

# National Theatre Collection

## *Frankenstein* – Learning Guide

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## About

This learning guide supports the National Theatre's production of *Frankenstein*, directed by Danny Boyle, which opened on 22nd February 2011 at the National's Olivier Theatre in London.

Our packs are designed to support viewing the recording on the **National Theatre Collection**. This pack provides links to the UK school curriculum and other productions in the Collection. It also has a plot synopsis with timecodes to allow you to jump to specific sections of the play.

Here you'll also find all the information you need to enable you to study the production and write about it in detail. This includes notes about all of the key elements from performance style to design. You'll also find pointers for further research.

## Background Information

Recording Date – 17th & 24th March, 2011

Location – Olivier Theatre, National Theatre

Age Recommendation – 15+ (contains nudity and strong sexual violence)

## Cast

<b>The Creature</b>	Benedict Cumberbatch / Jonny Lee Miller
<b>V. Frankenstein</b>	Jonny Lee Miller / Benedict Cumberbatch
<b>Agatha de Lacey</b>	Lizzie Winkler
<b>De Lacey</b>	Karl Johnson
<b>Felix De Lacey</b>	Daniel Millar
<b>Elizabeth Lavenza</b>	Naomie Harris
<b>William Frankenstein</b>	William Nye
<b>M. Frankenstein</b>	George Harris
<b>Clarice</b>	Ella Smith
<b>Ewan</b>	John Stahl
<b>Female Creature</b>	Andreea Padurariu
<b>Constable</b>	John Killoran
<b>Rab</b>	Mark Armstrong
<b>Servant</b>	Martin Chamberlain
<b>Ensemble</b>	Josie Daxter
<b>Klaus</b>	Steven Elliot
<b>Servant</b>	Daniel Ings
<b>Gustav</b>	John Killoran
<b>Gretel</b>	Ella Smith
<b>Ensemble</b>	Haydon Downing

## **Background Information**

Recording Date – 17th & 24th March, 2011

Location – Olivier Theatre, National Theatre

Age Recommendation – 15+ (contains nudity and strong sexual violence)

## **Creative Team**

<b>Director</b> .....	Danny Boyle
<b>Writer</b> .....	Nick Dear (based on the novel by Mary Shelley)
<b>Set Designer</b> .....	Mark Tildesley
<b>Costume Designer</b> .....	Suttirat Anne Larlarb
<b>Lighting Designer</b> .....	Bruno Poet
<b>Music &amp; Sound Score</b> .....	Underworld
<b>Fight Director</b> .....	Kate Waters
<b>Director of Movement</b> .....	Toby Sedgwick
<b>Music Associate</b> .....	Alex Baranowski
<b>Sound Design</b> .....	Underworld
<b>Sound Design</b> .....	Ed Clarke

## **Contextual Information**

This production involved double casting: Benedict Cumberbatch and Johnny Lee Miller played The Creature/Frankenstein on alternate nights. Danny Boyle has spoken about the way in which this brings a freshness to each performance and stops actors becoming too fixed in what they do.

Mary Shelley’s original novel was written at an important point in history where science and technology were becoming powerful influences in society. The notion of the outsider, of people who are different are just as relevant now as when the novel was first published in 1818.



# Teaching Information

## **This production is particularly suitable for:**

- **English Literature** students studying the original novel at GCSE or A Level
- **English Literature** students studying the gothic genre
- **Drama and theatre** students studying the play for A Level
- **Production arts** students with an interest in lighting and sound design
- Cross-curricular working at Key Stage 3 and above

## **In particular you might like to explore:**

- The design of the production and how it contributes to creating the gothic world on stage
- The director's decision to have two actors alternate the roles of Victor Frankenstein and the Creature, and how this impacts on our understanding of the characters and their relationship.
- The themes of nature and science and how they relate to the contemporary audience.

## Teaching Information

There are a number of other productions in the **National Theatre Collection** that relate to this one, which you and your students may wish to explore alongside it.

### Other adaptations of novels for the stage in the NT Collection

<b>Productions</b>	<b>Adaptation</b>	<b>Director</b>
<i>Jane Eyre, Peter Pan</i>	Companies	Sally Cookson
<i>Treasure Island</i>	Bryony Lavery	Polly Findlay
<i>Small Island</i>	Helen Edmundson	Rufus Norris

### Other productions featuring members of the same creative team

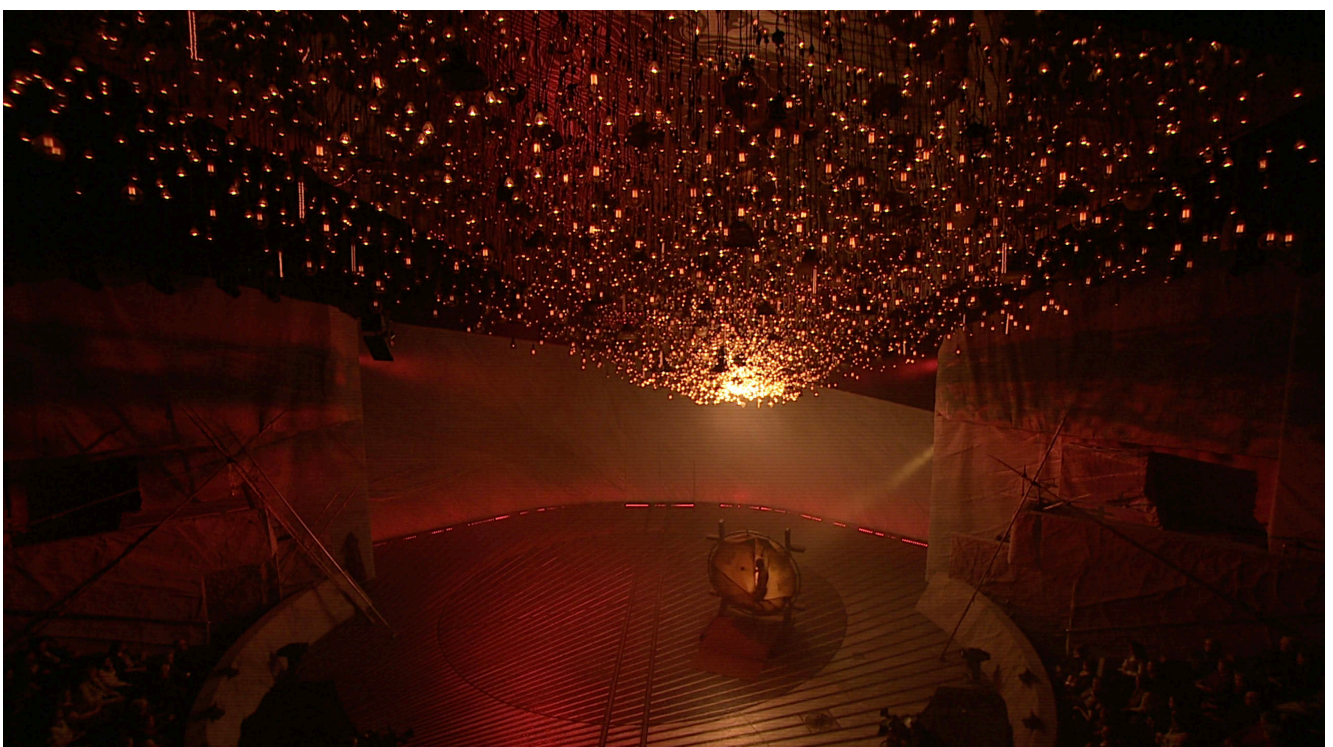
<b>Productions</b>	<b>Artist</b>
<i>Julius Caesar, Treasure Island</i>	Bruno Poet - Lighting Designer
<i>Dara, Small Island, Hamlet, Othello One Man, Two Guvnors</i>	Kate Waters - Fight Director

## Production Notes

*The following notes have been compiled to help guide you through the significant design and performance aspects as you watch the production, or to remind you of them after you have watched it. You may also want to make your own notes and form your own opinions on the effectiveness of these aspects as you explore the production.*

### **Key Design Elements: Set**

- The Olivier stage has a drum revolve. The floor is grey, which enables a versatile creation of setting. There are a lot of different internal and external locations in this play and so the set design must allow for quick transitions and utilise minimal items of set to indicate location and period.
- Look closely at the sides of the stage – they are dressed in fabric, the design extends much further to the sides of the stage than many other production designs.
- There is a train which emerges from upstage centre (travelling across tracks in the stage floor).



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- Patches of grass are placed on parts of the stage, as well as bundles of corn. It creates an important contrast with the industrial nature of some of the other set elements.
- The effect of rain and snow from above the train track/De Lacey cottage is also created on the empty stage.
- The De Lacey house is flown in, a wooden structure with very thin gauze creating the wall. The lines of an old tree are drawn on the front wall of the house, and in front of the house is a wooden bench – very rustic and home made. The De Lacey location is an agricultural one.
- The Frankenstein house emerges from the drum revolve. It is situated centre stage, on the downstage half of the performance space. It includes a round table, period furniture and arched windows. Frankenstein was written by Mary Shelley in the Regency era and the architecture and costume reflect that period. Light comes from behind the window frames.
- For the subsequent scene that takes place in the Orkneys, the revolve turns 180 degrees, the lighting becomes much dimmer to create the power of the weather over man. Smaller items such as trunks and cases give the impression of being at a port.





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- Victor's house is on the reverse of the Frankenstein house includes rocks, mesh and canvas. The table is a rough wooden table.

### Key Design Elements: Costume

- The Creature wears a loincloth at the beginning of the performance, and then gradually wears additional layers such as the red cloak.
- The ensemble often wear grey, period detail such as necklines and accessories such as top hats.
- The industrial workers wear aprons and goggles as well as shirts and trousers, female ensemble long grey dresses with a corseted bodice.
- Agatha wears skirt and long apron, white laced up bodice, a brown shawl and a headscarf, all in natural muted colours. De Lacey wears breeches, woollen waistcoat and overcoat, again in browns and reds (natural colours).



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- The Creature wears grey trousers and a loose fitting shirt whilst at the De Lacey cottage, he is barefoot.
- William wears a blue short jacket, a matching blue cap, black boots, grey trousers and a white scarf around his neck.
- Frankenstein wears a white shirt, frock coat, black trousers, black boots.
- Elizabeth wears a blue dress (empire line) with a burgundy jacket and white collar. She wears white gloves.
- The Frankenstein family go into mourning after William's death, and so wear black coats, scarves and dresses.



### Key Design Elements: Lighting

- The lighting is designed to reflect electricity, and the bright flashes of light present the metaphorical as well as literal light and darkness. The play is set during the advent of electricity and the Industrial Revolution so many of the lighting choices are also designed to reflect that.
- This production uses stage lights with and without lenses, moving lights and follow spots, as well as a large mirrored 'wedge' with 3500 filament light bulbs suspended above the stage, again to reflect the advent and importance of electricity. These light bulbs can flash and pulse or chase sequence as well as giving out consistent light.



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- Danny Boyle is also a film director and in this production, the lighting design helps create ‘close ups’ that we would normally achieve in film through camera work, by focusing the audience’s attention on specific parts of the stage through the use of follow spots and moving lights.
- Some lights are shone directly at the audience, for example the front of the train, to create shock, intensity.
- Pyrotechnics create sparks.
- There is often a strong contrast of dim, grey light and then very bright yellow to enhance the natural green, bright and even reflective surfaces to create the sense of nature.
- Cross fades often allow transitions from one location to the other, for example the fields and the De Lacey cottage – a split stage effect.
- Red lighting, flame and smoke for the De Lacey cottage fire.
- Lighting is also vital in creating location – look at the way in which the much colder lake near Geneva is partly created by a blue-white light flooding the

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stages.

- Handheld lanterns for the men in the Orkneys.

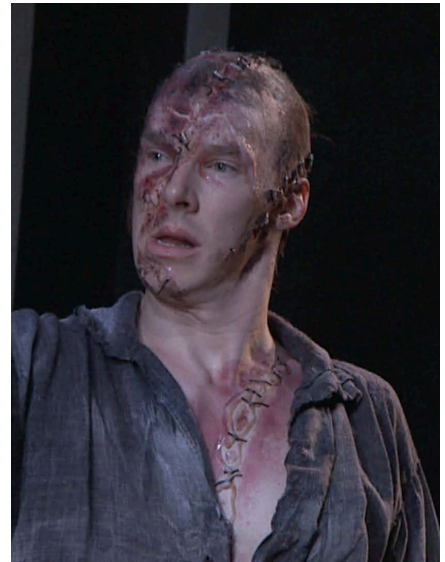
### Key Design Elements: Sound

- The music of Underworld is particularly important in the production.
- The soundtrack also reflects the Creature's discovery of nature.
- Actors create soundscapes (such as from the train).
- Whistles, the sound of metal clanging are also used to add to the mechanical soundboard.
- Recorded sound of birdsong in the nature scenes.
- Underscoring, including choral music which is slightly warped as if played at a higher speed.
- De Lacey plays the guitar live on stage.
- Guitar music accompanies the meeting of The Creature and the female creature.
- Large bell tolling, the sound of hammers on metal, steam, industrial noises created through recorded and live sound.
- Mont Blanc is created through the sound of heavy winds, echo and amplification.
- The sound of wind and rain helps create the sound of the weather beaten Orkneys where Victor goes to create the female creature.

# Production Notes

## Key Design Elements: Wigs, Hair and Make-up

- The Creature's prosthetics are extremely detailed, both on his face and body. In particular there are scars and stitches to indicate the different parts that Dr Frankenstein has combined to make his creature. The prosthetic and make up design also considered decay of skin, and the effect of disease on it, as well as the trauma of surgery on limbs and skin.
- The scars are made from latex – the particularly visible scars are textured and painted with bits of metal and thick black stitches. Finer scars are made from silicone and coloured to match the actor's skin tone. The desired effect is that the Creature must look shocking and even repulsive, but not to the point where it is distracting for the audience or negatively affects the level of sympathy the audience feels for him.
- Elizabeth's hair is highly decorative – styled in a complex chignon. On her wedding night it is left down.



## Performance Style

- The Creature's body movement is jerky and uncoordinated – we must remember he has been created by the fusion of various different body parts. He also gradually finds his voice and then starts to learn language. He is often childlike in his facial expressions and movements, just like any child learning to use their body.
- Look at the way in which The Creature mimics a lot of De Lacey's vocal and physical mannerisms, which creates comedy but also makes him a hugely sympathetic character. He is childlike and very endearing.
- Notice how transitions are created when the set changes are significant, for example at 43 mins 10 secs we focus on the characters downstage whilst the set is changed further upstage. It is a non-naturalistic set design so it does not matter that the audience can see the changes being made, particularly as this is a play about building one thing out of another!

# Production Notes

- The style of the production is non-naturalistic, which is highly appropriate for an adaptation of a Gothic novel.
- There are moments of comedy in the production – sometimes physical (such as The Creature mimicking De Lacey’s movements), other moments are comic timing of the delivery of lines, particularly those which might remind the audience of modern day issues (again, look at the De Lacey scene, for example, when they talk about war and power).

## Key Moments

*You might like to consider these key moments in particular when you are studying the production.*

- Opening scene, birth of The Creature, which allows consideration of set design, lighting and performance. (00:00 – 10 mins 13 secs)
- Entrance of the train, ensemble soundscape and movement. (13 mins 31 secs)
- The Creature arrives at the De Lacey cottage. (24mins 12 seconds up to “I look bad” – 30 mins 16 secs)
- The Creature meets/dreams the female creature. (36mins 25 secs - 38 mins 21)
- Fire at the cottage, where you might like to focus on lighting, special effects, use of music, and transitions. (42 mins – 42 mins 48 seconds)
- The Creature and Frankenstein on Mont Blanc. (51 mins 20 secs – 1 hr 4 mins)
- Grave robbing. (1hr 13 mins 45 secs – 1hr 17 mins 40 secs)
- Frankenstein shows The Creature the female version and then destroys her. (please note that this scene involves partial nudity).(1hr 20 mins 50 secs – 1hr 28 mins 35 secs)
- Victor arrives in the Arctic Circle. (1h 47 mins – 1hr 53 mins 30 secs (end))

## Production Notes

### Key Quotations

#### Scene 12

**De Lacey** You've no reason to harm me. I won't hurt you. I can't see you. I don't fight on any side. Go on, citizen, take the food.

#### Scene 16

**De Lacey** The other school of thought – to which I subscribe – insists that when we leave the womb we are pure, that a babe in arms is untainted by sin, that God has nothing to do with how a man turns out, be it good or be it bad.

#### Scene 18

**Creature** With all that I read, all that I learn, I discover how much I do not know.

#### Scene 24

**Victor** I have come to kill you!

**Creature** To kill me? Why then did you create me?

**Victor** To prove that I could!

**Creature** So you make sport with my life?

**Victor** In the cause of science! You were my greatest experiment - but an experiment that has gone wrong. An experiment that must be curtailed!

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**Creature** I should be Adam. God was proud of Adam. But Satan's the one I sympathise with. For I was cast out, like Satan, though I did no wrong.

## Production Notes

**Creature** I burned them. In a fire.

**Victor** I'm sorry, I –

**Creature** Sorry? You're sorry? You caused this! This is your universe!

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**Creature** Because I am lonely! Every creature has a mate. Every bird in the sky! Even you are to be married! Why am I denied the comforts you allow yourself? A moment ago you were amazed at my intellect, but now you harden your heart. Please, do not be inconsistent, I find it infuriating! All I ask is the possibility of love!

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**Victor** You were an equation. A theorem. I confess it. A puzzle to be solved.

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**Victor** My God, what a challenge! If I could make something immaculate, something that I could – exhibit? – not a demon but a – a goddess!

### Scene 25

**Victor** You are beautiful. You will make a beautiful wife,

**Elizabeth** Victor! What do you think I am? A specimen?

### Scene 28

**Victor** I have travelled where no man has travelled. I wonder how far I can go. I can create people, Will! Living people! Look at me, I breathe the breath of God!



## Production Notes

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**William** You are their King – will they do as you tell them? Or will they be bad? Like the one who killed me?

### Scene 29

**Victor** I had a vision, a vision of perfection. I followed nature into her lair, and stripped her of her secrets. I brought torrents of light to a darkening world.

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**Victor** I am talking about science –

**Elizabeth** No, you are talking about pride! You have been trying God's work.

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**Victor** The apple is eaten. We cannot go back.

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**Creature** I did not ask to be born, but once born, I will fight to live. All life is precious – even mine.

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**Creature** At the feet of my master, I learnt the highest of human skills, the skill no other creature owns: I finally learnt how to lie.

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### Scene 30

**Creature** My heart is black. It stinks. My mind, once filled with dreams of beauty, is a furnace of revenge!

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**Creature** Don't leave me. Don't leave me alone. You and I, we are one. While you live, I live. When you are gone, I must go too.

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**Victor** Every chance I had of love, I threw away. Every shred of human warmth, I cut to pieces. Hatred is what I understand. Only you give me purpose. You, I desire.

# Adaptation Details & Plot Synopsis

## Differences to Shelley's novel

While based on the novel by Mary Shelley, Nick Dear's adaptation has a number of key differences to the original story. This production condenses Shelley's novel to just under 2 hours.

- The story is from the Creature's perspective rather than Victor's. The audience witnesses the Creature's early life with De Lacey first hand, rather than as a backstory.
- The framing story of Captain Robert Walton is dispensed with entirely, as is much of Victor's backstory. The play opens with the Creature's "birth".
- Elizabeth Lavenza is Victor's cousin rather than his adopted sister. (They are cousins in the original release of the novel but changed to adopted siblings in the 1831 rewrite. In the play, they remain cousins.)
- The Creature does not leave for Geneva until a full year after his birth, rather than four months in the novel.
- The character of Justine, William's nurse, is cut, and William's murder is never solved. The character of Henry Clerval is also cut.
- M. Frankenstein personally brings Victor home from Scotland, and Victor is never imprisoned.
- M. Frankenstein does not die at the end of the play.
- The Creature rapes Elizabeth before killing her in the play.

*BC indicates the recording with Benedict Cumberbatch as the Creature, JLM: Jonny Lee Miller.*

**Scenes 1 – 3:** The Creature is brought to life. Alone, naked and confused, he learns to walk. Frankenstein discovers him, and flees, terrified.

**Scenes 4 – 5 (BC: 0:10:19 JLM: 00:07:55):** The Creature stumbles into the streets of Ingolstadt wearing a cloak from Frankenstein's apartment.

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He is scared by the rowdy, industrial city. He saves a woman's life but she runs away when she sees his face. People throw stones and chase him out of town.

**Scenes 6 – 8 (BC: 0:13:40 JLM: 00:12:00):** In the forest, the Creature finds joy in the sun, rain, birdsong, and grass.



He discovers Frankenstein's journal in the pocket of the cloak, and plays with it.

**Scenes 9 – 11 (BC: 0:18:56 JLM 00:16:20):** Two beggars at a campfire in the wood are scared away by the Creature. At the fire, the Creature discovers warmth, and learns to eat their food. The beggars return, beat him with sticks and chase him away. He howls in the dark, alone.

**Scenes 12 – 18 (BC: 0:22:18 JLM: 00:19:37):** At a house in the woods, the Creature meets an old blind man called De Lacey who takes pity on him and befriends him. Over several months, De Lacey teaches the Creature to read, write and speak, all the while keeping him secret from his son Felix and his wife Agatha, whom the Creature fears will reject him. At night, the Creature performs good deeds for Felix and Agatha, like collecting firewood for them. Felix and Agatha think they must be blessed, and thank the "elves and sprites" who have helped them.

## Adaptation Details & Plot Synopsis

**Scene 19 (BC: 0:36:06 JLM: 00:33:02):** The Creature dreams of a female version of himself, who would love and accept him. They dance together.

**Scene 20 (BC: 0:38:20 JLM: 00:35:22):** The Creature reads Victor's journal, learning he lives in Geneva with his family. Agatha and Felix discover the Creature, and are terrified of him: they beat him with sticks and chase him out of the house despite De Lacey's protests.

**Scene 21 (BC: 0:41:27 JLM: 00:38:15):** Angry and hurt, the Creature wonders aloud what humans do when they feel this way – 'they revenge', he says. He burns down De Lacey's house with Agatha, Felix and De Lacey inside.



**Scene 22 (BC: 0:43:20 JLM: 00:40:02):** In Geneva, Frankenstein's brother, William, is playing hide and seek with Elizabeth. The Creature approaches William while he is alone, and after discovering he is Frankenstein's brother, asks him to come with him. William refuses, and the Creature kidnaps him.

**Scene 23 (BC: 0:46:52 JLM: 00:43:18):** That night, a search party looks for William, amid rumours of a monster in the mountains. Victor finds William's dead body in a boat on the lake, alongside pages from his journal.

**Scene 24 (BC: 0:50:35 JLM: 00:47:17):** Victor hunts down the Creature in the mountains and tries to kill him, but the Creature overpowers him. Victor is astonished at how advanced the Creature is, and asks how he learned so much.



## Adaptation Details & Plot Synopsis

The Creature tells him about the cruelty he suffered, and blames Victor for his suffering – that being abandoned and alone has led him to do these terrible things. He asks Victor to make a female Creature for him to love, promising to disappear with her forever. Victor reluctantly agrees.



**Scene 25 (BC: 1:04:06 JLM: 1:00:20):** Back at his house, Victor tells his father he must leave at once to do important work. His father can't understand why he won't stay for William's funeral, and why he must postpone his wedding to Elizabeth. Elizabeth begs to go with him, but he tells her there is no place for a woman in his work. She doesn't understand, but supports him anyway – she tells him to go and do great work, and then to return, marry her, and give them a child.

**Scenes 26 – 27 (BC: 1:10:25 JLM: 1:06:53):** On a remote island, Victor rents a small house and starts work on a female Creature, enlisting two locals to find him a suitable corpse to work from.

**Scene 28 (BC: 1:17:49 JLM: 1:13:50):** William appears to Victor as a ghost, and asks what will happen if the two Creatures have children. The following day the Creature appears and demands he see his bride. He insists to Victor he is capable of love. After bringing the bride to life, Victor breaks his word, and slashes the female Creature to pieces. The Creature swears revenge, fleeing as Victor's father



## Adaptation Details & Plot Synopsis

arrives, demanding he return to Geneva.

**Scene 29 (BC: 1:29:33 JLM: 1:25:42):** Back in Geneva, Victor confesses everything to Elizabeth after they are married. He asks her to stay in the house while he goes out into the night to kill the Creature. Once he is gone, the Creature reveals himself to Elizabeth, and tells her everything about himself. She is kind, and understanding, and offers to be his friend. After gaining her trust and promising not to harm her, the Creature breaks his word, just as his creator did to him.



He attacks her, raping and killing her as Victor bursts in. He vanishes into the night.

**Scene 30 (BC: 1:45:10 JLM: 1:40:40):** Victor has chased the Creature to the North Pole, and has grown weak. Thinking Victor has died from the cold, the Creature weeps, begging him for forgiveness, telling him he is all he has left. Victor recovers, and the Creature rejoices, leading his maker further into the frozen wastes.

**The End**

## Find out more

### ***Read***

The **Rehearsal Insights Pack**, featuring background information from the rehearsal process and an interview with Director Danny Boyle.

### ***Watch***

[Victor Frankenstein: a character study](#)

[The Creature: a character study](#)

[Mary Shelley: A Biography](#)

[Directing \*Frankenstein\*](#)

[Danny Boyle and Nick Dear on \*Frankenstein\*](#)

[Nick Dear on adapting Mary Shelley's \*Frankenstein\* for the stage](#)

[Doubling Frankenstein and The Creature](#)

[Creulty, Violence and The Creature](#)

[Adapting novels for the stage](#)

## Find out more

### *Explore*

The National Theatre's digital exhibitions on Google Arts & Culture, including **Costume at the National Theatre**

More materials relating to the production including the costume bible, poster, prompt scripts, programme, stage management reports and more are held at the National Theatre Archive, which is free to visit. Find out more here: **<https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/archive>**

### *Suggestions for Further Activity*

- As well as visiting the NT Archive to look at production photos, costume designs and the prompt book for this production you could also look at Danny Boyle's scrapbook (as photographed in the production programme) particularly the photograph of the Barcelona players embracing (looks like they're entwined as one body rather than two which was influential to Danny Boyle's interpretation of the relationship between The Creature and Frankenstein.
- Watch both versions of the performance: there are subtle differences in the way that Miller and Cumberbatch play the two roles, particularly in some of the comic lines/moments. What do you notice about the similarities and differences in their interpretations? Once you've made those notes, **read this article from *The Guardian*** and write your own review or article on the merits of the two performances.
- Watch **this video of Nick Dear talking about the adaptation**. Having listened to what he says, create a proposal for another novel that you know well. What perspective would you tell the

## Find out more

story from? What would the key scenes be, and what would you remove? (Most adaptations involve removing certain characters and events)

### ***Suggestions for Further Research***

- Read **this article from the British Library** about the origins of the Frankenstein novel.
- Read **this article about ‘body snatching’** which is referenced in the story as Victor must obtain body parts illegally.
- Watch the opening ceremony of the London 2012 Olympics, directed by Danny Boyle the following year. Are there any elements of this that remind you of this production of Frankenstein?

We hope that you have enjoyed watching and studying ***Frankenstein***. Don't forget that there are many more fantastic productions to explore as part of the NT Collection. We hope that watching this recorded production has made you feel inspired to see and make live theatre. **Why not find out what's happening at your local theatre and how you can get involved?**

*This guide to support your viewing of the production was compiled by Teacher and Arts Education Consultant Susie Ferguson.*

*If you have any comments or feedback on our resources please contact us:*  
**[ntcollection@nationaltheatre.org.uk](mailto:ntcollection@nationaltheatre.org.uk)**