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Dramatic Publishing

FRANKENSTEIN

An adaptation of Mary Shelley's classic

By

RIC AVERILL

Commissioned by Coterie Theatre



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(FRANKENSTEIN)

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DEDICATION:

This play is dedicated to my fellow playwrights, directors and peer mentors who have nurtured me, encouraged me, and helped along the path toward creating dramatic literature for young people: Sandy Asher, Jeanne Averill, Roger Bedard, Laurie Brooks, Kent Brown, Max Bush, Jeff Church, Scot Copeland, Kim Peter Kovac, Gayle Sergel, Dorothy Webb, Graham Whitehead and Pat Wilhelms.

Frankenstein premiered at the Coterie Theatre (one of the top five children's theatres in the country according to TIME magazine) on Sept. 24, 2002. Directed by Cynthia Levin of Kansas City's Unicorn Theatre, the play opened the Coterie's 24th season in a newly renovated space with the following cast and production crew.

Producing Artistic Director Jeff Church
Executive Director Joette Pelster

THE CAST:

VICTOR Charles Fugate
ELIZABETH Sarah Crawford
HENRY Jonathan Shannon
JUSTINE. Angela Wildflower Polk
PROFESSOR WALDEN Walter Coppage*
CREATURE Kyle L. Mowry *

THE ARTISTIC AND PRODUCTION COMPANY:

Director Cynthia Levin
Set Design Gary Wichansky
Costume Design Jennifer Myers Ecton
Lighting Design Art Kent
Sound Design David Kiehl
Properties Master Jon Cupit
Creature Make-up Design Andrew Chambers
Production Stage Manager Amy M. Abels Owen*
Set Construction/Technical Coordinator Jason Harris
Production Assistant/House Manager Sarah Wienke

*Denotes member of Actor's Equity Association

The playwright also wishes to give credit to the invaluable second production directed by Pat Wilhelms at the Mill Mountain Theatre in Roanoke, Virginia. Cast members and production staff included: Gregory Prigel, Meredith Holcomb, Chris Holms, Jeanine Gangloff, David Howard, Zach Nadolski, Jimmy Ray Ward, Angela Valerio, Sara Halstead, Michael Mansfield, Abigail Hartmann, Claire Van Cott and Pat Wilhelms.

Pat Wilhelms was an excellent dramaturg as well as director and gave the play the jolt of electricity it needed to be ready for publication.

Director's Notes

From: Pat Wilhelm, Mill Mountain Theatre

Setting this classic story in the present and using contemporary “Gothic” dress and make-up as well as “techno” music and video were very successful tools in drawing today’s audiences into the story. Ric Averill did an excellent job of writing a very thrilling, keep-you-on-the-edge-of-your seat script and I wanted to make sure that was carried out in the production values and staging of the play. Our set included gurgling containers of bloody fluids, severed legs, heads in jars, blood packs and hypodermic needles that drew blood (chocolate syrup) from Victor’s neck that was then squirted into the mouths of the Creature and Justine.

One challenge we had, was figuring out how to sew the Creature together. We used sleight-of-hand techniques that a magician uses, to draw the audience’s eyes to a different direction as we placed a fake eyeball into the head of the Creature and plunged a heart into his chest. Another challenge was the re-animation of the “mouse” in Professor Walden’s classroom. We devised a spring-wire mechanism that the mouse lied on. The end of the spring had a wire with a loop at the end that pulled tight over a nail. When the mouse had to “jump” the loop was removed from the nail and the mouse jumped up into the air.

I hope you have as much fun as we did in the creative process. This play will hold the attention of audiences of all ages and inspire a lot of discussion. Good luck!

FRANKENSTEIN

A Play in One Act

For 4m., 2w.

CHARACTERS:

VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN. . . . an ambitious scientist and
assistant professor, 26

ELIZABETH. a university student and his fiancée, 20

HENRY. a university student and friend to Victor and
Elizabeth, 21

JUSTINE. a local girl who works as a caretaker and
maid for the professor, 18

THE CREATURE. Victor's creation

PROFESSOR WALDEN. . a blind teacher of science, older

SETTINGS:

A unit or revolve set must include areas that represent: a *graveyard*, complete with several raised crypts and benches; a *classroom*, with an old desk, a table and anatomical charts, and a small lab desk; and Victor's *laboratory*. The laboratory is the most elaborate area with pumps, vials and tubes and a very large, table/tub/aquarium in the center. Into the tub are inserted several diodes and springs which are attached to a large, complicated set of fuses and breakers on the wall. The original production featured a set backing of tall three-dimensional "Cornell" boxes (for examples, see gibson.hypermart.net/cornell-boxes.html <<http://gibson.hypermart.net/cornell-boxes.html>>) filled with artifacts and scientific equipment in myriad shelves. The classroom then emphasized anatomical drawings, bones, beakers and props for those scenes while the laboratory featured

drawings, ingredients, jars, samples, etc. The boxes also represented walls and other environmental areas as well as entrances, exits and escape routes. UC, a framed entrance serves as the back of the “castle” and also indicates the “window” through which the Creature enters and exits. There should be a sense of height and foreboding to that exit.

COSTUMES:

The costumes are a combination of romantic upper-middle-class early 19th century and contemporary “goth.” There is a sense of edginess to the dress and setting, as though it all came out of the imagination of a contemporary youth upon reading the novel and setting the characters within the context of the contemporary world. Everything reflects a romantic sensuality and an edge toward the bizarre. These are students who would purposefully set out to draw attention by setting themselves apart.

MUSIC:

Most productions have used very hard rock, punk, goth and/or metal music to establish mood and provide for scene changes and transitions. Included in the text is one original lullaby that is more typical to the period of the original story. This “Rose song” may be sung a capella, with a distant (or recorded) harpsichord or simple acoustic guitar accompaniment. Music, lyrics, accompaniment and chords are all provided with the song (see page 56) and may be used in any combination.

The original production went through the entire song and then had Elizabeth stop singing after she became aware of the Creature’s presence. The published version reflects a later production where the song is interrupted just prior to its ending. Directors are encouraged to use the piece however it is most effective for their individual production and actors.

FRANKENSTEIN

SCENE ONE — The Graveyard.

(Edgy hard goth and techno rock music. Night sounds. The graveyard is dark and murky. Lights come up on VICTOR, who is alone. He leans down, picks up earth and lifts it into the air. He murmurs a chant.)

VICTOR. In the cemetery of dead professors, old brains rot. *(He drops the dirt.)* In the cemetery of dead professors, new ideas are born. *(He picks up another handful.)* In the cemetery of dead professors, old brains rot.

(He drops it again, looks around. ELIZABETH, his fiancée and fellow student, enters and quickly joins him.)

ELIZABETH. In the cemetery of dead professors, new ideas are born. *(ELIZABETH kisses him then holds out a small bag, which contains something slightly heavy and “jar” shaped.)*

VICTOR. You’re here. Were you afraid? Was it hard to get?

ELIZABETH. Hard enough. *(VICTOR smiles and reaches for it, but she pulls back.)* You don’t get it for free. *(Puts the bag behind her back.)*

VICTOR. Let me see.

ELIZABETH. Come and get it, Victor. (*He holds his hand out for it, she pulls it away.*) I don't think so, Mr. Frankenstein. (*VICTOR drops his hands, smiles. She leans forward and he reaches out, cups her chin, leans in and gives her a kiss. She starts to respond but he reaches around with his other hand and takes the bag, breaking off the kiss.*)

VICTOR. Now we'll see how you did.

ELIZABETH. I hate you.

VICTOR. No, you don't.

ELIZABETH (*flirting*). Yes, I do.

VICTOR. No, you don't. (*From the bag he pulls a large jar. Floating in the jar are two eyeballs.*) They're wonderful. No one saw you?

ELIZABETH. Kiss me again and I'll tell you. (*He looks at her, then leans forward and kisses her cheek.*) Justine let me in.

VICTOR. Justine? She didn't see you leave with them?

ELIZABETH (*in a "mocking" ghastly voice*). I told her I wanted to be alone with the smelly cadavers.

VICTOR. You're a frightening woman.

ELIZABETH. That's why you love me. Why she loves me, too.

VICTOR. Justine loves anything that walks on two feet.

ELIZABETH. I think I've just been insulted. (*VICTOR holds his hand up, feigning innocence.*) Be nice. She's going to be in *your* wedding.

VICTOR (*looks at the eyes in the jar*). Did I ever tell you that you have beautiful eyes?

ELIZABETH (*reaches out and pushes the jar down, slightly, getting his attention*). Two weeks, Victor. I tried

on the dress today; ten yards of black lace. Ask me how I looked.

VICTOR (*lifts the jar and looks at the eyes*). I'm sure you were the most beautiful bride in the shop. (*Looks into the jar.*) What do you suppose they've seen? These eyes. What do you suppose they remember? Flesh remembers, you know.

ELIZABETH (*remembering his touch*). I know.

VICTOR. When these eyeballs see again—

ELIZABETH (*takes jar between her hands, between them, looks at VICTOR through the jar, uses a "different voice"*). That's a very exotic bride you have there, Mr. Frankenstein. You should stay focused, my dear, or her eyes, too, may wander.

VICTOR (*pulls the jar away, looks at her*). You have my attention. And we're alone. What more do you want? (*He leans close to her. She shifts away, indicates jar.*)

ELIZABETH. I don't want any trouble right before *my* wedding.

VICTOR. There won't be any trouble, Elizabeth. Not when I'm finished. Maybe some praise and a little surprise but no trouble.

ELIZABETH. Hmm. Promise?

VICTOR (*takes her hand*). I promise that you will be happy—married to the most brilliant scientist in the world.

ELIZABETH. With seven brilliant children. (*Indicates stepping stair heights.*) I can see them all lined in a row: Victor junior with your hair, Meg with my nose— (*Lifts the jar.*) Percy with these eyes.

VICTOR (*takes the jar back from her*). Seven? Aren't you rushing things a bit?

ELIZABETH (*takes his face in her hands, pulls him toward her*). Not as much as I'd like to.

(*Starts to kiss him. A severed hand is thrown between them. HENRY comes bursting into the graveyard.*)

HENRY. In the cemetery of dead professors, old brains rot.

ELIZABETH. Company.

VICTOR. Henry! (*HENRY steps out of the shadows.*) In the cemetery of dead professors, new ideas are born... (*VICTOR picks up the hand.*) ...so, where did you get it?

HENRY. The old icehouse—where they keep the ones they don't bury. The anatomy class donations.

VICTOR (*looking at the hand*). You couldn't find a matched set?

HENRY. Not the size or strength you wanted. You said you wanted the biggest, the best.

ELIZABETH (*to HENRY*). Clearly the other hand was taken as a bloody trophy by the executioner.

HENRY (*they seek to top each other*). Burned by battery acid in a laboratory experiment gone horribly bad.

ELIZABETH. Chewed off after being mangled in a devastating accident.

HENRY. You win.

ELIZABETH. I always do.

VICTOR. We're close. Just a few more days in the lab and a few more parts to collect—

ELIZABETH (*acting "put upon" for HENRY*). Deserting his poor fiancée at the doorsteps of the cathedral, she waits, lingers, molds, lace turns to spider webs, dress tatters and flutters in the cold north wind. She dies, neglected by his laboring genius.

HENRY (*suddenly falls to his knees*). Elizabeth, leave this pathetic, self-absorbed genius and run away with me to Paris. We'll dance all night in underground clubs and live on French wine and aged cheese.

ELIZABETH. Oh, Victor, I have another suitor. What shall I do?

VICTOR. Go with him, if you can stand the cheese.

HENRY. I'm insulted. My family is insulted. My honor is insulted. (*He extends his arm.*) En garde.

VICTOR (*holds the hand out and uses it like a sword*). Touché!

HENRY (*snatches the hand from VICTOR, looks up at him, remembering*). Walden's doing a lecture on reanimation tomorrow, with electricity.

VICTOR. I know. I'm supposed to help.

HENRY. You get to pull the switch?

VICTOR. No. It's an experiment with a dead mouse. I get to put the poor creature to sleep.

ELIZABETH. I'll do it if you're too squeamish.

VICTOR. I don't care about that. It's just...the dear professor will stop short of anything really challenging. Walden's a frightened old man with one foot already here.

HENRY (*holds up the hand*). Or one hand. Maybe he can reanimate this.

ELIZABETH. Or *deanimate* you.

VICTOR. He'll make the mouse jump, talk about the importance of electricity—but he doesn't understand the possibilities...no, he refuses to explore them.

HENRY (*imitates the PROFESSOR, sliding the dead hand up his sleeve and wagging it*). "Respect your elders, Victor, my boy."

VICTOR. Respect your elders? When our dear old professor refuses to acknowledge the most significant written theories...

HENRY. You mean Magnus?

ELIZABETH. Agrippa.

VICTOR. Paracelsus. He forbids their books. He ignores their work.

ELIZABETH. Because there's no proof, Victor. The Professor is a man of proof.

HENRY (*imitates the PROFESSOR*). "Mystical obsession is not a topic for discussion in *this* field of science."

VICTOR. Galvanization, alchemy, memory of the soul, the inner spark of life in the tiniest subset of the body—all are connected—maybe mystical, perhaps even magical—and "provable." You'll see. It's more than just science.

ELIZABETH. Then maybe we are more than just scientists.

VICTOR. We need a brain. The most brilliant we can find.

ELIZABETH. A brain?

HENRY (*cradling his head in the palm of the severed hand*). Though I hate to give it up...

ELIZABETH. Wait a minute. Aren't you getting a little ahead of yourself? I thought we were just talking about reanimating limbs.

VICTOR (*to ELIZABETH, taking her hands*). You trust me.

ELIZABETH. Of course.

VICTOR (*looks around*). In each element of creation, there is a cosmic memory. This hand...this hand has its own knowledge of all that's gone before. We need to find a way to take all such knowledge, the wisdom of collective consciousness sleeping in tissue, and bring it into

being—so that the human race can progress—at a pace never before thought possible. Imagine the wisest brain, the strongest heart, the most powerful frame, the sharpest eyes and the knowledge of all they've seen.

(JUSTINE steps out from the shadows. She is carrying a jar in which there is another pair of eyeballs.)

JUSTINE. If you're looking for the best, then you stole the wrong jar, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH. Justine! What are you doing here?

JUSTINE *(with a grin at HENRY and then ELIZABETH)*. Visiting my lost loved ones—and look, here they are, alive.

VICTOR *(moves toward her in a slightly menacing manner)*. What have you seen? Or heard?

ELIZABETH. Victor.

JUSTINE. Mostly you talking.

(VICTOR moves away, irritated. HENRY walks to JUSTINE, to flirt.)

HENRY. You just had to see what *I* was up to, didn't you, Justine?

JUSTINE. Maybe. Or what you're all up to. I've watched you before, doing this graveyard thing. And tonight, I followed Elizabeth—from the lab.

ELIZABETH. Wait a minute, you saw me take the jar? You won't say anything?

JUSTINE. What good's it do me to say you stole something? I'd lose my job at the lab for not keeping an eye on the eyeballs. But you took the wrong ones, from what

Victor's saying. That jar was for a study on blindness—*(She hands the jar to ELIZABETH.)* —but these were the eyes of an astronomer, a far-seer. *(VICTOR looks up, interested.)*

HENRY *(looking at her body, points to his own eyes)*. These eyes are capable of looking through layers of clothing.

JUSTINE *(grins at HENRY)*. That mouth is capable of getting you into trouble. How did they let you into an institute of higher learning?

VICTOR *(takes the newer jar of eyeballs, looks up at her)*. I'll see to it you lose your job if you say anything about what you've seen here.

JUSTINE. Elizabeth, call off your thoroughbred, he's annoying me.

ELIZABETH. Ease up, Victor.

HENRY. Justine's not going to say anything, are you?

JUSTINE *(slightly sarcastic)*. I don't want rich boy here threatening to pull his family funds unless they fire poor little Justine for body-part snatching... *(Then directly to him.)* Of course, then, I don't think *you* really want me saying anything to the Professor about where some of those missing organs are showing up—'cause even *you* might have to explain what you're doing out here with Elizabeth and brainless.

HENRY. She loves me.

JUSTINE *(walks up to VICTOR)*. I'm not going to say anything. *(Then smiles at ELIZABETH.)* I don't want to get Elizabeth into trouble. *(ELIZABETH smiles back, does a faux curtsy.)*

VICTOR. Don't even say anything to your friends—they already think we're a little crazy.

JUSTINE (*moves right up to VICTOR and looks him in the eye, a very sultry smile on her face*). How can that be?

VICTOR (*holding her gaze intensely*). Maybe I underestimated you.

JUSTINE. It happens.

ELIZABETH (*moving between them, an arm around each*).

So Justine joins us.

VICTOR. She joins us. But she's the last. I don't need anyone else knowing what I'm doing—we're doing. Not yet.

JUSTINE (*leaning toward VICTOR, flirting again*). My lips are sealed.

HENRY. I'll initiate her. (*He takes her hand and kisses it. She smiles, curtseys, holds her hand out for his. He puts the dead hand in hers and she leans down, decides not to kiss it.*)

JUSTINE. That's cold.

VICTOR. Skip the initiation. (*He looks at the others, reaches down, picks up a handful of earth, stares at them.*) In the cemetery of dead professors, old brains rot. (*The others pick up dirt and repeat, including JUSTINE, who watches the others to get it right.*)

JUSTINE, HENRY, ELIZABETH. In the cemetery of dead professors, old brains rot.

VICTOR. Henry, you'll go back to the icehouse tomorrow night. I have a list.

HENRY (*looks at JUSTINE*). I'll need some help.

VICTOR. I don't think so. Besides, Justine has an in at the lab. She can get us additional stitching and surgical supplies...and maybe a few unattached organs.

JUSTINE. Just let me know what you're missing.

VICTOR. And Elizabeth will cover for me when I have to miss classes and laboratories.

ELIZABETH. Of course.

VICTOR (*drops the dirt as he speaks*). In the cemetery of dead professors, new ideas are born. (*They all drop their dirt and repeat.*)

JUSTINE, HENRY, ELIZABETH. In the cemetery of dead professors, new ideas are born.

VICTOR. No one speaks a word spoken here. Understood? (*They nod.*) Then midnight tomorrow, and tomorrow.

JUSTINE, HENRY, ELIZABETH. Midnight tomorrow, and tomorrow.

(HENRY picks up the hand, takes JUSTINE's hand. They leave. ELIZABETH stays for a moment, reaches out for VICTOR's hand, but his mind is already elsewhere. She leaves. He kneels down, picks up some dirt, drops it. Music. End of Scene.)

SCENE TWO — The Classroom.

(Lights come up to reveal a classroom with several chairs and small lab tables in front of them. At front of class is a screen with projections of human anatomy and brain. The screen is “cranked” down, a mix of contemporary and very old—the anatomical drawings from older texts, the light of which pastes across the face of the actors as they pass back and forth in front of it. A tall desk filled with debris of years of experiments is at front, a tall stool behind that. Seated on the stool is PROFESSOR WALDEN, a short man with unkempt hair.