

FRANKENSTEIN

an opera in three acts

music by Greg Sandow
libretto by Thomas M. Disch

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CAST

Victor Frankenstein, a rash young Swiss scientist	Baritone
Elizabeth Lavenza, his fiancée	Soprano
Henry Clerval, his friend, also in love with Elizabeth	Tenor
The Creature, created and then abandoned by Victor Frankenstein	Bass-baritone
Victor's Father	Bass
Charlotte, Elizabeth's friend and confidante	Mezzo
Philip, a mad friar	Bass
Lars, a sea-captain	Tenor

Villagers; Elizabeth's friends; Victor's friends; Lars's crew.

The roles of Philip and Victor's Father may be sung by the same singer.

Frankenstein is adapted from Mary Shelley's 1811 novel, and is far closer to the book than to the famous Boris Karloff movie. I wrote a scenario for the opera, setting forth the overall story, the division into acts and scenes, and the layout of the main musical numbers. The novelist, poet, and literary critic Thomas M. Disch wrote the libretto in an amazing 19th century style, refining the details and characters of my scenario in ways I never would have thought of. We both wanted to create an opera in the style of the 19th century Italian works we both love, and in certain scenes tried to imagine what might have happened if Bellini or Donizetti had adapted Mary Shelley's story. That's clearest in the second scene of Act 1, with its opening chorus followed by the soprano's aria and cabaletta.

Act 2, scene 2 was performed at the Lake George Opera Festival in 1979. That scene, along with Act 1 up to the end of Elizabeth's aria, was performed at the opera workshop at C.W. Post College in 1980. The entire opera was premiered (with piano) in a wonderful production there in 1981. I'm indebted to all the fine people involved:

Victor	Allan Glassman
Elizabeth	Carolyn Mallory
Henry	John Absalom
Creature	Robert Stephens
Father/Philip	Joseph Warner
Charlotte	Cheryl Littell
Lars	Richard Nickol

music director and pianist:	Ralph Zitterbart
stage director:	Richard Getke

Synopsis

Act 1 – The Open Grave

Scene 1: A room in a remote Swiss inn. Victor Frankenstein, a young Swiss scientist, lies sick, tended for many months by his friend Henry. As Victor raves, we learn that he has found a way to bring dead flesh to life, and then recoiled in horror from what he had created. An offstage horn announces the arrival of the mail coach, and Henry leaves, hoping there will be letters from Victor's fiancée Elizabeth. Villagers pass by, singing a Lenten hymn. Victor awakens. Henry returns with a letter from Elizabeth, but Victor will not read it, saying that he knows what it will say. He orders Henry to pack his things; he will return to Elizabeth, hoping she can fill his emptiness with light.

Scene 2: A graveyard. Elizabeth, her confidante Charlotte, and a chorus of her friends stand mourning at an open grave. Buried there is Justine, a servant girl who has been hanged for the murder of a young child, Victor's brother William. Elizabeth believes Justine was innocent, and persuades Charlotte and her friends to put flowers in her grave. As the friends leave, Charlotte tells Elizabeth that Victor has returned. When he arrives, supported by Henry and his father, he is weak, and barely speaks. Elizabeth pours out her love; Charlotte and Henry worry that her love will doom her; Victor's father looks at his son with blind pride. Elizabeth faints. A storm is coming; everyone leaves except Victor, who asks to be left alone. As he sits, haunted by fearful thoughts of the Creature he has built, he hears a voice; the Creature has been watching him, and now emerges from the darkness. As the storm begins to rage, it tells its story. Victor had fled in terror after bringing it to life; it had watched him and Henry through the windows of the inn, and had learned to speak by imitating them. Now, filled with rage, it has murdered William, and will do worse if Victor does not build it a female companion. Lit by a ghastly flash of lightning, it pulls Justine's body from the grave. "We will wait, my ladylove and I," it shouts, and then vanishes into the fury of the storm. "If I comply," Victor, devastated, cries, "it's for your sake, Elizabeth!"

Act 2 – The Bridal Bed

Scene 1: The anteroom of Victor's laboratory. Victor's work is interrupted by Elizabeth, who wonders when Victor will fulfill his pledge to marry her. She helps him remember a song they used to sing, about the southern sun of Italy. Voices are heard outside; these are Victor's friends, singing a song of love in a performance Charlotte has organized. They and Charlotte enter, joined by Henry and Victor's father; all beg Victor to marry Elizabeth, who has nearly lost all hope. Victor, overwhelmed, at last agrees, but says he must first complete one last piece of work. Left alone, while his friends continue their song in the distance, he kills the female creature, which he had just brought to life. It screams horribly as it dies.

Scene 2: Elizabeth and Victor's bridal chamber. They have just been married; now it is evening, and Elizabeth awaits him anxiously. But instead the Creature comes, and stabs her repeatedly. As she weakens, it holds her in its arms, as each thinks of the happiness they might have had, Elizabeth with Victor in the sun of Italy, the Creature with its mate in the distant forest. When she dies, the Creature lays her tenderly on her bridal bed – and then, overcome by fury, stabs her once more before he vanishes.

Act 3 – The Triumph of Death

Scene 1: Outside a tavern in a Norwegian fishing village. Philip, a mad friar, raves about a monster he has seen. Victor thinks this might have been the Creature, which, with Henry, he has followed to the frozen north. He goes to question Philip; while he is gone, Henry bribes Lars, a sea-captain, not to sail with Victor further in his mad pursuit. Victor returns, certain that Philip's monster is the Creature. He swears vengeance while Lars and his men drink. Henry begs Victor to return home, where his father lies dying. Enraged, Victor kills him. As he leaves with Lars and his men, Philip screams that they're sailing to their death.

Scene 2: A frozen waste. The Creature is dying, surrounded by the corpses of Victor, Lars, and Lars's men. It curses humanity, and then, weakening, curses itself, until its voice is lost in the icy silence.

CD tracks

Act 2

CD 1

Scene 1

Act 1

Scene 1

1. Prelude
2. Recitative and Aria: "You are the cause, Elizabeth...See where he lies." Henry
3. "I will not look at it" Victor, Henry
4. Chorus: "There was an apple on the tree" Villagers (offstage)
5. "You are awake!" Henry, Victor.

Scene 2

6. Chorus: "Just as, my dear, each day at dawn" Elizabeth's friends, Elizabeth
7. Recitative and Aria: "Dear friends, I thank you...A child not ten years old" Elizabeth, Charlotte, Elizabeth's friends
8. Cabaletta: "Elizabeth, he's here...Love cannot change" Charlotte, Elizabeth
9. Quintet: "Elizabeth, I have been near to death...Love swells through my heart" Victor, Elizabeth, Charlotte, Henry, Victor's Father
10. "Henry--I need your help" Charlotte, Victor's Father, Victor
11. "Oh, that I might cease to think...And even in the air you breathe" Victor, Creature
12. "Craven it was in me to flee" Victor, Creature

13. Prelude

14. "Am I forgiven" Elizabeth, Victor

15. Chorus: "Dark was the night" Victor's friends, Elizabeth, Charlotte, Henry, Victor

16. Ensemble: "As trapped steam turns my factories' wheels" Victor's father, Victor, Henry, Charlotte, Elizabeth, Victor's friends

17. "You'd have me fix a date" Victor, Elizabeth, Victor's Father, Charlotte, Henry, Victor's friends

18. "Be life engendered from the light" Victor, Victor's friends (offstage)

Scene 2

19. Prelude

20. Recitative: "A bride!" Elizabeth

21. Aria: "Doubtless all brides have known such fear...Tonight in darkness" Elizabeth

22. "Elizabeth Lavenza!...This, Elizabeth" Creature, Elizabeth

23. "A glass? A glass?" Creature, Elizabeth

24. "He whispered once" Elizabeth, Creature

25. Duet: "Oh, I could have loved" Creature, Elizabeth

26. Postlude

CD 2

Act 3

Scene 1

1. "Men of Jacobstad!" Philip, Lars, Lars's crew
2. "The man of whom he speaks" Victor, Henry, Lars
3. "His mind has been destroyed by grief" Henry, Lars
4. Aria: "Captain, prepare to sail tonight...Already in my pistol's sights" Victor, Lars, Lars's crew
5. "I give you Dolly" Lars, Victor, Lars's crew
6. "Madman or monster" Henry, Victor, Lars
7. "Let all who've never stained their hands" Philip, Lars's crew
8. Henry's Death: "Not lifeless quite" Henry

Scene 2

9. Final Scene: "Alone!" Creature

ACT 1 – The Open Grave

Scene 1

1 (A room in an inn. Papers scattered everywhere; books on a shelf. Victor Frankenstein lies in bed, unconscious. Henry sits near him.)

HENRY

2 You are the cause, Elizabeth:
For you I have put by
My study of the law.
For you I've journeyed
To this mountain waste
To find your false betrothed,
Your Frankenstein!
For you, through months
Of snowbound silence
I have nursed him—
Frankenstein,
Friend of my childhood,
Rival of my youth,
The man you love, Elizabeth,
As faithfully as I've loved you.

See where he lies, inert,
Unconscious, infantine;
Only alive at all
Because I spoon
Into his drooling mouth
The slops
He cannot feed himself.
Look at the limbs I daily bathe,
How like the rotted flesh
His learned knives
Would once dissect.

See how his breath barely stirs

The bedclothes
His incontinence defiles.
And what is most obscene—
When he awakes
I must listen to
Ravings inconceivably vile...

(Victor stirs, then speaks.)

VICTOR (raving)

3 I will not look at it.
I will not touch...

And yet, see there,
The muscles
Contract,
Relax, contract...

No more!...
In daylight,
With you, Elizabeth,
In Italy, as I have vowed—

But stop, regard:
To these sorry scraps of death
I shall impart
A rhythmical...dilation.
Observe it well.
See how the plasma's sucked
Into the artery and then expelled.
Quite dead, you see, but then
Infused with air, it's red, alive.

HENRY (approaching the bed)

He seems half-rational today.
Some stench yet of the charnel house
In all this speech, but his manner
Has become so much more calm.

VICTOR (recoiling when Henry tries to touch him)

Away from me!
There is no pact,
No bond between us. None!
You have no right to look at me
Nor yet to live.

(A distant horn call is heard offstage)

HENRY

The coachman's horn!
At last...the pass is clear.
There will be letters from Elizabeth.

(joyfully)

Elizabeth!
See what a treasure I bring.
I've kept my pledge to you;
Now take my wounded heart.

(Henry leaves. Villagers pass by outside singing a Lenten hymn. While they sing, Victor slowly and painfully gets up from bed and dresses.)

VILLAGERS (offstage)

4 There was an apple on a tree
That grew in God's eternity.
That apple eaten, we must die.
Our sins are written in the sky.

No innocence on earth is found.
Closer, closer comes the sound
Of Death within his crimson coach.
Our hearts invite. Approach! Approach!

He makes the bridal gown a shroud.
He smites the wise, the brave, the proud.
Into his cup our blood is poured;
Our flesh is bread upon his board.

O Lord of Heaven, hear our cry!
Lead us to life, and let death die.
Crush his bones, his name, his face,
And ever shall we praise thy grace.

(The Villagers' hymn fades away in the distance. Henry returns, a letter in his hand.)

HENRY (surprised)

5 You are awake!

VICTOR (grimly)

I am alive.
How long have I lain here,
How many days?

HENRY

It was November when I came.
Today Lent begins.
Have you not heard the penitents?
Four months you lay
In thrall to your delirium.
Now you arise again – and look,
A letter from Elizabeth.

VICTOR (taking the letter)

There is no need to open it.
Return to me, she writes.
Fulfill your vow.
Make me your bride.

(with determination)

Henry, I must again
Command your strength.
Collect these papers from my desk,
And from the shelf above,
Those books.
See they are packed.

(with great feeling)

Elizabeth!
Destroy my memories,
And fill my emptiness with light.

(Curtain)

Scene 2

(An unhallowed graveyard at the top of a
rugged hill. A few crude graves shadowed
by cypresses, and one open grave. Elizabeth,
Charlotte, and a chorus of Elizabeth's
friends stand near it.)

FRIENDS

6 Just as, my dear, each day at dawn
The bright stars disappear,
So must at last we die, my love,
Into the brightness of the sky above.

ELIZABETH

So must we die, so must we die.

FRIENDS

How swift the rose
Doth wilt and decompose.
How harsh the terms of death...

ELIZABETH

How harsh the terms of death.

FRIENDS

As living bodies yield
Their flesh...

ELIZABETH

...to worms!

FRIENDS

How harsh of death,
How harsh the terms.

ELIZABETH, FRIENDS

How deep the grave,
How dark the earth...

FRIENDS

Wherein we crave
Our second birth.

ELIZABETH

How deep, how dark,
How dark the earth.

FRIENDS

O Lord of light,
Instruct our sight.
Reveal the stars
That blossom always
In the meadows of the night.

ELIZABETH

That blossom
In the meadows of the night.

FRIENDS

Reveal, O Lord, the night.

(A brief silence.)

ELIZABETH

7 Dear friends, I thank you
That you share my grief.
Left to myself I would grieve
Wordlessly, and tears unshed
Would turn my heart to stone.

FRIENDS

Elizabeth,
Poor lamb,
Sweet child.

CHARLOTTE

To be alone,
And to have felt such woe!

ELIZABETH

William is dead!

A child not ten years old,
Slain
For mere possessing
Of a golden chain.
I cannot bear
Remembering.
And worse, to think

That Victor must return
To such a horror.
His dearest brother
Dismembered brutally.

FRIENDS

Elizabeth,
Be calm, no more.

ELIZABETH

And mine the hand that hung
The chain about his neck
As invitation to the deed.

CHARLOTTE

Your hand, Elizabeth
Is guiltless as your heart.

ELIZABETH

Guiltless!
Dare you accuse Justine?
She loved that child
As I loved her.
A murderess – Justine?
Because, her false accusers claim,
The locket I let poor William wear
Was found on her
And she could not explain?
And yet she swore – and I believe –
That she was innocent.
If there is guilt, it's mine!
I hung that chain on William's neck
And by it my Justine
Was hanged.
See where her poor dishonored corpse
Rots in a grave unhallowed.
A victim of the law.

CHARLOTTE

Elizabeth,
Justine confessed.

ELIZABETH

Yes,
When her confessor threatened to withhold
The sacrament,
Under that torture
She confessed.
But at the moment of her death,
In sacred confidence she swore
That she was innocent.
If you had held her hand,
If you had seen her tears,
You could not doubt her innocence.
Justine, poor wretched girl, Justine!

And now, in honor of her innocence,
I place this flower on her grave.

(From a large bouquet, she takes a single
flower and drops it into the open grave.)

As you hold yourselves my friends,
Place by this flower
Flowers of your own.

(Elizabeth's friends, led by Charlotte,
advance one by one to take a flower from
the bouquet. Each kneels to place it in
Justine's grave, then slowly exits through
the graveyard's iron gate. As the last
member of the chorus departs, Charlotte
returns excitedly.)

8

CHARLOTTE

Elizabeth, he's here!

ELIZABETH (faintly)

Victor?

CHARLOTTE

With Henry,
In his father's coach.
And oh, prepare yourself,
For he is changed!

ELIZABETH (defiantly)

Victor – changed?
Love cannot change.
Together, apart,
Love lives in the heart
And cannot change.

The constant heart
Is beating always –
Awake, asleep,
In sorrow, in pleasure,
In anger, in pain,
The heart is ever the same.

CHARLOTTE

How short his breath,
How slow his steps.
Scarce has he strength
To lift his feet.

ELIZABETH

How long I've prayed for his return,
But now I feel a piercing fear.

The constant heart
Is beating always.
In sorrow, in pleasure,
In anger, in pain,
The heart is ever the same.

(Victor enters, with his father, supported by
Henry. He takes a few weak steps toward
Elizabeth.)

VICTOR (weakly)

9 Elizabeth, I have been near to death.
Elizabeth—

(He breaks off, overcome by weakness and
emotion.)

ELIZABETH (aside)

Love swells through my heart
Like the tides of the sea
That spill on endless sands,
For see, he stands
Beside me.

VICTOR (aside)

Like the dove to its nest
My heart has come home
To the home it knows best,
And my love lies at rest
Beside me.

ELIZABETH (aside)

Love swells through my heart
For see he stands beside me.

CHARLOTTE (aside)

Like a moth to a flame
She is drawn to the doom
Of a misplighted troth,
And she can do naught
But fly to the light.

HENRY (aside)

Love swells through my heart
Like the tides
As they surge on shore,
Love swells through my heart,
And I can do naught
But hear its roar
Inside me.

VICTOR'S FATHER (aside)

Like the prodigal son
Of parables' fame,
My boy has come home
And my heart swells with pride,
With a terrible pride.

ELIZABETH

Ah!

Like the light of the moon
At the noontide of night,
When it stands at its height
Love shines in my soul,
For I know you'll be soon
And forever beside me.

VICTOR

My heart has come home;
My love lies at rest

Beside me.
Like the dove to its nest, etc.

CHARLOTTE

Like a moth to a flame
She is drawn to her doom, etc.

HENRY

Love swells through my heart, etc.

Like a moth to a flame
I am drawn to my doom.
My heart swells with love, etc.

VICTOR'S FATHER

My boy has come home.
My heart swells with pride, etc.

(At the end of the quintet, Elizabeth faints.
Victor, hardly strong enough to move,
stands still; Charlotte goes to help
Elizabeth.)

CHARLOTTE

10 Henry, I need your help.

(Scoldingly, as Henry and Victor's father
take Elizabeth and act as Charlotte directs
them.)

Why did not you wait below?
We must take her to the coach.
Gently, gently.

VICTOR'S FATHER (turning back to
address his son)

Are you not coming with us?

VICTOR

I must be alone awhile.

CHARLOTTE (as she leaves)

Do not be long.
A storm will be upon us momentarily.

(Charlotte follows the others offstage. Night
begins to fall.)

VICTOR (alone)

11 Oh, that I might cease to think
Or that my will were stronger
And I could say,
I will not think on it again
And it would go away.
I cannot see a cripple in the street,
Or mourn this innocent dead girl,
But straight I see the limbs
My hands and knives have knit,
And fear and prophecy become
A single pulse in artery and vein.

(A voice is heard behind Victor. It is the
Creature, invisible in the darkness.)

CREATURE (implacable)

And even in the air you breathe
The scent of that prophetic fear
Will hang,
I'll cling to you,
And drink your strength and make it mine.

Believe it, Frankenstein, as you'd believe
The digits on this hand
That killed your brother and purloined the
chain
By which this innocent was hung
Are five. And what these five
Have done they'll do again.
No crime so gross but it shall be the dug
At which these carrion lips shall suck
revenge—
Until the shadow rules the man,
Until I've drained your soul
And made it mine.

VICTOR (as if in a dream)

I will not think on it again...
And it will go away!

(Throughout all this, the Creature has come
closer and closer; now it stands directly
before Victor.)

CREATURE

I am beside you now.
And when you crept into the cave
Of your delirium
I always was nearby.
Through the window of the inn
I saw you being fed
And knew from that
The use of bread.
And when your friend
Addressed long monologues
To your unheeding ears
I listened close and apled
The motions of his mouth
To satisfy
The hunger of my lips
For speech.

Eat, he would insist,
And you would eat.
But to be aware of him—
That you would not, and so
He thought himself alone,
And spoke in perfect confidence—
To me!
Somehow I understood
His talk of love,
Of loyalty, of sacrifice—
And I'd go out onto the frozen lake
And howl his words:
“You are the cause, Elizabeth!”

(Distant thunder. During the following, the
storm begins, and grows more violent.)

From your ravings, Frankenstein,
I learned a darker lore:
That all hearts are divided so,
Mere pumps that cause the blood to flow.

VICTOR

12 Craven it was
In me to flee
As your flesh convulsed to life.
Long had I gazed on death's abyss:
Why then should life
Awaken horror?
A climber, at the peak he's strained
To reach, can think of nothing
But the vastness opened to his view.
So was it as I moved from height to height
And held, within these hands,
The key of life.
Enraptured so, how could I think
The gift of life could be bestowed
Except to bless?
Until I saw
Your gaze, until I heard

Your –

CREATURE (angrily)

You fled!

VICTOR (weakly, offering his hand)

All I can do
To spare you further pain, I shall.

CREATURE (grasping Victor's hand
violently)

All you can you shall indeed!
This guilty hand, which I could crush
Like bundled sticks, shall once again take up
Its knife!

VICTOR (frightened)

What do you ask?

CREATURE (with great intensity)

Keener than hunger, endless
As the circling of my blood –

VICTOR (frightened; beginning to guess the
Creature's meaning)

Desire!

CREATURE (looking at Victor, as if to
acknowledge that he's right)

I cannot sleep
Until I'm given
All I need.

VICTOR (helplessly)

Desire is keenest
When it cannot be appeased.
Resign yourself –

(The storm rages furiously.)

CREATURE (furious)

You lie! For I, I, I
Am myself the proof
That what I ask
Is yours to give.
Create – create – as you created me –
My female counterpart.

(The storm is now at its height.)

VICTOR (terrified)

Never!
By all that's human, never!

CREATURE (scornfully)

Weakling! Philosopher!

(indicating its own body)

You will create a woman limbed
With limbs like these
Her face deformed.
For I've a right to live
And lust and breed like you.
Deny me, and I'll work at your destruction
Till I desolate your heart.

(Loud thunder. The Creature pulls Justine's
body from the grave, scattering the flowers

placed on it. It stands leering, holding the body, silhouetted in a great flash of lightning.)

We will wait, my ladylove and I,
Where, at my birth, I was left to die.

(It disappears with the body into the raging storm.)

VICTOR (desperately)

If I comply,
It's for your sake,
Elizabeth!

(Curtain)

Act 2 – The Bridal Bed

Scene 1

13 (An antechamber to the laboratory of Victor Frankenstein, which has been furnished as a parlor. Stage left a door to the outside; stage right double doors, now closed but offering a view, when open, to the laboratory. Elizabeth and Victor are talking.)

ELIZABETH

14 Am I forgiven, then, for having come
Here where my visits were forbidden?

VICTOR (indicating the doors to the laboratory)

This is the sanctum to which I may admit
No visitors.

ELIZABETH (teasingly)

Such advice Bluebeard would give
His latest bride: "To every room but *one*
My dear, the keys are yours."

VICTOR

Elizabeth, I know you do but jest,
But lack of sleep has parched the fount
Where laughter has its source.

ELIZABETH

In short, I am not welcome here.

VICTOR

You are as welcome as the spring

ELIZABETH

It was in spring, a year ago,
You asked if I would be your wife.

VICTOR

Indeed. How quick the time has flown.

ELIZABETH

That day I sang a song for you.

(prompting him)

To the South!
To the South...

VICTOR (unable to remember)

To the...

ELIZABETH

To the blossoming, sun-dappled South!

VICTOR (joining in, as he begins to remember)

...sun-dappled South!

ELIZABETH (prompting him)

There...

VICTOR (trying to remember more)

There...

ELIZABETH

There, where the ancient...

VICTOR (joining in)

...where the ancient, ageless truths
Of...

(Victor hesitates)

ELIZABETH

...Life's geometry...

VICTOR (joining in)

...Life's geometry are writ
Upon, upon...

(Victor hesitates)

ELIZABETH

Upon the oleander's boughs.

VICTOR

...the oleander's boughs.

There, there,
There be my spouse...

ELIZABETH

There be my spouse...

VICTOR

As I am yours,
As I am...

(breaks off, helplessly)

ELIZABETH

My answer then was yes.
A year's gone by,
And still my bridal gown
Lies folded in its lavender.

VICTOR (reassuringly)

A very little longer while,
I swear, Elizabeth.
My work needs but one missing element
To be complete.

ELIZABETH (close to tears)

But at the latest, Victor, when?
A date, a date!

(Any answer Victor might give is cut off by the sound of Victor's friends at the door, beginning to sing.)

15

VICTOR'S FRIENDS (offstage)

Dark was the night
And dim beyond recall
When down from heaven's awful height
Our God allowed the fire to fall.

ELIZABETH (reassuring victor, who has given a little start of surprise)

It's Henry and Charlotte.
They have prepared a small surprise.

(Victor's friends now enter, accompanied by Henry and Charlotte. They are carrying unlighted candles, which they light one by one as they sing, each member of the chorus after the first taking his light from his neighbor's. Thus the level of illumination grows as the music becomes more fervent, both reaching their full intensity only at the end of the hymn, when Elizabeth and Victor – following the directions in the text – light the two candles with which they have been supplied. Charlotte sings the hymn with the male chorus of Victor's friends. Henry, rather downcast, comes downstage and stands apart. Victor listens quietly, troubled at first but by the end deeply moved.)

CHARLOTTE

Joy fills our hearts;
The fire flows
From lamp to lamp, from friend to friend,
A gift that, being given, grows...

VICTOR'S FRIENDS

...From lamp to lamp, from friend to friend,
A gift that, being given, grows;
A sun eternally reborn
From torch to torch and morn to morn.

CHARLOTTE

Thus leaps the love of all mankind –
From spouse to spouse, from child to dam.

ELIZABETH (going over to Henry)

Dear Henry, I see *your* hand in this.

HENRY (dejected)

All that is beautiful and true
Is Charlotte's work.

CHARLOTTE

As one flame dies, another flares;
All of one primal fire the heirs.

VICTOR'S FRIENDS

All of one primal fire the heirs.

Light now thy torch, Elizabeth, from ours,
And now from flame of hers take thine –
And love her, Victor Frankenstein.

HENRY (aside, bitterly)

All that is beautiful and true
Is Charlotte's work.

CHARLOTTE AND VICTOR'S FRIENDS

Be life engendered from the light
When, flame to flame, two lovers plight
Undying love...

VICTOR'S FRIENDS

...Undying love.

VICTOR (deeply moved)

Oh, God – that I might share
That life, and join my
Hand with theirs.

(surprised, seeing his father who has
entered during the hymn)

Father!

VICTOR'S FATHER (taking Victor aside)

16 As trapped steam turns my factories'
wheels,
So Science fuels our progress.
We must have Science.
But, son, in your devotion
Do not neglect
The name of Frankenstein.
We live not for ourselves alone.
Naught can be reaped if naught be sown.

VICTOR

Father !

VICTOR'S FATHER

Let me not hear that word "postpone."
It's time you made Elizabeth your own.

HENRY (going up to Victor)

Victor, a word.

VICTOR

Another time!

FRIENDS

What did his father say to him?

HENRY (masking his bitterness)

One word, good friend – Elizabeth.

FRIENDS

See how he's pale!
What did his father say to him?

HENRY

Can you love her and not see
The pain delay
Engraves in her flesh?

FRIENDS

He's pale!

HENRY

You were away
A year, while she

| Unremembered –

VICTOR

You do me wrong!

FRIENDS

He's pale!

What did his father say to him?

HENRY

Our friendship, Victor, is too strong
That ever I could do you wrong.
If I seem cruel, you surely know
It is your own heart speaking so.

FRIENDS

His father, fiancée, and friends
Plead to be told what he intends.

HENRY

Go to her and tell her now
You will at last fulfill your vow.
Either marriage or release:
If love is lacking, offer peace.

FRIENDS

How can one man against such weight
Know his own mind or form his fate?
He's pale!

CHARLOTTE (watching Henry)

No need to hear the sad words spoken:
He pleads to have his true heart broken.
If love would grow where it is sown,

Henry nor I would love alone.

FRIENDS

He's pale!

What did his father say to him?

VICTOR'S FATHER

Make her your own!

VICTOR (to himself)

Speak may I not, although she's dear.
I would but add to sorrow fear.

There was a thread of love that led
Me through the labyrinth of my dread,
But then it snapped and I am trapped
In darkness love has never mapped.

FRIENDS

He's pale!

How can he know his mind?
What did his father say to him?

HENRY (to Victor)

If love is lacking, offer peace.

CHARLOTTE (aside, still watching Henry)

He pleads to have his poor heart broken.

VICTOR'S FATHER (to Victor)

It's time you made Elizabeth your own.

ELIZABETH (aside, heartbroken)

I can remember when we were in love.
I can remember how he smiled.
Our speech was free, our hearts at ease;
All that we did, we did to please.
But now a shadow lies between.
Words die unspoken
Smiles unseen.
So little left of what has been;
So little left of what has been.

FRIENDS

His father, fiancée, and friends
Must be told what he intends.
How can one man against such weight
Know his mind or form his fate?

VICTOR (aside)

Speak may I not.
Oh, she's dear.
Speak may I not, or I am trapped.
I am trapped in darkness love never
mapped.

HENRY (to Victor)

Tell her now.
Either marriage or release.
Offer peace. (etc.)

FATHER (to Victor)

Make her your own. (etc.)

CHARLOTTE (aside, watching Henry)

No need to hear the sad words spoken. (etc.)

ELIZABETH (heartbroken)

So little left of what has been,
Of what has been...

VICTOR (to Elizabeth, in a tone of
surrender)

17 You'd have me fix a date. Well then,
Let it be from Saturday a week.

ELIZABETH

You're absolute? I may invite
My cousins from Lucerne
And never be disgraced?

VICTOR (grimly)

Put this building to the torch
If I ask for more delay.

ELIZABETH (nearly overcome)

A week from Saturday!

VICTOR'S FATHER

And if your work should once again
Resist completion?

VICTOR

My work – is through.
What's left
Can all be done tonight.

VICTOR'S FATHER

Why then –

(He raises his arms.)

Your attention, please!
I am happy to announce
That my son Victor Frankenstein
And my dear ward Elizabeth
Are to be married on the Fifth of May,
One week from this coming Saturday.
May I now, although the wine
Lies still uncorked within my cellar,
Propose this toast: The happy pair!

VICTOR'S FRIENDS

The pair!

VICTOR'S FATHER

Come who would our pledge redeem
With wine my cellars now shall stream.

(The chorus begins to leave. Victor's father
follows them, but turns in the doorway.)

Victor? Elizabeth?

VICTOR

Momentarily.

(Victor's father exits after the chorus. Henry
and Charlotte are the last to depart. Each in
turn offers imaginary glasses in toast.)

CHARLOTTE

And once again, when wine there is:
My ever dearest, lovely Liz!

(Charlotte exits.)

HENRY (magnanimity overcoming his
disappointment)

And yet another draught of wine
For my friend, Victor Frankenstein!

(When Henry exits, Victor and Elizabeth
kiss; he rather dutifully, she clingingly.)

ELIZABETH

Victor, I feel...
Happy...chiefly that...
And yet...I can't explain.

VICTOR

In my heart too mere happiness
Is mixed with sentiments
I cannot name. Let us explore
These deeper water of our love
When I am home tonight. But now –

ELIZABETH

You must work, I know. And I must join
Our friends below. Until tonight!

(She exits, looking at him longingly.)

VICTOR'S FRIENDS (offstage)

18 Be life engendered from the light
When, flame to flame, two lovers plight
Undying love.

VICTOR (grimly)

An hour since
My creation's bride took breath.
Now she must breathe her last.

I am resolved;
It's for your sake, Elizabeth!

(He opens the locked doors and enters his laboratory.)

VICTOR'S FRIENDS (offstage, further away)

Light now thy torch,
Elizabeth, from ours,
And now from flame of hers take thine—
And love her, Victor Frankenstein!

(A terrible scream comes from the laboratory as Victor kills the female Creature. Curtain.)

Scene 2

19 (A bridal chamber in a rustic northern style, with a carved bed decked with flowers. Candles burning near the bed are the only source of illumination. The back of the room is deeply shadowed.

(The curtain rises toward the end of an instrumental prelude. Elizabeth is discovered just within the candles' effective range of illumination, wearing her bridal gown and veil. She has been married that day to Victor Frankenstein. Lost in her thoughts, she runs her hands nervously down her body from her face to below her heart. The touch of the bridal veil is her cue to sing.)

ELIZABETH

20 A bride,
And not Lavenza now,

But Frankenstein.

Through how many nights alone
Have I longed for his plighted word
To be fulfilled?
And now, in a moment, it will.
Not Lavenza now, but Frankenstein

And yet, alas,
Within the chambers of my heart
All is darkness absolute.
No tapers burn of joy,
Or bridal blytheness,
And I must feel my way alone,
As down a lightless corridor,
Guided only by the touch
Of fingertips on sweating stone.

An hour more, and then we...

(She laughs uncomfortably.)

21 Doubtless -- doubtless all brides
Have known such fear.
Each time a woman's joined
In wedlock to a man
An ancient sacrifice
Is reenacted,
Fearful to think of
But in the act
Harmless as the sacrifice of Isaac.
No more than Isaac
Have I cause to fear.

(She pauses, lost in thought.)

These repinings are unworthy
Of the bride of Victor Frankenstein.

(She continues, first with determination, and then with awe.)

School your heart, Elizabeth,
To its conjugal duty,
Be a wife true and welcoming.

Tonight, in darkness,
Let Victor discover
That reason to rejoice
You have heard whispered of.
Receive the amazement
Of a man's love.
Through you, by his kiss,
New life shall enter the world.

(Elizabeth sits quietly, lost in thought. From the deep shadows at the back of the stage the Creature enters -- or rather emerges. With a knife in its hand it advances confusedly towards Elizabeth, who turns toward it, putting her back to the audience, at the first utterance of her name. By the third repetition it has come next to her.)

CREATURE

22 Elizabeth Lavenza? Elizabeth Lavenza?
Elizabeth Lavenza?

ELIZABETH (frightened)

My name is Frankenstein!

CREATURE (stabbing her as she says the name)

That name is your death.

(A pause. Elizabeth is shocked, hurt, weak, bleeding; she cannot react. The Creature is angry, upset, and confused; it watches her, nearly panting with dismayed emotion.

Finally it gains some measure of composure and speaks.)

CREATURE

This, Elizabeth, I bring
From your bridegroom,
The man whose fatal name you bear,
Victor Frankenstein.

This to my bride
He brought as dower gift.
He sends it with a love
In which there is no pity.
Such a love he taught to me.

(It stabs her again.)

ELIZABETH

Who...are you?

CREATURE

I was born without a name,
A being begotten
By man alone.
I am his son
Whose wife you would have been.

(Elizabeth regains a measure of strength. She turns away from the Creature to face the audience, revealing bloodstains covering the front of her clothing.)

ELIZABETH (defiantly)

While there is blood
To stain this gown,
Still can I be his wife.
But you, monstrous miscreant,

Can be no son of his.
Even dying, I can deride
A claim so false.
Those vacant eyes,
Those twisted lips,
'That cankered and discolored flesh --

(She musters all of her waning strength to hurl these next words at the Creature with one supreme effort.)

Never could *such*
Have sprung from a root
Healthy and whole.
The son of Frankenstein?
Before a glass
You could not tell such lies.

CREATURE (with bitter derision)

23 A glass? A glass?
My creator had no use
For mirrors, Madam.
He made me with this knife!

(It stabs her again, and then continues gloomily.)

From parts of men
Exumed from paupers' graves,
From organs cut from guts
Of malefactors left to rot
On gallows, from meat gone bad
And blood grown cold --
These materials
He made reanimate in me.
In me you see a man
God had no share in making.
I am the product
Of the mind of Victor Frankenstein.
Has he never spoken

Of his great work?
I am that work.
I am his high ambition.
I am his high ambition realized.

ELIZABETH (as if to herself)

24 He whispered once, he hinted of
Some secret.
I did not wish to hear.
His work, his ambition
Were not concerns of mine.
I was to be his wife,
To bear his children,
To shape for him a human happiness,
To sing as evening
Draws its draperies of shadow
About us close,
A favorite song.
To trust implicitly,
To answer love for love.

CREATURE (still derisive, but with growing tenderness)

Yes, yes -- those were your crimes.
I'm glad you can confess them
As you die.
Tell me, Elizabeth,
Was there, room within
That human happiness
For such as I?

(It stabs her again.)

Look at me, Elizabeth.
The despair in your eyes --
How it feasts,
How it nourishes my soul.

ELIZABETH (almost light-headed with weakness, but still with determination)

There's no despair
When love can be
Remembered.
Nor can you, though you rend
My heart, still living, from my breast,
Rob me of love's sublimity.

(The Creature, furious, stabs her again.)

I have loved. You have no soul
For love to enter,
It is you who should despair,
And I, even now,
As I part this life,
Who have reason to rejoice.
For still, as it leaves my veins
My blood is warm,
And still my lips
Remembering his kiss
Have strength to insist
That I have loved
And you can only hate.

25 (These next lines are sung simultaneously.)

CREATURE (sadly, almost to itself)

Oh, I could have loved,
Elizabeth Lavenza.
I could have loved
A woman
Formed like myself
By the knife of Victor Frankenstein.
I longed for that with all the soul
You tell me I don't have.

I would have lived
With such a one

Happy as beasts
That graze and forage
On the mountainsides.
I would have gone with her
To forests men have never reached
And lived as happily as you,
If you had been allowed to live.

ELIZABETH (becoming weaker and weaker)

Perhaps. Perhaps.
What might have been
Will never be.
We cannot even guess
What might have been.
If I had lived
We might have gone
To Italy. He promised
That we would.
There is nowhere in the world
So beautiful. So full
Of our humanity.
I would have loved
To live in Italy.

I would have loved
I would have loved...

(She dies. During the last part of the duet, she has been supported in the Creature's arms. Her death is scarcely perceptible at first. After she dies there is a pause as the Creature looks at her.)

CREATURE (very softly)

I could have loved...

26 (The Creature lifts her in its arms solemnly and carries her slowly toward the bed. It

places her on the bed, composes her limbs with grave deliberation, and spends a long while looking down at her. Its features should suggest some degree of tender regard. Then, without warning, and very quickly, it lifts the knife above its head and plunges it violently into her corpse. Without haste it turns to the back of the stage and merges, in a few strides, into the shadows, as the curtain falls.)

Act 3 – The Triumph of Death

Scene 1

1 (The outside of a crude tavern in Jacobstad, a Norwegian fishing village on the Gulf of Bothnia. Lars, a sea-captain, and his crew are drinking and gambling. Victor sits brooding on one side of the stage, accompanied by Henry. Both are muffled in winter clothing. They have come north following the Creature's trail, and have hired Lars and his crew to pilot them further. Except for the tavern there are no other buildings, only a wasteland of tundra stretching out of sight.)

PHILIP (offstage)

Men of Jacobstad!
Men of Jacobstad!
Repent your sins!

LARS, CREW (gambling)

Watch out! Watch out!
Watch out! Watch out!
He's scuppered now!
He's scuppered now!

He's scuppered –

(Philip enters, wearing a ragged friar's robe. The sailors put by their cards, and listen to his wide-eyed tirade in a spirit of amused contempt.)

PHILIP

I have seen wonders
In the sky and on the sea –
A narwhale, seven-horned,
Rose from the deeps
And spoke in human tongues.
See!
The bright Boreal lights
Announce the Son of Man!

LARS (mocking Philip)

And me, I saw a pot of cheese
Last night when I was soused,
And then the Whore of Take-your-ease
Was buckled and deloused!

CREW (joining in)

...buckled and deloused!

PHILIP

O sinners, let the glory of His name
Pierce the ice that seals your hearts.
Repent, repent, for lo
I've seen the evil one himself
Tossing on the waves.
His face was like the face of death,
His stature greater than the fabled norse!

(Philip, seeing that the men are no longer listening, stops and retires, muttering, to the

tavern.)

VICTOR (who has been listening to Philip)

2 The man of whom he speaks –
Might that be the enemy I seek?

HENRY

Death's in the face of every man.
Your father's eyes were dark
With death when last I spoke with him –
And when he begged you, Victor, to return.

VICTOR (ignoring Henry)

And of great stature, too, he speaks.
Who else could it be, who else but him?

LARS (coming up to Victor and Henry)

I would not put much faith
In Philip's tales, good sir,
He's mad; we let him rave.

VICTOR

I have no other aim but this
To fill with lead the heart
I once too rashly filled with blood.
I'll speak with him.

(Victor follows Philip into the tavern.)

HENRY (to Lars, watching Victor go)

3 His mind has been destroyed
By grief. It would be wrong to follow him.

LARS

Follow him, sir? Nay,
I follow gold.

HENRY

Then let my greater wealth
Persuade you.

(Shows him a purse.)

This, and more, is yours if you refuse
Your boat to his insane pursuit.

LARS

Your humble servant, sir.
I am persuaded.

VICTOR (coming out of the tavern greatly
excited)

4 Captain, prepare to sail tonight.
That friar's Evil One is him I seek!

(Lars goes to tell the crew. While Victor
sings, they continue drinking, getting more
and more drunk.)

VICTOR (turning away from Lars, singing
to himself)

Already in my pistol's sights
I see his loathsome face.

LARS (to his men)

More ale!

VICTOR

Within my heart I feel
His final agonies of fear.

CREW

Another pint!

HENRY (watching Victor, disgusted)

Delusions!

VICTOR

I see those hands that tore the life
From bride and brother
Bloodless, dead, inert,
Mere sticks upon the snow.

CREW

Drink!

LARS

This one's on me!

VICTOR

Whatever little joy I've known
Before tonight is nothing to the joy
I feel before me now.

CREW (calling out to one of their favorite
whores)

Hey, Gertie!

LARS (drinking)

I give you Gertie
Who's crazy and dirty,
And lives on the outskirts of town.

CREW (drinking)

I give you Netty,
Stinking and sweaty,
And ready to blow a man down.

VICTOR

Whatever price of pain was paid
Is small against the thrill
Of knowing he is mine!

CREW

Ale! More ale! Hey Gertie!

LARS

Ale!

VICTOR

Mine! Mine!
Mine to rend!
Mine to flay!
Mine to work my will upon!

CREW

More ale!

LARS

Hey, Gertie!

VICTOR

Mine!

LARS

Hey, Gertie!

VICTOR (turning away, lost in thought)

Mine!

CREW (starting to sing a lewd song)

5 I give you Dolly,
Juicy and jolly,
Who sells more than cod by the docks.

LARS

I give you Polly,
The fishmonger's folly,
And with her I give you the pox.
VICTOR (suddenly noticing Lars and the
crew; deranged)

Beth!...

CREW (turning toward Victor as if egging
him on)

Beth!

VICTOR

...And certain death,
For Beth lies in her grave.

CREW

Death!

Beth lies in her Grave.

VICTOR

I'd give you Liz,
But as it is,
Poor Liz lies dead as well.

CREW

Liz!
Poor Liz!

VICTOR

I'd give you her,
If blood there were...

CREW

Blood!

VICTOR

...But now she's gone to hell.

HENRY (who has been listening with
increasing horror)

6 Madman or monster,
Have you no shame?
Can you, in, company like this,
Dishonor Elizabeth's name?

VICTOR (with restrained fury)

Henry! Again I warn you –
Do not seek to stay my hand.
My will is proof against your words.

HENRY (firmly)

Then be commanded.
Your father's dying.
Filial duty demands your presence by his side.

VICTOR

My father dies in his time.
I grieve for him, but larger grief
And higher duty rule my acts.

HENRY (desperately)

Read his letter.

VICTOR

Do you suppose that having reached
This near my goal, I'd be denied
The only pleasure life can offer me
His death, who killed Elizabeth.
Return to your domestic hearth, Henry.
Leave me to my revenge.

HENRY (with half-mad persistence)

You may be deaf to reason.
These men are not.
My purse is deeper far than his, Captain.
Give me your pledge you won't indulge
This madman in his flight beyond
The pale of law. It's not revenge,
Unworthy motive that it is, but lust—
Not revenge that draws him north,
But lust for his own death.

LARS (leaning toward Victor, with drunken eagerness)

What say you Frankenstein?

Can you meet his price?

VICTOR

I'll double it!

(Victor draws his pistol and shoots Henry.
He takes the purse from Henry's convulsing
hands, and turns to Lars.)

This will I add to the sum
Already yours, when my foe
Lies at my feet, as lifeless
As this foolish friend.

(Victor exits toward the ship, never once
looking back. The sailors, both shocked and
impressed, watch him for a moment in
silence.)

LARS, CREW (finally finding their voices)

7 Let all who've never stained
Their hands with blood remain behind.
We sail for higher wages, lads,
And for a man who knows his mind.

(Lars and the Crew begin drunkenly to pick
up their things, getting ready to follow
Victor on board ship.)

PHILIP (who has emerged from the tavern
just in time to see Victor shoot Henry)

Unholy man, fly to your doom.
The wretch whose blood compels your thirst
Shall never fall a prey to you.
Your friend's the only foe you kill;
Your bride's, the only blood you spill.
It stains your guilty hands
Fly — to the north — and die,

And die, and die on frozen strands!

Scene 2

LARS, CREW (preparing to leave)

Let all who've never stained
Their hands with blood remain behind
We sail for higher wages, lads.
And for a man who knows his mind.

(They leave as they sing. The last few words come from offstage. Philip stays behind for a moment, watching Henry, and then exits in a different direction. Henry, not quite dead, begins to stir.)

HENRY (remembering Victor's final words)

8 Not lifeless quite...
Nor yet a friend,
Although I thought...
But all thoughts
Are nothing now...
For a while the air will pulse
With breath,
Then comes death,
Friend death...
Have you never stood so close
That you could see
Its emptiness?
Bend down, bend down,
And study how I die,
And feel...
Your own...approaching...
Nothingness...

(He dies.)

(Curtain.)

(An Arctic waste. A twilight varied by the constantly changing colored gleams of the aurora. On the packed ice the dim forms of the corpses of men and dogs. The Creature stands at the highest point on the stage, dressed in a motley of furs and hides.)

CREATURE

9 Alone! Alone!
Unwitnessed in a world
No mind but mine was ever shown;
No voice but mine, no summons possible
No choice of aye or nay.

See where they lie, my enemies –
Their corpses piled.
Here my Creator lies!

Pain! Endless, ever keener pain!

(Addressing the corpses, as if in a vision, it invokes a grim future for humanity.)

I bid you breed, increase
Until you
Spill into the seas and fill the air
With screams of rage.
Spawn and gnaw like rats
The suffering flesh you press against.
See nothing in each other's eyes
But greed and knife-inviting fear.
Snatch the starveling's
Last adulterated loaf,
And satisfy your lust upon his children.

Nature! Study her decrees!
Discover there the key to universal death,
And turn this spinning ball of dirt,

This Earth, into a second sun!
And may they burn,
The slaughterers who still survive,
In one last all-destroying holocaust!

(Weakly)

What's left to curse?
Only myself, who stood accursed
From moment of first consciousness.

Nothing left...
My mind...
The silence...

(Its voice becomes inaudible.)

(Silence.)

(Curtain.)