcendent visions of the beauty and majesty of goodness” (189). Filled with grief he tells Walton he will head north, make his funeral pyre and “consume to ashes his miserable frame” (190). Both creator and creation finally find peace in death.

My synopsis and analysis of Shelley’s novel is brief. It misses the poetry of Shelley’s descriptions and many similarities between the Creature and Frankenstein as they wrestle with loneliness and isolation. Many of the subplots of Shelley’s novel do not appear in most dramatizations, such as the indictment of Justine or Victor’s own imprisonment after the discovery of Clerval’s body. As Paul O’Flinn summarizes the dramatizations, “the book is reduced to no more than an approximate skeleton, fleshed out in entirely and deliberately new ways.”¹⁷ The skeleton is the myth. It provides adaptations a basic structure and narrative to expound upon, and offers opportunities for diversions in new subplots, characters, and events.

Five years after Shelley anonymously published her novel Richard Brinsley Peake’s adaptation, *Presumption; or, the Fate of Frankenstein*, opened at the English Opera House on July 28, 1823.¹⁸ Mary Shelley attended a performance shortly before her twenty-sixth birthday. Shelley later wrote to a friend that while she enjoyed the performance of Thomas Peter Cooke,

who performed the Creature nearly 365 times, the “story is not well managed.”¹⁹ It is uncertain whether Shelley attended other productions that began populating the theatre landscape, but by the time Shelley’s 1831 *Frankenstein* was offered to the public, the theatrical adaptations had already left their mark. Shelley had “lost control of the plot and specifically over its range...symbolized by the fact her Creature speaks,” and adaptations continued to present a silent monster.²⁰ When *Frankenstein* was first published many criticized the novel for its impiousness. Peake’s stage adaptation initially received similar condemnation. Despite not having seen it, “a small section of the London public mounted a protest centered on the supposed immorality of Peake’s dramatization.”²¹ Had the small group of protestors seen the production many of their fears would have been assuaged. While some reviews would continue to criticize the immorality of the story, popular interest in seeing a dramatization of Frankenstein did not wane. *Presumption* was a hit. It was likely seen by over 55,000 Londoners in its first run and introduced many people to the story of Frankenstein who had never read the novel.²²

Fred Botting writes of *Presumption*: “Not only did the production retitle and rewrite the novel, supplying it with a moral and starting the popular tradition of silencing the monster...it also signaled *Frankenstein*’s transformation into a modern myth.”²³ Chris Baldick suggests the play “had to pander to the conscience of the churchgoing paterfamilias,” but set a “pattern for nearly all subsequent stage versions.”²⁴ The play is fashioned in the popular melodramatic style of the early 1800s with exotically-inspired costumes, songs, many action and chase scenes, and clearly delineated characters of villain and hero. The Monster, as the character is aptly referred to in the unsympathetic depiction, is silent.²⁵ Any justification for his actions and motivations is assumed or ignored. With the silence of the Monster the complexities of Shelley’s character are erased, leaving behind a character that is more fiendish than human. Similar to how the Monster

would reappear in several adaptations, notably in the 1931 Universal Studios' *Frankenstein*, the mute Monster remains an underdeveloped character. He has similar sensory experiences that the novel presents such as a "sensitiveness of light and air," burning his hand in a fire, expressing "surprise and pleasure," and being soothed by the harp playing of De Lacey.²⁶ These experiences provide opportunities to show the vulnerability of the Monster. Yet, without the ability to talk the increasing anger and violence of the Monster are more alarming than understandable. Steven Earl Forry writes, "Melodramatizations, concerned as they were with action, did not really desire to exhibit the mind of the Creature coming into Lockean awareness."²⁷

In the early dramatizations of the 1820s the Monster seldom causes as much death and destruction as he does in Shelley's novel or in later productions. In both Peake's play and Henry M. Milner's popular 1826 play, *Frankenstein; or, The Man and The Monster*, the Monster's actions range from kidnapping women, chasing and outsmarting Dr. Frankenstein, and setting a cottage on fire from which characters narrowly escape. Paradoxically, Frankenstein's hatred towards the Monster appears stronger than it does in later adaptations. In *Presumption* after the Monster saves Agatha from drowning, Frankenstein shoots at him, shouting, "Misery! the Fiend!...Hence, avoid me! do not approach me---thy horrid contact would spread a pestilence through my veins."²⁸ The young Frankenstein demonstrates guilt over his creation, declaring, "What have I cast on the world?," and "I am the father of a thousand murders."²⁹ Nevertheless, his statements appear to solidify the moral tone of these plays rather than to illustrate significant despair, evident by how quickly his guilt dissipates. The early stage adaptations are composed of too much action to allow Frankenstein to be as fully developed or as emotionally wrought as he is in Shelley's novel. Contributing to the moral tone of *Presumption* is the character of Fritz, the lowly laboratory assistant of Dr. Frankenstein. A Fritz-like character continues to appear in

dramatizations for the next two hundred years. In Peake's play he observes Frankenstein's work and claims, "To be sure Mr. Frankenstein is a kind man...but that I think as he holds converse with somebody below with a long tail, horns, and hoofs, who shall remain nameless."³⁰ Similar biblical and Faustian references reappear throughout dramatizations in the 1820s and in later adaptations by *The Living Theatre*, *Gialanella*, and *Dear*. The character of Fritz and his immediate condemnation distances Frankenstein's experiment from the secretive and secular tone it has in Shelley's novel.

The Creature and Frankenstein encounter one another many times in early dramatizations, but their interactions are predominantly framed by "elaborate pursuits, abductions, and chases."³¹ In Milner's adaptation, the Monster kidnaps a child, and Frankenstein chases them up a summit, pleading, "I do implore thee, I, thy creator...to spare that unoffending child!"³² The Monster, unable to speak, responds through a series of gestures as he "points to his wound—expresses that he would willingly have served Frankenstein and befriended him, but that all his overtures were repelled with scorn and abhorrence."³³ The Monster's silence clashes with the playwright's expectations that the character can physically convey thoughts comparable to the verbal Creature of the novel. Given that one character cannot speak it is logical why scenes between Frankenstein and the Monster are more about action than dialogue. The relationship between the Monster and Frankenstein in the 1820's dramatizations often began in a creation scene hidden off stage, only depicted through changing colored lights. It was not until Milner's 1826 adaptation that the creation scene was first shown on stage. As in Shelley's novel and future dramatizations, Frankenstein's joy is short lived. He feels immediate repulsion and cries, "What have I accomplished? the beauty of my dream has vanished! and breathless horror and disgust now fill my heart."³⁴ Noël Carroll in *The Philosophy of Horror* examines how the horror

genre is composed of the paradox in which both attraction and repulsion are simultaneous reactions to a horrifying event, object, or person. The “visceral revulsion” experienced by Frankenstein informs the audience how to react by “parallel[ing], roughly and in certain aspects, the emotions of the human protagonists in the fiction.”³⁵ In early dramatizations Frankenstein is the protagonist, guiding the audience to empathize primarily with him as he escapes the Monster and saves his loved ones from the Monster’s wrath. The fears and disgust experienced by the audience are usually alleviated at the play’s end. In *Presumption* the Monster and Frankenstein perish in an avalanche, and in *The Man or the Monster* the Monster leaps to his death in a volcanic crater after stabbing Frankenstein. The demise of the Creature/Monster and Frankenstein rarely mirrors Shelley’s design, and instead becomes a strange mix of either one or both characters dying, sometimes in an extraordinarily bizarre manner.³⁶

Peake’s *Presumption* was staged several times across London in 1824 and continued running in production as late as 1843 in New York City.³⁷ Milner’s play was not Peake’s only competitor as the stages were also flooded with the 1823 production of *Presumption and the Blue Devil*, Milner’s earlier 1823 play *Frankenstein; or, The Demon of Switzerland*, and the 1826 French adaptation *Le Monstre et le magicien*.³⁸ The various stage productions established Frankenstein’s rising presence in popular culture. Forry writes that by 1826 Frankenstein became so popular that the name “could be invoked to retail commercial products,” and began to carry “political overtones,” popping up in newspapers, political cartoons, and political debates.³⁹ Assisting in the interest in Frankenstein were the equally popular burlesques and parodies, which marks the second category of Frankenstein adaptations. The burlesques and parodies are comparable, but the parodies of Frankenstein tended to imitate and mock the style of melodramas, whereas burlesques usually had a more general humorous and broad approach to

the material of the Frankenstein story. Lavalley writes, “the melodramatic simplifications of *Presumption* obviously placed it on the edge of comedy and ripe for parody.”⁴⁰ As early as 1823 the London stage saw both *Frank-in-Steam*, about a medical student ‘giving life’ to a bailiff who actually is awakened from “a state of catalepsy,” and *Frankenstitch*, about a tailor who creates a man “from parts of bodies of nine dead journeymen.”⁴¹ In *Frank-in-Steam* the character of the young creator even mocks the guilt typically experienced by Dr. Frankenstein stating, “What have I done? Instead of raising a dead body to raise the wind I’ve raised a live Bailiff to arrest me.”⁴² In 1849 Richard and Barnabas Brough wrote the burlesque-extravaganza *Frankenstein; or, The Model Man*. Humorously lampooning Peake’s *Presumption* and satirizing politics of the day, Forry claims the burlesque “represents one of the best nineteenth-century dramatizations of the novel.”⁴³ Most noteworthy from Broughs’s play is the depiction of the Monster. Other characters in the play more or less follow portrayals from earlier adaptations, but the Monster, listed in the *Dramatis Personae* as “The What Is It,” speaks in Broughs’s play.⁴⁴ After being abandoned in the laboratory the Monster says:

Well though I have’nt mixed much in society,
 That seems to me an outrage on propriety,
 Closing by such unceremonious plan,
 The only opening for a nice young man
 In life but just begun, as one might say,
 To look around him and to see his way.
 But stop. Where am I, aye & likewise who?⁴⁵

Replicating the Creature in Shelly's novel, the Monster shows a mental awareness absent in prior productions. He also hints at the profound sense of uncertainty about who or what he is that will be repeated in future productions. Part of the humor lies in the rapidity in which the Monster speaks and thinks, only heightened by the clever verse used throughout the play. After the Monster's intellectual awakening he breaks into song, singing verses, "I'm a gent, I'm a gent ready made..."⁴⁶ The song foreshadows the future cinematic parody, *Young Frankenstein*, and its musical number "Puttin' on the Ritz," featuring a Karloff-like Creature dancing in a tuxedo with Gene Wilder's Dr. Frankenstein.⁴⁷ Also similar to *Young Frankenstein* is the civility of the Monster in *The Model Man*. He appears "neatly dressed á la happy Villager with his hair and moustaches curled" by the play's end. Frankenstein responds to his newly cleaned-up creation, "Come to my arms you wild young rascal do, I don't mind saying I'm proud of you."⁴⁸ The Monster and Frankenstein embrace, leaving behind a happier conclusion than seen in most Frankenstein adaptations.

Susan Tyler Hitchcock writes, "With every offbeat parody, the core story of *Frankenstein* was retold and remembered, to the point that many an author could presume general familiarity with plot and message."⁴⁹ The parodies illustrate that Frankenstein is a myth that can manifest itself in an assortment of ways. From the burlesque-extravaganzas of the 1800s, to the parodies of *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* and *Young Frankenstein*, to the camp of Herman Munster in television's *The Munsters* and Frank N. Furter "an alien scientist born on the planet Transsexual in the galaxy Transylvania" in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, the story of Frankenstein has always shown a possibility for humorous and absurd interpretation.⁵⁰ In many of these comical adaptations the reference to Frankenstein is winked at, loosely played with, or confused by referring to the Monster/Creature *as* Frankenstein.⁵¹ Yet, these adaptations

exemplify that there is something potentially funny about the story. Even in dramatic adaptations there are hints of comedy in the audiences' observation of the Creature fumbling through a world considered commonplace. It is amusing almost on a slapstick level to see the Creature place his hand in fire not knowing it would burn him. Additionally, many dramatic interpretations add humorous, lower characters. Dear's script, not uncommon in this vein, deploys humor through the lower characters of Ewan, Rab, and Clarice. Ewan and Rab are two crofters who argue about the beauty of the "terribly skinny" female corpse they dig up.⁵² Clarice, the servant of Elizabeth, amusingly relates to the young bride with her own trials of marital sex. By comparison Shelley's novel has little comedic reprieve. Philip Stevick discusses in "*Frankenstein and Comedy*" that despite the darkly serious tone of the novel, the story has the "capacity to provoke laughter."⁵³ While Stevick focuses primarily on how the novel is composed of illogical events that may provoke humor in their preposterousness, he notes that the story can "arouse an extraordinary wide range of responses, one of which is amusement."⁵⁴

Dear's script, like all *Frankenstein* adaptations, in part lends itself to amusement because the story is part of the horror genre. In horror the "distress" of our fear is "outweighed...by the pleasure we derive in having our curiosity stimulated and rewarded."⁵⁵ As Noël Carroll points out, a creature coming to life at the hands of a naïve scientist can be both terrifying and fascinating. Comedic dramatizations illustrate that within the fine line between attraction and repulsion, disbelief and fear, and amusement and anxiety a nudge in one direction can garner laughs instead of shrieks. When Lou Costello's Wilbur Grey watches Dracula bring *Frankenstein* back to life in *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* the audience laughs as his eyes widen, he bites his lip with fear, and quickly decides to appear frozen in a catatonic state.⁵⁶ In comedic adaptations the audience is asked to laugh at the unbelievable; in dramatic adaptations the

audience is asked to be horrified at the possible. The separation between the two categorizations of Frankenstein adaptations is thin, because even an adaptation that attempts to terrify can produce laughter in its failure.

Aside from the few parodies and burlesques, there was a dearth of Frankenstein adaptations in the late 1800s. By the early 1900s a groundbreaking adaptation was overdue. Introducing my third category of adaptations, the budding medium of film offered the story of Frankenstein an opportunity to be inventively dramatized. Albert J. Lavalley writes, “The images from various films are so firmly imprinted on our minds that it is almost impossible not to filter the events and images of the book through the more familiar ones of the films.”⁵⁷ The film adaptations of Frankenstein, particularly from Universal Studios, have guided much of the public perception about Frankenstein in the twentieth century. The annual Halloween costumes that celebrate Frankenstein replicate Karloff’s Creature with a green face, a flat head with dark hair, and bolts placed in the side of the neck. Hitchcock summarizes, “This is our monster... This is the monster called by his creator’s name, if named at all.”⁵⁸ Before the Universal films dominated the image of Frankenstein, Edison Film Company released a 1910 silent film adaptation starring Charles Ogle in the role of the Monster. The short film follows the “highly moralistic melodrama of nineteenth-century theatrical presentations.”⁵⁹ The film also offers a rare glimpse of the Creature in action, pre-Karloff. Ogle’s strange distorted face, bizarre makeup, and mummy-like garment make his Monster’s appearance a contrast from previous dramatizations. In theatrical adaptations of the 1820s the Creature was mostly blue with makeup more “clown-like than monstrous.”⁶⁰ Most images depicting T.P. Cooke in *Presumption* show a Creature who is large in stature, with a somewhat crazed look in his eye, but lacking the disfigurement or stitches now associated with the monster. Legendary makeup artist Jack Pierce

spent nearly three weeks with Boris Karloff designing the look for the Universal film that would henceforth be recognized as *the* appearance of the Creature.⁶¹ Baldick calls the iconic look of Karloff as having “fixed our idea of the monster into a universally-known image from which it is hard to see further revisions breaking free.”⁶² I agree with Baldick, but I argue that future adaptations have successfully challenged Hollywood’s monster by allowing the Creature to speak once again. When the Creature speaks, the importance of the visual aspect of the character is diminished.

Edison’s *Frankenstein* offered a chance for amazing visual representations and proved that the story could work in the medium of film. With access to the effects of editing, the creation scene and several sequences could be performed unlike any dramatization before by using “clever photographic tricks.”⁶³ During the creation scene Dr. Frankenstein watches through a caldron window to observe the creation of his Monster. In the cauldron the Monster rapidly recomposes from a skeleton. It is mesmerizing to watch the Creature flesh out in front of our eyes, without the traditional electricity or lighting. The film is a brief series of scenes with the Creature scaring and pursuing Frankenstein and his young bride.⁶⁴ The ending of the film follows the Creature into a room with a large mirror. He sees his own grotesqueness in his reflection. Dr. Frankenstein enters the room, and the Monster then appears as the reflection of Dr. Frankenstein. This short scene is a “sequence of masterful splicing,” stylishly illustrating the shared duality of the Monster and Dr. Frankenstein.⁶⁵ Dr. Frankenstein is shocked at seeing his monstrous reflection, but the image quickly changes to a normal reflection of himself. The Monster is now just a terrifying memory.

In the early part of the twentieth century the prospect of putting a larger scale Frankenstein on screen became possible with developing technology. Simultaneously, new stage

adaptations of Frankenstein were being written. Peggy Webling's 1927 *Frankenstein: An Adventure in the Macabre* was performed in and around London as a companion piece to Hamilton Deane's *Dracula*.⁶⁶ Webling's script follows Frankenstein as he creates a Monster that kills Frankenstein's sister and the creator after refusing to build him a companion.⁶⁷ Universal Studios purchased Webling's play and hired playwright John Balderston to adapt the script and James Whale to direct the film. The proximity of the final film version to Webling's play is not close in many regards, but the Creature is kept a "loutish brute imbued with a child's longing for pleasure and acceptance."⁶⁸

The James Whale films *Frankenstein* and *Bride of Frankenstein* are stylistically indebted to many German expressionist films. Lavalley claims that the Universal films "owed much to the psychology of terror so brilliantly exploited" in the German films *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *The Golem*, and *Metropolis*.⁶⁹ The visual style, tone, and mysterious quality of these films can be seen in Whale's Frankensteins, particularly in revealing the Creature. It is hard not to see the resemblance of Karloff's Monster to Cesare in the *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and Lon Chaney's Phantom in the 1925 *The Phantom of the Opera*. Yet, the Universal films created so many of their own iconic sequences, shots, and characters that they too have spawned many to follow their lead. The most fascinating aspects of *Frankenstein* and *Bride of Frankenstein* are the presentation of Dr. Frankenstein and the Creature/Monster. Despite following earlier play adaptations by making the Monster mute, the films allowed various close-ups and subtle moments where Karloff's Monster is allowed to act rather than be in constant motion. Many of Whale's close-ups show the Monster in the stark, frightening shadows of the castle or in the bright wilderness, possessing a serene appearance. "Close-ups of Karloff's suffering and barely comprehending face only...heighten our sympathy for the Monster," thereby making our

empathy for the Monster match our fear.⁷⁰ When the Monster encounters other people he is capable of relating to them through minimal means including a twitch of the face, a look in the eye, and the sound of a grunt. Karloff plays the silent brute with remarkable range. With Karloff's portrayal and the visual style of Whale's direction, an icon was made.

In relation to the silent Karloff Monster, who scared and thrilled the mass audiences at the movies, is his counterpart, the anxious and driven Dr. Frankenstein. In the early twentieth century scientists were making advances the world could hardly anticipate, particularly entering into World War II. The egotistical scientist who scarcely acknowledges ethical boundaries was becoming a reality, and both of Whale's films replicate the building fear surrounding such men and their dangerous experiments. In the films the character of Dr. Frankenstein displays a range of emotions including pride, joy, shame, grief, and anger, similarly to the character in Shelley's novel. Dr. Frankenstein becomes consumed with guilt and unable to act, rather than filled with endless determination to stop the monster as presented in earlier melodramatic stage adaptations. The accountability of Dr. Frankenstein is related to his concern for others welfare and not by his failure to teach or nurture his creation as a human being. There are few creation scenes that can rival Whale's cinematic adaptation. With his assistant Fritz, the newly-named Henry Frankenstein zealously and egotistically allows his friend Victor, Elizabeth, and Dr. Waldman to sit and watch his moment of creation.⁷¹ Dr. Frankenstein's secret experiment is willingly exposed; he allows others to observe what he maddeningly believes is his moment of glory. He sparks his Monster to life with lightning crashing and various machines ignited, enthusiastically shouting, "It's alive!...Now I know what it feels like to be God."⁷²

The film follows the narrative trajectory seen in many adaptations, but concludes with an angry mob chasing the Creature though the uninhabited hillsides. The final showdown between

Dr. Frankenstein and his creation occurs in a windmill. Lacking speech, there is no opportunity for the Creature to place blame on Dr. Frankenstein. After a brief struggle Frankenstein is thrown from the top of the windmill, and the windmill is set on fire by the angry mob of villagers. In *Bride of Frankenstein* we are assured both men lived; and the new 'Dr. Frankenstein' is the evil Dr. Pretorius, who manipulates the humble and defeated Frankenstein to create another creature. The Monster speaks in the sequel, saying limited phrases such as, "I love dead. Hate living."⁷³ At the film's end the Monster even saves Frankenstein, telling him "You live." Frankenstein escapes as the Monster destroys the laboratory with himself, Dr. Pretorius, and the failed companion bride inside.⁷⁴ The sequel permitted a continuing evolution of the Monster as he speaks and grasps complex human concepts of friendship and sacrifice. Lavalley assesses that of all the films *Bride of Frankenstein* comes "closest to Mary Shelley's emphasis on desolation and loneliness."⁷⁵ These themes likely emerged because Whale lets the story unravel over two films, allowing both characters to rise, fall, and rise again.

In comparison, the 1957 Hammer Film Productions' *The Curse of Frankenstein* dismisses any sympathy for the Monster or Dr. Frankenstein. The Hammer screenwriters deliberately departed from the previous films and present the story with darker characters and themes. Dr. Frankenstein, portrayed by the actor Peter Cushing, appears quite older than the young Frankenstein in Shelley's novel. He also significantly lacks the plaguing conscience of past Dr. Frankensteins. To acquire a brain for his experiment he kills a brilliant scholar who visits him. After animating his Creature he chains him up in his laboratory and allows him to kill his pregnant lover Justine. Hitchcock assesses that, "He kills without conscience, he operates without a doubt."⁷⁶ Frankenstein's counterpart, the Creature, is silent and appears more disconnected from humanity than any previous Creature. The Creature, played by Christopher

Lee, is “ridged, pimpled, and pockmarked,” and he ambles about the wilderness and kills without any flicker of awareness.⁷⁷ Paul Krempe, Frankenstein’s friend and mentor, interrogates Frankenstein when he watches the Creature’s limited ability to follow directions, asking, “Is this your superior being?”⁷⁸ In the end, the Creature is set on fire and falls into an acid bath, and Dr. Frankenstein is locked away and charged with the murder of Justine. The protagonists, Krempe and Elizabeth, leave Dr. Frankenstein to be executed, rambling ‘madly’ how his Creature was the murderer. The 1957 audiences who made the film popular were exhausted by war and cold-war paranoia. In the film they are given the ‘normal’ and ethically concerned Krempe and Elizabeth to rally behind and empathize with, and the two characters survive while Dr. Frankenstein and the Creature face their deaths yet again. Though the film was criticized for its gore, epitomized in a scene where Dr. Frankenstein shoots the Creature’s eye out, the film was a huge success.⁷⁹ Furthermore, the movie kept the Frankenstein story alive in the public’s mind.

Dramatizations in the second half of the twentieth century continued alternating between parodies and serious adaptations for both stage and screen. It is also during the second half of the twentieth century where visionary dramatizations were conceived. Almost as a reaction to the commercial horror films released by Universal and Hammer Productions, stage adaptations strove for innovation rather than appealing to popular taste. The fourth category of Frankenstein adaptations approached the story with vibrant originality, and The Living Theater’s 1966 *Frankenstein* is an excellent example. Becoming one of the theatre’s landmark productions the play used the “Frankenstein myth [as] a means of asserting its more Rousseauistic leanings, its antipathy to social corruption, its belief in innate goodness, and universality of cycles of creation and destruction” as a response the hopeful idealism that surged again in the mid-1960s.⁸⁰ Judith Malina constructed her *Frankenstein* by combining references from the Frankenstein films,

Metropolis, *Modern Times*, and Shelley's novel.⁸¹ The play travels through various settings and explores ideas from Greek and Judeo-Christian religion to prison anarchy. The Living Theater's *Frankenstein* was three acts and three hours of "ritual, myth, nightmares, and legends of ancient science and contemporary civilization."⁸² At one point Frankenstein asks, "How can we end human suffering?"⁸³ The Creature/Monster is not a character in Malina's play. Instead the Creature is an assembly of ideas shaped by humanity and visually represented by a group of people and the outline of a head. Dr. Frankenstein is in an abyss, left alone with his decision to create life. Pierre Biner describes him as "an impotent spectator of violence and injustice, decid[ing] to start all over again from the beginning, in order to make the world different, more livable."⁸⁴ The Living Theater's play is astoundingly differently from other adaptations. However, it similarly portrays a Frankenstein who pursues the belief that his ability to give life might just change the world for the better.

The darker, anarchic themes introduced in The Living Theatre's *Frankenstein* form Clive Barker's adaptation. Barker, one of the most prolific film directors and authors in the horror genre, wrote *Frankenstein in Love, or The Life of Death*. First performed in 1982 at The Cockpit Theatre in London the extraordinarily innovative play was "inspired by" Shelley's novel and continues to be staged in America and England. Using the Grand Guignol tradition, Barker says in his production notes that the play is "designed to disturb and scare its audience...But that for all the trickery and effects in the piece, its strength must finally reside in its efficacy as a story."⁸⁵ The play has shocking descriptions and gory events, but manages to find moments of humor, most likely based in its own ludicrousness. Here the world is presented as Post-Frankenstein. Frankenstein, now an old man, never stopped with his first Creature and instead assembled and tortured masses of new beings. The Creature, called El Coco, says of Frankenstein, "Sons are

always like their fathers, however deeply the resemblance is buried. I wanted to see him once more, know the miseries I'd inherit, then kill him." The monstrosity of El Coco pales to Frankenstein. Frankenstein has men tear the flesh off the Creature's body, demanding "Unman him, unmake him." Yet, El Coco survives and sews himself together again. He pursues Frankenstein, as he always does, and reappears before his maker stating, "I'm still here...Couldn't I pass for a man?...And so, appearing to be a man, I claim the right of every natural son: to murder his father."⁸⁶ The audience is asked to keep up with new subplots, added characters, and a guerilla revolution backdrop, while the story's base is composed of the same enduring Creature, Frankenstein, and their strange, unresolvable relationship. While Forry calls the play "arguably the most challenging adaptation ever written," he makes it clear that "Many excellent scenes could be quoted at length to illustrate the fervor of Barker's prose and the intensity of the play."⁸⁷ Barker's play continues to be popular due to his careful and entertaining manipulation of the Frankenstein story. In a less conventional way than Nick Dear's script, Barker possesses a keen sense of what works in Frankenstein, such as the complicated relationship between creator/creation and father/son, in order to reconceive it.

As far as Barker's play strays from Shelley's original plot line, playwrights and filmmakers return to her story, claiming faithfulness to it in their adaptations. Victor Gialanella's 1981 Broadway play and Kenneth Branagh's 1994 film retain many aspects from the novel, particularly in preserving the traditional characterizations of the Creature and Dr. Frankenstein. The dramatizations represent a restoration of 'authenticity' and belong to my fifth category of Frankenstein adaptations. In Gialanella's script Victor reappears as a young man, full of hubris, increasingly isolated from loved ones in the pursuit of his experiment, and overwrought with guilt and fear. Distracted by his hunger to create life he exclaims in his laboratory, "We stand at

the threshold of a new age of man. The dawn of a new species who will bless us as their creators.”⁸⁸ The machines pulsate, lightning crashes, but the creation appears a failure. The Creature is left alone in the laboratory, but then “sits bolt upright with a deep horrendous scream...sits for a moment, breathing deeply as it recovers from the violence of its birth.” The Creature sets out into the world and is greeted by the terror and hatred of humanity, strongly resembling Shelley’s Creature. Gialanella allows the Creature to develop a lengthy relationship with De Lacey, from whom he learns how to speak and read. In these later dramatizations the Creature is once again articulate and thoughtful, developing a sharp awareness that “I am not as other men. I have memories...pain.” The conversations between the Creature and Frankenstein depict a convoluted relationship similar to Shelley’s novel. The Creature seeks answers, help, and companionship from Frankenstein, yet Frankenstein is incapable and unwilling. Victor, astonished at the Creature’s path of murder, says, “Oh my God. What have you done?,” to which the Creature replies, “What have we done, oh Creator.” Gialanella resolves his play with Victor chasing the Creature into the laboratory. The Creature kills the young man by breaking his back. Setting the laboratory on fire the Creature speaks to the body of Frankenstein, “Farewell...I shall die as you are dead...But we will be bound together, forever all alone.”⁸⁹ The complicity of both characters is evident in Gialanella’s script, leaving their mutual deaths the only reasonable conclusion.

Branagh’s film, *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein*, is highly stylized and full of lavish costumes and sets. The adaptation comes closer to Shelley’s novel than many previous dramatizations. The inclusion of Robert Walton, the execution of Justine, the deep (if not overly sexualized) loving relationship between Elizabeth and Victor, and the Creature’s evolution follow Shelley’s novel. Talented actors like Robert De Niro, Branagh, and Helena Bonham

Carter perform their scenes with nuanced subtlety and sincerity. Seldom has Frankenstein exuded the depth of remorse, the desperation to rectify his mistake, and the sense of loss as he does in Branagh's portrayal. De Niro's Creature is a large man, sewn together with hideous scars, has unusual colored eyes, and is affected by a speech that sounds strenuous. Talking with De Lacey the Creature softly and resignedly tells the blind man why people reject him: "Because I am so very ugly, and they are so very beautiful."⁹⁰ When the Creature encounters Frankenstein in the snowy, ice cavern where he resides, Frankenstein observes, "You do speak." The Creature responds, "Yes, I speak. And read. And think. And know the ways of man."⁹¹ The film has moments of excessive gore, such as the Creature ripping out the still beating heart from Elizabeth's chest. Such effects exemplify the film's attempt to compete in the horror genre and to shock an audience familiar with the monster in front of them. The movie ends like the novel. The Creature lights a funeral pyre on a drifting ice raft with Frankenstein's body as Walton's ship heads back home.

Despite the adherence to the novel, both Gialanella's play and Branagh's film were critical and commercial failures. Forry writes that Gialanella's play was "much maligned" and "lost two million dollars when it closed on Broadway the day after its premier."⁹² Frank Rich in the *New York Times* argued that though many think the story of Frankenstein is "foolproof," Gialanella's script lacked a sense of fun and missed "the gripping tone of the book [and] the humorous pleasure of the film."⁹³ With poor reviews and high pre-production expenses producers quickly closed the show. After its failure director Tom Moore told the *New York Times*, "We didn't attempt to say anything with a message in 'Frankenstein.' We attempted to make a grand entertainment - a spectacle - and we did."⁹⁴ Branagh's film had an expensive budget, estimated at 45 million dollars. The film meagerly opened to a U.S. box office of under

12 million.⁹⁵ Critics were not often kind to the film. Critic Desson Howe for *The Washington Post* fairly summarizes the film's uneven tone, writing, "from swashbuckling adventure to classic horror to frilly-shirted romance to campiness to graphic gorefest, there's no telling what you're watching."⁹⁶ Gialanella and Branagh's dramatizations illustrate the fickleness of staging Frankenstein for modern audiences and the high price of creating a spectacle that may fail. Despite the criticism, particularly for Gialanella's script, his adaptation continues to be staged in theatres across the country. The failure of the play and movie illustrate that Dear and Boyle had to discover a way to make the show a spectacle without relying on spectacle alone for storytelling. The failures also illuminate that for the material to work for modern audiences the contemporary relevance of the story had to be rediscovered and that returning to Shelley's novel would not alone guarantee success. In Chapter Three how Dear and Boyle created a successful, imaginative, and spectacular production will prove how the two men avoided the fate Branagh and Gialanella's adaptations met.

The story of Frankenstein reincarnates on stages and screens introducing new dramatizations every year. The history of Frankenstein in performance shows the endless possibilities as previous adaptations have ranged from melodramas in the 1820s, multiple comedies and parodies, films in the 1930s and 1950s, and dramatic adaptations in the last half of the twentieth century that are bizarre or conventional. Few other stories have had as many lives as Frankenstein. While some of these dramatizations are now a mere footnote, they contributed to the lasting fascination of Frankenstein and sustained or created the patterns that dramatizations continue to use. The Creature and Dr. Frankenstein have changed, but the characters consistently appeal to audience's sympathies, curiosities, and fears. Nick Dear and Danny Boyle crafted their play with the history of dramatizations in mind. They created an adaptation that merges patterns

with their own originality by placing the Creature as the central character. The choice is creative and unique, but not incidental. In Chapter Two my exploration of Frankenstein as a modern myth will clarify how the changes seen in the many adaptations and Dear's script reflect shifting cultural ideologies and social anxieties. The story of Frankenstein has sustained its intrigue because of its capacity to change and its ability to stay relevant over time. After all, every time Dr. Frankenstein animates his Creature the audience is not surprised but still curiously awaiting to see what happens next.

¹ Marilyn Butler, introduction to *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus: The 1818 Text* by Mary Shelley, edited by Marilyn Butler (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008), xv.

² Mellor, "Monster," 43-44.

³ Harold Bloom, introduction to *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: Mary Shelley's Frankenstein: Updated Edition*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 2007), 4.

⁴ Mary Shelley, Introduction, *Frankenstein (1831)*, 23. When discussing Shelley's novel I will reference the 1818 text. I am interested in illustrating that after the publication of 1818 text many stage adaptations were immediately written and performed. There are differences in the 1831 text, but most scholars agree that contrasts were largely in style and not in idea.

⁵ Paul O'Flinn, "Production and Reproduction: The Case of *Frankenstein*," in *New Casebooks: Frankenstein: Mary Shelley*, ed. Fred Botting (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995) 26-27.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁷ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus: The 1818 Text*, edited by Marilyn Butler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 180. Further citations of this work are given in the text.

⁸ Albert J. Lavalley, "The Stage and Film Children of *Frankenstein*: A Survey," in *The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel*, ed. George Levine and U.C. Knoepfelmacher (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 244.

⁹ Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1987), 41. Many consider Shelley's novel ahead of its time given its modern perspective, including its use of significant scientific and secular considerations.

¹⁰ Joyce Carol Oates, "Frankenstein's Fallen Angel," in *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: Mary Shelley's Frankenstein: Updated Edition*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 2007), 34.

¹¹ Lavalley, "Stage," 244.

¹² Butler, introduction, xxx.

¹³ Luigi Galvani was an Italian scientist in the late 1700s who experimented with 'animation' after observing sparks from static electricity could generate leg twitches in dead frogs. His experiments in bioelectricity continued to interest scientists and doctors for the next century, leading many to think animals and humans could be animated by electricity.

¹⁴ In all the adaptations I have watched or read Dr. Frankenstein's reaction is consistently repulsion and fear. The exception is Gialanella's 1981 *Frankenstein*, where Victor immediately reacts with curiosity at his Creature's abilities and strength.

¹⁵ Bloom, introduction, 6.

¹⁶ The brutality of human interactions the Creature experiences through various dramatizations ranges from being chased, shot at, stabbed, and beaten with various objects. Victor Frankenstein also commits some of these violent acts, sometimes without provocation.

¹⁷ O'Flinn, "Production," 34.

¹⁸ Denise Gigante, "Facing the Ugly: The Case of Frankenstein," *ELH* 67, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 582, accessed January 17, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org.www2.lib.ku.edu:2048/stable/30031925>.

¹⁹ Steven Earl Forry, *Hideous Progenies: Dramatizations of "Frankenstein" from Mary Shelley to the Present*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 4.

²⁰ Butler, introduction, 1.

²¹ Forry, *Hideous*, 3.

²² Stephen C. Behrendt, "Introduction," to *Presumption; or The Fate of Frankenstein*, Romantic Circles Electronic Edition (website), accessed February 10, 2012, <http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/peake/apparatus/introduction.html>.

²³ Botting, Introduction, 3.

²⁴ Baldick, *Frankenstein's Shadow*, 59-60.

²⁵ In several adaptations, commonly before 1960, the Creature is referred to as the Monster. I will refer to the character as the Monster in reference to these adaptations.

²⁶ Richard Brinsley Peake, *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein, Hideous Progenies: Dramatizations of "Frankenstein" from Mary Shelley to the Present*, ed. Steven Earl Forry (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 146.

²⁷ Forry, *Hideous*, 22.

²⁸ Peake, *Presumption*, 152. Aside from Frankenstein and the Creature, character names fluctuate between dramatizations, evident in the appearance of 'Agatha.' In what is usually a conflation of ideas, Frankenstein's love interest, his friendships and family ties, and the residents of the 'De Lacey' cottage are a mixture of names and characterizations borrowed from Shelley's novel and originally conceived. The inconsistency of the supporting characters only reaffirms that the significant characters are Frankenstein and the Creature.

²⁹ Peake, *Presumption*, 43; Henry M. Milner, *Frankenstein; or, The Man and the Monster*, in *Hideous Progenies: Dramatizations of "Frankenstein" from Mary Shelley to the Present*, ed. Steven Earl Forry (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 198.

³⁰ Peake, *Presumption*, 137.

³¹ Lavalley, "Stage," 247

³² Milner, *Frankenstein*, 202.

³³ *Ibid.*, 202.

³⁴ Peake, *Presumption*, 143.

³⁵ Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 19 and 53.

³⁶ Forry discusses the many ways Creatures die on stage, often after being shot. He describes one play in which the "Creature shoves a burning stake down his throat." In the accumulating history of Frankenstein adaptations, writers attempt to find new, shocking ways for the Creature to die. This is especially evident in film dramatizations. See Forry, page 127, endnote 6.

³⁷ Forry, *Hideous*, 10.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 121.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

⁴⁰ Lavalley, "Stage," 250.

⁴¹ Glut, *Catalog*, 145.

⁴² *Frank-in-Steam; or The Modern Promise to Pay*, in *Hideous Progenies: Dramatizations of "Frankenstein" from Mary Shelley to the Present*, ed. Steven Earl Forry (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 182.

⁴³ Forry, *Hideous*, 54.

⁴⁴ Richard and Barnabas Brough, *Frankenstein; or, The Model Man*, in *Hideous Progenies: Dramatizations of "Frankenstein" from Mary Shelley to the Present*, ed. Steven Earl Forry (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 227.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 238-239.

⁴⁷ *Young Frankenstein*, directed by Mel Brooks, (1974; Century City, CA: 20th Century Fox Film Corporation), film. The dancing scene similarly occurs in the Broadway musical of *Young Frankenstein*, which opened in November of 2007. The musical received mixed reviews and did not have the same success as the film version. Interestingly, the stage production designed the Monster to have green makeup, in line with most post-Karloff representations.

⁴⁸ This and preceding quotation are both from Brough, *Model*, 249.

⁴⁹ Susan Tyler Hitchcock, *Frankenstein: A Cultural History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 105.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁵¹ Though the phenomenon of the Creature/Monster referred to as Frankenstein will be discussed in Chapter Two, it should be noted that this confusion is repeated in adaptations making the same ‘mistake.’ For example, Abbott and Costello meet the Creature/Monster, not Dr. Frankenstein.

⁵² Nick Dear, *Frankenstein* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), 55.

⁵³ Philip Stevick, “*Frankenstein* and Comedy,” in *The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley’s Novel*, ed. George Levine and U.C. Knoepfelmacher (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 221

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁵⁵ Carroll, *Philosophy*, 193.

⁵⁶ *Bud Abbott and Lou Costello Meet Frankenstein*, directed by Charles Barton (1948; Universal City, CA: Universal Studios), film. I use the abbreviated title of the film *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*, as it is commonly referred.

⁵⁷ Lavalley, “Stage,” 243.

⁵⁸ Hitchcock, *Cultural*, 3-4.

⁵⁹ Lavalley, “Stage,” 250. The Edison film was considered lost for much of the twentieth century. In 2010 it was publically released and available on several websites.

⁶⁰ Lavalley, “Stage,” 249.

⁶¹ Robert F. Moss, *Karloff and Company: The Horror Film* (New York: Pyramid Publications, 1976), 26.

⁶² Baldick, *Frankenstein’s Shadow*, 5.

⁶³ Hitchcock, *Cultural*, 125.

⁶⁴ *Frankenstein*, directed by J. Searle Dewey, (1910; Edison Manufacturing Company), film, accessed December 23, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcLxsOJK9bs>.

⁶⁵ Hitchcock, *Cultural*, 129.

⁶⁶ Forry, *Hideous*, 90.

⁶⁷ Glut, *Catalog*, 155.

⁶⁸ Forry, *Hideous*, 99.

⁶⁹ Lavalley, “Stage,” 252.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 265.

⁷¹ Another example of unnecessary name changing, few movie theorists can explain why Henry was changed from Victor besides giving a more familiar, American-sounding name to the main character.

⁷² *Frankenstein*, directed by James Whale (1931; Universal City, CA: Universal Studios), film.

⁷³ *Bride of Frankenstein*, directed by James Whale (1935; Universal City, CA: Universal Studios), film.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Lavalley, "Stage," 275.

⁷⁶ Hitchcock, *Cultural*, 213.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁷⁸ *The Curse of Frankenstein*, directed by Terence Fisher (1957; United Kingdom: Hammer Film Productions), film.

⁷⁹ "The Curse of Frankenstein," *BFI ScreenOnline* (website), accessed February 10, 2012, <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/455382/index.html>.

⁸⁰ Lavalley, "Stage," 278.

⁸¹ Pierre Biner, *The Living Theatre* (New York: Horizon Press, 1972), 111.

⁸² John Tytell, *The Living Theatre: Art, Exile, and Outrage* (New York: Grove Press, 1995), 210.

⁸³ Biner, *Living*, 121.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁸⁵ Clive Barker, *Frankenstein in Love, or The Life of Death*, in *Incarnations* (New York: HarperPrism, 1995), 151-152.

⁸⁶ This and the preceding two quotations are all from Barker, *Frankenstein*, 186, 199, and 238.

⁸⁷ Forry, *Hideous*, 116 and 119.

⁸⁸ Victor Gialanella, *Frankenstein* (New York: Dramatists Play Service Inc., 1982), 23.

⁸⁹ This and preceding three quotations are all from Gialanella, *Frankenstein*, 26, 41, 44, and 60.

⁹⁰ *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, directed by Kenneth Branagh (1994; Culver City, CA: TriStar Pictures), film.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Forry, *Hideous*, 112.

⁹³ Frank Rich, "Theater: 'Frankenstein' Has Premiere At Palace," *New York Times*, January 5, 1981, accessed February 11, 2012, <http://theater.nytimes.com/mem/theater/treview.html?res=9E04E1DF173BF936A35752C0A967948260>.

⁹⁴ Carol Lawson, "'Frankenstein' Nearly Came Back to Life," *New York Times*, January 7, 1982, accessed February 11, 2012, <http://theater.nytimes.com/mem/theater/treview.html?res=9F03E3DC173BF934A35752C0A967948260>.

⁹⁵ "Frankenstein (1994)," *IMDb* (website), accessed January 27, 2012, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0109836/>.

⁹⁶ Desson Howe, "'Mary Shelley's Frankenstein,'" *Washington Post*, November 4, 1994, accessed January 27, 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/maryshelleysfrankensteinhowe_a01afc.htm.

Chapter Two: The Myth of Frankenstein

The word myth brings to mind stories from ancient times, and in our Western world often evokes an assortment of Greek and Roman gods and goddesses. The nineteenth century *Frankenstein* does not fit the model. Yet, writers consistently describe Frankenstein as a myth. Many clarify the story's contemporary origins specifically categorizing Frankenstein as a 'modern myth.' Like ancient myths, modern myths are comprised of characters that capture the public's imagination and transcend a single adaptation. The stories of Frankenstein, Faust, Don Quixote, and Dracula are usually acknowledged as examples of modern mythology, given their recent development and the fact they represent more than a fictional character or story.¹ However, Frankenstein appears distinctly different from these other modern myths. Few stories, from modern or ancient times, can compare with the many ways Frankenstein permeates popular culture, entertainment, and social consciousness. For example, on January 5, 2012, *The Telegraph* reported on 'Frankenstein' ants that were man-made and genetically engineered.² The idea of Frankenstein is anchored deeply enough in our language, thoughts, and culture that it can be used as a loose reference in a news story about genetically modified ants. There is something particularly rare and exceptional about the many ways we continue to use and be interested in the myth of Frankenstein.

Anne K. Mellor writes that Frankenstein "can claim the status of a myth" because it "so profoundly resonat[es] in its implications for our comprehension of our selves and our place in the world."³ Susan Tyler Hitchcock addresses Frankenstein's mythology stating, "The story of Frankenstein's monster is a myth of claiming long-forbidden knowledge and facing the consequences."⁴ When interviewed about the 2011 *Frankenstein* Nick Dear called the story a "modern creation myth" with "resonance and strong dramatic possibilities."⁵ With so many

people describing Frankenstein as a myth it is difficult to understand what definition of myth is being used. Complicating the issue is the uniqueness of the Frankenstein myth. It is often compared to earlier myths, but is also defined as a myth in its own right. The myth continues to evolve past its origin in Shelley's novel, but several adaptations revert to the novel in the hope of reclaiming authenticity of the story itself. Its long history of dramatizations adds to its mythology. However, a myriad of social anxieties and cultural ideologies inform these dramatizations. The simplicity of labeling Frankenstein a myth frequently ignores the complexities of mythology and Frankenstein.

In this chapter I clarify how Frankenstein is a myth and what it means for Frankenstein to be considered a myth. Beginning with Levi-Strauss's analysis of myths and Chris Baldick's addendum to Levi-Strauss's assessment, I will illustrate why Frankenstein can be defined as a modern myth. Frankenstein's relations to earlier myths, including Prometheus and the Genesis creation myth, will be briefly addressed. However, Frankenstein's mythology remains separate from these stories and does not adhere to the same standards ancient myths do. Using Roland Barthes's *Mythologies*, I will show how the cultural investment in the myth of Frankenstein recurs through the many incarnations the story has had as a novel and dramatization. From Shelley's novel, through the 1820s, 1930s, and the latter half of the twentieth century, the myth of Frankenstein reflects our cultural fear of progress. The ideological framing of Frankenstein proves that the story continues to intrigue us as it finds new ways to reflect our anxieties. Finally, Frankenstein's mythic status illustrates why there are high expectations for a new dramatization. Dear and Boyle's production allowed the story to reinvent itself and to reinvigorate the relevance of the myth. Lavalley explains:

Frankenstein has always been viewed by the playwright or the screenwriter as a mythic text, an occasion for the writer to let loose his own fantasies or to stage what he feels is dramatically effective, to remain true to the central core of the myth, and often to let it interact with fears and tensions of the current time...⁶

Lavalley summarizes what I hope to elucidate in the following chapter. The myth of *Frankenstein* is open to countless adaptations, in part because it continues to represent the anxiety we experience in the world around us.

Somewhere between the many lives of *Frankenstein* and the many definitions of myth the intersection of the two has created a story that continues to enthrall us and envelop us. On his deathbed the young Dr. Frankenstein in Shelley's novel remembers the creation that "destroyed [his] friends" and "devoted to destruction beings who possessed exquisite sensations, happiness, and wisdom."⁷ *Frankenstein's* haunted memories demonstrate the possible ramifications in the pursuit of progress. In the modern age, where our push for progress continually encounters our perceived limits and raises ethical quandaries, the story of *Frankenstein* reverberates. *Frankenstein* is a modern myth, and as O'Flinn reminds us, "If ideology has taken hold of *Frankenstein* and remade it for its own purposes, Mary Shelley led with her own suggestions about how it might be done."⁸

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines myth as "a usually traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon."⁹ By many accounts *Frankenstein* fulfills the definition. *Frankenstein* is a story that is used to explain the potential dangers in the unruliness of certain social, political, and scientific phenomena. However, the word 'traditional' is fraught with

implications that may exclude Frankenstein due to its contemporaneity. Chris Baldick writes, “There may be Shelleyan purists for whom the development of the myth is all a huge mistake.”¹⁰ These purists may object to Frankenstein’s mythology due to a classic understanding of myth or because claiming the story as myth distorts the integrity of Shelley’s novel. Claude Lévi-Strauss in “The Structural Study of Myth” appears to eliminate Frankenstein from the possibility of being called a myth. Lévi-Strauss writes, “a myth always refers to events alleged to have taken place in time: before the world was created, or during its first stages—anyway, long ago.”¹¹ Baldick also acknowledges myths are typically considered to be “exclusively a product of pre-literate cultures.”¹² By these standards Shelley’s novel would fail to produce a myth given that it is a literary work from recent times.

Frankenstein has often been compared to myths that comply with Lévi-Strauss’s temporal qualification. The full title of Shelley’s novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* references an ancient Greek myth. The myth portrays a wily Prometheus who is capable of deceiving Zeus. In earlier versions “He was probably nothing more than a clever trickster,” but in later translations by Hesiod and Aeschylus, Prometheus becomes “man’s creator and savior.”¹³ Prometheus in his clever ploys steals fire from Zeus to give it to mankind and becomes a “symbol of defiant progress.”¹⁴ In multiple versions of the myth Zeus punishes Prometheus for his deception by having an eagle eat his liver throughout the day, which is restored every night. The defiant Frankenstein who creates a man can be compared to the strong-willed and intelligent Prometheus. Dr. Frankenstein ‘steals’ the gift of creating life, often considered a gift from God in Judeo-Christian religion. In various Frankenstein dramatizations the Creature compares himself to Adam in the Garden of Eden. In Dear’s script the Creature tells Frankenstein, “I should be Adam. God was proud of Adam. But Satan’s the one I sympathize with.”¹⁵ Gialanella’s

Frankenstein includes a scene where Frankenstein tells the Creature he is his creator. The Creature responds, “I know of the Creator. You are my Creator, and thus...my God!”¹⁶ Even in Shelley’s novel the Creature tells Frankenstein, “Remember, that I am thy creature: I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel.”¹⁷ The comparison of Frankenstein to the Genesis creation myth appears more consistently in adaptations than the Prometheus myth, which is not surprising given the widespread familiarity and use of the story in religious practice today. Yet, “Mary Shelley’s novel represents a surprisingly early conflation of the[se] two representative myths,” as the shame of Adam and the defiant pride of Prometheus can be seen in both the Creature and Frankenstein.¹⁸

What strongly differentiates the Frankenstein myth from the Genesis creation and Prometheus myths is the absence of a higher being. Frankenstein is spoken of being like God or a god, but it is his very humanity that distinguishes the myth of Frankenstein from many ancient myths. While both Frankenstein and his Creature rival for being the hero and villain in late adaptations, the modernity of *Frankenstein* is pitted in the fact that “there is no divine source for the rules, no final moral answer, no divine authority to judge, punish, or reward.”¹⁹ The novel, written in the early nineteenth century and during a surge of scientific advances, sharply contrasts from ancient myths with its absence of divine intervention of any kind. There is no liver-eating eagle or banishment from the Garden to punish Frankenstein for his hubristic pursuit of knowledge. Joyce Carol Oates argues in her essay “Frankenstein’s Fallen Angel” that the story lacks a clear sense of evil in either character or their actions because “the universe is emptied of God and theistic assumptions of “good” and “evil.” Hence, its modernity.”²⁰ If we take Oates’s analysis to be true, the ‘modern’ aspect of the Frankenstein myth is in large part due to its lack of religion and morality related to any deity. Jon Turney writes in his book

Frankenstein's Footsteps: Sciences, Genetics, and Popular Culture that Shelley's story is "a creation myth based on science as a substitute for God."²¹ The Creature falsely identifies his creator to be a god or God-like in several adaptations. Rather Frankenstein, a fallible man carelessly using his intelligence in the pursuit of knowledge, can never live up to any higher being's benevolence or judgment in regards to his own creation. The Creature and Frankenstein are left to flail alone in their actions, only having each other to blame for their faults. I agree with Turney and Oates that the secular nature and scientific frame of the story gives the myth its modernity. However, this does not elucidate how Frankenstein is considered a myth, modern or not.

To return to Lévi-Strauss, it appears Frankenstein meets other expectations attributed to myths. Comparing poetry to myth, Lévi-Strauss suggests that poetry is a "kind of speech that cannot be translated except at the cost of serious distortions," but the value of a myth can endure through the "worst translation." He adds that a myth is "felt as a myth by any reader throughout the world," and that its "substance" does not lie in style, approach, or any syntax but rather "in the *story* which it tells." Lévi-Strauss briefly summarizes that the meaning of a myth does not "reside in the isolated elements...but only in the way those elements are combined."²² I have demonstrated in Chapter One that despite any of the novel's weaknesses, its skeletal story survives through various adaptations. While there are literary scholars who want to preserve Shelley's text for the novel that it is, the dramatizations can scarcely be called distortions given their prevalence and their contribution to the story's perseverance. As Stephen Bann argues, "*Frankenstein* embodies a relentless drive towards representations, and indeed visualization."²³ I contend that it is impossible to discuss Frankenstein as a novel today without deriving some knowledge from dramatizations or popular culture imagery. In the 1820s Frankenstein quickly

illustrated that the story could endure various dramatizations, some of poor quality. Frankenstein proves to be more myth than poetry.

It may appear that Frankenstein's mythology is an American and British interest, yet Donald F. Glut's catalog lists many adaptations, cartoons, and comics of Frankenstein that have traversed across national boundaries into Germany, Italy, Spain, Mexico, and Japan. The transnationalism of Frankenstein proves its relevance and wide appeal. The history of dramatizations shows a variety of approaches to the material, but ultimately the myth and core story of Frankenstein are not affected. In Chapter One I discussed many dramatizations that were particularly divergent from Shelley's novel, but the divergences did not irreversibly change the myth. While Frankenstein evolves over time and continues to reflect different anxieties, the basic story of the myth remains unalterable, evident in radical adaptations by The Living Theatre and Clive Barker.

Many isolated incidents occur in the retellings of Frankenstein. Regardless of how Frankenstein's wedding night, De Lacey's cottage, and the creation scene are depicted, these isolated elements do not inform the meaning of the myth. Some of these isolated incidents do not even appear in certain dramatizations. However, when they or other events replace them it is usually to exemplify the destruction manifested by the Creature. Ultimately the myth does not succeed or fail based on any singular incident. As Lévi-Strauss suggests, it is the combination of these elements and the character progressions of Frankenstein and the Creature, which constitutes the composite story. The myth is built on the escalating terror of Frankenstein realizing the consequences of his pursuit of knowledge in light of the Creature's harmful actions. Any particularities about these incidents are largely insignificant, evident in the history of dramatizations. Baldick argues that the "clumsily-written *Frankenstein* created a living myth

because it contained...fruitful possibilities.”²⁴ In its simplest form Baldick believes that the myth of Frankenstein can be reduced to two statements:

(a) Frankenstein makes a living creature out of bits of corpses.

(b) The creature turns against him and runs amok.²⁵

How (a) and (b) are constructed and performed leaves much open to interpretation. Baldick and I use a “broad interpretation of myth” that avoids the “elaborate anthropological sense analysed by Lévi-Strauss.”²⁶ Yet, I argue that aside from the temporal consideration, Frankenstein satisfies several other components that Lévi-Strauss suggests a myth should embody. Accordingly Frankenstein can arguably be defined as a modern myth.

Baldick clarifies modern myths “should not involve any claim that they have the same importance...that myths have in pre-literature culture,” but this does not dispute the validity of modern myths given “the lasting significance in Western culture of the stories of Faust, Don Quixote...Frankenstein.”²⁷ Baldick’s statement reminds me to make a similar clarification. Lévi-Strauss’s “The Structural Study of Myth” details many complicated features of mythology that I am not addressing in relation to Frankenstein. I follow Baldick’s lead in utilizing Lévi-Strauss to argue that the fundamentals of mythology apply to Frankenstein, aside from the myth being modern rather than ancient. Where Baldick and Lévi-Strauss agree on mythology elucidates how Frankenstein mutually changes and stays the same over time. One of most intriguing aspects of Lévi-Strauss’s analysis is his suggestion that there is no “*true* version” of a myth.²⁸ Lévi-Strauss writes, “we define the myth as consisting of all its versions...made up of all its variants.”²⁹ He examines the Oedipus myth and offers the idea that Freud’s use of the Oedipus myth is as

relevant as the play by Sophocles. Baldick concurs, but adds, “the openness or adaptability of myths is not a question of infinite variety.”³⁰ Too many exemptions from the myth means a dramatization no longer represents the myth at hand. Nor does every dramatization significantly contribute to the myth of Frankenstein parallel with the way Freud’s and Sophocles’ works contribute to the myth of Oedipus. Despite these limits of adaptations, Lévi-Strauss’s argument illustrates that Shelley’s novel is only one part of the Frankenstein mythology. The quantity and dominance of stage and film dramatizations challenge, if not overshadow, the position of the novel as *the* myth. O’Flinn says it best: “There is no such thing as *Frankenstein*, there are only *Frankensteins*, as the text is ceaselessly rewritten, reproduced, refilmed, and redesigned.”³¹

Labeling Frankenstein a myth means more than a qualification or categorization. The fascinating aspect about the myth of Frankenstein is how the myth is used and reconstructed to reflect current times. Over the last two hundred years the introduction of many ideas involving science, morality, politics, and religion have been woven through the myth. The incorporation of these ideas and their hints at ideology can be related to the assessment of myth in Roland Barthes’s *Mythologies*. Barthes discusses how myths are comprised of a form, concept, and signification in a “*second-order semiological system*.”³² In the first-order semiological system a signifier and signified construct a sign. In the case of *Frankenstein* let us assume the Creature is a signifier and the signified is danger. The sign would then be the dangerous Creature. In the second-order semiological system, the dangerous Creature becomes a signifier, or form, which is robbed of its prior meaning. The character no longer exists simply in its original shape in Shelley’s novel, representing a fictional being. When a form meets a concept, the form takes on an entire new meaning. A form “will be wholly absorbed by the concept, “ and the concept is both “historical and intentional.” What has frequently happened with Frankenstein in

adaptations, political cartoons, and news stories is the form of the dangerous Creature unites with the concept that progress may produce uncontrollable and destructive results. Through the concept a “whole new history...is implanted in the myth.” Additionally, a concept is open, unstable, and “less reality than a certain knowledge of reality.”³³ It is obviously not the case that all progress is undesirable, but the concept of uncontrollable progress united with the form of the dangerous Creature indicates a negative connotation, reminding people that progress can be bad. The concept attached to the form of the Creature creates an ideological signification that progress, scientific or otherwise, should be strictly monitored by social and/or governing bodies. Beginning with Shelley’s novel the fear of progress is hinted at, but becomes increasingly attached to the story as it was dramatized and used in political cartoons. At different points in history the fear of progress has been social, political, and scientific. In today’s world, news media, the governing bodies of congress and parliament, and the public continue to bandy about the term ‘Frankenstein’ in the argument for limitations of progress, usually claiming a moral or ethical imperative. The contemporary ethical debate is subjective. Certain progressive efforts are denounced until political groups or the majority of the public accepts the progress, usually after the government has intervened and stated approval. The myth of Frankenstein transcends to a new level of myth-making in light of Barthes’s analysis.

A fascinating aspect of Barthes’s analysis of myths is his assessment that it “transforms history into nature.” Barthes explains how myth powerfully naturalizes the relationship between form and concept. Their separation then becomes almost inconceivable due to the distortion and naturalization myth provides. Barthes elaborates on bourgeois society’s ability to affect many aspects of daily life through mythologies that support society’s continuing privileges. “Bourgeois ideology can therefore spread over everything,” infiltrating language and metaphors to

perpetuate its own interests. Over time the naturalization of bourgeois society and their created myths leaves both to appear as natural components of everyday life, where “the memory that they once were made” disappears.³⁴ In 1818 Frankenstein reflected a fear of bourgeois society losing its control to progress. In 2011 Nick Dear and Danny Boyle’s *Frankenstein* reflects a similar fear of progress, but conceived in a new way to address the anxieties of the world today.

The anomaly of Frankenstein is that it transforms with us, articulating our fears but remaining a captivating story to watch. The question remains, however, why Frankenstein continues to engage us whereas other stories have not lasted as long or become as prevalent. Jon Turney poses similar questions when he asks:

Why, then, has the story endured? Is it simply because the frame is so open at various points that it is infinitely adaptable? Or are there particular reasons, culturally general enough to read across the retellings, with all their differences of detail, yet still specific to the culture which we share with Mary Shelley—broadly, the culture of modernity?³⁵

In answering Turney, I think the Frankenstein story endures because its open frame allows multiple adaptations. Frankenstein enables writers to be creative with an already intriguing and established story. I also contend that the fear of progress in the modern age was a legitimate fear in Shelley’s day just as it is in Nick Dear’s. In 2011 progress is valued, sometimes at any cost, and often brings results at a rate that exceeds our capacity to foresee its ethical implications. Though Turney directs his focus to the scientific, I think the myth of Frankenstein is used to illustrate the fear of progress in several ways. Noël Carroll entertains the possibility that the

public receives the horror genre well because it depicts our fear of “transgressions of the norm,” but by the end of the story “the norm has been reconstituted.”³⁶ Carroll dismisses the idea, however, that horror is “perennially with us” simply because it “serves ideology.”³⁷ He thinks the ideological justification for horror does not apply to all stories within the genre or entirely explains the sustaining interest in the genre. I agree with Carroll that ideology and a return to norms does not explain all horror stories, but it is difficult to examine *Frankenstein* without encountering the many ways adaptations change to reflect current social anxieties about progress. Furthermore, it is hard to dismiss the notion that *Frankenstein* reflects a Barthesian hope of normative or bourgeois society to maintain the status quo, at least at a rate of progress the government and dominating social classes approve of. How else can we explain why *Frankenstein* and/or the Monster consistently die at the end of most dramatizations, appearing as a corrective punishment for the brilliant man and his successful creation? Clive Barker’s *Frankenstein in Love* depicts a Dr. Frankenstein who thrives after his moment of creation and gains tremendous power by acting dangerously independent. The results are horrifying and once again illustrate the need for social intervention in the realm of progress.³⁸

The fear of progress appears in Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. In 1818 many societal circumstances appeared to have influenced Shelley’s novel, intentionally or not. After the French Revolution many in England feared that riots and revolutions would occur, creating “chaos, of revolving and uncontrollable extremes.”³⁹ In the 1790s Edmund Burke wrote *Reflections on the Revolution in France* about the monstrous capabilities of the French revolutionaries who were irrational and unstable. Mary Wollstonecraft, Shelley’s mother, responded to Burke with her *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, which attacked government tyranny rather than the radicals Burke scorned.⁴⁰ By the time Shelley wrote *Frankenstein*, fears of uprisings were still lingering.

With both her parents championing revolutionary thinking, Shelley had “sympathy for the suffering poor.”⁴¹ Johanna M. Smith says the Creature has often been viewed as Shelley’s response to the plights of the poor: the Creature is like “the rebellious working class: he has no right and no claim to the recognition he demands from his superior.”⁴² Shelley does demonstrate a justification of the Creature’s anger as he is ignored and shunned by society and those in power. The Creature’s demands of Frankenstein are only listened to after he acts in violence, and he cruelly retaliates when his demands are not met. The path of destruction made by the Creature accentuates the failure of Frankenstein to provide for the Creature, just as the government and aristocracy failed to provide for the poor, working class. The Creature reflects an underlying anxiety felt by the dominant social classes and government about the social progress of giving power to those below who demand it. In the early 1800s the population was growing, the effects of the Napoleonic Wars were evident with larger work forces and lower wages, and there were many economic and political riots.⁴³ It was not until the 1832 Reform Bill that suffrage was extended to larger amounts of the population. Prior to 1832 the poor were disenfranchised, demanding voting rights and better wages, and creating anxiety for those in power in the shadow of revolution. The Creature illustrates that perhaps that anxiety is warranted.

The early 1800s also saw progress in science and medicine.⁴⁴ In 1814 at Edinburgh, the leading university in science, scholars explored and deliberated about the moment when life begins.⁴⁵ Medical schools debated animating corpses with galvanistic practices, and the use of cadavers became increasingly popular in order to understand the mechanics of the human body. Grave robbing became a rampant problem in order to supply cadavers to medical students, and the practice was exposed during the Burke and Hare murders in the late 1820s when the two men were tried for murdering over seventeen people in order to sell the corpses to an anatomy

lecturer.⁴⁶ While the Creature may represent the suffering poor, Dr. Frankenstein embodies the ambitious medical student who wants to know more about life regardless of ethical concerns. Ethics concerning science and medicine could not keep up with the progress and pursuits of scientists. Dr. Frankenstein's limitless pursuit of knowledge would continue to build into the mythology of Frankenstein as the fields of medicine, science, and technology grew over the next two hundred years. Shelley's novel hints at the terrifying potential of scientific progress that had started to generate unease in an increasingly secular world.

Shelley's *Frankenstein* rectifies the problem of the uncontrollable monster and the ambitious scientist by suggesting that progress of this kind must be governed. As I discussed in Chapter One, the character of Walton in the novel offers a counter model of progress that is governed by the democratic body of his crew. His ambition is halted when he realizes it has a bigger social cost. The end of *Frankenstein* depicts the demise of the Creature and Dr. Frankenstein. If the two characters represent progress of the working class and more generally, the field of science, Shelley does not offer much hope to either cause. Shelley ultimately conforms to the idea that progress needs to be governed or else there are repercussions. As Noël Carroll writes, "The horror story can be conceptualized as a symbolic defense of a culture's standards of normality; the genre employs the abnormal, only for the purpose of showing it vanquished by the forces of normal."⁴⁷ Carroll disputes this theory by arguing that the abnormality presented in horror does not usually challenge cultural norms in a way applicable to the real world.⁴⁸ Yet, when it comes to *Frankenstein* the ideological value of keeping the status quo intact becomes evident in the Creature's resolution to destroy himself after the death of his creator. The arrogant scientist and his unstoppable Creature will no longer be a problem, and their existence will never be known. Shelley's novel does not suggest this is a great loss but

rather an inevitable conclusion. It may be arguable if Shelley constructed her characters to represent progress in the way I describe, but the fact that writers have theorized how both characters are embedded with symbolic meaning exemplifies the power of the myth Shelley started. Furthermore, the ability to read into the story and find ideological remnants did not stop with Shelley's novel, as the practice became essential to the use and history of the Frankenstein myth.

In Chapter One I explained how early playwrights in the 1820s altered their adaptations to infuse the story with more morality and religion than Shelley's novel. Many critics morally denounced Shelley's novel for its impious nature in consideration of allowing man to play God, necessitating playwrights to modify the story when adapting it for the stage. Chris Baldick mentions several newspaper reviews claiming Shelley's novel was impious, horrible, disgusting, shocking, and heretical.⁴⁹ While some reviews praised the book and its originality, a common criticism was the novel lacked a moral lesson. The novel's lack of morality "influenc[ed] the story's adaptation for the stage."⁵⁰ The critics and public had spoken and playwrights listened. The moral ambiguity and guilt of Dr. Frankenstein and the Creature are eradicated in the 1820s stage adaptations. Silencing the Monster made the character unsympathetic. Therefore, the condemnation of his evil actions is easy. The comparisons of the Monster to the Devil are frequent in the early plays, evident with Fritz in *Presumption* stating, "my master is raising the Devil."⁵¹ The secular and scientific nature of Shelley's book is lost in the heightened morality and melodrama of these early stage adaptations.

Frankenstein's guilt over his creation seldom seems to be out of concern for the Monster, or for those around him because they usually remain unharmed. Instead Frankenstein blames himself for his determination, stating, "Oh! how to avoid the powerful vengeance of the monster

formed by my cursed ambition.”⁵² In Milner’s *Frankenstein; or, The Man and The Monster* Frankenstein asks himself, “Have all my dreams of greatness ended here? Is this the boasted wonder of my science.”⁵³ In early stage adaptations Frankenstein’s guilt appears somewhat unreasonable given the lack of destruction caused by the Monster. Frankenstein’s ‘cursed’ ambition reads as a social appeasement to the responses to Shelley’s novel. Forry argues that the early playwrights “solve[d] their dilemma by substituting for an incarnated moral order (the hero) a divine moral code,” and “Frankenstein... becomes a modern hero-villain whose crimes we exonerate because of his exaggerated remorse.”⁵⁴ While the early plays commonly had the Creature and Frankenstein dramatically perish at the end, the recognition of their faults before doing so is absent. In Shelley’s novel, the Creature and Frankenstein are aware that they made terrible decisions before their death. In the plays from the 1820s the evil Monster and his overly ambitious creator die abruptly, leaving the normal status quo intact and minimally affected. There is no need for either character to explain his failure, because the playwrights depict their actions as inherently corrupt and immoral. The question of morality is not whether the creation is threatening, but the act of even daring to create is dangerous and socially unethical. The dangerous Creature never has a chance to be dangerous, and any fear of progress shown by the scientist is condemned quickly. The early plays elucidate that society has no place for unbridled ambition. The very idea of experimenting in such an immoral way is wrong and will bring terrible consequences for those who do so.

The 1820s dramatizations also proved that the story of Frankenstein could serve as popular entertainment. Infused with moral and ideological beliefs, the story could be retold in countless ways. In sum: the early plays established the myth of Frankenstein in ways that fulfilled both Lévi-Strauss’s and Barthes’s beliefs about mythology. After the dramatizations of

the 1820s, the Monster quickly became a Barthesian mythic character, used throughout the rest of the nineteenth century in political cartoons that “lambast[ed] the passage of the Reform Bill, labor unrest and the Irish Question.”⁵⁵ In the evolving mythology of Frankenstein, fears of progress by many social and political factions of the lower classes became equated with the monstrous and unstoppable Creature that needed to be suppressed. Strangely, the early political cartoons conflated Frankenstein and the Monster. In many images the Monster is renamed Frankenstein. Forry’s book contains several political cartoons depicting an uncontrollable “Irish Frankenstein,” which usually is an image of a very large, boorish monster and not a man tinkering with science and creation.⁵⁶ Today it is still hard to see an image of the Creature, often bearing a resemblance to Karloff, and not call it Frankenstein. George Levine is one of many to address the frequent “doubleness” of Frankenstein and the Creature. He writes, “So pervasive has been the recognition that the Monster and Frankenstein are two aspects of the same being that the writers...assume rather than argue it.”⁵⁷ Levine adds that the confusion replicates the story’s theme of “the divided self,” where “Frankenstein’s obsession with science is echoed in the monster’s obsession with destruction.”⁵⁸ I agree with Levine that part of the elision of the Creature and Frankenstein is because they share similar characteristics in their ambition. The duality of Frankenstein and the Creature is equally apparent in the Boyle and Dear production where two actors alternate between the roles. In the developing mythology of Frankenstein and its recurring use as a warning against progress, both the image of the dangerous Creature and the word ‘Frankenstein’ have become equal forms linked to the concept that progress may produce uncontrollable and destructive results. As Turney states, “The early stage productions...served to introduce ‘Frankensteinian’ as an adjective,” appearing in newspapers shortly after *Presumption*’s premiere.⁵⁹ The political cartoons and labeling of ‘Frankenstein’-like scientific

advances that occurred in the 1800s through today illustrate that the Creature and Frankenstein may be viewed as “two monsters,” equally complicit in the terror of progress.⁶⁰

The 1930s Universal Studios’ films embraced the myth in its most formidable shape. Jon Turney iterates “that cinema is the pre-eminent vehicle for the propagation of myth in contemporary mass societies.”⁶¹ If Lévi-Strauss compares Freud’s and Sophocles’ variations on the Oedipus myth as equals, many could contend that Shelley’s novel and Whale’s films similarly contribute to the Frankenstein myth. From the crackling sounds and lightning strikes of the creation scene, to Karloff’s strange appearance and stilted walk, to Dr. Frankenstein’s mad cry, “It’s alive!,” the 1931 *Frankenstein* has left a monolithic imprint on the public imagination. Forry says, “the first Universal film revitalized the myth.”⁶² Bouriana Zakhariieva writes in “Frankenstein of the Nineties: The Composite Body” that the Universal films account for the “clichéd popular perception of the monster.”⁶³ I would surmise that after the release of the films, seldom has the Creature appeared in political cartoons without similarly looking like Karloff’s Monster. Zakhriieva also discusses the ideological message embedded in the films. The Karloff Monster behaves like the monsters in the expressionist German films. He is a robotic, simple-minded character capable of being “an instrument of evil.”⁶⁴ The zombielike creation can “be interpreted as a premonition of the dangers of the then rising fascist ideology.”⁶⁵ In Shelley’s novel the Creature’s horrific behavior can be explained as a result of the cruel cycle of rejection he experiences by Frankenstein and humanity, much like revolutionaries of the nineteenth century. In the early melodramatic dramatizations the Creature’s actions appear to be part of his nature because he is a devilish creation that challenged decency and morality in his very existence. Yet, in the 1931 film the Monster is given an abnormal, criminal brain. O’Flinn believes that the decision makes the Monster “sub-human” and a character incapable of being

reasoned with.⁶⁶ The only option to stop him is death. O'Flinn disagrees with the ideological readings of the film that compare the Monster wandering in the wilderness to a Depression era tramp, ostracized from social life and unable to receive help from others.⁶⁷ However, Zakharieva and O'Flinn agree that the mob chase at the end of the film, something briefly introduced in earlier adaptations with a zealous Frankenstein in charge, sheds light on a social current of the time. Zakharieva describes the angry crowd, which chases the Monster into a windmill that is then set on fire, as a lynching mob. The mob "reconstitut[es]...the integrity of the communal body through the act of exclusion."⁶⁸ O'Flinn adds the mass audience appeal of the film should not be overlooked when analyzing why a crowd of anonymous people would be deployed to stop the monster. The dominant ideological belief that social bodies should govern acts of progress is shown in the "traditional and reactionary" vengeance of the angry mob, which is "ambiguously endorsed."⁶⁹ The dangerous entity with the criminal brain created by Dr. Frankenstein was no match for the community that collectively acted. The film, which depicts a momentarily crazed scientist and his terrifying mindless monster, hinted at the future war that was coming all too soon.

By the late 1950s and early 1960s the world had changed. America and England, the two countries which contribute most significantly to the sustaining life of the Frankenstein story, found ways to return to the material with a vastly different perspective. If the 1930s films showed an increasing social isolation experienced by most citizens of both countries and "general disillusion following World War I and preceding the Great Depression," the dramatizations post World War II and in the midst of the Cold War exemplified fears that had been realized.⁷⁰ The scientist capable of using his knowledge to create an act of terror was witnessed in the horrors of World War II in the concentration camps and the Manhattan Project,

which proved science could create bombs that could end human existence. O'Flinn discusses the changes seen in the popular film adaption *The Curse of Frankenstein* where there is a definite “shift in the structure of fears within the dominant ideology.”⁷¹ *The Curse of Frankenstein* and The Living Theatre's *Frankenstein*, with its broad themes of how to end human suffering, illustrate the damage and authentic anxiety that technological and scientific progress had already caused and could potentially continue to cause. O'Flinn describes how *The Curse of Frankenstein* reflects a “source of anxiety in a deranged individual” and how “imminent catastrophe” lies in his hands.⁷² In the film Dr. Frankenstein recklessly murders without any sign of guilt, and he enjoys the horror of the Monster he has crafted. The Monster is even more sub-human than Karloff and murders without any semblance of a thought. The Monster is simply the destructive bomb released upon the world by the evil Dr. Frankenstein. The movie is a reactionary reply to the fears of cold war paranoia, shared by the mass audiences that attended the film.

On the other hand, the proactive production conceived by The Living Theatre illustrates a hope for a “new universal humanity, not merely the Faustian power of the creator.”⁷³ Malina's highly theoretical play was directed towards a savvier and smaller audience base. The play acknowledges the evils that Dr. Frankenstein and others like him are capable of, but refuses to accept that humanity is doomed to destroy itself in the midst of a 1960s rejuvenation of optimism. The Creature becomes a symbol of the potential for creation and progress to be good, despite cycles where humanity acts otherwise. Lavalley writes, “The Living Theater's insight into the positive side of Mary Shelley's novel is perhaps the most striking feature of the production.”⁷⁴ The myth of Frankenstein in *The Curse of Frankenstein* and The Living Theater's *Frankenstein* recognizes that the world is different. *The Curse of Frankenstein* represents the

worst possibilities when the Dr. Frankensteins of the world are allowed to reach the limits of progress with little ethical concern. Yet, even *The Curse of Frankenstein* demonstrates that normative society will ultimately police such men. The Monster perishes and Dr. Frankenstein is captured and held accountable for the crimes that both he and the Monster committed. The myth of Frankenstein continues to reflect idealized social norms that those who step too far over the boundaries of acceptable progress will be punished, this time by the social institution of the penal system. The Living Theatre's *Frankenstein*, on the other hand, represents the belief that humanity will always find a way to return to the primal source of that which makes us humans, including our "love, knowledge, imagination, intuition, ego, death, creativity."⁷⁵ The production offers the Frankenstein myth the caveat that though progress can produce horrific results, humanity governs itself by recovering.

Arguably the most common use of the Frankenstein myth in the twentieth century is its application to science and technology. Jon Turney's book navigates through the various ways Frankenstein has been utilized in discussions about science. Turney describes how the myth of Frankenstein allows us to understand ethical considerations of scientific progress in fields ranging from gene splicing and test-tube babies, to cloning. Turney argues the "endurance of the myth plainly does testify to a deep disquiet at the potentialities inherent in a scientific discovery in general, and the science of life in particular."⁷⁶ Turney's historical survey illustrates how frequently the news media in the twentieth century has reverted to Frankensteinian metaphors to explain ethical and moral problems with scientific progress. Frankenstein becomes an easy, if not superficial, way to understand complicated scientific issues that are now a part of our lives. As Turney adds, "Our awareness of science, and of the infiltration of modern technology into every corner of everyday life, is greater."⁷⁷ The issues of scientific progress have become a global

interest and the twenty-four hour news cycle constantly informs the population about every advancement and anxiety that are possible.

In the last half of the twentieth century what were once scientific fantasies are becoming realities. The ability to create life in a laboratory is no longer an impossibility given the progress in fertility sciences and artificial life. The Creature, in response, begins to think, speak, and evolve because science is capable of producing remarkable results. The highly articulate Creature in Branagh's 1994 film and Dear's 2011 play represents the capacity of current science to create something comparable. The possibility of the Creature is not as far-fetched as he once was. In 2010 scientists created a living cell with manmade DNA which, "can evoke images of Frankenstein-like scientific tinkering," yet also provides insight to the progress of science that hints towards "exciting hopes that it could eventually lead to new fuels, better ways to clean polluted water, faster vaccine production and more."⁷⁸ Just as Dr. Frankenstein himself envisions his Creature providing insights into answering the problems facing humanity, the myth of Frankenstein lives on and offers the same hope. Kenneth Branagh said of his film adaptation, "We hope audiences today might find parallels with Victor today in some amazing scientist who might be an inch away from curing AIDS or cancer."⁷⁹ Charles McNulty for the *Los-Angeles Times* watched the Dear and Boyle production through a live broadcast. McNulty recounts how the play made it "impossible to leave behind the unfolding series of catastrophes in Japan," which led to fears of nuclear crisis after devastating earthquake and tsunami damage.⁸⁰ McNulty writes:

But the story of a scientist rivaling God for earthly dominion seems to me uniquely pertinent at a time when the costs (economic, political and ecological) of mankind's breathtaking scientific advances have never been more evident.⁸¹

Nothing in Dear's play or Branagh's film directly refers to any contemporary scientific issue or medical crisis. Yet, the story of Dr. Frankenstein and his Creature continues to find resonance, either in demonstrating the hope or the horrific cost of progress. The myth continues to adapt to the times, partly because the story has proven to be malleable to the many additions writers have made. The myth also continues to adapt because aside from the writers, the public adheres to and uses the myth of Frankenstein. In reflection on Barthes's explanation about the making of myths, Frankenstein has transformed into a collectively owned myth with a multitude of uses. In many ways Frankenstein has become unilaterally applied to so many moments of progress and anxieties that the story is "evolving in ways which are hard to pin down exactly."⁸² George Levine additionally summarizes that the myth "has achieved its special place in modern consciousness through its extraordinary resistance to simple resolutions and its almost inexhaustible possibilities of significance."⁸³

The myth of Frankenstein may appear open to countless possibilities and readings. Yet, Baldick reminds us there is closure for myths. I contend the use of the myth to reflect our fear of progress closes the 'possibilities of significance.' The progress has been focused primarily on the scientific and technological in the twentieth century, but the rogue scientist who refuses to listen to the government in 2011 is parallel to the rogue monster who represents the disenfranchised working class in the 1800s. Both represent to bourgeois society a fear of the individual or group who acts in a potentially disruptive way that counters socially accepted norms. Today, science is

not locked away in a laboratory but rather debated on the floors of the parliament and congress. Recent debates on stem cell research illustrate a conservative fear of unlimited scientific research, the interest of society to keep progress confined, and the hypothetical anxiety of possibilities unforeseen. In today's technological age we are bombarded with opinions on such highly contested issues. Even a simple Internet search of the terms "Frankenstein" and "stem cell research" finds countless amounts of reputable news stories and scholarly articles appearing to confirm or debunk the analogy between the two. The use of the Frankenstein myth as a tool to frighten the public embodies a Barthesian-constructed ideology. The actual complexity of the Frankenstein story and the Creature's reasons for being destructive are lost when the word 'Frankenstein' is used to reference potentially uncontrollable manmade disaster. Barthes analyzed how history is transformed into nature by mythologies. The history of Frankenstein, as an intricate story about a created man shaped by the injustices and cruelty of society, is simplified to represent the idea that ungoverned progress is dangerous. The idea seems natural by now: 'Frankenstein' is something to fear.

Susan Tyler Hitchcock describes Frankenstein as "a universal symbol and a myth known around the world."⁸⁴ Her words illustrate why there would be high audience and critical expectations for the 2011 *Frankenstein*. The story is familiar to us. It is infiltrated in our culture and language. It has been told countless times. We keep watching adaptations of the myth, because it is endowed with ideological relevance and it entertains us. Yet, are these separate or conjoined reasons? Does Frankenstein entertain us because it reflects our normative desires and socially shaped ideologies? It is difficult to definitively answer these questions, but they are worth considering. At the end of her introduction to *Frankenstein: A Cultural History*, Hitchcock writes, "This is our monster. To know him is to know ourselves."⁸⁵ Perhaps no other sentiment

best justifies why the myth of Frankenstein continues to interest us. Frankenstein's pursuit of knowledge and the Creature's desperation to find his way in the world relate to our own hopes and disappointments. In our fear of progress, the fear of failure and success are both present. Novelist Henry Miller once wrote, "Whatever there be of progress in life comes not through adaptation but through daring, through obeying the blind urge." Dr. Frankenstein possessed the blind urge to dare, and he succeeded. The Frankenstein myth speaks to the human truth that we, as individuals and as a society, want to advance but the results are sometimes unpredictable and reasonably frightening. Nick Dear and Danny Boyle, daring to write and stage *Frankenstein*, confronted the significance of the myth that reflects our modern age contradiction of wanting progress but needing limitations. In Chapter Three my analysis of Dear's script and examination of Boyle's direction will explain how the 2011 *Frankenstein* was carefully crafted with knowledge of the past and an understanding of present circumstances. The history of dramatizations and mythology of Frankenstein influenced many choices within the 2011 production. However, the next chapter proves how Dear and Boyle revived Frankenstein on their own terms with a unique interpretation. The Creature is once again alive, but in the 2011 *Frankenstein* he is given center stage.

¹ Baldick, *Frankenstein's Shadow*, 2.

² "Frankenstein ants created by scientists," *The Telegraph*, January 5, 2012, accessed January 23, 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/science-news/8996395/Frankenstein-ants-created-by-scientists.html>.

³ Mellor, "Monster," 43.

⁴ Hitchcock, *Cultural*, 4.

⁵ "Nick Dear on Frankenstein," interview, *National Theatre: Frankenstein, for iPad/Mac/PC*, April 14, 2011.

⁶ Lavalley, "Stage," 245.

⁷ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 185.

⁸ O'Flinn, "Production," 32.

⁹ *Merriam-Webster Online*, s.v. "myth," accessed February 20, 2012, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/myth>.

¹⁰ Baldick, *Frankenstein's Shadow*, 4.

¹¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," in *Structuralism in Myth*, ed. Robert A. Segal (New York: Garland Publishing: 1996), 120.

¹² Baldick, *Frankenstein's Shadow*, 1.

¹³ Michael Grant and John Hazel, *Who's Who in Classical Mythology* (London: Routledge, 2002), 285.

¹⁴ Mark P.O. Morford, Robert J. Lenardon, and Michael Sham, *Classical Mythology, Ninth Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 92.

¹⁵ Dear, *Frankenstein*, 40.

¹⁶ Gialanella, *Frankenstein*, 42.

¹⁷ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 77.

¹⁸ Theodore Ziolkowski, "Science, Frankenstein, and Myth," *The Sewanee Review* 89, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 48, accessed August 14, 2011, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27543797>.

¹⁹ Hitchcock, *Cultural*, 6.

²⁰ Oates, "Fallen," 36.

²¹ Jon Turney, *Frankenstein's Footsteps: Science, Genetics, and Popular Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 23.

²² This and the preceding two quotations are all from Lévi-Strauss, "Myth," 120-121.

²³ Stephen Bann, introduction to *Frankenstein, Creation, and Monstrosity*, (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), 2-3.

²⁴ Baldick, *Frankenstein's Shadow*, 3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁶ Turney, *Footsteps*, 27.

²⁷ Baldick, *Frankenstein's Shadow*, 2.

²⁸ Lévi -Strauss, "Myth," 125.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Baldick, *Frankenstein's Shadow*, 4. As mentioned in chapter one, Baldick argues that a moment of closure occurred with Karloff's iconic appearance in the Universal film. Though I dispute his claim, his remark clarifies that though the myth is flexible there are still limits to its flexibility.

³¹ O'Flinn, "Production," 22.

³² Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 114.

³³ This and the preceding two quotations are from Barthes, *Mythologies*, 118-119.

³⁴ This and preceding two quotations are from Barthes, *Mythologies*, 129, 139, and 142. One of the interesting ways to observe the regulation of science by 'bourgeois society' is in approval of pharmaceutical drugs by the FDA. Jon Turney describes the fears and frequent Frankenstein comparisons of in-vitro fertilization in its earliest stages in the 1960s and 1970s. In 2002 the FDA approved Bravelle for in-vitro fertilization. What was once protested against and created anxiety now makes money for pharmaceutical companies and their shareholders and is legislated by a government body. Society now accepts in-vitro as a legitimate way to reproduce, and fewer Frankenstein comparisons are made to the fertilization process. See Turney, Chapter 8 "The Baby of the Century."

³⁵ Turney, *Footsteps*, 35.

³⁶ Carroll, *Philosophy*, 201.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Frankenstein is not the only story to portray the dangers of science. *The Island of Dr. Moreau* and *Jurassic Park* have similarly depicted how the progress of science without restriction can yield dangerous results. Frankenstein is often called the predecessor to both books.

³⁹ Fred Botting, "Reflections of Excess: *Frankenstein*, the French Revolution, and Monstrosity," in *Frankenstein: Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism*, ed. Johanna M. Smith (Boston: Bedford/St Martin's, 2000), 439.

⁴⁰ Baldick, *Frankenstein's Shadow*, 22.

⁴¹ Johanna M. Smith, "Introduction: Biographical and Historical Contexts," in *Frankenstein: Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism*, ed. Johanna M. Smith (Boston: Bedford/St Martin's, 2000), 14.

⁴² Ibid., 16.

⁴³ Ibid., 13-14. Smith writes that between 1790 and 1810 there were at least five hundred riots over the price of bread in several textile districts across England.

⁴⁴ J. R. Edwards, *British History 1815-1939* (London: G. Bell and Sons LTD, 1970), 19.

⁴⁵ Butler, introduction, xviii.

⁴⁶ Smith, "Introduction," 15.

⁴⁷ Carroll, *Philosophy*, 199.

⁴⁸ Carroll points out that in many horror stories and films an abnormality may be a zombie who eats human flesh or an insect that terrorizes a community. Real-life radicals are unlikely to challenge the accepted norms that reject cannibalism and insect dominance. See Carroll 203.

⁴⁹ Baldick, *Frankenstein's Shadow*, 57.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 58.

⁵¹ Peake, *Presumption*, 138.

⁵² Ibid., 154.

⁵³ Milner, *Frankenstein*, 194.

⁵⁴ Forry, *Hideous*, 21.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 43.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 50-52.

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- ⁵⁷ George Levine, "The Ambiguous Heritage of *Frankenstein*," in *The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel*, ed. George Levine and U.C. Knoepfelmacher (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 15.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid.
- ⁵⁹ Turney, *Footsteps*, 29.
- ⁶⁰ Johanna M. Smith, "Contextual Documents: Editor's Note," in *Frankenstein: Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism*, ed. Johanna M. Smith (Boston: Bedford/St Martin's, 2000), 191.
- ⁶¹ Turney, *Footsteps*, 29.
- ⁶² Forry, *Hideous*, 100.
- ⁶³ Bouriana Zakhariyeva, "Frankenstein of the Nineties: The Composite Body," in *Frankenstein: Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism*, ed. Johanna M. Smith (Boston: Bedford/St Martin's, 2000), 416.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid., 419.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶⁶ O'Flinn, "Production," 36.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid., 38.
- ⁶⁸ Zakhariyeva, "Composite," 421.
- ⁶⁹ O'Flinn, "Production," 39.
- ⁷⁰ Forry, *Hideous*, 93.
- ⁷¹ O'Flinn, "Production," 42.
- ⁷² Ibid., 43.
- ⁷³ Lavalley, "Stage," 278.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., 279.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid.
- ⁷⁶ Turney, *Footsteps*, 36.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., 91.
- ⁷⁸ "Scientists Create Synthetic Life in Lab," *Associated Press*, May 20, 2010, accessed February 26, 2012, <http://www.foxnews.com/scitech/2010/05/20/scientists-announce-produce-living-cell-using-manmade-dna/>.
- ⁷⁹ Turney, *Footsteps*, 203.
- ⁸⁰ Charles McNulty, "Critic's Notebook: 'Frankenstein' is endlessly, frighteningly relevant," *Los Angeles Times*, March 19, 2011, accessed August 14, 2011, <http://articles.latimes.com/print/2011/mar/19/entertainment/La-et-frankenstein-notebook-20110319>.
- ⁸¹ Ibid.
- ⁸² Turney, *Footsteps*, 26.
- ⁸³ Levine, "Ambiguous," 18.
- ⁸⁴ Hitchcock, *Cultural*, 12.
- ⁸⁵ Ibid.

Chapter Three: *Frankenstein* in 2011

The year is 2011. It is nearly springtime in London, England. Nick Dear and Danny Boyle's *Frankenstein* is playing to full houses at the National Theatre. Outside the theatre doors, the world is a place of uncertainty. The global economy is shaken, and England's economy is facing dire circumstances with high inflation and high unemployment.¹ Many people struggle to find work and are unable to afford the rising cost of living as the economic crisis slowly recovers. Practices of religion are changing, evident in England's census data. Sixty-five percent of Britons do not consider themselves religious.² Yet, the demographics of those practicing religion are shifting as the rising Muslim population is expected to grow considerably in the next twenty years.³ Science and technology continue to progress. Nick Collins reports in *The Telegraph* on the practice of transplanting human cells into animals, creating a "Frankenstein-fear'...that without careful scrutiny ethical boundaries could be crossed within the next few years."⁴ Nigel Hawkes writes about stem cell research leading to the ability to regenerate human organs. Hawkes discusses England's approved clinical trials involving embryonic stem cells that recall Prometheus's restorative liver, as well as Shelley's *Frankenstein*. He writes,

But myths have a habit of becoming reality, and life of imitating art. For more than a decade we have been seduced by the idea that it may truly be possible to recreate organs. Our response to this possibility incorporates both the Promethean dream and the Frankenstein nightmare, inspiring hope and fear in almost equal measure.⁵

In 2011 the growing population of a struggling class, the uncertainty of where God and religion fit, and the progress of science pushing the boundaries of achievement shape our world and lives.

The world is significantly different in 2011, but remarkably challenged by many of the same questions and problems the world faced in 1818 when Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was first published.

The modern myth of Frankenstein continues to reverberate. As George Levine states, "Mary Shelley did, indeed, create an image, with the authenticity of dream vision, that became prophetic: that the image articulates powerfully the dominant currents of her culture and ours."⁶ The ability of the modern myth to resonate with Shelley's nineteenth-century culture and ours is tied to recurring questions about change and progress that continue to haunt us. Will the government protect our rights and futures, much like Frankenstein should have protected the Creature? How does God and religion factor in our lives, if at all? How far can science go and when does it go too far? Nick Dear says of Frankenstein, "We never really saw this as a story about what it means to be a monster; we see it as a story about what does it mean to be human."⁷ The anxieties and neophobic reactions to progress are part of the human condition in the modern age, which I have framed as part of the increasingly urbanized, secular, and scientific moment of Shelley's day through today. The 2011 production of *Frankenstein* embodies these anxieties, just as Frankensteins have before, but with a perspective that reflects life as it is at this moment in time.

In this chapter I explore and analyze the 2011 *Frankenstein*. I examine ways in which the recent *Frankenstein* builds on the history of dramatizations. The basic relationship between Victor and the Creature, theological considerations, moments of humor, and elaborate spectacle recall many patterns from past Frankenstein dramatizations. The way that Dear and Boyle shift their adaptation is of particular interest, given the mythic status of the story and the public's high expectations for staging Frankenstein. The small modifications in the story illustrate influences

by the modern world and culture. The depiction of Victor, the centralization and characterization of the Creature, and the two characters' sordid relationship are similar to past productions but also noticeably distinct. The ending of the play defies expectations and suggests a lingering irresolvability about circumstances in 2011. The ideological significance of the changes in Dear's script exemplifies how the myth of Frankenstein continues to reveal our fears of progress. Additionally, Boyle's direction and alternating roles between the lead actors significantly strengthened the play. The alternation highlighted the duality of the creator and creation that has always permeated through the story, but has never been represented as clearly. All of these factors contributed to the highly praised and wildly successful 2011 *Frankenstein*. My analysis of the 2011 production emphasizes the way in which the history of dramatizations has led to the formation of the recent Frankenstein adaptation, and demonstrates the way this play has added to, and fits within, the modern myth of Frankenstein. Frankenstein perseveres because it continues to have the capacity to be excitingly dramatic and emblematic of life in the modern age. Could we hope for anything more from a play?

Victor Frankenstein and his Creature meet for the first time in Dear's script briefly during the creation scene. Victor quickly runs away from the gruesome monstrosity before there is much interaction. The second time the two characters meet the Creature's abilities dazzle the young, frightened scientist. Victor marvels at "Muscular coordination—hand and eye—excellent tissue...I failed to make it handsome, but I gave it strength and grace."⁸ The Creature has recently killed Victor's brother William, but the revelation of his amazing creation standing in front of him momentarily overcomes Victor. Then the Creature speaks; "You abandoned me" (Dear, 38). Frankenstein admits he was terrified of the Creature in its initial moments of life. Yet, Frankenstein, in this second meeting, vengefully plans on killing his creation. The Creature

retorts with lines from *Paradise Lost*. Frankenstein is impressed, “You are educated! And you have memory!” (40). The Creature recalls his memories of being brutally beaten by strangers, rejected by De Lacey’s family, and turning to violent acts in retaliation. He asks Frankenstein, “What is the function of remorse?” (40). For every attempt by Frankenstein to condemn the Creature’s actions, the Creature has a rational and intelligent response. Unlike previous Creatures, Dear’s Creature possesses an extraordinary ability to articulate his thoughts and feelings. When asking Frankenstein to make him a companion, the Creature perceptively catches himself after rebuking Frankenstein:

A master has duties—you left me to die! I am not a slave. I am free. If you deny my request I will make you my enemy, I will work at your destruction, I will dedicate myself, I won’t rest until I desolate your heart! (*Pause*) I apologise. I did intend to reason. I am capable of logic. I do not think what I ask is immoderate? A creature of another sex, but as hideous as I am. (42)

With a quick shift of tactics there is a glimpse of the dark humor in Dear’s script and an insight into the Creature’s highly evolved intelligence. The Creature threatens Frankenstein’s life with extreme declarations, but pauses and quickly tries a more eloquent approach of appealing to Frankenstein’s sensibilities. The Creature’s skills as a rhetorician are exceptional. Moments later, as he continues to plead to Frankenstein for a companion, he strategically flatters Victor. The Creature says, “You alone can do it. You alone have the skill” (44). Frankenstein begins to agree with him, “I alone—in the whole world—and no one to share the secret!” (44). The Creature adds, “You are a king! The King of Science! Build me a woman. Please! A bride” (44). Victor

accepts the challenge due to the Creature's argument of rationales. The scene displays how much has changed in dramatizations over time. Gone is the silent, chasing monster of the 1820s or the stiff sub-human brute from the Frankenstein films. Dear's Creature is an intellectual equal to Victor, similarly reflected by the actors alternating roles between the characters.

Victor and the Creature's relationship is different in Dear's script. However, the sequence of events between the two echoes the majority of past dramatizations: Victor abandons the Creature, the Creature stumbles around in the world alone, the two meet, Victor makes a companion and destroys the companion, the Creature sets off on a rampage, and Victor chases the Creature into the Arctic wilderness. The core myth is intact with incidents showing variation from the novel and other dramatizations. Similarly to early stage adaptations from the 1820s is the notable presence of religion, often recalling the Genesis creation myth. The occurrence of religious references is striking in comparison to recent dramatizations from Branagh and Gialanella where religion was infrequently mentioned. Dear argues the story gives a chance for the articulate Creature to confront his maker, replicating the desires of man if he were able to confront God. Dear says, "It's man and God, obviously: 'Why did you make me, why did you make me like this and then why did you abandon me?'"⁹ Religious themes are threaded throughout the play, some hinted at and others obvious. When the Creature is alone in the wilderness, Dear describes him as "*Adam in the Garden—an innocent*" (Dear, 7). Later when Victor confides to Elizabeth about his experiment he tells her, "In you I found paradise. But the apple is eaten. We cannot go back" (70).

De Lacey teaches the Creature about original sin. It is a striking moment in Dear's script as other adaptations I have seen and read never discuss the concept. De Lacey explains to the uneducated Creature how some believe we "are all made imperfect, and require the assistance of

a higher authority,” but he instead believes “when we leave the womb we are pure...God has nothing to do with how a man turns out” (18). The conversation raises two interesting issues. The first is the denial by De Lacey that man needs a higher authority, or that man acts morally because of a higher authority. De Lacey discusses religion with generality and informality. Perhaps Dear is conscious of the increasing religious diversity of England or the growing population of those who are not religious. De Lacey’s suggestion that man is good and “evil is the product of social forces” recalls Shelley’s argument that “the monster’s eventual life of violence and revenge is the direct product of his social circumstances.”¹⁰ Reading De Lacey’s statement from an ideological perspective, the conversation argues for moral action regardless of religious belief. In a world that is less religious, expectations of morality are now founded on appeals to human goodness or enlightened self-interest and not judgment or reward from divine authority. If social bodies are to govern people and their progressive efforts, appeals made to ethically responsible behavior need to be based on a respect for humanity and social concern. De Lacey later tells the Creature he will find companionship and wealth because “A good man deserves it. You are a good man. Someone will love you, whoever you are” (Dear, 24). De Lacey’s optimism is met with disaster once his family learns of the Creature’s presence, but his sentiment shows the possibility of humanity to be redemptive, hopeful, and forgiving despite a lack of religious conviction.

The second issue that is brought up by De Lacey’s comments on original sin is the idea that humans are pure as they leave the womb. The Creature is an abnormality since he is not born from a woman. Cynthia Freeland explores female reproduction in *Frankenstein* writing, “The focus on pregnancy, birth, mothering, and reproduction...is hard to ignore.”¹¹ Freeland is one of many writers to use a feminist perspective when analyzing *Frankenstein*, illustrating how

Shelley's gender and the early death of her mother influenced the story. While feminist scholars have explored *Frankenstein*, Dear and Boyle dismissed their ideas about the story when constructing the play, suggesting, "it didn't work."¹² Boyle adds the "modern age has tried to impose feminism on the story, but Shelley is discussing the men in her life."¹³ Boyle unfairly reduces the portrayal of gender in Shelley's novel as largely irrelevant, but his point reminds us that *Frankenstein* is peculiarly devoid of female characters. If anything, the absence of women and mothering is a startling contrast with the coldly scientific and detached 'paternity' of *Frankenstein*. If De Lacey is correct and humans leave the womb with purity, it is uncertain what to expect from a creature born in a laboratory from a male scientist. The idea of reproduction in Dear's script is raised again when Elizabeth questions Frankenstein why he created life in an unnatural way, rather than with and by her, as will be discussed later.

De Lacey's discussion of original sin is not the only mention of religion in the play. In a dream Frankenstein envisions his dead brother William and debates with him whether the gift of life comes from God and whether man can be a god (Dear, 59). The crofters, Ewan and Rab, who aide Frankenstein much like Fritz from *Presumption*, tell the scientist they will not rob graves to supply him with body parts because "We are Christians in the Orkneys, sir" (53). When Dr. Frankenstein madly plans to chase and kill the Creature after the death of Elizabeth, his Father claims, "Victor, this is not godly" (76). Seconds later his father asks men to take his raving son away and weeps to himself, "Oh, dear God, forgive me!...What have I brought into the world?" (77). Mirroring Dr. Frankenstein's guilt over his Creature, especially evident in past dramatizations, Frankenstein's father wonders how he could have released his own monster upon the world. Dear's script continually portrays these moments of struggle where an individual questions their beliefs about God and religion. Baldick describes Shelley's novel as a "godless

world of specifically modern freedoms and responsibilities.”¹⁴ Dear’s script reflects Shelley’s secular world, but also infuses it with individual uncertainty about how religion should dictate their behavior and if it offers redemption. In an interview Dear said of Shelley’s novel it “looks forward to the coming century, the machine age, the death of God, the humanist revolution.”¹⁵ Though God may be dead, Dear acknowledges religious beliefs are not yet obsolete. The myth of Frankenstein continues to exemplify the modern age confusion that as we willingly accept scientific progress, we continue to debate the place of God and religion.

The play may sound quite serious in its theological considerations, but like many Frankensteins before it has moments of levity and humor. The theology and humor in Dear’s script reflect the patterns that past dramatizations have established. Shelley’s novel does not consider theological beliefs or humor in a way significantly comparable to the dramatizations of the 1820s through today. As I mentioned in Chapter One, the inclusion of lower class characters is common to Frankenstein dramatizations. Dear uses the characters of Ewan, Rab, and Clarice to inject moments of light humor. In an early scene the Creature saves a young prostitute, Gretel, from being attacked. In gratitude Gretel offers the Creature wine and a chance to come with her. The Creature, still unable to speak, drops to his knees and starts sniffing the woman. Gretchen finally catches a look at his face and says, “I’m not going to scream. I’m just going to walk away. All right, mister?” (Dear, 7). Gretel leaves behind her wine, which the Creature drinks and spits out. The humor of the scene is based in Gretel’s assumption that she is dealing with a competent adult man, contrasted with the reality of the Creature’s nubile innocence where he has no interest in sex or alcohol. The Creature picks up speech from his encounters with humans. Meeting De Lacey, the old blind man offers him food, to which the Creature responds “Pissoff buggeroff!”(13). The Creature learned the foul language from his run in with a couple of beggars

that shouted at him to scare him off. Like a child who acts and swears without realizing the implications, the Creature fumbles through the world and entertains the audience by his simplistic understanding of it. The humor is sometimes related to the unawareness of characters, such as when Victor looks intensely at his love Elizabeth and “*appraises her thoroughly,*” stating, “You are beautiful. You will make a beautiful wife” (51). Elizabeth responds, “Victor! What do you think I am, a specimen?” (51). Elizabeth unknowingly identifies the exact manner in which Victor examines his life and those in it. Elizabeth’s comment is humorous but also possesses a tinge of sadness in her obliviousness to Victor’s secret life. As Philip Stevick analyzed the possibility of amusement as a response to Frankenstein, the audience may laugh at the Creature’s initial naiveté. Yet, the amused response is mixed with sympathy. There is a sympathetic response felt in watching the Creature and other characters struggle to make sense of their circumstances and frustrating relationships. Though the lower characters infuse the script with humor by their often-ignorant remarks as they rob graves and prepare a bride for her wedding night, the humor contrasts with the morbid setting of the graveyard and the unhappy anxiety of an unloved bride. The humor is not as light as it is in earlier stage adaptations or as extreme as it is in the many parodies. In week four of rehearsals Boyle asked his cast to “look for the wonder in their performance. His big note of the week is ‘Why so serious?’ The company are enjoying discovering the humour of the play.”¹⁶ Boyle and Dear did not want Frankenstein to be dreary or too somber. Dear’s script shows humor by the dark reality encountering the absurdity of situations. Boyle’s direction indicates the importance of the material remaining entertaining and having a sense of fascination. Dear and Boyle are following in the footsteps of the many playwrights and directors before who crafted their Frankensteins with the same qualities of amusement, wonder, humor, and sympathy.

A significant part of the appeal in dramatizing Frankenstein regards the decisions about the visual components of the play. As somebody who has watched and read several Frankensteins, I found it captivating to observe how the creation will be staged and how the Creature will appear. In the creation scene and the appearance of the Creature the imagination of directors and writers can run free, given that Shelley only vaguely described the scene and the Creature in her novel. Dear begins his play with the creation scene. I briefly described the scene in my Introduction, but I will expand on my description to illustrate the significant construction of the scene in Dear's adaptation. Between the darkness, flashes of light, and sounds of a heartbeat the audience catches glimpses of the Creature suspended from rubber tubes (Dear, 3). He falls to the floor as the flashes of lights and distorted sounds imitate the Creature's own awakening senses, showing "light when he opens his eyes" (3). The Creature crawls on the floor, struggles to walk, and "licks at the blood on his skin" (4). In the third scene the audience meets Victor who is, as always, curious and repulsed. The Creature "reaches out to him, babbling incoherently. He gives a ghastly smile" (4). Victor repeats what he has done in the countless dramatizations before and flees. The Creature is left alone in the laboratory until he escapes into the streets of Ingolstadt. The creation scene, composed of minimal dialogue and shockingly introducing the Creature, was highly praised by critics. Charles McNulty of the *Los Angeles Times* writes, "The opening scene is an elaborate coup of physical theatre dramatizing its emergence from a membrane-like chrysalis."¹⁷ Charles Spencer called the scene a "particular triumph," and describes the Creature "writhing, groaning, before learning to sit up...It's like watching a speeded up version of human evolution."¹⁸ Ben Brantley of the *New York Times* writes:

That opening sequence, in which the bloodied and naked Creature pushes through a membrane and into existence, has been staged as a brilliant, lonely ballet. Watching each of these actors (whom I saw on succeeding nights) find their feet and test their body parts is such a dizzy high point that it can't be topped. (And their approaches are just different enough to make you want to see both.)¹⁹

Nick Dear says when writing the scene he avoided any explanation of how Victor creates the Creature. Boyle's stylistic choices of light, sound, and imagery of the naked Creature cleverly rejects any clarification about the science behind such an experiment. Dear says, "The important thing to say about that moment is that if you start to ask yourself the question, 'how does he do it?,' there is no answer."²⁰ Dear and Boyle acknowledged the inability to compete with iconic creation scenes from film adaptations, dictating their interest in simplifying the scene and focusing on the growing physicality of the Creature. Minimalizing the explanation and amplifying the physicality through the deployment of sound and lighting effects was effective and dramatic.

The appearance of the Creature is always a contentious decision. Mentioned previously, Karloff's Monster is hard to overcome in the public's perception. Interviewing Dear and Boyle, Christopher Frayling suggested it is difficult to "liberate Frankenstein from the long shadow of Boris Karloff."²¹ In many ways, Frayling's remark hints at the building mythology of Frankenstein that was significantly contributed to by James Whale's films. I have argued that part of the reason to reconstruct the Creature as a speaking and thinking character is an attempt to reclaim the Creature from Karloff's characterization. Dear argues that the movies missed the opportunity to tell the Creature's story. Boyle adds, "the story had never been told from the point

of view of the Creature.”²² In centralizing the Creature’s story his appearance is secondary to his evolution. Nevertheless, Suttirat Anne Larlarb designed the Creature’s makeup to be “cobbled together from human remains,” but wanted the Creature “to look human... We, the audience, have to live with the Creature for the duration of the play.”²³ The scars and disfigurement are shocking at first glance, but Larlarb did not want the audience’s initial repulsion to distract from their empathetic connection to the character. The Creature is no longer in the blue makeup from the 1820s, or the mummified garments of the Edison film, or has bolts in the neck and a flat top head like Karloff. Instead Cumberbatch and Lee Miller’s Creatures appear bald with many scars, but they are not monsters. The mythology of Frankenstein has often been built on the appearance of the Creature, evident in the iconic film imagery and his reappearance in political cartoons for nearly two hundred years. Yet, Boyle and Dear sidestepped the relevance of the Creature’s appearance by making the character fully developed; his thoughts and emotions are more important than his image in the 2011 *Frankenstein*. Boyle states, “The approach of giving him his voice back is very theatre-based...It was a wonderful opportunity to try and use the language of theatre to try and illustrate his life.”²⁴

The National Theatre’s *Frankenstein* patterned itself in many ways on past dramatizations, often consciously by Dear and Boyle who display an astute and knowledgeable awareness of the history of adaptations. They knew the Creature in past dramatizations had been relegated to a one-dimensional monster, or as Boyle says, “a dud.”²⁵ Dear and Boyle discussed how Branagh’s highly anticipated film “scared everyone away” from *Frankenstein* as source material for adaptation, forcing them to put the script aside for several years.²⁶ The largest consideration for Dear and Boyle in adapting the story was placing the Creature in the center, requiring the story to begin with the Creature’s birth. The explanation of Victor Frankenstein’s

interest in his experiment, his connections to his family and friends, and the empathetic appeal of Frankenstein are in many ways reduced to the background. Michael Billington writes that the focus on the Creature “downplay[s] some of Shelley’s themes,” and Victor’s “initial hubris in animating lifeless matter is minimised.”²⁷ Focusing predominantly on the Creature shapes the audiences’ perception and inevitably loses aspects of Victor’s history and relationships. Yet, Billington argues, “If there are losses, there are also huge gains.”²⁸ In the history of dramatizations the choices made by playwrights, screenwriters, and directors perpetually loses or adds something from the novel and notable dramatizations. The myth perseveres, but it always materializes differently in dramatizations. The hope of these artists is that what is lost is not mourned, and what is added successfully brings a fresh life to the story. Dear and Boyle are two more artists in the long history of writers and directors who attempted to try something different with Frankenstein. They fortunately succeeded.

Despite the differences, every dramatization for stage and screen is concentrated on the action between the Creature and Frankenstein. Other characters are supplementary, affected by the two characters’ actions. In the 2011 *Frankenstein*, Victor is an arrogant, single-minded man who may have been drawn to science given his complete incompetence in understanding human beings beyond their organic matter. Aside from a brief moment during the creation scene, Victor does not appear in the script until page twenty-seven, after William’s death. William, before his death, describes Victor to the Creature as “silly, he never leaves his room!” (Dear, 32). Victor’s father, who loses one son to the murderous Creature, watches Victor become increasingly detached and unwilling to stay for William’s funeral. He scolds Victor, “You flout my authority; you do not respect the codes by which we live. In short, you disappoint me” (47). Frankenstein, unable to confide to anyone the cause of his anxiety, appears cold and “cruelly distant, arrogantly

self-involved.”²⁹ Frankenstein in the many films and plays has appeared in a range of characterizations from the faulted hero, to the guilty but crazed scientist, to the man with no remorse at all, and to the overwhelmed youth who cannot forgive himself for his creation. Here Victor is keenly intelligent, calculatingly composed despite moments of terror and anxiety, and never entirely remorseful given his pride and inability to reach emotional depths. His loneliness is obvious, but appears as a result of his natural demeanor.

In Dear’s script Victor is at odds with his father and has no friend, such as a Henry Clerval, to talk to or find comfort from. He is equally as disconnected from his lover Elizabeth. The two young adults have a difficult time communicating feelings and sharing hopes for the future. Elizabeth accuses Victor of avoiding her, stating, “We’re supposed to be getting married!...talk to me occasionally” (Dear, 35). Victor responds, “But what if I haven’t got anything to say? What am I meant to do then?” (35). Compared to the many Frankensteins of the past, in Dear’s script Victor seldom has or seizes the opportunity to protect or reassure Elizabeth. There are no chase scenes where the romantic Victor fires a gun at a monster that threatens his young, beautiful bride. Instead Elizabeth is left to question the emotionally remote man she plans on marrying. She asks, “Victor, what do you think love is?,” to which he answers, “Well, it’s not quantifiable, is it? I mean, what do you measure? The number of kisses?” (50). Elizabeth asks for children from Victor, unaware that he has already created life on his own. Later when Victor confides to Elizabeth that he has created a monster, she is dumbfounded, responding, “But if you wanted to create life...Why not just give me a child? We could have married years ago!” (70). Elizabeth harshly judges Frankenstein for his arrogant creation: “You have been trying God’s work...You’ve meddled with the natural order, and led us into chaos, because you worship the gods of electricity and gas!” (70). The criticism of Frankenstein by Elizabeth and Victor’s father

reflects a normative ideology. Victor is accused of not respecting the codes and order of normal life by proceeding with his experiment. Victor dared to enter a realm where creating life is normally perceived by society as the work of God. Frankenstein's unorthodox behavior of single-minded determination and his successful scientific progress are condemned in light of the consequences. The social fear of progress is noticeable. Once again Frankenstein becomes the symbol of why man needs to be governed, and how unrestricted progress can bring catastrophic results. Charles McNulty discusses the thematic tone in Dear's script, which warns the audience against progress without considering the societal implications and detrimental consequences. He writes:

But with the clock ticking on global warming, Japan now facing its worst disaster since the Second World War and Libya and its neighbors erupting in bloodshed, this is no time to quibble over subtleties of craft. Certainly our leaders won't connect the dots between all the recent breaking news calamities without being cudged into it. Somebody is going to have to spell things out for them.³⁰

McNulty proves the myth of Frankenstein and its representation of our fear of progress are alive and present in the 2011 production. Whether Dear and Boyle intended for their *Frankenstein* to speak to a political agenda the way McNulty analyzes is uncertain. Boyle seldom has discussed the play beyond an aesthetic and entertainment quality. Though Dear has discussed how the story has modern relevance in vague terms, he also has not definitively stated he wanted the script to be read in the way McNulty envisions. However, McNulty's comments prove the ideological significance and political and social possibilities in the story of Frankenstein. Whether

playwrights and directors intend a political agenda or not, Frankenstein conveys social meaning that audiences may infer.

In contrast to Victor Frankenstein is the Creature that evolves from an innocent creation to a clever, manipulative murderer. The rehearsal diary recounts how the director saw “aspects of the Creature’s character and situation as relating to autism.”³¹ Boyle had Cumberbatch and Lee Miller meet with children with Asperger’s and autism. Recent scholarship has started comparing the Creature to those living with Asperger’s and autism, but scholars are not the only ones making the comparison. Matthew Readman, a ten-year-old boy living with Asperger’s, explains the similarity, “I feel like the monster. All he wanted is to be accepted as he was, he didn’t have any social skills and tried to adjust to the world he knew. All the monster wanted was a friend.”³² Boyle wanted the Creature to display similar feelings of being overwhelmed by sensorial stimulation and being socially ostracized. The Creature is introduced to a world that continues to bombard his senses as he slowly develops the ability to walk and speak. He is incapable of relating to people because he does not look, walk, or speak ‘normally.’ After his creation, abandonment, and initial contact with the quick-paced society outside of the laboratory, the Creature struggles to make sense of his budding thoughts. At one point “*He stands and addresses us: a speech of confusion and sometimes distress, but without actual words*” (Dear, 8). With no one to talk to and no one to care for him the Creature pieces together the world he encounters. With De Lacey the Creature forges a friendship that lasts for months, unparalleled in previous dramatizations. The kind man teaches the Creature speech, literature, religion, and the ways of humanity. When the Creature tells De Lacey of the cruel treatment he has experienced from, “Men. Women. Childs. Dogs,” De Lacey replies, “Peasants are ignorant people. They do not read like you and I. It’s an instinct to protect the home and family” (19). The Creature is

fascinated and repulsed by the ways of man. He questions De Lacey as to why people choose to live in cities, why humans are good but massacre each other, and why De Lacey has to live a life of poverty. The Creature is confounded by the answers that appear illogical, stating, “I do not like inconsistent! Why must it be so?” (23). De Lacey replies, “I don’t know. That’s the way it is” (23). The Creature is frustrated by the inability to explain his own existence in the world, “I discover how much I do not know. Ideas batter me like hailstones. Questions but no answers? Who am I? Where am I from?” (22). His intellectual evolution exceeds the many Creatures before. Dear’s Creature is curious about his existence and the way human beings act and think. When De Lacey’s family finally catches the Creature with their father, he is beaten away. De Lacey tries to defend his friend, “No man is a monster!” (28). Yet, it is too late. The cruel treatment convinces the Creature he cannot be accepted by mankind. He sets the De Lacey cottage on fire, and the family burns alive inside.

The Creature finds Victor. He asks for his companion, and he observes Ewan and Rab robbing a grave for the body. He realizes, “Was this how I was formed?...Stolen at night from wet soil?...It was better when I knew nothing, when I had no questions” (56). The Creature understands that his ignorance was bliss. Despite an increasing intelligence that is coupled with a deeper awareness of the dark nature of human existence, the Creature is capable of feeling emotional depths Victor cannot. When Victor makes the female companion the Creature promises to love her. Victor is surprised, as indicated by the script:

Victor: Are you saying you will love her?

Creature: Yes, I am!

Victor: Because love is not something one can teach, not something one can learn. Either you feel it in your soul, or—

Creature: Oh, master! I do! I love her! I do!

Victor: You’re telling me you have a soul?

Creature: I must! Say you believe me –

Victor: How does it feel, to be in love?

Creature: It feels like all the life is bubbling up in me and spilling from my mouth, it feels like my lungs are on fire and my heart is a hammer, it feels like I can do anything in the world! Anything in the world!

Victor: Is that how it feels?

Creature: Yes

A heartbreaking moment in which it becomes clear that the Creature may be more capable of love than Victor is. (62-63)

The Creature has evolved past Victor in emotional development. Unlike previous dramatizations, Dear suggests the monster has a soul. Yet, the Creature's immediate connection to his companion is shattered when Victor tears the female creature apart. With feelings of profound loneliness and anger, the Creature promises to seek revenge. When the Creature finds Elizabeth alone on her wedding night, he meets a woman with a gentle heart. The Creature asks Elizabeth, "If you had a child, and it looked like me, would you abandon it?" (72). She tells him she never would, no matter how repulsive the child was. She promises the Creature to speak to Victor, she offers him friendship, praises his extraordinary abilities, and asks him what he is good at. The Creature responds, "I am good at the art of assimilation...slowly I learnt: how to ruin, how to hate, how to debase...I finally learnt how to lie" (74). He apologizes to the sweet Elizabeth for what he must do next. The Creature rapes Elizabeth. Victor enters the room to her screams, but "hangs back in appalled fascination as he watches his Creature mating" (75). Elizabeth screams again, and the Creature breaks her neck.

The Creature has transgressed into a human being capable of evil. By learning the most selfish and destructive human behaviors, the Creature rapes and murders Elizabeth with reason and intention. He is a monster, and perhaps a scarier version than any before because he knows what he is doing is wrong. In the Arctic Circle setting of the last scene the Creature tells the

audience, “My heart is black. It stinks. My mind, once filled with dreams of beauty, is a furnace of revenge” (77). He lays out food for himself as the frostbitten, nearly dead Victor appears dragging a dog sled. The Creature offers Frankenstein food and a moment to rest in the endless pursuit. The Creature tries to revive Victor, “Up you get! We go on, on to the Pole!” (79). Victor remains still. The Creature is worried and cradles Victor, “Don’t leave me. Don’t leave me alone. You and I, we are one...Oh Frankenstein. Will you forgive me my cruelty?” (79). The Creature desperately pours wine into Victor’s mouth, and tells him he would have loved him had things been different. Victor replies, “I don’t know what love is” (80). The Creature says, “I will teach you,” and Victor agrees, “Yes, you understand it better than I. Do you have a soul, and I none?” (80). The Creature celebrates Victor’s restored energy and teases, “Come, scientist! Destroy me! Destroy your creation! Come!” (80). The two remain alive. Unlike any dramatization before, Dear and Boyle’s play ends with both men exiting into the “*icy distance, the Creature prancing in front of Victor, who struggles after him*” (80). There is no rewarding redemption or punishment of death for either. The ambiguous resolution, where both characters live their last days in a bizarre mixture of dependence, loneliness, and hatred, illustrates the confusing times in which we live. There is no perfect or clear-cut resolution to the economic despair, the religious uncertainty, and the progress of science and technology that create as many problems as solutions.³³ The horrific Creature and his hubristic creator do not find peace in death, and instead keep pursuing one another because nothing else is left.

Michael Billington discusses how the play refuses to answer which character is the real monster, suggesting that the ending proves “The issue is not so much resolved as left hanging as the two figures memorably depart into an eternal icy wilderness.”³⁴ Paul Taylor describes the last scene as a “luminously ice-green Arctic” where both men “survive, umbilically linked in the

kind of perpetual deathly symbiosis that would pass muster in Dante's *Inferno*.”³⁵ As seen in Chapter Two, the endings of Frankenstein dramatizations often provide what Noël Carroll has described as a reconstitution of norms. The death of one or both characters resolves the harm caused by them, and the characters exemplify what happens when man crosses too many boundaries. If an ideological message can be derived from the 2011 ending it would seem to reflect that man has perhaps lost the ability to be governed in his ambitions of progress. In 2011 our fear of progress is realized. The progress in industrial development in the last two hundred years has led to devastating pollution, global warming, and a resulting higher frequency of natural disasters. The push for financial dominance, fostered by greedy individuals, banks, and corporations, created an economic depression with little reprieve in sight for most people. Despite our progress in technology, anxiety rises as certain countries develop nuclear weapons and we are uncertain how they will use them. Our fears of progress are justifiable, given how it can create long-lasting and damaging results. The cost of progress may already need to be paid in perpetuity, and the Creature and Frankenstein's seemingly endless game of cat-and-mouse arguably represents the inability of the norm to be reconstituted. If nothing else, the play's ending reflects how the Creature, Frankenstein, and the myth continue to live, providing us the reminder in the modern age that though we wish to see the Creature open his eyes, we should know once he does he is our responsibility.

The play intrigued and captivated audiences and critics alike. Yet, many critics faulted Dear's script. Paul Callan writes, “the script often dragged as badly as the Creature's foot when he learnt to walk.”³⁶ Charles McNulty adds, “it's true his dialogue isn't always as sharp as his interpretive grasp of Shelley's novel.”³⁷ The criticisms are not unfounded. At times Dear's script lacks the nuances of Shelley's novel. The dialogue misses opportunities for subtlety, instead

opting for heavy-handed responses and far too many exclamations. The script's beauty and construction pales in comparison to Shelley's novel, which is true for many past dramatizations. Where Dear fails in writing eloquent dialogue, he makes up for by crafting the story with a renewed perspective and a series of dramatic and escalating events. Dear consciously excluded aspects of the novel, including Walton, many of the subplots, and Henry Clerval in order to focus on the Creature as the central figure. He argues, "we never wanted to do the Dickensian, epic version."³⁸ Dear instead chose to write a streamlined script that "simplifies and coarsens its fascinating source."³⁹

Yet, the performance of the myth of Frankenstein is never contingent on one factor, such as the script. Much of the success of the 2011 production appears to be attributed to the direction of Danny Boyle. Critics unanimously agree that any weakness in the script was overcome by Boyle's vision. Critic Charles Spencer says Boyle revitalized the story by "constantly creating shocks, spectacular coups de theatre."⁴⁰ The spectacle of the show included a dramatic lighting design, haunting music score, strange sound effects, and unique stage pictures that are credited to Boyle's love of visual and aural embellishments. Patrick Marmion says Boyle directed the "gothic classic like a kid in a toy shop," even including a large steam engine momentarily used in an early scene as the Creature comes face to face with the loud, modern world.⁴¹ Boyle's production of *Frankenstein* marks his return to the stage after creating a prolific film career. He infused the stage production with his "rough magic" and "his vision here has none of a filmmaker's representational literalness."⁴² It is ironic that a highly celebrated film director would opt to direct a stage production of Frankenstein after recently winning an Academy Award for directing in 2009. Boyle's return to the theatre marks another way in which Frankenstein dramatizations unite the mediums of stage and screen. Boyle says the story for him is about

“Science and Love--and the wonder they both cause, and the tension between the two.”⁴³ The theme of science and its detrimental consequences reappears in many of Boyle’s films. His 2002 film *28 Days Later* details how a virus accidentally released from a laboratory turns human beings into rage-filled zombies. His 2007 *Sunshine* is about a space crew whose mission is to re-ignite the dying sun. The mission nearly fails after the crew encounters a sabotaging scientist who has been lost in space. The films are a precursor to Boyle tackling Frankenstein; the modern myth is arguably one of the prototypes for such films.

One of the most unique aspects of Boyle’s direction of *Frankenstein* was his idea to double-cast the two lead roles. There have been a few successful productions that have alternated roles, but the practice is rarely done. The process requires certain considerations in rehearsals and performance given that two actors must learn and perform both roles. Boyle argued for the alternation, suggesting Frankenstein is a story about creation without women. He clarifies, “The idea is to bring two actors as close to that notion as possible...In terms of the performance, Frankenstein and the Creature literally create each other: every other night they reinhabit each other.”⁴⁴ Having worked with Jonny Lee Miller in his 1996 film *Trainspotting*, Boyle found his other actor, Benedict Cumberbatch, through auditions. Boyle initially considered separate rehearsals unless the two characters were in the same scene. Cumberbatch and Miller found the separate rehearsal process unnecessary; as Miller made clear, “We find it constructive to talk to each other about what looks good, what doesn’t. We’re more of a team.”⁴⁵

Rehearsals began with just the two actors. Boyle used neutral mask work to assist the actors in discovering the physicality of the Creature.⁴⁶ Both actors developed their own physical approach through extensive movement training. For both actors the Creature required the most consideration in character development. When asked if the actors had a favorite role

Cumberbatch replied, “I do enjoy playing both characters but it’s pretty bloody obvious which one is the bigger, more unusual ask.”⁴⁷ Boyle learned that the process of alternating roles “breaks the monolithic concentration an actor has on his own role within the process,” and allows the actors to know the play “inside and out.”⁴⁸ The rehearsal journal recalls how the two actors were in constant conversation with one another, listening to each other’s difficulties, and helping each other find new approaches to their characters.

The actors discuss in great length the experience of sharing roles and watching each other perform. Cumberbatch admits that acting opposite a role he also performs is unusually enjoyable. He says, “The evolution of the performance is different...we worked separately and then we watched each other...there is a lot of sharing...I still pick up things that he does.”⁴⁹ Miller adds that critiquing one another’s performance is not entirely absent from the process. He says observing “has taught me a lot in this extraordinary experience...a lot of it you say, ‘I wouldn’t do it like that’ but a lot of it you say, ‘I would do it like that. That’s amazing.’”⁵⁰ Both actors gave each other permission to borrow discovered moments that effectively added something to the production. Boyle, thrilled with the cooperative effort the actors adapted, has noted how sharing the roles mirrors the shared nature of Dr. Frankenstein and the Creature: they are two distinct people but are incomplete without each other.⁵¹ The biggest factors in rehearsing the alternations were the lack of rehearsal time and the pressure of learning twice the amount of lines. Cumberbatch explains the added stress is not simply a matter of the technical skill of memorizing the quantity of lines. For the actor the difficulty is juggling both parts and remembering one character’s lines as an actor repeats the memorized lines of the other character. It is not an easy feat as both actors recall moments of confusion and frustration during rehearsals.

Cumberbatch also acknowledges there are different audience expectations depending on which alternation they see. He states:

There have been moments in the last couple of weeks when I have been looking at him in either role and going, 'I hope I'm not mouthing his lines.' The real problem is psychologically going "tonight this is what they get"...and you can hear people coming in and you can hear the audience talking about it [thinking] "Oh no, is it him?"⁵²

Critics responded favorably to the role alternations, describing how the concept worked effectively for the play and brought a new perspective to the 'old' material. Critics relished choosing their favorite Creature and Dr. Frankenstein. Maddy Costa in *The Guardian* writes, "the thought occurs that the actors' strengths veer in opposite directions: that Cumberbatch is obvious for Frankenstein and [Lee] Miller will excel as the Creature."⁵³ Paul Taylor of *The Independent* suggests Cumberbatch understood thoughts behind both characters, whereas Lee Miller understood their emotions. He concludes he favored Miller's Creature and his "aching need for contact," and enjoyed Cumberbatch's "brilliant" way of portraying the "ridiculous aspects of the hubristic Scientist."⁵⁴ Though Michael Billington comments similarly, he writes, "The actors complement each other perfectly rather than provide a contest and Boyle's production is a bravura triumph."⁵⁵ Critics noted that alternating roles contributed to the play's "beauty" and to the "mesmerizing suppleness of performances."⁵⁶ Rather than lambasting either actor or focusing solely on the phenomena of having two actors perform two roles, the alternation seamlessly fit into a production where there were other exciting factors at hand to consider. With Boyle's celebrated return to the theatre and the centralization of the Creature

critics had plenty to discuss and analyze in the 2011 *Frankenstein*. The alternation was another twist, illustrating the commonality between Dr. Frankenstein and the Creature as it had never before been demonstrated.

The 2011 *Frankenstein* met critical expectations, even though it was an imperfect production. Charles Spencer summarizes, “The production may be intermittently hobbled by dud dialogue and second-rate supporting performances, but at its best there is no doubt that *Frankenstein* is the most viscerally exciting and visually stunning show in town.”⁵⁷ With sold out houses, the production introduced and rekindled the intrigue of *Frankenstein* for audiences. The myth, both in a structural Levi-Strauss sense and in an ideological Barthes sense, thrived in the 2011 production just as it had in previous dramatizations. As Dear’s script uniquely ends with the Creature running off into the distance with an exhausted Frankenstein pursuing him, we see once again that the dangerous Creature, representing a fear of progress that political and social bodies must confine, is beyond our grasp. Yet, as neither character dies, we also see a new urgency of the ideological message embedded in Dear’s conclusion. We must keep chasing the Creature before it is too late, and this time we cannot hope he will stop himself in death. Global warming is not ceasing, the possibility of nuclear war is not over, and scientific advances with unforeseen ethical and global ramifications are not a moment of the past. The danger of uncontrollable progress is our present and modern problem, seen in Shelley’s day with her framing of *Frankenstein* and evident in Dear’s *Frankenstein*. We are both man and monster: we created many of the problems our world faces today in our own pursuit of boundless progress, and we are also the only ones who can hopefully stop the damage that some of our pursuits have created. Like Frankenstein, we hope political leaders, governing social bodies, and we as individuals realize we need to keep chasing the dangerous Creature that we are responsible for

making and letting run free. The myth endures, but Dear and Boyle found new ways for the story to relate to the current world, evident in its theological considerations, irresolvable ending, and a Creature that represents our own complicated humanity. Many patterns from dramatizations are repeated in Dear's script, but Dear added new life to Shelley's story by reframing the main narrative through the Creature. Boyle's direction proves that Frankenstein on stage can be revitalized by the skillful use of theatrical effects, a keen sense of stylistic vision, and a unique approach in challenging actors with alternating the lead roles. Dear and Boyle galvanized Frankenstein and reminded critics and audiences that in the twenty-first century the myth can still attract and sustain our attention. In 1979 George Levine and U. C. Knoepfelmacher wrote in their appropriately titled book, *The Endurance of Frankenstein*, "After a century and a half, *Frankenstein* begins to look both inexhaustible and inexplicable."⁵⁸ Thirty-two years later Frankenstein chased his Creature off stage and thunderous applause filled the house at the National Theatre. We may never quite understand why Frankenstein endures, but as the 2011 production proves, we are quite thrilled that it has.

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- ¹ Phillip Inman, “Is the worst finally over for the UK economy?,” *The Guardian*, February 27, 2012, accessed March 1, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2012/feb/27/is-worst-finally-over-uk-economy>.
- ² John McManus, “Two-thirds of Britons not religious, survey says,” *BBC News UK*, March 20, 2011, accessed February 28, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-12799801>.
- ³ Simon Rogers, “Muslim populations by country: how big will each Muslim population be by 2030?,” January 28, 2011, *The Guardian*, accessed February 28, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2011/jan/28/muslim-population-country-projection-2030>.
- ⁴ Nick Collins, “Ethical rules needed to curb 'Frankenstein-like experiments' on animals,” *The Telegraph*, July 22, 2011, accessed February 28, 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/science-news/8652093/Ethical-rules-needed-to-curb-Frankenstein-like-experiments-on-animals.html>.
- ⁵ Nigel Hawkes, “Are we finally able to repair our own organs?,” *The Observer*, October 29, 2011, accessed March 1, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/mending-broken-hearts/british-heart-foundation-stem-cell-research>.
- ⁶ Levine, “Ambiguous,” 8.
- ⁷ “Interview with Danny Boyle and Nick Dear,” interview by Christopher Frayling, *National Theatre: Frankenstein, for iPad/Mac/PC*, April 7, 2011.
- ⁸ Dear, *Frankenstein*, 38. Further citations of this work are given in the text.
- ⁹ Sarah Hemming, “The Creatures has his say,” *Financial Times*, accessed March 7, 2012, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/79323e8a-2fe3-11e0-a7c6-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1oNzwxpKt>
- ¹⁰ Dear, *Frankenstein*, 18; O’Flinn, “Production,” 36.
- ¹¹ Cynthia A. Freeland, *The Naked and the Undead: Evil and the Appeal of Horror* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 32.
- ¹² “Interview with Boyle and Dear,” *National Theatre*.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Baldick, *Frankenstein’s Shadow*, 5.
- ¹⁵ “Q&A: Playwright Nick Dear on Adapting Frankenstein,” *The Arts Desk*, February 10, 2011, accessed March 3, 2012, <http://www.theartsdesk.com/theatre/qa-playwright-nick-dear-adapting-frankenstein>.
- ¹⁶ Abbey Wright, *discover: National Theatre Background Pack* (London: The National Theatre Board, 2011), 10.
- ¹⁷ McNulty, “Critic’s Notebook.”
- ¹⁸ Spencer, “*Frankenstein*.”
- ¹⁹ Brantley, “Alive.”
- ²⁰ Wright, *Background Pack*, 15.
- ²¹ “Interview with Boyle and Dear,” *National Theatre*.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Wright, *Background Pack*, 16.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 11.
- ²⁵ “Interview with Boyle and Dear,” *National Theatre*.
- ²⁶ Wright, *Background Pack*, 11.
- ²⁷ Billington, “Review.”
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Taylor, “First Night.”

³⁰ McNulty, "Critic's Notebook."

³¹ Wright, *Background Pack*, 7.

³² Matthew Readman, "A child's view on living with Asperger's," *Autism Support Network* (website), accessed March 18, 2012, <http://www.autismsupportnetwork.com/news/childs-view-living-asperger-s-332451>.

³³ TIME magazine is one of many news sources that has investigated if technology and science are progressing at a rate humans cannot keep up with. In the article, "Is Technology Moving Too Fast?," Steward Brand writes, "Radical new technologies are often seen as moral threats by conservative religious groups or as economic and cultural threats by political groups." Written in 2000, Brand's article reflects twentieth century developments that have brought ease to our lives but also negative side effects, such as environmental damage. Needless to say, twelve years later the question if science and technology are progressing beyond limits humans and our world can adapt to is still a viable question. <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,997268,00.html>

³⁴ Billington, "Review."

³⁵ Taylor, "First Night."

³⁶ Paul Callan, "Review: Frankenstein, National Theatre," *Express.co.uk*, February 24, 2011, accessed July 28, 2011, <http://www.express.co.uk/posts/view/230869/Review-Frankenstein-National-Theatre>.

³⁷ McNulty, "Critic's Notebook."

³⁸ "Interview with Boyle and Dear," *National Theatre*.

³⁹ Brantley, "Alive."

⁴⁰ Spencer, "Frankenstein."

⁴¹ Patrick Marmion, "Monster success: This double dose of Frankenstein is full of life," *Daily Mail Newspaper*, February 24, 2011, accessed June 28, 2011, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/reviews/article-1360112/Danny-Boyles-Frankenstein-The-National-Theatre-life.html#ixzz!QgzkuPWG>.

⁴² Brantley, "Alive."

⁴³ Wright, *Background Pack*, 12.

⁴⁴ Maddy Costa, "Frankenstein: Man or Monster?" *The Guardian*, January 17, 2011, accessed October 19, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2011/jan/17/a-monster-role-frankenstein-danny-boyle/print>.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Wright, *Background Pack*, 7.

⁴⁷ "Frankenstein Q&A Transcript with Jonny Lee Miller, Benedict Cumberbatch, and Danny Boyle in Aid of Dramatic Need," interview by Madeline Morris, April 20, 2011, accessed October 5, 2011, <http://www.benedictcumberbatch.co.uk/frankenstein-qa-transcript.html>.

⁴⁸ Wright, *Background Pack*, 9.

⁴⁹ "Transcript," Morris.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Costa, "Frankenstein."

⁵⁴ Taylor, "First Night"

⁵⁵ Billington, "Review."

⁵⁶ Taylor, "First Night;" McNulty, "Critic's Notebook."

⁵⁷ Spencer, "Frankenstein."

⁵⁸ George Levine and U.C. Knoepfelmacher, "Preface," in *The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel*, ed. George Levine and U.C. Knoepfelmacher (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), xiii.

Conclusion

The story of Frankenstein will not leave the stage or screen anytime soon. Just when the story appears to have exhausted every possible angle, a new adaptation comes along offering an innovative interpretation. Nick Dear and Danny Boyle's *Frankenstein* is not, in many ways, a drastic reconstruction of the story. Yet, the production's clever reconfiguration of placing the Creature at the forefront and selectively adding new elements, such as the unresolved ending and the alternation of roles, illustrates the infinite possibilities of adapting and producing Frankenstein. The inexplicable power of Frankenstein is that it has weathered an assortment of adaptations ranging in quality, style, and tone. Its endurance is a testament to the ongoing fascination of Shelley's core story and the characters of Dr. Frankenstein and his Creature. Even in its first adaptation Frankenstein proved its durability. When Richard Brinsley Peake's *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein* opened in 1823 it received several scathing reviews.¹ Nevertheless, the audiences came, the play was wildly popular, and it spawned a wave of Frankenstein adaptations across the country. Nearly two hundred years later, audiences crowded into the National Theatre to see the young scientist give life to his creation. In the years to come Dear's script will be produced by several English and American theatres, just as Clive Barker's and Victor Gialanella's adaptations have been. Time will tell if the play can sustain its appeal without Danny Boyle's direction and the performances of Jonny Lee Miller and Benedict Cumberbatch in the roles of the Creature and Dr. Frankenstein. Even if it does not, a new Frankenstein play or film dramatization will eventually appear, reinterpreting the story and inevitably revitalizing the myth.

Like the many myths that have come before, we return to Frankenstein for dramatizations because it continues to have relevance for the audience. I have argued that Frankenstein mirrors

our fears of progress, socially and politically in the early 1800s and technologically and scientifically in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Yet, there are other ways to explore the meaning of the myth of Frankenstein. Writers have analyzed Frankenstein from historical, biographical, feminist, psychoanalytic, Marxist, and cultural perspective. Frankenstein is open to multiple readings, reflecting its ability to relate to various aspects of human experience. Perhaps future scholarship can utilize the various frameworks to look at the totality of the myth of Frankenstein. By identifying Shelley's novel as the origin of the myth and navigating through the history of dramatizations I have approached Frankenstein as the living, dynamic, and ever-changing story that it is. If the past is an indication of future scholarship, Frankenstein will be predominantly approached as an inert story once told in a novel. Frankenstein scholarship could benefit from examining the story's movement as it progresses through dramatizations, representation in news media and political rhetoric, and as a part of popular culture and common vernacular.

Claude Lévi-Strauss once wrote, "I therefore claim to show, not how men think in myths, but how myths operate in men's minds without their being aware of the fact."² I have attempted to explain how the myth of Frankenstein resonates with the public, historically and today. The story continually shifts because writers are products of the modern age and their adaptations, intentionally or not, reflect social anxieties about progress. Yet, Levi-Strauss's comment reminds us there is an intangible quality to the myth of Frankenstein. By now Frankenstein has become deeply entrenched in our culture as a source for storytelling. To pinpoint how the myth has slipped into our consciousness to the depths that it has is difficult. I have suggested a possible explanation, which argues that the story's ability to weave entertainment, innovation, and ideology in each adaptation has kept the myth viable. I admit that my explanation may not

entirely grasp the many applications and uses of the myth. Perhaps its intangibility is linked to the fact that few other myths resonate as well as Frankenstein can and does in our modern age. In Chris Baldick's discussion of modern myths, he argues other stories such as Dracula, Faust, Don Quixote, Robinson Crusoe, and Jekyll and Hyde should be given "mythic status."³ A further exploration of other modern myths might specify what distinguishes Frankenstein as a myth. It is questionable if these other stories have the same potency, variability, or endurance as Frankenstein. A closer comparison may illuminate why Frankenstein stays vivid in our minds, despite us not always knowing how it does. Frankenstein has infiltrated our thoughts, and it is hard to remember when you first heard the name, saw an image of the monster, or knew what it meant. Interestingly, it was likely before ever reading the novel or seeing a dramatization.

Nick Dear said of Frankenstein, "The story at its core is a story about magic and fantasy."⁴ Magic and fantasy may seem like odd places to conclude after surveying the history of dramatizations, considering the ideology in the story's mythology, and deciphering how Dear and Boyle successfully readapted the story to the stage. Yet, where the theories are insufficient and the explanations fall short, maybe it is the magic and fantasy of Frankenstein that keep us waiting for the curtain to rise or the screen to flicker. Reading the enthusiastic reviews of Nick Dear and Danny Boyle's *Frankenstein* it is evident the two men simultaneously captured the magic of Frankenstein and the magic of theatre to craft a powerful night of entertainment. Before disregarding the notions of magic and fantasy, consider that for nearly two hundred years audiences have watched a young scientist attempt to give life to a creature, believing if even for a moment, in the possibility that it works. As the Creature takes its first breath and captivates the audience, the story of Frankenstein magically and fantastically proves it has another life to live on stage.

¹ Forry, *Hideous*, 4.

² Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked: Mythologiques, Volume 1* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 12.

³ Baldick, *Frankenstein's Shadow*, 2.

⁴ "Interview with Boyle and Dear," *National Theatre*.

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