

Frankenstein, the Modern Prometheus
A novel by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley
adapted to a musical drama without intermission

by Libby Larsen

CHARACTERS

Principals: Victor Frankenstein - tenor - 20 years old, young student
Elizabeth - lyric soprano - 18 years old, Frankenstein's fiance
Captain Robert Walton - baritone - about 25 years old
Ship Victor - tenor - a wizened, older Frankenstein

Secondary: William - boy soprano - Frankenstein's younger brother
Justine - mezzo - 18 years old, Elizabeth's friend
Clerval - baritone - 20 years old, Frankenstein's friend

Acting roles: The Monster

Chorus : (8 men) sailors, backstage and Victor doubles
Offstage chorus: 8 women, uncostumed

Video and slide projection system needed to project details of eyes, hands, etc. on various layers of the scrim. Sound system needed to project backstage chorus into the hall and to amplify body microphones and mix orchestral sound.

ORCHESTRA 15 players

Sound enhancement needed for proper electro-acoustical mix

Flute (doubles Piccolo)
Oboe (doubles English Horn)
Clarinet (doubles Bass Clarinet)
Bassoon (doubles Contrabassoon)
Horn
1 Trumpet
2 Percussion
Timpani
1 Keyboard (Piano, DX7 Synthesizer)
String quintet

Period - *About 1817, in and around Geneva, Switzerland and the Arctic*
A deliberate infidelity to locale and period is important.
Ambiguity as to technological context is important.

SETTINGS

The set should be a unit set consisting of hung ropes and rope ladders, constructed levels and multilayered, hanging scrim, creating ambiguous environments. The effect of each setting should be that of a multi-dimensional Feininger painting. Except for the video tape representing the monster's point of view, the production should be black and white. Ramps should be designed to give access to playing areas behind some of the scrim. It is extremely important that the scrim and design explode the proscenium, extending out, up, and precariously over the audience.

Mer de Glace - Ship's deck and Captain's cabin

Devoid of color, extremely cold, represents voyages in darkness expecting to discover light. Represents the paralysis of the moral dilemma, isolation in the face of ambition, pressure of unanticipated consequence.

Geneva lake / ambiguous place

Represents the search for human spiritual knowledge.

Library of House in Geneva

Represents emotional warmth, knowledge, companionship, generosity, understanding, and curiosity.

Laboratory

Represents the dark regions of the human spirit, precariousness, technological evil.

The chase

Represents frantic, desperate, flight from realization.

TABLEAU SETTINGS

The scene of William's murder, lakeside Gallows

THE COUCH

The couch is a central prop used to symbolize the journey of the soul. The couch should be the same couch in Walton's cabin, the library, and the laboratory sleeping cove. It may or may not move.

THE LOCKET

The locket is both the instrument of murder and the symbol of family unity. It must be extremely shiny.

ACT I

Ship's deck and captain's cabin, mer de glace. WALTON sings of his own isolation. SAILORS sight MONSTER. FRANKENSTEIN (stunt double) is taken aboard ship and brought to Walton's cabin. Lying on the couch, he deliriously recounts his tale as the scene fades to Scene 2.

Backstage chorus used.

Scene 1 - Impulse

Ambiguous place which becomes the lakeside for scene 2. FRANKENSTEIN (real) contemplates the sky and its life-giving potential, with fresh innocence.

Scene 2 - Curiosity

Lakeside. WILLIAM, FRANKENSTEIN (real) and CLERVAL launch silk balloons in the face of a raging electrical storm. They attempt to revive a dead rat using the storm's electrical power. ELIZABETH and JUSTINE call to them to come into the house. The tree under which William, Frankenstein and Clerval have set up their experiment is struck by lightning and explodes.

Scene 3 - Arrogance

Library. WILLIAM, JUSTINE, CLERVAL, ELIZABETH, FRANKENSTEIN (real). William has a mechanized toy. A discussion of mechanized experiment versus biological experiment which, while light-hearted, isolates Frankenstein from the others as he defends theories of spontaneous regeneration. The argument becomes awkward as it unfolds, and Frankenstein stubbornly holds his ground. His curiosity gives way to arrogance and determination. WALTON observes and questions.

Scene 4 - The Act

Laboratory. FRANKENSTEIN (real and stunt double) works to create the MONSTER. ELIZABETH and CLERVAL unsuccessfully implore him to abandon his work. There is another raging electrical storm outside. The laboratory is a fantastic tangle of cables and rope ladders which extend beyond the proscenium sightlines. We do not see the entire monster, only a bit of its profile. Frankenstein frenetically works, scaling the ladders, connecting cables, electrifying the monster. After a few attempts, he succeeds. He implants the monster's eyes. The monster (video tape) perceives life. He approaches Frankenstein. Frankenstein flees. BACKSTAGE CHORUS.

Scene 5 - Insomnia

Shipdeck. FRANKENSTEIN (real) questions the consequences of his arrogance. WALTON joins him on deck for Scene 6.

Scene 6 - Tragedy

Library. FRANKENSTEIN (stunt double) returns home, distraught. He finds ELIZABETH in library, weeping. She recounts WILLIAM'S death (aria), which we see in a *tableau* scene on an elevated ramp. The scene is a lake beside which William is playing. JUSTINE is on trial. We see the trial proceedings on another *tableau*, an elevated ramp, behind a scrim. CLERVAL enters, pleading with Frankenstein to intervene. He tries to tell them about the monster but cannot. Justine is sentenced to death, sentence to be carried out immediately. We see Justine hung, overshadowed by the shadow of the MONSTER. BACKSTAGE CHORUS. WALTON observes and questions.

Scene 7 - Isolation

Ship's deck. FRANKENSTEIN, (real) alone and isolated, contemplates pursuit to death and asks questions about creation and responsibility.

Scene 8 - The Meeting

Ambiguous region. FRANKENSTEIN invokes the monster to meet him face to face. The MONSTER comes to him. BACKSTAGE CHORUS.

Scene 9 - What the Monster Saw

Video. MONSTER observes the cottagers. He learns to speak, read, love, have compassion, and love music and dancing. He confronts the blind DANCER, who befriends him, until OTHER DANCERS, disgusted by the sight of the Monster, exile him. He resolves himself.

Scene 10 - The Bargain

The laboratory. The MONSTER challenges FRANKENSTEIN to create a companion for him with the threat that if he does not, the monster will kill every person dear to Frankenstein. Frankenstein refuses. BACKSTAGE CHORUS.

Scene 11 - Revenge

Library. ELIZABETH sits quietly on the couch, reading. The MONSTER gradually looms over her. The monster murders Elizabeth. FRANKENSTEIN (real, on board ship), sees.

Scene 12 - The truth

Ship deck. WALTON remarks on the Frankenstein's actions and the reactions of the Monster.

Scene 13 - Resolve

Library. FRANKENSTEIN (real) returns to the library. CLERVAL sings a rather tender lullaby to Frankenstein. Clerval leaves Frankenstein. Frankenstein packs and leaves to pursue the Monster.

Scene 14 - Pursuit to death and life

(Orchestral) FRANKENSTEIN (real and stunt double) rushes away from the house into ambiguous *wanderings*, but everywhere he turns, he faces the MONSTER. As he runs, he becomes more and more entrapped. Finally, *arriving on the ship deck*, he faces the Monster. He sings what he must do. BACKSTAGE CHORUS. The Monster and Victor confront each other. On video, we see the Monster's point of view and we see the final video image of the Monster's hands around Victor's neck, strangling him.

Mer de Glace WALTON moralizes briefly.

End

Characters by Scene

Frankenstein(real) - 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,10,11,12,13,14

Frankenstein (stunt double) - Prologue, 1,4,6,11,13,14

Monster - 4,6,8,10,11,13,14

Elizabeth - 2,3,4,6,11

Walton - Prologue, 1,3,6, 12, 13, 14

Clerval - 2,3,4,6,12

Justine - 3,6

William - 3,6

Backstage Chorus - Prologue, 4,6,8,9,10,11,13,14

Male chorus members - Prologue(sailors), 4 (Victors), 14 (sailors) *possible 13 (Victors)*