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World Premiere



Mary Shelley

By Helen Edmundson

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Mary Shelley

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Mary Shelley

Shared Experience

Shared Experience has been instrumental in pioneering a distinctive performance style that celebrates the union of physical and text-based theatre. We are committed to creating theatre that goes beyond our everyday existence, giving form to the hidden world of emotion and imagination. We seek to explore the relationship between the world we inhabit and our inner lives.

Text plays a major part in our productions as we strive to offer our audience not only visual excitement, but also deep emotional engagement and intellectual stimulus. We see the rehearsal process as a genuinely open forum for asking questions and taking risks that redefine the possibilities of performance. At the heart of the company's work is the power and excitement of the actor's physical presence and the collaboration between actor and audience – a shared experience.

*“Shared Experience are
in a league of their own”*

Time Out



Image : Naomi Dawson
Actors : Kristin Atherton, Ben Lamb

Mary Shelley

Shared Experience and Expressionism

In our everyday lives we hide much of what we think and feel, for fear we would be considered foolish or even mad. I believe we have a longing to see expressed in the theatre that which we conceal in life; to share our 'madness' and understand that we are not alone.

Central to Shared Experience's approach is the desire to go beyond naturalism and to see into the character's private worlds. There will be moments on stage when we literally enact whatever a character is secretly feeling or imagining. In more realistic scenes the social façade is a thin layer beneath which bubbles a river of suppressed emotion. During rehearsals we encourage actors to allow this bubbling emotional energy to explode and take over. In a scene where someone is secretly feeling very angry, when we allow the inner to erupt onto the surface they may viciously attack the other person; if the other character is feeling afraid they might crawl under the table. Having allowed the inner to erupt, the actor must return to the scene and struggle to conceal it. Although we may see two people drinking tea, we sense that underneath the social ritual it is as if murder is taking place.

This emphasis on subjective experience runs through all areas of the production. For example, the setting of the play will be more expressive of what a place feels like than what it realistically looks like. In *Jane Eyre* everything on stage was grey or black to express the loneliness of Jane's inner world. In *War and Peace* the set was a hall of mirrors to suggest the vanity and narcissism of the aristocracy in Tolstoy's Russia. In *The House of Bernarda Alba* the house felt like a prison. We decided to make the door colossally large and encrusted it with locks and bolts. It is this emphasis on the 'inner' or the subjective experience which characterises expressionism and it is at the heart of Shared Experience's approach.

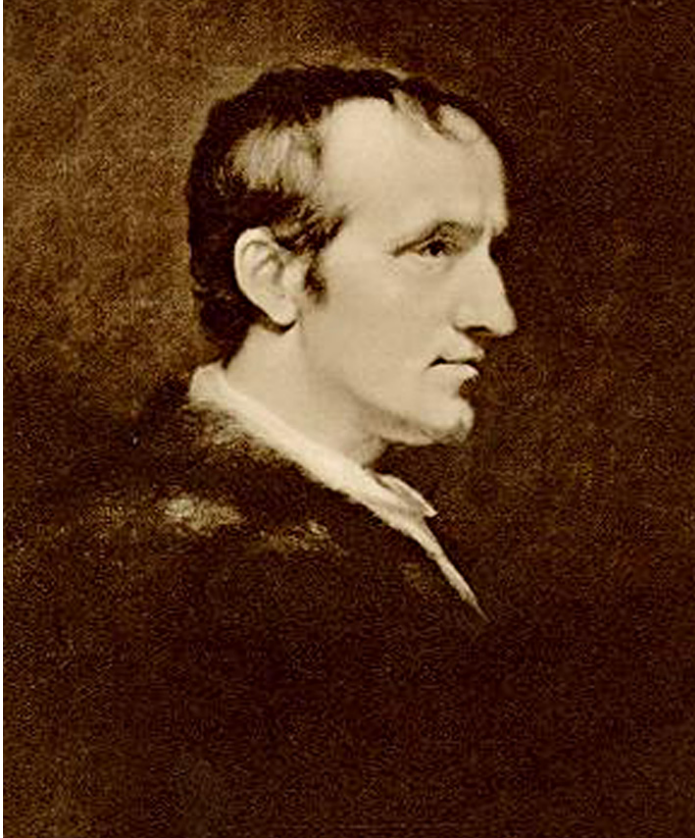
Polly Teale



Image : Naomi Dawson
Actress : Kristin Atherton

Mary Shelley

Mary Shelley's father – William Godwin



William Godwin

On 3rd March 1756, William Godwin was born to John and Anne Godwin in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire. As a child, William was rather introverted but had a voracious appetite for learning. It is believed that very little affection passed between Godwin and his stern, strict father.

Godwin's family were very religious and adhered to a strict form of Calvinism called Sandeman. It was expected that William would follow his father's footsteps into the Ministry, which he did; he was educated at Hoxton Academy (a Sandemanian, Dissenting College).

After serving time as a Minister in East Anglia, Godwin moved to London where he was to meet and encounter many individuals who influenced his philosophy. It was at this time that political events in America and England, discussions with his associates and his study of the French *philosophes* (in particular Rousseau, Helvetius, d'Holbach and Montesquieu), the Latin historians and English writers (Locke, Swift and Priestley) combined to convert him to political liberalism. His religious beliefs evolved and changed.

Godwin decided that he would abandon his position as a Minister as his interest grew in politics, as did his association with radical societies. The French Revolution profoundly influenced the direction of Godwin's career and he was inspired to write his most famous publication, an analysis of society and government, published in 1793: *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Political Justice and its influence on General Virtue and Happiness*.

In this three volume work, Godwin proposed a society in which human beings use their reason to decide the best course of action. He also argued that all forms of government are oppressive and should give way to freedom of thought and reason. He advocated discussion and reason to achieve one's aims, put emphasis on 'reform' rather than 'revolution' and believed that enlightenment would free man from the political, economic and social deficiencies of society. The publication was an instant success selling over 4000 copies. In the same year, his novel attacking aristocratic privilege, *Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*, was published. The huge success of both earned Godwin a reputation as one of the most influential and radical thinking writers of philosophy and literature.

Godwin married twice, firstly to Mary Shelley's mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, herself a liberal thinker and published writer. Godwin was attacked after Mary Wollstonecraft's death for his candid biography of her. His second wife was Mary Jane Clairmont.

As the political climate shifted to the right, Godwin's ideas fell out of favour so that by 1814, when our play begins, the family were struggling to survive in straightened circumstances. The play shows Godwin, no longer the celebrity he once was and preoccupied with mounting debts. When his young disciple Shelley offers to pay his debts Godwin hopes to restore his reputation.

Aoibheann Kelly

Mary Shelley

Mary Shelley's mother – Mary Wollstonecraft

“I do not wish them [women] to have power over men; but over themselves. ”

Mary Wollstonecraft , *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.



Mary Wollstonecraft

Mary Wollstonecraft, often referred to as the 'First Feminist', was passionately concerned with the innate and intrinsic rights of all people. At a time when women were viewed as 'possessions' and when much of their 'being' and 'identity' was dictated by superficial accomplishments such as sewing and obsession with appearance, she believed that this prohibited their ability to be independent thinkers and make a positive, meaningful contribution to society. She believed that change should come from women themselves; they should take responsibility for their intellectual development and contribution to society.

On 27th April 1759, Mary Wollstonecraft was born to Elizabeth Dixon and Edward Wollstonecraft in East London. The family she was born into was a middle class Anglo Irish family consisting of one older sibling, a brother. Life for Mary was

not easy growing up and her childhood was one of instability. Her father could be exceptionally brutal, heavily influenced by alcohol. During her childhood, Mary's family relocated six times and she found her escape through a passion for education and reading. A formal education was out of the question for her but her older brother Edward received a good education resulting in a position at a law firm.

In 1783, driven by her zeal and enthusiasm in regards to the importance of education, Mary and her friend, Fanny Blood, set up their own school in Newington Green, London. After Fanny died in childbirth, Mary closed the school. Needing a source of regular income, she accepted the position of governess to the daughters of Lord Kingsborough in Ireland. It was here that Mary had her first experience of life in a powerful aristocratic family and she saw how superficial 'education' could be for women. This inspired her pamphlet *An Education of Daughters* where she argued that a woman's 'education', as it stood in the day, did nothing to promote or inspire independence of thought.

In 1790, Mary wrote *A Vindication Of the Rights of Men* in which she supported the ideals of the French Revolution and its principles.

In 1792, Mary's *A Vindication of The Rights of Woman* was published. In this, Mary made clear her belief of equality of the sexes, advocating true education as the pathway to independence of mind, thought and reason.

In 1793, Mary moved to Paris to write a book that supported the aims of the revolution. There she met Gilbert Imlay, a handsome American businessman and fell pregnant with his child, outside of wedlock. Imlay rejected Mary and she gave birth to a daughter whom she named Fanny, after her beloved friend. Mary, devastated by Imlay's rejection, attempted suicide twice.

In 1796, Mary was introduced to the famous philosopher William Godwin at a friend's dinner party in London. In Godwin, she found a friend and partner whom she could trust. Although both opposed the idea of marriage, they decided to marry when Mary fell pregnant with their daughter, Mary Shelley, in 1797. Mary Wollstonecraft died days after giving birth.

Aoibheann Kelly

Mary Shelley



Mary Shelley by Dr Mark Philp

Dr Mark Philip is a Fellow and Tutor in Politics at Oriel College, University of Oxford.

The wars triggered by the French Revolution in 1789 finally came to a close at the battle of Waterloo in 1815. The initial British response to France's reform of its political order had been warm but it cooled rapidly with the increasing radicalism and violence of the revolution. Fear that the 'French distemper' would spread across the channel resulted in a polarising of political opinion and increasingly repressive activity by the British Government. This lasted for twenty five years and had a profound effect on British political, literary and cultural life.

Helen Edmundson's play, *Mary Shelley*, focusses on two years (1814-1816), right at the end of this period, in the turbulent lives of six people: Mary Wollstonecraft-Godwin (who became Mary Shelley in 1816 and published *Frankenstein* shortly after these events); her father, the radical philosopher and novelist William Godwin; her step-mother Mary Jane Clairmont; her two step-sisters Fanny Imlay and Jane Clairmont; and the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. Often hailed as the foremost family of British romanticism, they were also a family of contrasts and tensions: enlightenment and romanticism, reason and imagination, principle and feeling, conformity and rebellion. Those tensions were played out with often tragic consequences in the relationships between Mary Shelley and her family.

Godwin's political philosophy was in part inspired by his positive reaction to the opening events of the French Revolution. His work epitomised enlightenment optimism about the progress of humanity. He believed that through education and the development of the understanding it was possible to foster our innate sense of responsibility, benevolence and goodness. He predicted a future in which virtue would triumph and in which reason would conquer nature, enabling us to achieve immortality. Government may once have been a necessary evil but as mind progressed it would wither away. Authority, law, marriage, contracts, promises – indeed, anything that constrains the sovereignty of the individual's private judgment and freedom to act – would become redundant. His radical vision brought him widespread fame – the essayist William Hazlitt said of him that he 'blazed as a sun in the firmament of reputation; no one was more talked of, more looked up to, more sought after ... Truth, moral truth, it was supposed, had here taken up its abode.'

Although Godwin was intellectually radical he was politically cautious – wary that precipitate action could produce chaos and delay progress. For the radical John Thelwall, Godwin's 'visionary peculiarities of mind,' which 'recommend the most extensive plan of freedom and innovation ever discussed by any writer in the English language...' were coupled with a conviction that it was necessary 'to reprobate every measure from which even the most moderate reform can rationally be expected.'

But for all his caution, Godwin was deeply affected when he fell in love with the feminist writer Mary Wollstonecraft. She was a crucial catalyst in Godwin's life. Their deep and moving relationship, which flourished between April 1796 and September 1797, took the over-rationalist, ex-dissenting minister wholly by surprise. When Wollstonecraft became pregnant they married – not without a certain amount of philosophical embarrassment on Godwin's part. Six months later, Wollstonecraft died following Mary's birth. Stricken with grief, Godwin threw himself into a memoir to commemorate the woman he had loved, not seeing that his work would provide a perfect target for scurrilous attack by the increasingly vituperative reactionary press. From 1798 he was denounced in lecture halls and from pulpits and villified in the loyalist press. He continued to work and write for the next thirty-eight years, producing novels, literary studies, histories and essays, but his reputation never recovered. In 1801 he wrote: 'I have fallen ... in one common grave with the cause and love of liberty; and in this sense have been more honoured and illustrated in my decline than ever I was at the tide of my success.'

Godwin was left caring for Mary and for Wollstonecraft's three year old daughter Fanny, the child of Wollstonecraft's affair in Paris with Captain Gilbert Imlay. Godwin felt Wollstonecraft's loss acutely. His sister Hannah and his housekeeper, Louisa Jones, cared for the girls while Godwin wrote but he played a central role in the girls' life. Both girls referred to him as Papa, and their relationship with him was warm and affectionate, even if he was often distracted by intellectual concerns.

In December 1801 Godwin married Mary Jane Clairmont. She already had two children, Charles (then 6) and Jane (then 3). The couple's only child, William, was born in 1803. They established a children's publisher and bookshop and produced several works of lasting value, such as Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807). Godwin was not, however, a good manager. Following advice, he tried to increase the capital of the business but this led to one

Mary Shelley

round of borrowing after another – exhausting his credit and his remaining reputation with his friends and former associates. The business struggled for twenty years before being declared bankrupt in 1825.

For much of this time his relationship with Mary Jane was a strained one. She resented his old friends whom she saw as hangers on, and was oppressed by the debts, the work, and Godwin's often very poor health. Their life presented a sharp contrast to the one Godwin had sketched in his philosophical work and in his memoir of Wollstonecraft. These contrasts were obvious to his remaining friends and acquaintance, and to the succession of visitors (from America and Europe as well as Britain) who sought out the philosopher.

Mary too was increasingly conscious of the contradictions and tensions in her father's life and increasingly drawn to her real mother (whom she knew primarily through her father's writing and her own imagination). Her relationship with her step-mother was not good – and that with her step-sister Jane was tense. She relied on Fanny, as did Godwin, but neither wholly appreciated her.

Percy Shelley was not quite twenty (already expelled from Oxford and married with a child) when he wrote to Godwin in 1812 to introduce himself and register his surprise - and delight - that Godwin was still alive. For the best part of two years, in typically chaotic style, Shelley was forever about to arrive, and Godwin about to pounce on what looked like a financial saviour. They had finally settled matters to arrange a loan to solve Godwin's debts (on the basis of Shelley's inheritance prospects), when Mary returned from an extended stay in Scotland. As a radiant 16 year-old she entranced Shelley and was entranced by him. For Shelley, she was the daughter of the most radical and famous couple; for Mary, he represented a revivifying of the conviction and intellectual passion she had seen gradually extinguished in her father.

Godwin was outraged by their affair. He could not condone the relationship between the impressionable Mary and blithely irresponsible Shelley. There was too much feeling, too little reason. When they eloped, Godwin became a caricature of damaged pride, which he occasionally swallowed to cadge further financial assistance from Shelley. He coupled this with an almost vindictive withdrawal from his daughter, refusing to see her or to communicate with her. This hurt her deeply. So deeply that it is hard not to see her working out her distress and her conflicting emotions in her



Image : Naomi Dawson
Actors : Kristin Atherton, Ben Lamb

own writing – with Dr Frankenstein as the father figure who spurns his creation; and the creature wreaking destruction on Frankenstein's family to gain his attention and affection and to force Frankenstein to create a mate for him. The novel is a maelstrom of conflicting perspectives, emotions and demands - a cathartic expression of Mary's own sense of confusion, rejection, and dismay.

The reconciliation between Mary and her father comes with her marriage to Shelley, with which the play closes. It is not easy to like Godwin's letter to his brother two months after the wedding:

"The piece of news however I have to tell you is, that I went to church with this tall girl some time ago to be married. Her husband is the eldest son of Sir Thomas Shelley of Field Place in the county of Sussex, baronet. So that, according to the vulgar ideas of the world, she is well-married; and I have great hopes the young man will make her a good husband. You will wonder, I dare say, how a girl with not a penny of fortune, should meet with so good a match. But such are the ups and downs of this world. For my part I care comparatively little about wealth, so that it should be her destiny in life to be respectable, virtuous and contented."

Mary Shelley



Image : Naomi Dawson
Actor : William Chubb

The letter is a pompous and mangled but nonetheless genuine expression of Godwin's abiding pride in and love for his daughter. His love had a price: he was very demanding of her, for attention, help and support, and he expected a great deal of her – expectations which *Frankenstein* both vindicated and fuelled. These became still harder to meet in the years that followed, when two more of her children died, when Shelley drowned, and before her last child, Percy Florence Shelley, was formally accepted as the heir to the Shelley fortune, giving her some security. Yet for all his insensitivity and neediness, Godwin remained a central part of Mary's life, bound to him by the tragedies and experiences they had shared, and by their shared intellectual pursuits.

The story of Mary and her family is a complex one, replete with tragedy and heartbreak. Godwin's rationalism epitomised the optimism of the late enlightenment, but his actual life became increasingly gothic, dark, and subject to currents and forces he could not control. Mary's *Frankenstein* expresses her sense that when mind over-reaches it unleashes dangerous primitive emotions. In her early life, the expectation had been that reason and justice would order her world. But over and over again she encounters the reality as unruly and resistant - subject to powerful psychological forces that Godwin's rationalism left him ill-prepared to respond to, and to which she gives full rein in *Frankenstein*. In the end they held fast to each other among the wreckage but, as *Mary Shelley* eloquently attests, their lesson was learnt the hard way.

A wide range of letters and papers from the family are available on-line at:

<http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/online/1500-1900/abinger/abinger.html>

Godwin's detailed but cryptic Diary has been scanned, transcribed edited and is available on-line at:

<http://godwindiary.bodleian.ox.ac.uk>

The journal kept by Shelley and Mary on their elopement to France, and sustained thereafter by Mary has been published as: *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814–1844*, ed. by Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press; Clarendon Press, 1987)

A comprehensive bibliography is available at:

<http://godwindiary.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/project-bibl.html>

Schools with A level students interested in undertaking projects in English or History associated with the Shelley – Godwin circle are encouraged to contact the team associated with the on-line edition of Godwin's Diary at:

godwindiary@politics.ox.ac.uk



Mary Shelley

The relationship between William Godwin and Mary Shelley

Father versus Daughter

By all accounts Mary Shelley and her father William Godwin were incredibly close until her elopement, at sixteen years of age, with Shelley. At the centre of this production is an exploration of the tension between Godwin's radical ideas and his treatment of his daughter Mary.

A radical liberal, Godwin raised and educated his daughters as equals to men and instilled in them his and their mother Mary Wollstonecraft's progressive political beliefs. As part of the Enlightenment movement and an advocate for social reform, he argued that the government and related social practices, such as property monopoly, marriage and monarchy, restrained the inevitable progress of humankind. Mary in particular was heavily influenced by her mother and father and espoused their beliefs, relishing opportunities to learn about them through their published writing.

After Mary and Shelley's declaration of love, Godwin's shock at what he feels is a betrayal causes him to cut Mary off. Even after hearing of the death of Mary's baby, he is unswerving in his attitude: "The world does not stop turning because of the death of one child. Nor should it." (Act 1, Scene 9). Contrary to Godwin's stance against the institution of marriage, shared by Shelley, it is only when Mary and Shelley marry that he welcomes them back into the family. Godwin's severe reaction to his daughter's choice of lover and alternative life style contradict the very principles he raised her with: a belief in a society where individuals should have the right to use their own reason to dictate the best course of action for their lives.

Godwin cannot accept his daughter's choice to act of her own free will and in effect he himself becomes the authoritarian dictating with whom and how Mary should live her life. Mary appeals to him: "I can't believe you're behaving like this. You're behaving like the worst kind of autocrat." (Act 2, Scene 4)

At the beginning of our play, before Mary meets Shelley, Godwin speaks to Mary about the public reaction to his book about her mother Mary Wollstonecraft. He counts the three of them as progressive thinkers and advises her how to deal with those who are more narrow-minded: "...there are many people who cannot view the world as openly, as honestly as your mother did. Or as you and I do... But we must be patient, cautious with those who do not have our capacity and strength of mind. Always remember who you are. And ask more of yourself" (Act 1, Scene 4)

But Mary's father does not take heed of his own advice.

After being cut off, Mary is desperate to regain his love and approval, to make him see she is still made in his image. When Fanny visits to meet her new baby, Mary says to her: "I know what he thinks: that I've betrayed my gifts - my promise, but he's so wrong. Because this is it - I'm living out my promise. I'm living the life with Shelley that he and my mother dreamt of living. Does he think I've just thrown everything up to swoon about like some lovesick girl? I'm reading and learning and thinking and writing more than I've ever done. (Pointing to the books beside her) Look. Look at all these. I've read them all. And Shelley and I talk about them. Talk and talk like I used to do with him. I want you to tell him that. Make him see that." (Act 3, Scene 7)

A Man-made Monster

It was the summer of 1814, when just a few weeks after meeting, Mary and Shelley fell in love and eloped to France, along with her stepsister Jane. The following year Mary gave birth to her baby daughter Clara who died 11 days later. Almost a year later she gave birth to her second child, a baby boy whom she named William, after her father. That summer in Italy Mary dreamt of a monster, whose story she began to write, in a novel called *Frankenstein*.

The rejection and abandonment by her father and Mary's experience of the pregnancies and birth of her two children and death of her first child can all be seen to have a depth of influence on her novel *Frankenstein*. The story can be perceived as a reflection of the author's own deep psychological fears and anxieties, such as fear of giving birth, even that Mary herself might be the monster, by her very birth destroying her own mother.

Mary Shelley

It is well documented that the writing of *Frankenstein* could be seen as an expression of a daughter's subconscious desire to both challenge her father and regain his approval. Mary dedicated the novel to her father. The monster's first murder victim, Frankenstein's young brother, is named William, (encompassing thereby Mary's son, her father and her stepbrother). The novel expresses Godwin's belief that monsters are not born but made. If we treat someone brutally they will become brutal. Although dedicated to Godwin, her father, as the monster is to Frankenstein, his creator, Mary also wants to be free from subordination to him and recognised as an equal. She wants to be allowed a mate, in the same way the monster demands one from Frankenstein.

Is Mary the monster, created by her well-meaning, but intellectual, emotionally cold father? Or is Godwin the real monster, rejecting his own child?

"You know, I really think he doesn't care. Not in a real way. All those times when he was cold and distant from us, and I used to think it didn't matter, because deep down, there was this...bedrock of love. But now I don't think there is. If I can do one thing, one thing he doesn't approve of and yet he can't forgive me." (Mary, Act 1, Scene 7)

Aisling Zambon O' Neill



Image : Naomi Dawson
Actress : Flora Nicholson - Assistant Director : Cecily Boys - Director : Polly Teale

Mary Shelley

Frankenstein

In the novel, Robert Walton, an English adventurer, undertakes an expedition to the North Pole and during this time he writes letters to his sister. On this expedition he comes across a weary and troubled stranger adrift on an ice floe. Walton brings the stranger, Victor Frankenstein, on board. Frankenstein tells Walton of his past which he has previously kept hidden.

Dr Frankenstein had a passion for science and this passion led to an obsession with the philosophy of the 'life principle' and so he had sought to create a human being. He haunted cemeteries and charnel houses to find pieces of the dead to make his creation. Following a period of working quietly and secretly for years, Frankenstein eventually saw his creation come to life. However, he soon became disgusted with his creation and horrified by its grotesque appearance. Frankenstein abandoned the creature, who then wandered great distances and eventually found refuge in a shelter where he observed a family living close by. Through his observations and through the influence of three books, most prominently, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the creature taught himself language and learned about humanity. But when the creature tries to reach out towards his fellow men he is cruelly rejected and attacked. Afraid of his outward form and fuelled by prejudice, all who encounter the creature try to destroy him. His attempts to live a good and decent life are crushed and he becomes bitter and angry. Seeking revenge on his creator, he pursues Frankenstein and leaves a trail of carnage.

Bereft, Dr Frankenstein pursued his creation to the Arctic Circle where he is discovered by Walton and his crew. Dr Frankenstein warns Walton against seeking glory, fame and recognition.





Mary Shelley

Idealism and Realism: William Godwin & Percy Bysshe Shelley

Shelley first discovered William Godwin's writing at the age of 14; *"I wept. I suppose it was some sort of relief. To have found that here was someone with the vision and clarity of mind to be able to strip away all that is wrong and useless and unjust, and present a way of living which would allow mankind to achieve his potential. To become perfect. I will never stop striving for that world."* (Act 2, Scene 1)

Godwin is the elder radical intellectual to Shelley's young, impulsive, idealistic poet, who is in awe of Godwin's ideology. Shelley lives his life with spontaneity, optimism and passion, whereas Godwin is more contained, dispassionate and realistic, yet both are guided by similar principles.

The two men share many of the same beliefs regarding the autonomy of the individual above the authority of the state, although they have come to them from very different backgrounds. Percy Shelley's father was a member of parliament and Shelley was educated at Eton and Oxford University, which is where he began to read radical writers such as Tom Paine and William Godwin and from where he was expelled for promoting atheism. William Godwin came from a poor, strictly religious and ministerial background, without wealth and privilege and the opportunities those could bring. It could be argued that Godwin was more of a pragmatist and realist than Shelley due to a greater struggle for survival than Shelley experienced in his life.

The contrast between the two characters is most apparent through their literary inclinations. In their first meeting Shelley tells Mary that his epic poem was inspired by her father's work, who however had told him to stick to *"prose and politics"*. Mary explains that her father dislikes poetry (especially Byron, who Shelley adores) and *"likes things to be said in a direct way"*. We see here that Godwin is really defined by his intellectualism and Shelley his artistic disposition.

Shelley is renowned for his lack of punctuality: he has a fluid sense of time and a tendency to live in the moment, characterised by his being frequently either early or late. Shelley's lust for living is depicted in the scene where he and Mary meet at her mother's graveside: Mary remarks to Shelley: *"You seem to contain so much... joy"* (Act 2, Scene 1). And yet for Harriet, Shelley's first wife, this same appetite for life and refusal to be bound by convention has devastating consequences.

Godwin is shocked and dismayed when Shelley announces that he and Mary are in love. He feels betrayed by them both and responds by cutting them off. However, throughout this time, Shelley's financial assistance to Godwin continues to bind them together.

Godwin and Shelley reunite at the end of the play when Shelley is to wed Mary. There is some irony in the fact it is because of this marriage that Godwin forgives Shelley, when neither men believe in the institution of marriage. In his book *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, Godwin had proclaimed; *"...the institution of marriage is made a system of fraud so long as two human beings are forbidden, by positive institution, to follow the dictates of their own mind, prejudice will be alive and vigorous."* (*An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, 1793)

After Shelley's wife Harriet commits suicide, Shelley decides to marry for the greater good as he sees it and explains to Godwin:

"My views on marriage have not altered. But I am fighting for custody of my two children by Harriet. Her family wish to keep them. I stand little chance of prevailing, if my situation with Mary remains unchanged. And financially, our marriage offers her greater assurance. It is what the law demands, it seems, and so I have decided that I must..."

Godwin: *"Compromise."*

Shelley: *"Yes. On this occasion. Until the law catches up with mankind."* (*Mary Shelley*, Act 5 Scene 1)

This dialogue echoes the first time they discuss marriage earlier in the play; Godwin tries to persuade Shelley to remarry Harriet under English rather than Scottish law, as it will provide more security over the sale of the bond. We learn here some fundamental differences between the two characters, related to their diverse life experience. Godwin tells Shelley about living in poverty and having been imprisoned for debt, experiences which have informed Godwin's pragmatic and realistic view of life. Shelley is incredibly reluctant to compromise his principles, until Godwin appeals to him to *"apply philosophy to this situation"*. Having married twice and looking back on his life Godwin explains: *"One learns to live with compromise. A horrible bed-bound relative in a secret room"*. (Act 1, Scene 5)

Mary Shelley

Shelley is driven to live by his ideals, whereas Godwin writes about philosophical ideals. On growing older, Godwin has accepted that society changes gradually and that he has to fit into society as it is. He has to apply reason over passion: *“We can use convention to defeat convention”* (Act 1, Scene 5). After Mary and Shelley declare their love to Godwin and he tries to make them understand what they are doing is unacceptable, Shelley confronts Godwin with his own political philosophy: *“I believe in what you originally wrote, Godwin. Even if you do not. And the more I live, the more I know you were right”* (Act 2, Scene 4).

Godwin’s writings have become a more powerful influence over Shelley than he himself.

At the beginning of the play, when justifying his trust in Shelley to Mrs Godwin, he declares: *“I have great faith in him. You cannot sit for hours with a man, discussing ‘Political Justice’ without learning something of his true nature. There are certain principles upon which we disagree, yes, but he knows as well as I, what constitutes just treatment of one man by another.”* (Act 1, Scene 3). The faith that Godwin had in Shelley at the start is renewed at the end of the play just before handing his daughter over to Shelley to be married: *“It is a privilege – to be amongst the legislators of mankind. And you will be, Mary. As your mother was, as I am. And as Shelley will be too”*.

Aisling Zambon O’ Neill



Image : Naomi Dawson
Actors : Kristin Atherton, Ben Lamb

Mary Shelley

Helen Edmundson, Writer

This play began with a question: how did Mary Shelley, aged only eighteen, come to write a novel of such weight and power as *Frankenstein*? I knew the story of the Villa Diodati, and the external impetus for her sitting down to write, but where did the thoughts come from? The themes? For *Frankenstein* is clearly more than a spine-chiller; it is a novel of ideas.

She dedicated the story to her father, William Godwin, the radical political philosopher. Much has been said about Shelley's influence on Mary at this time (some have even suggested that he had a hand in writing *Frankenstein*), but as I began my research, I quickly discovered that Shelley's own ideas and preoccupations had been inspired to a large degree by Godwinian philosophy. He and Mary shared a passion for her father's work, and I started to understand that it was this passion more than anything, which had equipped her to write so brilliantly about such ideas as the consequences of treating men like beasts.

But there was more. Mary was writing *Frankenstein* at a time when her relationship with her father was under great strain – when he had refused all contact with her for almost two years. The novel is more than a homage to his philosophies; it is a criticism of his nature and his choices, a warning, a reprimand and a huge cry for understanding. It is these elements, I think, which give *Frankenstein* its heartfelt urgency and power. I decided to place this complex relationship at the centre of the play, and to see where it took me.

The research I undertook was enormously absorbing and inspiring. Each of the principal characters could be the subject of a play in their own right. I loved delving into Skinner Street - into Mary's troubled family, patched together from bits and pieces of different relationships, crudely stitched - like the monster himself- into a clumsy, dysfunctional form. I loved discovering her sisters, each of whose fate was so bound up with Mary's, and learning about the daring and vision of Shelley's early socialism. It was a pleasure to imagine these people back to life.

And whilst I felt compelled, as Mary did, to depict the very real and awful dangers of putting principles before emotional need, I hope I have not painted too harsh a picture of idealism. For there is something courageous, surely, in striving to break new ground in the perilous business of living. In deciding to deal with the pain, the guilt, the disapproval this entails, in the belief and hope that, ultimately, humanity will be the richer for your efforts.

Helen Edmundson February 2012.



Image : Naomi Dawson
Actress : Kristin Atherton

Mary Shelley

Polly Teale, Director

“When Helen Edmundson and I began to talk about the project it was this tension between the radical ideas and the reality of their lives which fascinated us.”

I first read *Frankenstein* about five years ago after reading an article about Mary Shelley and her relationship with her father, the radical philosopher William Godwin. I was struck by the fact that the novel was written when Mary was in exile from her father who refused to have any contact with his daughter after she eloped with the poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley, aged just sixteen. Prior to this father and daughter had been very close. Mary was both raised and educated by Godwin and had absorbed his radical ideas. His belief in freedom and equality had been at the heart of his relationship with his daughter. She had been taught not only to think for herself but to believe she was capable of achieving great things. A rarity in a time when women had few rights and severely limited prospects. The legacy of her mother Mary Wolstonecraft, the pioneering feminist, was kept alive by her father. Despite having died after giving birth to Mary her portrait hung above Godwin's desk and the young Mary was encouraged to admire and emulate her mother's independent spirit. But when Mary met and ran away with the poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Godwin's reaction was severe and unforgiving. Having raised his daughter to believe she need not be bound by convention and must exercise free will, he was confronted by his own teachings manifest in the most challenging and tangible form. His daughter was no longer his protégée but had abandoned him for another.

Mary had fallen in love with a man who shared Godwin's passionate belief in the need to create a more egalitarian society where people would be educated and respected as individuals, not forced into obedience by punitive laws and crushing hierarchies. Had he not already been married Shelley was, in many ways, the perfect match for this child of radical parentage; the product of Godwin's teachings and her mother's free spirit and independence of mind.

However, Godwin was struggling to cope with feelings that he was ill-equipped to deal with. A fervent believer in the power of reason, Godwin found it hard to understand his deep feelings of rejection and loss at losing his beloved daughter and soul mate. He reacted harshly, forbidding anyone in the family from seeing Mary even when she lost her first baby. Mary, desperate to regain her father's love and approval, did the only thing she could to communicate with Godwin. She wrote a book and dedicated it to him knowing that he would read it. My guess is that Mary's conscious objective was to win back her father's love by writing a book that espoused his beliefs. The story of *Frankenstein* compellingly illustrates Godwin's belief that monsters are not born but created by their circumstances. That if we treat a person brutally they will become brutal. But beneath the construct of Mary's moral tale lies another story: that of the creature's rage at his rejection by his creator. At the heart of *Frankenstein* is the monster's cry of anguish and fury at being cast out by the person who gave him life. Like Mary he is in exile.

When Helen Edmundson and I began to talk about the project it was this tension between the radical ideas and the reality of their lives which fascinated us. The struggle to live according to their ideals in an imperfect, unequal world, where human beings are fallible and subject to unpredictable feelings.

We were both agreed that for all the contradictions and tensions their radical beliefs hold out a beacon. Now more than ever we need to be reminded of their struggle which was the precursor to so many of the hard won battles and those yet to come.

Mary Shelley

Rehearsal Diary Excerpt Cecily Boys, Assistant Director



Image : Naomi Dawson
Actors : Shannon Tarbet, Ben Lamb, Sadie Shimmin

Wednesday 29 February

We started the day by looking at the scene where Mary first returns home after six months in Scotland. Mary was sent away because of the tension between her and her stepmother. In order to explore Mary Shelley's and her stepmother Mrs Godwin's movement, Polly led an exercise in which she gave the actors a task: Kristin (playing Mary) was to think about rediscovering her home and Sadie (playing Mrs Godwin) to assert her authority over the household. The actors were asked to work without words, but to use physical moves to pursue their objectives, whilst also reacting or 'answering' each other's movements. This focused the conflict of who 'owned' the space and the different characters of the stepmother and teenage girl in opposition. Polly also explored how the women move around William Godwin, Mary's father (the only, but highly influential man in the household).

We then looked at Act 1, Scene 4 with Mary and Godwin in his study, finding both the distance and the deep connection between father and daughter. The actors explored the

balance between the two characters' joy at seeing each other again and Godwin's anger at Mary's inability to get on with her stepmother.

At lunch, there was a Progress Meeting with representatives of all the co-producing partners in this show. There was much to discuss, from the tiniest of details on a prop, to the grand plan for the tech – for a show with 39 scenes in total, that's a lot!

In the afternoon, we began by looking at Act 1, Scene 5, when Shelley arrives late at night at the Godwin's household. Ben (playing Shelley) focuses on what Polly dubs 'The Shelleyan Energy', his passion to help people and to defy stultifying convention. At the same time Godwin must try to calm the young man down, and focus him on the details of obtaining the loan, which the two men both need in order to survive. Shelley grapples with the excitement of being in the study of his hero whilst also wanting to be taken as an equal. Both men are committed to the same social cause, but age and experience divides them in their approach.

Liz Ranken, Movement Director, was in today as well and worked on the drowning sequences. It's fantastic to see how different pieces of fabric (traditionally a woman's domain) become the water, submerging the women.

Finally we looked at Fanny and Shelley meeting in Act 1 Scene 5, as Fanny lays out a bed for him in the study to stay overnight. Historically, Fanny Imlay was known to be shy of the irregular skin on her face (perhaps a birthmark or pock marks). Fanny was described as 'anxious and exceptionally sensitive', perhaps a legacy of her mother's death which left her an orphan. Polly asked Flora as Fanny to think of herself as a deer that could startle at any moment if Shelley moves too quickly. At the same time, she asked Ben as Shelley to try to tame and connect with this kind and fragile young woman. The delicacy of the burgeoning relationship between the two became more apparent. (The relationship is such that, eventually, Fanny asks for Shelley alone to bury her body after her suicide).

Mary Shelley

Drowning Imagery

The spectre of suicide and death haunts the play: three of the women either attempt suicide or succeed in doing so and Mary and Shelley's first-born baby, Clara, dies.



Image : Naomi Dawson
Actress : Flora Nicholson

The image of a woman drowning is the main expressionistic physical element in our production. The play opens with Mary Shelley imagining her mother's attempted suicide. Mary Wollstonecraft attempted suicide when she was abandoned by Fanny's father who had embarked on another relationship.

During the first week of rehearsals the Movement Director, Liz Ranken, leads an exercise involving the whole cast, where all the actors lie on the floor and are asked to find and explore within themselves the feeling of abandonment and then to physically embody that feeling.

The whole company is asked to imagine they are on a bridge, about to jump, emulating Mary Wollstonecraft when she considered suicide. Liz describes the atmosphere and the darkness and heavy rain...the sounds and smells. Each actor in turn takes a jump off 'the bridge' into the river. After this, Liz, Polly and the company discussed ideas of how they might present this moment in the play using elements from the drowning improvisations.

During the second week of rehearsals Liz and Polly work with Flora Nicholson, who is playing Mary Wollstonecraft, to look at the drowning scene. Rehearsing the movement sequence for this scene, Flora jumps off a crate onto the ground, trying to express the quality of water through her physical movement; she is creating the effect of being physically taken over by the waves. Liz suggests that when she jumps, (into the river) *"there should be a brutality"*. First she shows the great physical impact of her body entering the water, the struggle between the body's instinct to survive and the overwhelming currents in the river Thames. As the body loses consciousness she makes softer, more fluid movements, as she ceases to struggle and is carried away by the shifting tides of the water. They run through it again, this time with the music, composed by Keith Clouston, which is the sound of waves, over low minimal piano notes. This adds clarity and atmosphere to the scene. The company pause to discuss Flora's costume change to the following scene, where she will be playing Fanny. Polly notes that this quick change from Mary Wollstonecraft to Fanny could be very helpful to Flora: *"Fanny's been carrying that suicide attempt all her life; subconsciously burying it; so it's interesting that you'll have to go so quickly into playing Fanny after this scene."*

Mary Shelley

The legacy of Mary Wollstonecraft's suicide attempt and death impacts greatly upon Fanny and Mary. Kristin Atherton playing Mary Shelley believes Mary feels responsible for her mother's death - and then later for Fanny's and Harriet's, Shelley's first wife. In the first drowning scene Mary describes her mother's attempted suicide as we (the audience) watch it, and Mary tries to save her, holding on as her body rolls away, calling out for her in vain. This sense of loss is a theme that continues throughout the play, when she loses her father, her baby daughter, and her sister Fanny.

The second drowning scene comes after Mary receives a letter from Shelley's wife imploring Mary not to allow Shelley to abandon his wife and baby. This evokes memories of her own mother's suicide attempt when Fanny was a baby. A discussion follows between Flora, Polly and Liz about how someone committing suicide might feel they are protecting their baby by killing them too, and that Harriet may hold on to the baby in this scene for comfort as well as a kind of protection. Flora runs through the scene again, this time holding the baby bundle close to her chest with one arm while her other arms flail as her body is dragged back and forth by the string of currents. Then they explore letting go of the baby bundle, so the material unravels softly as if it becomes a wave.

Visually presenting drowning in our production is so essential because it emphasizes the presence of death and history repeating itself in Mary's life. Both the drowning scenes are in Mary's imagination and Mary's dreams are an important theme in the play. The element of water has connotations of dreamlike states, fantasy and timelessness, as well as female intuition.

Aisling Zambon O'Neill



Image : Naomi Dawson
Actress : Shannon Tarbet

Mary Shelley

Interview with Kristin Atherton, on playing Mary Shelley

What research have you done so far? Would you say it's important to undertake research in order to play this role?

I was part of a group of actors who workshopped scenes from Helen's first draft of *Shelley* back in June 2011, so really research began for me back then. I've done a lot of biographical reading and what became apparent to me was that biography is as much about interpretation as it is about solid fact. And an interpretation is ultimately what my performance of Mary is going to be.

Reading the letters of Godwin, Wollstonecraft, Mary and Percy Bysshe was a wonderful way to get to know their unique voices. In terms of building a detailed picture of the world and time they lived in, Amanda Vickery's books on the role of 18th century women were invaluable.

In terms of their own written works, William Godwin's memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft are astonishingly moving and a real testament to his devotion compared to the dry, philosophical voice he employs for *Political Justice*. Discovering Wollstonecraft's *Travels in Sweden* helped me to understand Godwin's growing love for such an extraordinary, challenging woman (he said himself it seemed designed to make the reader fall hopelessly in love with its author). Although for me, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* still makes for some difficult reading! I'd read *Frankenstein* when I was in my teens, so re-reading it again, hearing the philosophies of Godwin and Wollstonecraft echoing through it was really wonderful.

Ultimately none of this research may make its way into the play in any tangible way, as far as an audience is concerned. But for me, it informs every choice I make as an actor and helps me build as rich an imaginative world as possible.

How has learning about aspects of the 19th Century informed your view of how you might play Mary Shelley?

It solidified just how radical Mary's upbringing was; she was exposed to ideas that very few people, let alone women, would have been. For example, as a child, she and Jane hid under the sofa to hear Coleridge read his *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* one evening. The more I read, the stronger sense I got of her daring and lifelong intellectual curiosity. She had extraordinary intellectual heritage, born of parents who both fiercely questioned the accepted roles of men and women at that period in history and drew some (perhaps even now)

very unconventional conclusions. The political environment especially was a very dangerous one: Godwin and Wollstonecraft's ideas were more than radical, after the Terror in France they became positively treasonous. As actors we need to know the 'stakes', what is at risk; and for this family the stakes are high!

The poverty in England at that time was also extraordinary and widespread. It's hard to imagine an England with no welfare state; where the debtors' prison loomed large. I visited the tiny prison cell that had been constructed from recovered Marshalsea walls at the Museum of London, complete with 18th Century graffiti. The sense of dread and hopelessness from just those four walls is absolutely tangible. For the cast, knowing our entire family is on the brink of ending up in just such a place serves to charge the entire play.

What were the social and moral expectations of young women at the time?

A (conventional) woman at that time could hope for one happy outcome from life: marriage. Without a husband to provide for her she would be the responsibility of her immediate family for the rest of her days, perhaps uncharitably even seen as a burden (an important fact if we think about Fanny Godwin). That is not to say a woman couldn't 'earn her way'; Mary Wollstonecraft did exactly that and supported her family for years, but a woman's earning potential as compared with a man's was negligible. To remain respectable yet earn a living, a learned woman could hope to be a governess or teacher. A woman was expected to learn how to be a prudent housekeeper, a pleasingly decorative addition to a man's property and most importantly she had to *please*. The idea of romance, let alone sex, outside of marriage was highly improper. A man made the overtures and until a woman was 'won' her ardor had to be seen to be sufficiently cool. An unmarried woman was expected to be chaperoned when in the company of a man and would certainly never *call* on him uninvited (a habit Mary Wollstonecraft frequently indulged in during her courtship with William Godwin).

Mary Shelley

How unusual was Mary Shelley in terms of her access to learning and earning an income from her writing?

Traditional female accompaniments such as sewing, singing and cooking were taught to all the Godwin girls, but they were given access to areas of education that few other girls of the time would have been. More than anything her father encouraged her to read; and not the fashionable, romantic ladies' novels of the time (which Wollstonecraft positively abhorred in her *Vindication*), nor the regular educative books for young children. Godwin encouraged Mary to read not just according to his values, but to cultivate her own personal taste (central to Mary Wollstonecraft's thoughts on the education of daughters). Hence Mary had a love of poetry (which her father had little love for) and read much more widely than the majority of young women of the period.

Mary was not alone as a woman in earning an income from her writing; we know of successful female novelists of the time including Jane Austen, Fanny Burney, Hannah More and Anne Radcliffe (and Mary Wollstonecraft's travelogues and *Vindication* had made her a celebrity). However, they are notable for being exceptions; men were more widely published and were 'allowed' to write on a far greater variety of issues. It was still unusual and extraordinary that throughout her life Mary was able to earn her way by her pen.

What do you think has been Mary Wollstonecraft's legacy?

She began the travelogue as we now know it, and Godwin's biography of her has helped to form the modern day biography. On a humanitarian level she helped begin the slow progression towards what we now call women's rights; she began a debate that still goes on today in many ways. Wollstonecraft showed us very pertinently what was possible if we *questioned* the state we found ourselves born in to. She shaped the minds of future torch-bearers who would also question what women were capable of, such as her pupil Margaret King, fellow writers George Elliot, the Bronte's, Virginia Woolf and Emmeline Pankhurst (to name a few). Her legacy is also in her extraordinary daughters, both brave in their own manner: Fanny and Mary Shelley.



Image : Naomi Dawson
Actors : Flora Nicholson, Sadie Shimmin

Mary Shelley

Interview with Naomi Dawson – Designer

What were your starting points with this play?

We had a couple of starting points. One was a picture Polly found of an office in what looks like India; there are cupboards completely jam packed and overflowing with papers. This image of a sea of books and papers became a key starting point, as did an idea of a huge over-sized table, which could be used naturalistically and expressionistically.

Another main starting point was the work we did on the text last summer, when we explored the first 5 or so scenes with actors and minimal set. We were looking at a rehearsal room aesthetic which we found very useful and exciting for the piece. This meant that scenes or moments that take place off stage could be glimpsed in the background of the main action providing another layer of reality. The props tables and the costume rail are visible. These things would usually be hidden behind the scenes.

What key themes did you focus on for the set design?

Working from the themes of books, reading and writing, I have tried to create a space, or a world out of these. Most of the characters of the play including Mary are driven by ideas, words, books, reading and writing, as books were both their passion and their livelihood. We were keen to visualise this. We are also planning to explore using furniture in an abstract way when we are in Mary's dream sequences.

How will the set be used to create the different locations within the play?

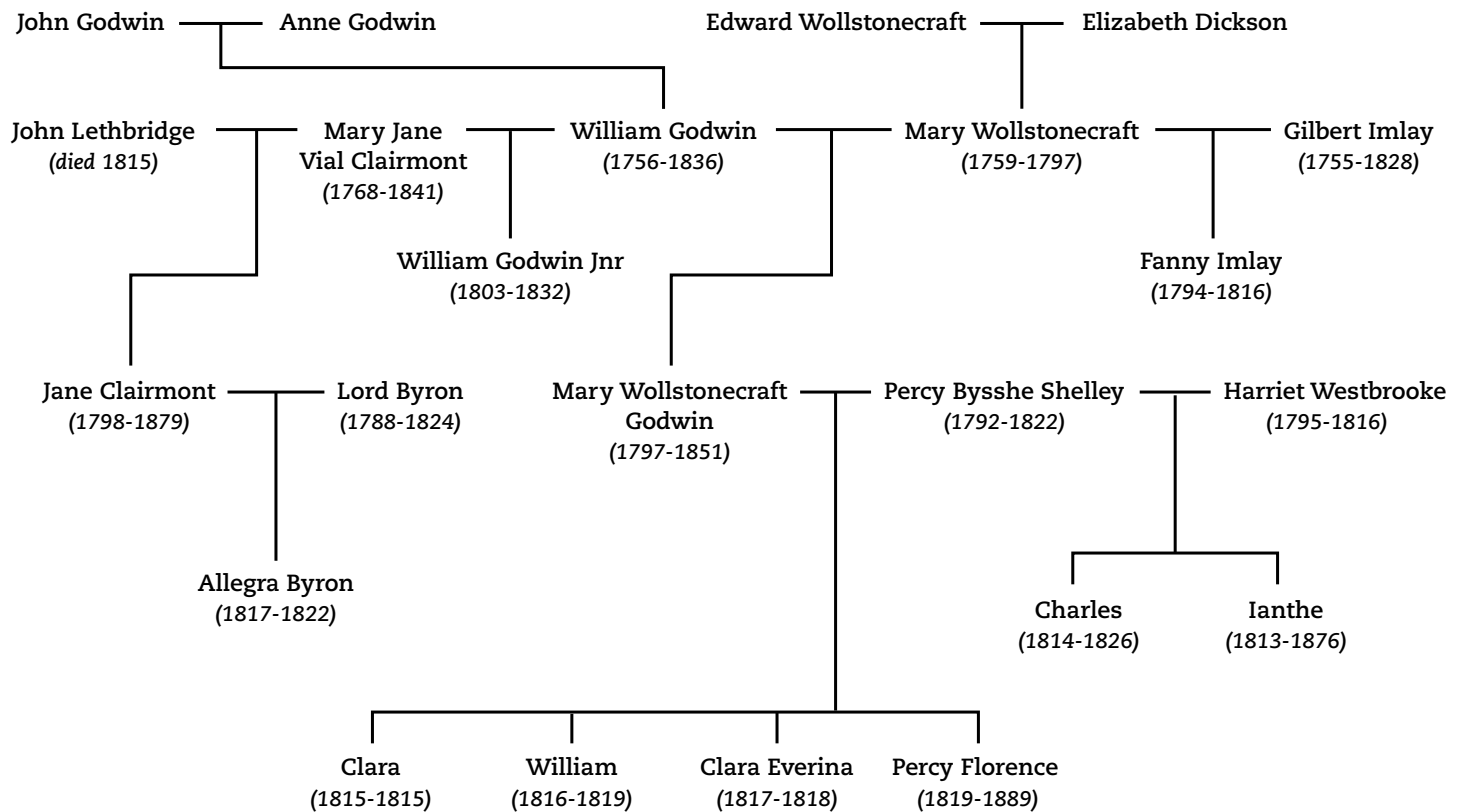
It will be used in a fairly non-naturalistic and minimalist way to evoke the locations and to allow for scenes to flow from one to another. Locations will be illustrated by the barest of props or furniture pieces and we will be exploring the 'feel' or 'expression' of a place. The biggest visual shift will occur between the first and second half, to explore the huge impact that Mary and Shelley have when eloping.



Image : Robert Day
Actress : Kristin Atherton


Mary Shelley

Godwin/Wollstonecraft Family Tree



Mary Shelley

Timeline

- 1792** Mary Wollstonecraft's feminist *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is published.
- 1793** William Godwin's radical political treatise, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* is published.
- 1797**
29 March Mary Wollstonecraft marries William Godwin in St. Pancras Church, London. Wollstonecraft already has one daughter, Fanny (b. May 1794), by Gilbert Imlay.
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- Mary's parents, Mary and William
- 30 August** Mary Wollstonecraft gives birth to Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin.
- 10 September** Mary Wollstonecraft dies – Mary is only 11 days old.
- 1801** William Godwin marries Mary Jane Vial. Mary Jane already has a daughter,
- 21 December** Claire Clairmont (born 1798)
- 1814**
July Mary Godwin meets Percy Bysshe Shelley (an admirer and follower of William Godwin's philosophies) and they embark on a relationship. Percy is 22 years old and married. His wife, Harriet is pregnant with their second child.
- William Godwin disapproves of the relationship. Nevertheless, Percy leaves his wife and family and goes on a European tour with the 16 year old Mary and her step-sister, Claire.
- August** On their return to London Mary is seen as a social outcast.
- November** Percy's estranged wife, Harriet Shelley, gives birth to their second child, Charles.
- 1815**
February Mary gives birth to her first child with Percy, Clara. Clara is two months premature and dies aged just 13 days old.
- 1816**
January Mary gives birth to a son, William.
- May Percy, Mary and their son William leave for a tour of Europe. Mary's step-sister Claire also joins them (pregnant with Lord Byron's child).
- June The weather takes a turn for the worse and they are confined indoors. Byron challenges the group to write their own ghost story. It is here that Mary begins to write her acclaimed novel *Frankenstein*.
- August All return to London.
- October Mary's half-sister, Fanny Imlay commits suicide in Swansea by overdosing on laudanum. She was 22 years old. She left a note:
- I have long determined that the best thing I could do was to put an end to the existence of a being whose birth was unfortunate, and whose life has only been a series of pain to those persons who have hurt their health in endeavouring to promote her welfare. Perhaps to hear of my death will give you pain, but you will soon have the blessing of forgetting that such a creature existed..*
- December After being missing for a month, Harriet Shelley's body is found in the Serpentine River, Hyde Park, London. She was 21 years old and heavily pregnant at the time of her death.
- A pregnant Mary marries Percy at St. Mildred's church in London. She is reconciled with her father.
- 1817**
January Mary's step-sister Claire gives birth to a daughter, Allegra, in Bath.
- May Mary completes her first novel, *Frankenstein*.
- September Mary gives birth to a daughter, her third child, Clara Everina.

Mary Shelley

November	<i>History of a Six Weeks' Tour through a part of France, Switzerland, Germany, and Holland; with Letters Descriptive of a Sail Round the Lake of Geneva and of the Glaciers of Chamouni</i> is published. This was a travel narrative, written by Percy and Mary about their trips across Europe in 1814 and 1816.	April	Lord Byron dies in Greece.
1818	<i>Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus</i> is anonymously published in three volumes and to immediate success. Mary's daughter Clara dies from dysentery in Venice.	1826	Mary Shelley's <i>The Last Man</i> is published; an apocalyptic novel which tells of a future world that has been ravaged by a plague.
May	Mary writes her mythological drama, <i>Proserpine</i> , written for children. Percy contributes two poems to the piece.	1832	Mary's half brother, William dies (son of William Godwin and Mary Jane Vial).
August	Mary finishes <i>Valperga</i> . <i>Valperga</i> is an historical novel which explores the adventures of the early fourteenth-century despot Castruccio Castracani.	1836 April	Mary's father William Godwin dies.
1819 June	Mary and Percy's three year old son William dies of Malaria in Italy. Mary is devastated at the loss of her child and suffers from a nervous breakdown. She is pregnant with their fourth child when the tragedy happens.	1837	Mary's last novel, <i>Falkner</i> is published, which charts a young woman's education under a tyrannical father figure.
November	Mary gives birth to their fourth child, Percy Florence (named after his father and Florence, Italy).	1839	A collection of Percy Bysshe Shelley's poems is published. Percy's father, Timothy, agrees to the publication.
1822 July	Percy Shelley drowns after a boat he is sailing capsizes in the Gulf of Spezia. He is cremated and buried in Rome.	1844	Sir Timothy Shelley dies. Percy Florence inherits the estate and title.
1823	<i>Valperga: Or, the Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca</i> is published in three volumes.	1848	Percy Florence Shelley marries Jane Gibson
1824	Following her return to England with her son, Mary begins to work on the collection of Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley, a volume of work containing a selection of Percy's poems that had never been published before. However, Percy's father, Sir Timothy Shelley demands that she cease all writing and publications about his late son.	1851 February	Mary Shelley dies from a brain tumour after a long illness. Her daughter-in-law arranges for the remains of her parents to be moved to St Peters Church in Bournemouth so Mary can be buried with them.

Mary Shelley

Scene Study

The scene of *Mary Shelley* imagining her own mother's attempted suicide is the scene that opens the play.

Act 1, Scene 1

March 1815. The mouth of the Thames. Mary is standing alone on the deck of a ship. There is a book in her hands.

Mary: (reading) Her first thought had led her to Battersea Bridge, but she found it too public. It was night when she arrived at Putney, and by that time it had begun to rain with great violence. The rain suggested to her the idea of walking up and down the bridge until her clothes were thoroughly drenched and heavy with the wet.

We are plunged into Mary's imagination. Darkness. Rain lashes down. We see a woman – Mary Wollstonecraft – holding out her arms to the elements, drenching herself. Then she climbs onto the edge of the bridge, and jumps into the water. We hear the sound of the water pounding in her ears, see her struggle to stay under, groaning and wailing with frustration. Finally she becomes senseless, giving herself to the water.

Mary: Mother...

Discuss:

The impact on Mary on reading this about her own mother.

Do:

Cecily mentions in her diary, that the company used pieces of fabric to create the illusion of water. Consider what type of fabric would be best used. When chosen, explore the various ways to use this fabric, in groups, creating dramatic moments to convey:

- The movement of the water
- The failed attempts at maintaining submergence
- The moment Mary Wollstonecraft 'becomes senseless, giving herself to the water'



Image : Naomi Dawson
Actress : Kristin Atherton

Mary Shelley

Exercises from the Rehearsal Room

1. Improvisations about William Godwin

William Godwin was a celebrated political theorist, who at one time was so famous that a man walked all the way from Edinburgh to see him in London. He envisaged a future utopia in which the 'perfectibility of mankind' would make people immortal. In an effort to stay true to the principles of absolute honesty as well as process his grief at the death of his wife, Mary Wollstonecraft, he wrote a candid memoir in which he told very personal details about her illegitimate daughter, Fanny, and her suicide attempts. These were scandalous stories at the time, damaging both his reputation, Mary Wollstonecraft's reputation as a feminist, and that of her sisters' school in Ireland.

Exercises

- One person plays the role of William Godwin. Others play the role of his peers at a dinner party. Improvise a scene when he is at the height of his fame. Imagine you are at a literary soiree where Godwin is asked for his opinion on every subject of discussion, intently listened to, praised and offered many other invitations.
- For the following improvisation one person plays Fanny, aged four, another person plays Godwin and the rest take on the role of his peers from the previous scene. Now improvise a scene after Mary Wollstonecraft's death. Godwin and Fanny are walking in the street and they meet those people from the previous improvisation's soiree. They have read the *Memoirs* and now do not want to socialise with him, or listen to him. See how far your characters go in expressing their disapproval of Godwin's publication.

Consider the following:

- How would a man like Godwin react to this treatment?
- Do you think Mrs Godwin's reaction to Mary reading the *Memoirs* is extreme?
- How much do you think Fanny understands at this age, regarding the damage done by her stepfather's writing? What effect does this have on her through her life?

2. Improvisations about Shelley's experiences at school

Percy Bysshe Shelley was badly bullied during his time at Eton. He refused to 'fag' (be a servant for) older boys at the school and was known as an outsider. The other boys used to enjoy what they called 'Shelley Baiting'. Shelley was a prolific reader, and would go down to the river to read. The boys would find where he was reading, chase him through the fields, knock books out of his hand, kick him, tear his clothes and pin him up against the wall to throwing muddy balls at him. In retaliation, Shelley would have fits of anger and fight back, like a wild, caged animal.

- Choose an actor to play Shelley whilst he was at school. Improvise a 'Shelley Bait'.
- What is the point at which you feel someone like Shelley would retaliate and fight back? Imagine all that energy converted into Shelley's political beliefs and convictions. Try reading his poem *Queen Mab* to the bullies, as a way of fighting back.
- Think how, in his future life, someone like Shelley might try to convert his bullies without violence.

Mary Shelley

3. Mary and Godwin - Scene Work

Mary wrote her novel, *Frankenstein*, about an austere creator of a monstrous being who is very powerful but desperately in need of affection and forgiveness for its mistakes. At the end of the play Mary tells her father, after he has rejected her for two years, what her novel is about:

Mary: *“It’s about... about a man who is... driven, consumed by the desire to explore the very limits of his powers... of science, of knowledge. He creates a creature... from the parts of other humans. A living being. But when he has created it, he finds he cannot countenance its needs – its need for love, companionship, respect, its whole monstrous reality. It pursues him, across mountains and seas. Across the wide world. They come to hate each other.*

I thought of you a lot, while I was writing. All your ideas about... humanity, they have all been there to draw upon. If I ever doubted how much I’ve learned from you, I do not doubt it now.”

Godwin: *“And I am the monstrous creator, I suppose?”*

- One person plays the role of Mary, and one plays Godwin. Imagine what Mary is trying to say to her father, in describing her novel, about what she believes a parent’s (the creator) responsibility to their child should be. See if you can use Mary’s speech to make her father understand the pain she has suffered as a result of his rejection.
- Consider how it feels for Mary to confront the person who has formed her life with his strong and unforgiving influence, whilst also craving his approval. Try the speech letting out all Mary’s anger with the objective to attack/shame/blame and then try again wanting to win back his love and approval.
- Now read through Act 1, Scene 4 with these thoughts in mind. How does it impact the scene?

Cecily Boys, Assistant Director

Mary Shelley

Act 1, Scene 4

Godwin's study. Evening. Windows look out onto the street. Above a large fireplace there is a portrait of Mary Wollstonecraft. Books line the walls, and lie in piles on the floor. Between the windows there is an old leather sofa. Godwin is working at his desk. Mary enters quietly. There is a small bundle of letters in her hand.

Mary The letters from Mr. Baxter, Papa.

Godwin (without looking up) Thank you. Place them there.

Mary puts them on the desk. She waits, but he continues to work.

Mary Shouldn't you stop now? It's quite late.

Godwin One or two things more.

Mary What are you working on?

Godwin Not really work at all. Calculations. Letters. Business. It doesn't deserve to be called work. Drudgery. Commercial drudgery.

Mary All the more reason to stop.

She goes to stand before the portrait, and stares up at it. Godwin glances up.

Godwin You have grown more like her.

Mary Have I?

Godwin A little in your looks. A great deal in your stridency of expression.

You went away a girl, and have returned a young woman.

Mary I still look like you though, don't I? Everyone says so.

Godwin Oh, yes. You will never be rid of that nose. The Gods are not entirely benign.

He continues with his work.

Mary Is it a good likeness?

Godwin Very.

Mary How old was she then?

Godwin About thirty. She was pregnant with Fanny.

Mary She looks happy.

Godwin finishes his work and sets his pen down.

Mary Are there more books about my mother which I can read? Or can I read the other books she wrote?

Godwin Hum. I can't remember what you've read already.

He goes to the bookshelves.

Mary Not that much. 'The Rights of Woman'. You read us that. 'View of the French Revolution'.

Godwin 'Letters from Sweden...?'

Mary No.

He hands it to her.

Godwin I think Fanny has read that one. Of course, there's a great deal in there about Fanny as a baby. Your mother took her with her on her travels.

Mary Yes.

Godwin And there are the letters.

Mary The letters?

Godwin (*handing her another book*) I edited a volume of her letters. I think you will find that interesting.

Mary Thank you. I want to know everything. I feel as though I've been sleeping on top of a treasure trove.

Godwin Mary...

Mary I'm sorry I lost my temper with Mrs. Godwin. I know that's what you're going to say. But she seemed to be implying that there was something wrong about my mother - about the way she lived. And there wasn't, was there?

Godwin No. But Mary, you are old enough to understand now, that there are many people who cannot view the world as openly and honestly as your mother did. Or as you and I do.

Mary Shelley



Mary You mean small minded people. Like Mrs. Godwin.

Godwin That is not what I mean.

Mary But she spoke about your book as though it were contaminated.

Godwin Mrs. Godwin has worked very hard - tremendously hard, as have I, to achieve the relatively settled life which we have given you, and all our children. If she is a little alarmed, or decidedly averse to anything which seems to flirt with scandal, then she is understandably so.

Mary Scandal?

Godwin The Memoirs were not well received. You ought to be made aware of that. In fact, I was vilified.

Mary But...

Godwin And not only in the reactionary press. Some people - friends even - thought I was wrong to write in detail about her private affairs. Some thought I was wrong to write so quickly after her death. I was only trying to make something useful out of tragedy..

Mary Yes.

Godwin But I was judged - we were both judged, very harshly. The suicide attempt...the circumstances of Fanny's birth...many people thought I should have left those things unstated. In the second edition, I tried to remedy some of the damage. Her sisters in Ireland - your aunts - had been very upset by the book. One or two of her friends...

Mrs. Godwin is only trying to protect us all. Do you understand?

Mary cannot answer.

Mary But you don't regret writing it? Surely you don't.

Godwin I don't.

Mary Surely for every person who balked at it, there was someone like me...who found it inspiring.

Godwin That may be so. But It was a shock. The reaction it received. I had grown used to a degree of criticism, yes, but I had not realised until then, how entirely out of step I had become - even with radical society. I simply want you to be aware that

there are certain sensitivities surrounding your mother's reputation, which we must be a little careful of. For so many reasons. Not least because we are reliant upon a business.

Mary Then perhaps we should not be. If it means we cannot be true to our principles and to your philosophies. If it means I cannot be openly proud of my mother.

Godwin Yes. Well. We must deal with things as they are.

Come and kiss me.

She does so. She hugs him.

Mary Poor, Papa. People are stupid. And mean.

Godwin Now you sound like a four year old.

You should be proud of your mother. Always be proud of your mother. But we must be cautious, Mary, and patient with those who do not have our capacity and strength of mind. I know you can be. Will you try?

Mary Yes.

Godwin Always remember who you are.

Goodnight now.

Mary Goodnight.

She starts to go.

Mary I wish she hadn't died. I wish we were together now. My mother and you. Fanny and I. That was how it was meant to be.

She leaves.

Info

For more information about Shared Experience's education work, please contact Hester Bond at Oxford Playhouse on: education@sharedexperience.org.uk or call: 01865 305334.

Pack compiled and edited by Kate Saxon, Associate, Shared Experience. Articles by Aisling Zambon O'Neill, Shared Experience and Aoibheann Kelly, West Yorkshire Playhouse. Additional articles by members of the creative team of *Mary Shelley*.