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March 28, 2018

*Phantasmagoria: Lessons in Collaboration*

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2018

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An abstract of  
a thesis submitted to the faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences  
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Playwriting

2018

## Abstract

### *Phantasmagoria: Lessons in Collaboration*

By Max McCreary

This paper chronicles the attempt of student playwright, Max McCreary, to work with a team of collaborators on a full production of his playscript, *Phantasmagoria*. The document includes the script of *Phantasmagoria* as it was publicly performed, followed by a collection of chapters detailing the significant lessons McCreary learned by bringing the script to an audience. As a student playwright, McCreary had learned and practiced translating the world in his head onto the page. The goal of this project was to learn what it takes to lift the story off of the page and into the real world in order to create a fully realized piece of theater, rather than an unproduced script, thereby going beyond the traditional boundaries of an undergraduate experience.

The script, like *Frankenstein*, is a ghost story that revitalizes Mary Shelley's memory by asking if she has the capability to be both great and good. The revelation of her stepsister's pregnancy, the looming ghost of her half-sister, and an innate desire to protect the ones she loves challenge Mary's ability to uphold this commandment. Throughout the play McCreary weaves together historical fact, intentional historical inaccuracies, and his own invention in order to help modern audiences re-consider Mary Shelley, a legendary character, as a young woman faced with challenges and decisions.

McCreary ends by illuminating the most vital lessons as a playwright with which he leaves this experience. He elucidates how working with a close team of collaborators influenced specific lines or moments in the play. In the conclusion of the paper, McCreary acknowledges that despite a strong production, the script was not yet ready for a full collaborative process and he would recommend a one week long workshop to continue to nuance the thematic purpose of each anachronism and push the structure and form of the script farther towards the surreal.

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## Acknowledgements

A special thank you to the PWC of Theater Emory, Theater Emory, Emory Admissions, the Mu Beta cast of Alpha Psi Omega, Malina Rodriguez, Donald McManus, Lisa Paulsen, Sara Ward Culpepper, Jiréh Breon Holder, and the talented team of student and professional designers that helped overcome the practical challenges of this project.

Thank you to Amanda Camp for diving headfirst into your role as Producer and taking every hitch in stride.

Thank you to Nichole Palmietto for your heartfelt commitment to creating a world that was just as enjoyable to live in, as it was difficult to watch fall apart.

Thank you to Jess Winer for keeping the entire project on track from November through February.

Thank you to Elizabeth Johnson for your brave portrayal of Mary Shelley, to Kayla Fallick, for accepting the challenges of living in the world of Fanny Imlay, to Ruth Puryear, for making Clara Clairmont's character arc so important to you, and to Nathan Ray for being the most fortuitous late addition to the company that we could have asked for.

This thesis would not have been possible without the work of all of the parties mentioned above.

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## Preface

The process of writing a script begins with the inception of an idea. The need to create galvanizes that idea and the playwright launches into the creative grunt work of putting words to a page. For weeks, months, or years, playwrights may engage in a process of outlining, writing, and editing that is largely solitary. However, before the script becomes a play, the playwright must invite collaborators into the process because an unproduced script never truly becomes a play. The script before you is a result of that invitation. Although I had experience as a student playwright in putting the world in my mind onto the page, I had never experienced the process of full theatrical collaboration as a playwright. This paper is a document detailing the development of the script, *Phantasmagoria*, into a fully realized play and the tools required to accommodate this transition gracefully.

For many playwrights, a script will never be finished. Writers are made to believe that their job is to communicate the world they have created to their collaborators and to their audiences but “the great enemy of communication, we find, is the illusion of it” (Whyte, 174). For this reason, almost all playwrights will continue to edit their text through the rehearsal process. Some writers, like Tom Stoppard, continue to edit through previews of a production. Throughout the course of previews of his play, *Jumpers*, Stoppard “had taken fifteen minutes out of the play” (Guppy, *Tom Stoppard, the Art of Theatre*). A second production is often necessary before a script is complete because a rehearsal process can be transformative for the text. For this reason, scripts are not typically published until after their second



production because the published version of a script must stand as the core of a play, the primary source material for each subsequent production, thereby allowing each company of artists producing the script to operate on the same set of basic assumptions. This is an essential step because the full actualization of a play is dependent upon accommodating the ideas and impulses of one's collaborators, which becomes difficult to navigate if a play feels unfinished. The production of *Phantasmagoria* was the first full collaboration for this script, and accepting that this may not be the finished draft is one of the most simultaneously difficult and valuable lessons I learned in the practice of playwriting.

This project was my first foray into the world of full collaboration and the script below represents the product of this experience as it was performed. It is the result of approximately three years' worth of writing this script over six to seven drafts of valuable rewrites in order to establish the core of the play. Following the performance draft I will detail how the script was affected by the influence of my company members and I will chronicle the journey of *Phantasmagoria* from its inception, through its two years of writing, three separate table reads, and upwards of one hundred and twenty hours of rehearsal, culminating in three public performances at the Oxford Road Living Room on the campus of Emory University.

### Dramaturgical Note

The origins of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* live as much in the world of legend as the scientist and monster that she created. Films such as *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) and *Gothic* (1986), galvanized a curiosity in the fantastic tale of what may have occurred in a villa on Lake Geneva in the summer of 1816. Now, two hundred years after the initial publication of *Frankenstein*, the fascination with Villa Diodati is just as prolific. In my initial interest I, like so many others, gave an intense focus to the time and place of *Frankenstein's* beginning, creating a cynosure in the sapiosexual relationships between the villa's inhabitants. Fixating on the legendary scenario elevates the people it involved into legend, adding to a sense of distance that is already present due to the separation of time. I challenged myself to write a play that would make the story, and the woman, more accessible to a contemporary audience. Ironically, I discovered that using fiction to fabricate emotional circumstances allowed the character of Mary to feel more present, and more real. The following play is primarily a work of fiction; it takes pieces of what I believe may have been influencing the development of *Frankenstein*, and embellishes upon them, taking them outside the context of their chronology to make the emotional stakes of Mary's journey more immediate.

*Phantasmagoria* "lovingly explores Mary's pain, regret, self-blame, and her upward journey towards healing" (Palmietto, *Director's Note*). The play should be performed in American English dialects as its current draft was conceived for a contemporary American audience. By bringing the legend into the here and now we allow ourselves the opportunity to remember Mary Shelley as she was: human. This

has been the truest pleasure in bringing this world to life, seeing Mary Shelley represented at arms length in an intimate and familiar setting that personally invites each audience member into the world of the play. Without further ado, I present: *Phantasmagoria*:

# Phantasmagoria

by

Max Andrew McCreary

**Directed by**

Nichole Palmietto

**Produced by**

Amanda Camp

Original Cast

Mary Shelley	Elizabeth Johnson
Clara Clairmont	Ruth Puryear
Fanny Imlay	Kayla Fallick
George Byron VI	Nathan James Ray

Original Company

<b>Director</b>	Nichole Palmietto
<b>Producer</b>	Amanda Camp
<b>Project Adviser</b>	Jiréh Breon Holder
<b>Stage Manager</b>	Jess Winer
<b>Sound Designers</b>	Jay Brunner and Lindsay Patton
<b>Properties Manager</b>	Victoria Hood
<b>Lighting Designers</b>	Wala Hassan and Maggie Higginbotham
<b>Costume Designer</b>	Nysa Loudon
<b>Publicity Manager</b>	Austin Geter
<b>Run Crew</b>	Abbey Middlebrook, Chloe Pak and Emily Russ

**Time:** 1816, kind of.

**Place:** Villa Diodati on Lake Geneva. A library. Mary's mind.

ACT 1

Scene 1

*A storm in an otherwise cold and barren place.*

MARY

To be great and good was the commandment given to me  
by my mother.

CLARA

Like any good ghost  
story, it began with  
a storm.

FANNY

Like any good ghost  
story, it began with  
a storm.

FANNY

Mary? Where are you?

MARY

Fanny? Is that you?

FANNY

You have to help me, Mary!

MARY

Where are you, Fanny? I'm coming?

FANNY

I'm here! I'm over here!

MARY

Fanny!

FANNY

Thank goodness you found me.

MARY

Tell me what's wrong. Are you all right?

FANNY

It's this storm.

MARY

It's just a little lightning. There isn't anything to  
be afraid of.

FANNY

I keep seeing shapes. I think there's something out there.

MARY

There isn't anything.

FANNY

You don't feel it? It's not just the weather. Something terrible is going to happen, I can almost taste it.

MARY

I'm telling you, there's nothing to worry about.

FANNY

You don't believe me.

MARY

It's just rain! A little rain never hurt anybody!

FANNY

How do I know you won't just leave again?

MARY

I'm not going anywhere this time.

FANNY

You left me in that terrible place. You took Percy away from me. You pulled everything away from me! Why did you do it?

MARY

Fanny, I never wanted to hurt you.

*A child's laughter. Something foreign, dark, uncomfortable.*

FANNY

It killed me Mary. You killed me! You did this Mary!

*The storm hits a crescendo*

FANNY

MARY!

CLARA

MARY!

WHICH FLOWS DIRECTLY INTO

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*The rain has topped but the air is gray and oppressive. FANNY has drifted into the back, but a shadow or impression of her is still felt. CLARA is entering.*

CLARA

MARY! Wake up!

(Mary Startles)

You've been asleep all afternoon. Byron has been begging Percy to let him talk to you all day – there was a problem with your writing challenge, I think – your son has been screaming for hours, the doctor is running around the top floor like a maniac trying to catch his rats –

MARY

Rats?

CLARA

Rats! They've escaped. And after all that, miraculously, I'm still bored.

MARY

Clara, I'm not in the mood to entertain. I just had the nightmare again.

CLARA

Well shake it off and wake yourself up because life around here is much more enjoyable when you're actually awake... Was it Fanny again?

MARY

It was.

CLARA

Your daughter or-

MARY

Our sister. I think. They blur together sometimes.

CLARA

I read a pamphlet the other day that said dreams were arbitrary anyway so it's not worth worrying about.

MARY

Arbitrary?

CLARA

Meaningless.

MARY

No, I know what arbitrary means, silly. I was just surprised to hear you say it.

CLARA

Oh.

MARY

So you don't think it's some kind of omen?

CLARA

Like she's trying to tell you something? Not unless it's to go somewhere where the weather is better. We've only had one nice day all month.

MARY

You don't think it's her ghost? That she's trying to communicate with us?

CLARA

No, frankly, I don't. That doesn't make sense to me.

MARY

Then it's no wonder you're not writing with us.

CLARA

What's that supposed to mean?

MARY

Ghost stories wouldn't exactly be your cup of tea.

CLARA

Maybe. I bet you're almost done already.

MARY

Ugh.

CLARA

I thought you had the whole story figured out.

MARY

The story, sure. But I'm not certain about Victor Frankenstein yet... he's too-



CLARA  
Male?

MARY  
No. Sadly, He has got to be male.

CLARA  
Why?

MARY  
Because if I make him Victoria no one will believe that she's a real scientist-

CLARA  
There are female scientists!

MARY  
And I'd be beating the readers over the head with her literal motherhood. I don't think they want to deal with the female body like that. Besides... There's something interesting about his son not having a mother. Just doctor Frankenstein.

CLARA  
What's so terrible about being a literal mother?

MARY  
You wouldn't understand.

CLARA  
Why wouldn't I get it?

MARY  
Don't worry about it.

CLARA  
No. Try me. Why wouldn't I get it?

MARY  
Because you've never been a mother.

CLARA  
Oh.  
*Beat.*  
How do I look?

MARY  
What's this about?

CLARA

I put on weight. You haven't noticed?

MARY

No.

CLARA

Really?

MARY

You're being ridiculous.

CLARA

Well Lord Byron is here and-

MARY

Stop it Claire you look\ fine.

CLARA

\Don't call me\ Claire.

MARY

\I only do it when you're being\ childish.

CLARA

\ I'm eighteen!

MARY

Did he say something? I know that he's handsome but-

CLARA

Oh you think he's handsome?

MARY

You can't hold your self-worth to his standards, he's  
\ an ass!

CLARA

\ He's not an\ ass!

MARY

He kept a bear for a pet at Cambridge just to piss off  
\ the administration.

CLARA

\ Seriously, Mary.. I'm trying to tell you something  
important.

MARY

Okay. I'm sorry. What's going on?

CLARA

His opinion matters because —

MARY

Because he's producing that play you\ auditioned for!  
I knew it!

CLARA

\ This isn't about the play! No, Mary! Because I'm  
pregnant.

MARY

You can't be.

CLARA

I am. I was late so when I went into town last week I  
saw a piss prophet.

MARY

You can't trust piss prophets. They'll tell you  
anything just as long as they get paid. You're  
probably fine.

CLARA

I know that I'm fine. How did you know? With your  
daughter, before we left.

MARY

I — I was late so—

CLARA

So you saw a piss prophet. He was right about your  
daughter. And if he was right about your baby Fanny  
then a piss prophet could be right about my baby girl,  
too.

MARY

I had this feeling, Clara. I just knew. Before I ever  
saw him, I knew.

CLARA

And I know, too.

*Beat*

MARY

You're sure that it's Byron's?

CLARA

What do you think I am? It's his, I swear.

MARY

How could you have let this happen?

CLARA

How could I - ? This is good news, Mary!

MARY

Good news? It's Byron! God! I could strangle him. You know the rumors are true.

CLARA

So what? I don't care.

MARY

Even if that is true, which, knowing you, is highly unlikely, you're too young. You're too inexperienced. And if you survive the birth you will be responsible for another human being.

CLARA

I know that! I figured out what I wanted and I went for it! I thought you would be proud.

MARY

Proud? I would give up almost anything to have never given birth to my daughter.

CLARA

I don't believe that for a second.

MARY

Why not?

CLARA

If you thought that, you wouldn't have. Any medical book could teach you how to make a tonic that would induce miscarriage.

MARY

Clara... there is a very real possibility that you or your child could get hurt. Maybe die.

CLARA

It doesn't make sense to worry about now.

MARY

I'm your sister. It's my job to worry. Especially after what happened to me.

CLARA

This isn't going to be the same. Because I have a plan!

MARY

Really? What's the plan?

CLARA

We get Byron to marry me.

MARY

What's the other plan?

CLARA

There is no other plan!

MARY

Hey, George! Guess what? I'm pregnant! Let's get married and honeymoon in Venice!

CLARA

Not like that.

MARY

What? Not Venice? Gordon, maybe? I hear Southern France is nice this time of year.

CLARA

Stop that. Hear me out. He respects you. If you convince him he'll listen.

MARY

That plan is insane. If you marry Byron you would never be able to go back to London.

CLARA

But if we can refute the rumors that Caroline Lamb spread they would let us back into the city.

MARY

Or you end up being another Caroline Lamb. Another Anne Byron. Only this time it's you. Do you really think that the men who were imprisoned lied about him?

CLARA

I don't know. Maybe. It was an opportunity to dethrone a celebrity.

MARY

If Byron stayed in London, he wouldn't have been dethroned, he would have been executed, so for their sake, as well as yours, I think it's best to believe them.

CLARA

I get it. You don't approve. But you have to promise to help me.

MARY

I can't.

CLARA

(With the biggest ever puppy dog eyes)  
You have to, Mary. I'm your sister.

MARY

Fine. I promise.

CLARA

Okay how are you going to do it? How are you going to convince him?

MARY

I thought you were the one with the plan.

CLARA

You hated my plan. Fix it. Make it better. That's what you do.

MARY

Fine... Fine. You said he respects me?

CLARA

That's what Percy told me.

MARY

Well when it comes to Byron, Percy isn't always the most reliable... You haven't told him yet? Have you?

CLARA

No. God no!

MARY

Good. That means we can use it as a playing card. Anne has kept Byron far away from his daughter, which is probably for the best, but if you really want to win him we can exploit that. Appeal to the fatherly side of him that misses his daughter. The part of him that needs to leave a piece of himself behind.

CLARA

We can't.

MARY

Why not? It's perfect. Every man wants to secure his legacy.

CLARA

You can't tell him, Mary!

MARY

But-

CLARA

I'm serious! It's not your secret to tell. You have to promise.

MARY

Fine. I promise.

*Beat*

CLARA

Really promise.

*They perform some secret childhood ritual indicating their promise of absolute secrecy.*

MARY

Okay. I won't say anything. But think about it.

CLARA

I don't need to use it. Not yet. I'm going to be okay, you know.

MARY

... I know.

CLARA

You don't seem too convinced.

MARY

Look at me. You're going to be fine. I'm sorry if I scared you.

CLARA

You're my stepsister. We're supposed to hate each other sometimes.

MARY

I'll do my best to avoid that as much as possible. I'm sure you're tired. You should go rest. If you think of another plan, let me know.

*CLARA exits*

*(Calling after her)*

A lot less boring now, huh?

*She's gone.*

You tried to warn me that this would happen.

FANNY

*(Stepping out of the shadows)*

No. That was a dream. And I tried to warn you that something terrible was coming.

MARY

This isn't it?

FANNY

No. It's not.

MARY

What could be worse than this?

FANNY

I don't know. Maybe it is just the weather.



MARY

If you're not going to say anything helpful then why are you bothering me?

FANNY

Bothering you? Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you wanted me here.

MARY

I do! I do. You know I do. I just have work to finish.

FANNY

And how is that going for you?

*MARY shows her a ream of blank pages.*

I thought as much. Look, if you want helpful, here it is: If you pull Clara too hard then you're going to pull her apart.

MARY

(Excitedly jotting it down)  
That's nice!

FANNY

Hey. Hey! Come on. You know I don't mean anything by it. I'm just saying, be careful not to take things too far.

MARY

You're lecturing me about taking things too far?

FANNY

One sentence is hardly a lecture. Can I see what you have written so far?

*MARY shows her the blank pages again.*

Very funny. But put the blank pages away and show me what you've actually worked on. You're psyching yourself out.

*MARY pulls out her actual notebook*

Interesting. A doctor brings his son back to life? There's a huge celebration... I remember this story. I

can't believe you do. But everything seems to be working out here so what isn't working for you?

MARY

Every time I finish this scene you're still dead.

FANNY

Hardly. Have you read this? I'm living everywhere in it.

MARY

It's not good enough. I want something real.

FANNY

Something real? I think you'd have to pull me out of a grave somewhere and I doubt that would be pretty.

MARY

I miss being able to hold you in my arms. I miss understanding each other.

*Beat. FANNY takes this in, considering their past.*

FANNY

I don't know if you get that with me. Stop looking for it here and find it elsewhere.

MARY

What do you mean?

FANNY

If you don't start doing things for the people in your life who are alive you're going to start losing more and more. And then surviving what happened to your daughter is for nothing.

MARY

I didn't survive.

FANNY

Then find a way to bring yourself back to life.

MARY

You chose a terrible time to leave.

FANNY

You're the one that left, Mary. Not me.

*Beat*

FANNY (Cont.)

You're going to keep your promise to Clara, aren't you?

MARY

Of course. She's my family.

FANNY

So was I.

*FANNY exits. MARY is left alone. A large shadow passes by her. We hear the voice of a young girl whispering.*

GIRL

Momma? Why won't you help us? This is your fault, Momma. Your fault. It's all your fault!

WHICH FLOWS DIRECTLY INTO

3

*MARY is suddenly younger. The child's voice has morphed into the sound of adults fighting. A mix of male and female voices that is indistinct and strange. CLARA fades into view. Not quite real yet, but getting there.*

CLARA

Mom and Dad are never going to stop bickering with Fanny, are they?

MARY

I'm sorry that you have to hear this. You're usually asleep by the time they start fighting.

CLARA

It's not even Fanny's fault.

MARY

I know that, believe you me.

CLARA

I wish they would just leave her be.

MARY  
Everyone who thinks that my mother was a bad parent  
should hear those two.

CLARA  
One word to describe them. Ready? Go!

CLARA  
Cruel.

MARY  
Abominable.

CLARA  
Abominable?

MARY  
Like cruel, but worse.

CLARA  
I like that word.

MARY  
I try. Hold on... do you hear that?

CLARA  
No?

MARY  
Exactly! I think they've stopped for now.

CLARA  
And you know what that means.

MARY  
Fanny incoming in three.

CLARA  
Two.

MARY  
One.

CLARA  
One.

*FANNY enters. She embraces her sisters.*

FANNY  
Mary. Clara. Thank goodness you're up. I didn't want  
to be alone.

MARY

What were they on about this time?

FANNY

My dowry. The debt is accumulating and I can't afford one. Not for a husband who will actually be able to support our parents' bad habits.

CLARA

They don't approve of Percy Shelley?

FANNY

No they do not. Our father is convinced that all his hanging around was to get under my petticoat and not because of his "staunch political support."

CLARA

I'll bet it doesn't help that Percy's becoming rather penniless himself.

MARY

Why not move on to someone else then? Thomas Hogg was showing an interest. Invite Aaron Burr back to the house. I'm sure he knows somebody.

FANNY

Because Percy is *The One*! And Father disapproves. I'm not sure what I'm supposed to do.

MARY

You haven't done anything wrong, I promise.

CLARA

So what did you tell your father?

FANNY

That I couldn't wait to take someone else's name, dowry or not, and that I would be happy to visit him in debtor's prison.

CLARA

I'm sure that went well.

FANNY

Not entirely. Where do we keep our trunks?

CLARA

He's turning you out? Over Percy Shelley?

FANNY

No, he wouldn't dare. Not when he's counting on my financial support when I marry. I just want to have my things in order. In case things get any worse and I can't stay here anymore.

CLARA

Any worse? Fanny your cheek is red.

MARY

Did Father hit you?

CLARA

He's never done anything like that before!

FANNY

He didn't.

CLARA

Oh.

FANNY

Your mother is stronger than she looks.

CLARA

This is all my fault, then.

MARY

Don't be irrational.

CLARA

If I weren't around then my mother would never have had the opportunity.

FANNY

You're the one who got dragged into this family. If you ask me, Mary and I got lucky.

MARY

We didn't make our parents who they are. Just because we were born from them doesn't mean they have to be our family. You are. Your mother isn't. It's that simple.

FANNY

And if I had to choose, I would pick you *and* your mother over neither of you every time. I couldn't take it if you blamed all this on yourself.

MARY

But if you really want to help you could always do something incredibly improper to get us back in their good graces. Even the odds a little bit.

CLARA

What, like wear trousers out into the city?

FANNY

Could you imagine the scandal?

CLARA

Your mother would die of happiness if she hadn't already.

MARY

And your mother would have a heart attack.

CLARA

Then I guess it's worth a go, isn't it?

*The girls make a show out of pretending to wear trousers out and about. They exhaust themselves. They laugh.*

FANNY

I like laughing. We should do that more often.

CLARA

I'll try my hardest.

FANNY

Good, I'm glad.

*Shouting is heard from downstairs.*

Ah. I knew the peace was too good to be true. They'll be calling for me then. I'll come back upstairs soon.

CLARA

We will wait up for you.

MARY

Be firm with them, Fanny. You can do it.

FANNY

Pull that trunk for me, would you?

MARY

Of course.

CLARA

Can I help?

FANNY

Find something pretty to pack in it. Something to get married in, maybe.

CLARA

I should be able to find something that will work quite nicely.

MALE VOICE

(O.S.)

Fanny! Downstairs! Now!

FANNY

I'll be back soon. Thank goodness you're both here. I don't think I could do this without you.

*FANNY exits.*

MARY

Clara, how many times have I told you not to talk about Percy around Fanny?

CLARA

Why not? He's important to her and we were talking about her suitors... he is her suitor.

MARY

She would be crushed if she found out.

CLARA

Or she would say, "Thank you for telling me, I understand, now go be happy."

MARY

My relationship with Percy is secret for a reason.



CLARA

You can't exactly keep the way you look at each other a secret. You should tell her soon.

MARY

Fine. Can we not talk about it anymore.. please?

CLARA

Does she love him?

MARY

You heard her call him, *The One!*

CLARA

Does he love her?

MARY

I don't know. He loves liberally.

CLARA

It sounds like you're making excuses for him.

MARY

No! It's complicated. Percy is already married, so it's not like anything is going to happen for either of us, at least not for a long time.

CLARA

Especially not if everything is being kept secret.

MARY

If it were out in the open then things would just get more complicated.

*Shouting from Fanny and her father can be heard from downstairs.*

CLARA

She has to know eventually.

MARY

I want to spare her from as much pain as possible.

CLARA

How does waiting help?

MARY

I don't want her to think that I'm pulling him away from her. She's been through enough.

CLARA

I don't know if it's a bad thing, but maybe that is what you're doing... pulling him away from her. But I don't want to try and control any of you so... I'll keep your secret. Just promise me that you'll tell her before things get too serious between you and Percy.

MARY

Thank you. I promise.

CLARA

Really promise.

*Beat. They perform their same ritual.*

MARY

There. Now can we pull that trunk for Fanny? I'm sure we'll all feel better when she knows she has a way out if she needs it.

CLARA

Of course.

*CLARA exits to find a dress, and MARY pulls a large trunk out of some crevice hidden in the set. She opens it. As she does so, time comes spilling back into place.*

WHICH FLOWS DIRECTLY INTO

4

*MARY is alone on the floor with Fanny's old trunk. She pulls out a gown and more memories of her sister come rushing back. Mary dances around the room, the fabric flowing around her. She catches sight of her reflection. BYRON enters behind her, carrying a doctor's bag. MARY startles.*

BYRON

That's quite a dress.

MARY

What are you doing here?

BYRON

Returning the Doctor's bag to the study.

MARY

Did he catch his rats?

BYRON

We can hope so.

MARY

I'm supposed to talk with you.

BYRON

Perfect, I need to have a word with you, too.

MARY

This is not the time. Please go away.

BYRON

No. This is my house.

MARY

I'd like to be alone. I was just about to sit down and work.

BYRON

So you were about to change into your comfy dress, naturally.

MARY

I- No. This was my sister's. I just found it.

BYRON

Percy talks about her very fondly. It would have been fun to meet her.

MARY

Not so fun for her.

BYRON

Oh?

MARY

She wouldn't like how close you are with Percy.

BYRON

She wouldn't have liked our dear friendship but she would have been fine with you marrying him?

MARY

I didn't say-

BYRON

Is that her trunk?

MARY

Kind of-

BYRON

Can I look?

MARY

I don't think she-

BYRON

Please.

MARY

No.

BYRON

Please? I said it twice. And I was actually asking the second time.

MARY

Stop being an ass.

BYRON

The problem is your thought process, darling. If you don't think of me as an ass then you won't see me as an ass. You'll see me as witty and charming.

MARY

I prefer to call a spade a spade and an ass an ass.

(to herself, returning to her work)

I can't believe that Clara wants my help marrying that arrogant -

BYRON

What's this?

MARY

It's a book.

BYRON

Well what do you know? I came in here looking for a book.

MARY

And this is a library.

BYRON

Yes, darling, but this is the book I was looking for.

MARY

*Phantasmagoria*? Really?

BYRON

Such an odd book. E. G. Robertson performed so many stories in it. So much magic, all with his little shadow puppets.

MARY

Hey, they were hardly little shadow puppets! They were important!

BYRON

Really? To who?

MARY

To whom!

BYRON

To you?

MARY

To Fanny. To the entire French government since they sued Robertson for bringing back the Sun King.

BYRON

All right, fair enough. I just think they're cute.

MARY

Then why are you looking for that book?

BYRON

We're writing ghost stories, love, it's hardly a surprise.

MARY

I'm not your love, and I'm not your darling, so call me Mary or don't call me at all.

BYRON

How precocious.

MARY

Besides, that copy is my sister's. You can't use it.

BYRON

Why not? She certainly isn't using it.

(Realizing he's stepped in it)

I'm sorry; I think I may have crossed a line.

MARY

You think?

BYRON

I need the book because I was planning on giving you the benefit of the doubt before I confronted you about this, but since you're obviously familiar with the work you'll be able to tell me if I'm wrong. I think you're plagiarizing Robertson.

MARY

Plagiarizing? How dare-

BYRON

There's a story in this book called the "Dance of the Sorcerers." Magicians bring a frog back to life by soaking it in a fluid called galvanism and shocking it with lightning. Is it just me or does that sound familiar?

MARY

My words are mine.

BYRON

I'm sure they are. I just thought we were writing original stories.

MARY

There's no such thing.

BYRON

Bold statement.

MARY

True statement. Everything is at least a little bit derivative. So pick and choose what works and make it work better. That's what I'm doing.

BYRON

Is it? What works better about your story then?

MARY

My story isn't about magic. It's about science.

BYRON

What's the difference?

MARY

Science is real. It's based in fact, not fiction.

BYRON

Great. When you prove that there's nothing fictional about bringing someone back to life, let me know. I'm curious to see how that works out for you.

MARY

You don't think it would be amazing?

BYRON

I don't. I think it would be messy... and monstrous. For both the scientist and the poor soul they tried to bring back.

*Beat.*

MARY

You don't believe in ghosts.

BYRON

No.

MARY

Even with the weather like it is? Even when you came up with the idea to have us all write ghost stories together during the wet season? We're all here because of you and you don't even believe?

BYRON

No. I think that when things die, they are gone. The only things that haunt us are the living.

MARY

Live a day in my shoes and then say that to me again.

*Beat.*

BYRON

You wanted to talk about something?

MARY

I have some ghosts I want to introduce you to.

BYRON

You might make a believer out of me yet.

MARY

We'll see. Fortunately these are just my literary ghosts.

BYRON

What do you mean?

MARY

All I want is to write a happy ending, but if Dr. Frankenstein creates life then the story should be over! But something is off.

*Beat. Taking this in.*

You're not saying anything.

BYRON

I was just listening. I have this theory that you're going to be able to figure it out for yourself if you just say things out loud.

MARY

Wow. What extraordinary help.

BYRON

I try. So... what does it mean for Dr. Frankenstein to create life on his own?

MARY

It's a birth. But without a mother.

BYRON

And that's a victory?



MARY

Trust me, birth is scary and painful. Women around the world would celebrate to know they could create life without going through that.

BYRON

Oh, I trust you. I wouldn't know anything about it.

MARY

It hasn't exactly been the most pleasant experience for me. I guess that's why it's important that Dr. Frankenstein succeed. But something about it seems inauthentic.

BYRON

Maybe it's too clean?

MARY

That might be.

BYRON

Things are always more fun when they're messy. I'm most content when happy endings make me feel a little bit sad.

*Beat.*

MARY

Can I ask you a personal question?

BYRON

You can ask. I won't promise that I'll give you a good answer.

MARY

What do you think about Clara?

BYRON

This does not feel like a question that is personal to you.

MARY

Trust me it is. But your physical situation with her seems very unlike you.

BYRON

A little bit unlike me, I'll admit.

MARY

Then why?

BYRON

She's there. It's a distraction. It fuels my anger about leaving London.

MARY

Is the sex good?

BYRON

Is the sex good?!

MARY

Yeah, is it any good?

BYRON

It's easy.

MARY

So you don't love her?

BYRON

Definitely not.

MARY

That's what I thought.

BYRON

Does she love me?

MARY

Not yet. She probably could. Could you? If you had to?

BYRON

I don't have to.

MARY

Do you at least care about her?

BYRON

What kind of question is that?

MARY

An honest one. I can't tell whether your blasé attitude is genuine disinterest or if you're being bashful because she's coming on too strong.

BYRON

One thing you will learn about me is that I'm never bashful.

MARY

Is that so?

BYRON

It is.

MARY

Then what about Percy?

BYRON

What?

MARY

Do you love my husband?

BYRON

He's brilliant.

MARY

Rephrase: Are you in love with my husband?

BYRON

Mary, I'm not —

MARY

Then is Percy lying to me?

BYRON

What?

MARY

He told me. About what happened between the two of you. The poem that he read to you. What happened afterward.

BYRON

What?

MARY

"An Ode to Intellectual Beauty."

BYRON

Why would he tell you about that?

MARY

I'm his wife, Byron. Percy's and my relationship has been complicated since day one. This isn't new.

BYRON

Did he tell you that he loved me?

MARY

I may be making inferences.

BYRON

Well he doesn't.

MARY

George Byron, you are being incredibly stupid.

BYRON

Nobody ever tells me that.

MARY

Look, I know you don't believe in ghosts, or magic, or anything like that, but for lack of a better phrase, I think you're cursed.

BYRON

What do you mean?

MARY

Love is a low burn. It starts to tear through everyone you meet but for some reason you are cursed to never love them back. I guess I'm only in the habit of accepting love that I can return. Maybe you aren't.

BYRON

It's not like that!

MARY

If you don't love each other then it is. If you don't care about Clara, then it is. It's like that.

BYRON

This isn't my choice, Mary!

MARY

Make it your choice! If you let him, Percy could love you but you have to love him back. Clara is the same way. They need you, and I love them both. Make a

decision to be in their lives, or go. This limbo is too hard for all of us.

BYRON

How do you do that?

MARY

Do what?

BYRON

Manage to convince everyone in the room that you're the smartest person there.

MARY

It helps if I am.

BYRON

I'm sure it would.

MARY

You've got to start paying attention to people, Byron. You've stopped seeing people because you're too worried about how people see you.

BYRON

I really hate that you're usually right.

MARY

Hmph.

BYRON

Don't hmph. And don't pretend like you don't expect that kind of perfection for yourself.

MARY

I don't —

BYRON

You do. And yet you are completely understanding of imperfection in other people.

MARY

Because other people can make positive change. This is my punishment.

BYRON

Your punishment?

MARY

For Fanny. For my daughter. It's my fault. I can't be fixed.

BYRON

Don't make this about trying to fix yourself, Mary. You're not broken. We've all been through shit but every good writer knows that you use that to be genuine. You –

MARY

Don't say that.

BYRON

It's true. Everything in your life –

MARY

Comes from the fact that my mother, and my sister, and my daughter are dead. Does that make good art? Their deaths were a tragedy.

BYRON

Exactly! Their deaths were real! That pain is real, and if you don't tell the story where it's painful, and challenging, and it hurts to breathe then you're not telling the right one.

MARY

Everything reminds me of them. I haven't played with my infant son in days because he reminds me of my daughter's birth. I can't be around Clara because when she doesn't remind me of our sister she reminds me of myself. That's worse.

BYRON

Funny.

MARY

What is?

BYRON

I can't seem to love other people, and you can't seem to love yourself.

MARY

This isn't about love.

BYRON

Good friends tell each other hard truths.

MARY

I don't know if we're good friends yet.

BYRON

Fine. Friends then.

MARY

Fine.

*They are now closer than they have been. CLARA enters with a book in hand.*

CLARA

Byron! Mary! I'm so glad to see you getting along!

BYRON

It's not that odd is it?

MARY

I didn't think you would be down until later.

CLARA

I was returning a book to the library. *The Family Herbal*. Have you read it?

BYRON

I haven't.

MARY

Isn't that a medical book? How did you get that?

CLARA

Well your doctor left it out and I was planning on returning it right away but I was bored so I read some of it and got even more bored so I'm returning it now and — I'm sorry. I'm babbling.

BYRON

You're quite all right.

CLARA

Is that Fanny's trunk?

MARY

Yes.

CLARA

You told me you wanted to meet her. Would you like to take a look?

MARY

Clara don't.

CLARA

Why not? It's not like it's a secret.

MARY

I'd like to keep her trunk between sisters.

CLARA

I guess. I just needed something to do.

MARY

We were talking about Fanny's book, if you wanted to join that conversation.

CLARA

You never took me to see any of the shadow puppets. It's fine, I don't like them anyway.

BYRON

Maybe you should read it. Your sister has given me a new appreciation for them.

CLARA

Really? That's nice to hear for a change.

(To Mary)

I'm glad to see you getting along with people. You normally just argue all the time.

BYRON

Sometimes it's fun to argue. It's boring when everyone is always so agreeable.

CLARA

I agree completely.

BYRON

Did you need something, Clara?

CLARA

Yes. Join me upstairs for a nightcap?



MARY

You can't have a nightcap.

CLARA

I just thought it would be a good way to pass the time. I want to be entertained for a little bit.

MARY

There are other ways to entertain yourself.

CLARA

Fine. I don't need a drink. But I would love the company and —

MARY

Clara. Would you come check on William with me?

CLARA

He's your son. And I'm trying to —

BYRON

Tell you what. I like to think that I am entertaining. And I can certainly use a drink. I'll wait upstairs for you, Clara.

*BYRON exits.*

CLARA

What the hell was that?

MARY

I was getting him to trust me. This is what we planned!

CLARA

Maybe you're trying too hard.

MARY

No. No, I was not pulling him away from you.

CLARA

You said it, not me.

MARY

I'm not trying to pull him away from you.

CLARA

Well you weren't trying with Percy either.

MARY

How can you say that to me?

CLARA

Because it's true. That's what you do! If you want me to believe that it's not happening you're going to have to stop keeping me away from him.

MARY

I was not keeping you away from him.

CLARA

Exhibit A: Fanny's things. I was trying to show him. It was an obvious bonding opportunity.

MARY

I didn't want him rooting through her stuff.

CLARA

Exhibit B: The nightcap.

MARY

You can't have a nightcap you're pregnant!

CLARA

Okay, but still.

MARY

And he's waiting upstairs for you anyway.

CLARA

Yeah, but no thanks to you. You didn't tell him, did you?

MARY

That you're pregnant? Of course not. I promised that I wouldn't.

CLARA

Look, I need this okay. I can't stay with you and Percy forever.

MARY

Where is this coming from?

CLARA

I'm not one of you. I'm not a genius. I'm not a writer. I try, but I can't keep up. This is my shot at a stable support system.

MARY

A stable support system? It's Byron! And he doesn't love you.

CLARA

How do you know that?

MARY

Because I asked him. How is that for a plan? You got the answer you need; now we can be done with this.

CLARA

We're not done with this.

MARY

Why not? You just heard me; he doesn't love you.

CLARA

It doesn't matter as long as he will stay with me.

MARY

What?

CLARA

I've been thinking about all of the rumors and I knew this was a possibility.

MARY

Why wouldn't you marry for love?

CLARA

Because it doesn't make sense for me, Mary. Not anymore. It can be... a business transaction. An exchange. His support for access to his daughter. It makes sense.

MARY

Or you can travel with Percy and me. If you have the child we can all take care of it together

CLARA

I can't raise the child and travel with you. I know that much!

MARY

Well you certainly can't raise this child on your own. \ It's crazy.

CLARA

\ You don't get both things! You don't get to tell me that I can't be with Byron and that I can't raise the child on my own.

MARY

Those aren't your only two opt-

CLARA

Is it worth it? Being a mother?

MARY

My daughter is dead.

CLARA

Your son is still alive.

MARY

It's hard. So much harder than I thought it would be. I had him too soon after...

CLARA

She was never going to live. You know that.

MARY

Clara... I killed her. I forced her into the world before she was ready.

CLARA

Fanny was premature; there was nothing you could do.

MARY

That doesn't mean it wasn't my fault.

CLARA

It means that maybe it wasn't your choice.

MARY

I hate that. I just hate that so much.

CLARA

It's nature, Mary. You can't beat it.

MARY

Marrying Byron and raising the child on our own aren't your only two options. Byron has a private doctor, I'm sure he has the herbs. It would be perfectly safe.

CLARA

Mary, are you suggesting...?

MARY

Every time someone in our family gives birth, somebody dies.

CLARA

Mary, that's just bad luck. You had no control over-

MARY

That's what it is, like some kind of -

CLARA

Curse? What happened to science, Mary?

MARY

This is how things happen for us, Clara.

CLARA

For us? I'm not like you.

MARY

You're my sister.

CLARA

I'm your stepsister. We're not related.

MARY

Of course we are! You have always been my sister and you always will be. It's not about blood. It's about the fact that this is a dangerous situation that could have very real consequences and I care about you.

CLARA

I'm not a child anymore. I shouldn't have to prove to you that I can make my own decisions.

MARY

Claire, I'm only -

CLARA

Don't call me Claire! You see ghosts of your daughter, right?

MARY

All the time.

CLARA

Well that wasn't your fault. Imagine what I would see if I do what you're suggesting.

MARY

Imagine what you'll see trying to raise that child in poverty.

CLARA

That's why I'm trying to marry Byron. So I don't raise the child in poverty.

MARY

And what happens if you don't get that?

CLARA

You're supposed to be on my side.

MARY

I am! But I am the only one of us who has had a child and lost one so I need to tell you that sometimes it might not be worth the risk. You have other options.

CLARA

Yeah! I do. But I want this child, Mary. I want it. That's the bottom line.

*Beat.*

MARY

Don't be stupid, Clara.

CLARA

Fine. If you think that there's some kind of Exchange of Life or something then tell me this: you have a beautiful, healthy, boy upstairs. Who died when he was born?

MARY

You know the answer.

CLARA

I don't. But maybe that's because I'm being stupid.

MARY

Harriet Shelley.

CLARA

Percy's first wife? You blame yourself for her death, too?

MARY

She hanged herself.

CLARA

I think we just figured out the pattern. So let's pray to God that there isn't any rope in the room when I give birth to this child.

MARY

You should go.

CLARA

I'll be upstairs. Come talk to me when you actually decide to support me.

*CLARA exits. We hear a small child laughing.*

MARY

No.

*The child laughs gain.*

Stop it.

*Another Giggle*

Stop Laughing! It isn't funny. You're going to kill her!

*Silence.*

Fanny?

*Nothing.*

Fanny, please come back! I don't want to be alone right now.

*MARY'S world begins to crumble in the resounding silence.*

WHICH FLOWS DIRECTLY INTO

5

*Lighting flashes. It is the middle of a storm. A whirlwind of sound and text sweeps across the stage. Mary is alone. Except for the shadows that begin to envelop her.*

## VOICES

There is something at work in my soul, which I do not understand.

When falsehood can look so much like truth, who can assure themselves certain happiness?

I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy and I shall again be virtuous.

Nothing is so painful to the human mind as a great and sudden change.

I should be the Adam, but am rather the fallen angel.

All men hate the wretched.

But hers was the misery of innocence.

## MARY

Fanny! Fanny, we need to talk! Please! Are you there?

*FANNY enters, smiling.*

## FANNY

I'm here. I'm here. What's the matter?

## MARY

Where have you been?

## FANNY

Someone was recreating "Dance of the Sorcerers" in the Catholic Church down the road. I just had to go see it. Thank goodness I made it back before the rain started.

## MARY

Fanny, Clara is gone.



FANNY

What do you mean? Where is she?

MARY

She just ran off, out the back. I think she's going to leave.

FANNY

Very funny. It's pouring outside. Where is she?

MARY

No I mean, leave, leave. Permanently.

FANNY

What are you talking about? Where does she think she's going?

MARY

Anywhere but here. That's what she told me. I think she's heading to her aunts' but they're traveling now.

FANNY

Mary, why would she do something like this?

MARY

I don't know. This is stupid.

FANNY

Did she leave by herself? Is she traveling alone?

MARY

Yes. I mean of all the dumb things she could have-

FANNY

I know. I know. She'll catch consumption or worse.

MARY

God, she didn't have to take me so literally when I told her to go.

FANNY

You told her to go? Why would you do something like that?

MARY

Because she was being childish. \ I told her.

FANNY

\ She's fifteen, you can't expect her to act grown up all the time.

MARY

She doesn't know how to deal with our parents. Not like you and I do.

FANNY

So you got in a fight and told her to leave? You have a plan to get her back, don't you?

MARY

I don't always have the answer, Fanny. It's not fair for you to expect me to.

FANNY

It may not be fair but I don't have the answers either.

MARY

Wait, I still haven't told you everything. Clara took your trunk with her.

FANNY

The one with all of my things?

MARY

Yes.

FANNY

You let her steal all of my things?

MARY

Yes.

FANNY

That settles it then. We have to go catch her and bring her home. I can't afford to replace that trunk, Mary.

MARY

We can always ask her to send your stuff back if we figure out where she's going.

FANNY

If we don't go to her now then how can we know that she makes it somewhere safely? It's frightening out there, Mary.

MARY

It's frightening in here! This household has been a disaster for years.

FANNY

Then are you planning to tell our parents? Because if Clara goes away you know that they would make it my fault. I don't want to see how her mother would take that.

MARY

You can handle her, Fanny.

FANNY

But this isn't supposed to be my problem. I have enough to worry about. Is there any chance she could have gone to Percy? He's been tutoring her recently. They're getting really close.

MARY

I don't think so. He's still living with Harriet. Can you imagine, opening the door and there's your husbands lovers' stepsister looking for refuge from your husbands lovers' father and stepmother?

FANNY

Right. You're right. That would be foolish.

MARY

But if she were heading to her aunts' -

FANNY

Then she would have to cross Aldgate -

MARY

Which will be closing soon because of the flooding.

FANNY

We have to hurry. If we cut through the churchyard we can catch her.

MARY

If I could just go running after her, I would.

FANNY

Well I can't go alone.

MARY

Look, this whole ordeal is kind of —

FANNY

Kind of what? Dangerous? I know.

MARY

What if we fall?

FANNY

What if Clara falls? We have to decide what risks are worth it for our family.

MARY

I'm pregnant, Fanny.

FANNY

What?

MARY

It's — um — It's Percy's. I didn't expect it but it's happened. I think it could be a good thing.

FANNY

I didn't know you were seeing Percy.

MARY

He wants to run away until Harriet consents to the divorce. He asked me to elope with him.

FANNY

I see.

MARY

He told me that he would talk to you about it.

FANNY

He didn't.

MARY

Please try and be happy for me.

FANNY

How far along are you?

MARY

About a month, I think. I was late so I saw a piss prophet last week. I'm going to name her after you.

FANNY

You should go. You need to catch Clara.

MARY

What if we leave, too? All of us. Together. We'll travel the world.

FANNY

I can't do that.

MARY

Why not?

FANNY

I just can't.

MARY

But we'd be together. We would be safe.

FANNY

I won't leave with you.

MARY

We would be happy!

FANNY

I would never be happy!

*Beat.*

MARY

...Fanny.

FANNY

I can hardly stand to look at you right now. How could I leave with you?

MARY

I understand. I'll be back. I really promise.

*Mary tires to start their ritual. But FANNY stops her.*

FANNY

If Clara isn't with you, don't bother. I don't know if I want to see you again.

*FANNY leaves. MARY is suddenly outside. She becomes drenched and chilled.*

VOICES

I was required to exchange chimeras of boundless grandeur for realities of little worth.

Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example.

I was a shattered wreck, --the shadow of a human being.

No mother could claim the gratitude of her child so completely as I should deserve theirs.

Was man, indeed, at once so powerful, so virtuous and magnificent, yet so vicious and base?

Subsequent degenerating.

*CLARA appears. Maybe a shade. Not quite real yet.*

MARY

Clara! Clara, there you are!

CLARA

Mary? How did you find me?

MARY

It wasn't that hard. Where do you even think you're going?

CLARA

France. I'll meet both of my aunts in Paris.

MARY

Clara, Aldgate is closing. Just come home. This is insane.

CLARA

Insane? Deciding to leave is the only sane decision I've ever made.

MARY

You can't honestly believe that.

CLARA

It hurts to stay. And you don't want me around anyway.

MARY

I was upset. I said things I didn't mean.

CLARA

How am I supposed to know that? Actions have consequences.

MARY

And so does running away with Fanny's trunk! It was supposed to be her safety net.

CLARA

We were supposed to be her safety net.

MARY

I've had enough of you acting out. If Fanny is willing to put up with our parents then you should be, too.

CLARA

I'm not going back. And you shouldn't either.

MARY

We're tougher than this.

CLARA

Just because we can tough it out, doesn't mean that we should.

MARY

I have to. For Fanny.

CLARA

Good lord, Mary. Fanny is an adult. It's not your job to take care of her.

MARY

If I don't then -

CLARA

She'll take care of herself. That's how it works. Not all women are your responsibility.

MARY

My sisters are! I can't just leave.

CLARA

Why not?

MARY

Because I told her... about Percy. She's so angry with me, Clara.

CLARA

You told her too late.

MARY

I'm sorry.

CLARA

What about your baby?

MARY

How do you know about that?

CLARA

I just had a hunch.

MARY

Okay. Yes. I'm pregnant, I can't just uproot everything.

CLARA

Do you really want to raise a child in that house?

MARY

Of course not. But I promised Fanny I would come back. And Aldgate is closing anyway.

CLARA

Mary, do something for yourself. Just this once. Let's go. Let's knock on Percy's door, tell him the news and leave.

MARY

If I leave with you and Percy –

CLARA

Does Fanny know about the baby?



MARY  
Yes.

CLARA  
Then the damage is already done. It's your child. Not hers. Maybe it isn't fair but... sometimes things aren't. It's your choice, Mary.

MARY  
Okay. Wait for me by the publishing house. Percy and I will meet you soon.

CLARA  
This isn't a mistake.

MARY  
I sure hope not.

*The storm surrounds MARY as CLARA exits.  
Something has changed. Something is... off.*

WHICH FLOWS DIRECTLY INTO

6

*Fanny's trunk is on the floor, open and empty.  
Its contents strewn about the room. An ocean of  
Fanny. FANNY watches as MARY swims through it.  
MARY finds Phantasmagoria and clutches it to her  
chest.*

*Byron enters.*

BYRON  
There's nothing I can say that is going to make this less uncomfortable.

MARY  
Byron! How long have you been there?

BYRON  
Enough to know that anything I can say will set me up for failure, so I'll get to it. I need your help. I'm stuck.

MARY  
I assumed as much.

BYRON

But for the moment it seems like it would be prudent to ask you if you're okay.

MARY

Since when does that matter to you?

BYRON

Since we became friends, obviously. But if you don't believe me then we can stick with a you help me and I'll help you kind of deal.

MARY

Seriously?

BYRON

Seriously.

MARY

Okay. I'm sorry you had to see me like this.

BYRON

Don't be. Everyone's got shit.

MARY

So. What is it that I can help you with?

BYRON

Well now it's my story that's going nowhere. I have this idea. A feeling. Like my life force is being drained from my body. I'm awake, but I hardly feel alive and it's keeping me from writing.

MARY

Well that wasn't melodramatic at all. Have you talked to Percy?

PERCY

About what?

MARY

About the two of you.

PERCY

Not in so many words.

MARY

That's probably why you're feeling drained.

BYRON

You think so?

MARY

I think it's kind of obvious honestly. You're tired. It takes more energy to keep everything pent up than it does to talk about it.

BYRON

I know that.

MARY

I know it's difficult to talk to Percy. Especially about emotional dependency and all that.

BYRON

What do you know about it?

MARY

Really? I'm his wife. I have lived with him for years now. He's petulant and self-absorbed, but he ardently wants the whole world to be good, so long as it's his version of good. And I love him. And when we were first together, he also loved Fanny.

BYRON

Oh.

MARY

She wasn't willing to share him so he chose someone else. Someone who could deal with his heart being just a little bit broken all the time.

BYRON

You really love him.

MARY

I do.

BYRON

What's it like?

MARY

There's this — this warmth that flows through me every time I see him happy. But it's not just that. It's like standing in the sun in late September. Or on the prow of a ship in summer. You know, how a cool breeze

brushes against your skin and you feel that sudden chill but somehow you're still warm? The only problem is that as warm as it is, you can't forget that everything outside of the sun is cold. And the sun is infinitely far away.

BYRON

Why are you telling me all of this?

MARY

Because you get it.

BYRON

And what is it that you think I get?

MARY

I'm sharing my husband with his lover and you're sharing your lover with his wife. You have exactly what you want but it still hurts to want it. You get it.

BYRON

(Less sure this time)

I don't love him. Not like you described.

MARY

Sure. But you might one day. So, um... what did you two talk about, if not that?

BYRON

We didn't talk much. Or at all, really.

MARY

I assumed as much.

BYRON

So this mess is about your sister?

MARY

And my daughter.

BYRON

Sounds like a lot.

MARY

It's paralyzing. It sucks.

BYRON

Have you figured out how to make your story messier?

MARY

Not entirely. I have this idea... about an exchange of life.

BYRON

How do you mean?

MARY

Every time there's a birth in my family, someone connected to it dies.

BYRON

So for someone to be brought back...

MARY

Someone else has to die.

BYRON

That is messy.

MARY

Yeah. But I hate it.

BYRON

Would you do it? Bring someone back if it meant killing someone else.

MARY

I've already done it. I've been sacrificing people my whole life.

BYRON

Mary...

MARY

When I was pregnant with my daughter I stole Percy away from Fanny and she died. I was so afraid of hurting her that I put my embarrassment in front of her wellbeing and it killed her. Even my birth was a sacrifice. But some reason I couldn't do the same for my daughter.

BYRON

No one blames you for not dying in childbirth.

MARY

I do. But if I can make it work in reverse, Victor Frankenstein would see his son again. And that would be worth it.

BYRON

Because you could see Fanny again?

MARY

Exactly.

BYRON

Have you ever thought about what she would say if you did bring her back?

MARY

All the time. I abandoned her. I took Percy and Clara with me. I can't imagine she'd be too pleased with me.

BYRON

Do you think that Fanny is in Heaven?

MARY

If I believed in that sort of thing, I would want her to be. She would deserve it.

BYRON

Well if I were in her shoes, I wouldn't be mad about anything that happened on earth after I had been in heaven.

MARY

What do you mean?

BYRON

If I were in heaven, and you ripped me out of paradise and treated me like everything was still the same then I would be pissed.

MARY

Then it's a good thing you'll never have to worry about that.

BYRON

Very funny.

MARY

I can't imagine what it would be like to be born again as an adult.

BYRON

Pretty traumatic, I would think. Do you really think that you killed your sister?

MARY

I don't know... maybe.

BYRON

Then I think I just became the smartest person in the room.

MARY

Don't be an ass.

BYRON

I am an ass.

MARY

Ugh. I know. I told Clara that.

BYRON

Aren't you trying to set us up?

MARY

I guess I'm not doing a very good job, am I?

BYRON

Not particularly. You're doing a better job at pawning me off to your husband.

MARY

I don't know if I'd call it pawning. I'm not getting anything from it.

BYRON

Oh, I didn't realize your matchmaking was so selfless. So do you want to tell me why you're setting me up with your stepsister?

MARY

You're a very aesthetically pleasing couple.

BYRON

Mhmm. I'm sure you believe that. So why aren't you trying harder? In the name of aesthetics, of course.

MARY

I don't think it's smart. I think you're going to hurt her.

BYRON

I probably would.

MARY

But I wish you wouldn't. If she could just understand, like I understand Percy, maybe she could do it.

BYRON

Do what?

MARY

I'm sorry, I already said too much.

BYRON

Okay. You don't have to go on.

*Beat.*

MARY

You're still being nice to me. Why?

BYRON

Because sometimes I actually like being nice. And you seem like you need it.

MARY

That doesn't mean I deserve it.

BYRON

Of course it does. There isn't anybody who doesn't deserve kindness.

MARY

Thank you, but —



BYRON

No buts. You're the smartest person I've ever met. And more than that, despite all of your circumstances, you're kind. That's better than I can do.

MARY

You're kind.

BYRON

To you. But I have lived a very charmed life.

MARY

Not entirely. You're estranged from your daughter. Hasn't that been hard?

BYRON

It has.

MARY

You miss her, don't you?

BYRON

Of course I miss her. She's going to be so smart when she grows up. And —

MARY

And she was yours.

BYRON

Yes. She was mine.

MARY

She was your legacy. She is what you were supposed to leave behind when you left England, but your wife took her away from you.

BYRON

What does this have to do with Clara?

MARY

She's pregnant.  
*A chasm opens.*

MARY

(Cont'd)  
It's yours.

BYRON

Mary. I can't be a father.

MARY

But that's what Clara wants from you and there's an opportunity for you, too.

BYRON

What are you talking about?

MARY

Your legacy. \ You get another shot with Clara.

BYRON

\ I could tell the doctor... I'm sure \ that he would -

MARY

\ You really don't think you could be with her, do you?

BYRON

I can't.

MARY

You don't have to love her.

BYRON

I want to love. But I could never love her.

MARY

What if we made an arrangement?

BYRON

What do you mean?

MARY

Marry Clara. Stay with us. The four of us together. I'll make sure that Clara understands how things are with Percy and you'll still have access to your daughter.

BYRON

No.

MARY

Why not?

BYRON

I can't do that. It's not... It's not right.

MARY

Then what is?

BYRON

I can't breathe in here. I should go.

*He does.*

MARY

Wait! Byron!

WHICH FLOWS DIRECTLY INTO

7

*MARY knows what she has done. At a loss, she finds her quill. It is all she knows how to do.*

*FANNY circles Mary as she tries to write. The words come broken, distorted, and impossible. They seem to take up physical space but Mary cannot grab them.*

VOICE

Feel

Life

Friend

Am

Mother

Only

Man

Will

Being

Human

All

Despair

Sun

*FANNY becomes real.*

FANNY

Her health, and even the tranquility of her hitherto constant spirit, had been shaken by what she had gone through.

MARY

What are you doing here?

FANNY

You needed to talk to me.

MARY

I have to save Clara.

FANNY

And breaking your promise to her accomplishes this... how.

MARY

I don't want her to turn out like me.

FANNY

Stop trying to make things perfect.

MARY

I'm not trying to make things perfect, I'm just trying not to repeat what happened before.

FANNY

If she is half the woman that she thinks you are then she'll be happy.

MARY

I doubt she thinks too highly of me right now.

FANNY

And she doesn't even know what you just told Byron.

MARY

I can't just support her decisions blindly.

FANNY

Why not?

MARY

Because she's wrong.

FANNY

Who cares? You're wrong all the time.

MARY

Not like this.

(FANNY gives her a wry look)

What would you say if I brought you back to life?

FANNY

Oh, Mary. "Dance of the Sorcerers" isn't real.

MARY

I know that. I recognize that.

FANNY

Do you? Because right now you are transcribing your life with different pronouns and a happy ending. Stop writing about me and write for me. Use me. Exploit me. Acknowledge the pain and write for the women you care about.

MARY

I'm trying to.

FANNY

Not hard enough. I should go. I don't need to be here.

*She starts to disappear.*

MARY

Wait!

*She does.*

Are you in heaven?

FANNY

Why would you ask me that?

MARY

Because I need to know whether or not I killed you.

FANNY

Mary. I can't be in paradise.

MARY

How could any just God turn your away?

FANNY

I don't have all the answers.

MARY

You have to be in paradise. After the life you lived, I need to be. So your suffering wasn't in vain.

FANNY

If you killed me and I was in heaven you would never join me there.

MARY

I know.

FANNY

And your daughter. Your baby Fanny was never baptized.

MARY

Yes. Once I'm gone, we'll never see each other again to this the only time we have. I'm not ready to say goodbye.

FANNY

We said goodbye a long time ago. You have to realize that.

*Beat. Footsteps.*

Someone is coming.

*FANNY fades into the back. Clara enters. She has a glass of water.*

CLARA

You're still here.

MARY

I was working. Or... trying to.

CLARA

You were really off base before.

MARY  
I —

CLARA  
Where is Byron?

MARY  
What?

CLARA  
He told me he was coming downstairs to check on you.  
Did he come in here?

MARY  
He did.

CLARA  
And?

MARY  
And he left.

CLARA  
Where did he go?

MARY  
I don't know.

CLARA  
Can you at least help me find him?

MARY  
I —

CLARA  
You owe me this. And you still haven't apologized for  
suggesting that I —

MARY  
I'm sorry.

CLARA  
Is that a real apology?

MARY  
I shouldn't have to tell you that.

CLARA

This all of Fanny's stuff.

MARY

Yeah, I – I have been having a rough time. It was comforting to go through it.

CLARA

Byron came in here to check on you and you were showing him her stuff?

MARY

It wasn't like that. I wasn't show-

CLARA

You told me not to do that. You told me to keep it between sisters and then you did it anyway. This is what you always do.

MARY

What are you talking about?

CLARA

You're intentionally pulling Byron away from me! I can't keep trusting you if you're going to keep going behind my back.

MARY

That's not what I'm trying to do.

CLARA

Then what is it?

MARY

I. I am just trying to write. I am just trying to be okay.

CLARA

Well you know what? You're not the only person who's trying to be okay. I'm trying to be okay too so help me find him.

MARY

You're going to ruin yourself. What if you ask him to marry you and you're not even pregnant? What if the piss prophet was wrong?



CLARA

This is happening, Mary! Whether you want it to or not. I was really hoping you'd come around.

MARY

Clara.

CLARA

I thought I needed your help with this. I hope I prove myself wrong.

MARY

Wait! Can't we talk about this?

CLARA

We just did, Mary. We talk, and talk, but we never make any decisions. I'm deciding now.

*She exits.*

*The child's voice giggles again.*

MARY

Why won't you just go away?

*Something dark compels her to go to The Family Herbal.*

"The Family Herbal: The cure of all disorders incident to mankind."

*MARY finds the doctor's bag that Byron brought. She opens it, taking out the ingredients as she finds them, mixing them together meticulously. Like a scientist.*

*A child's voice, almost.*

VOICE

Tansy oil.

MARY

Tansy oil to make the blood bitter.

VOICE

Pennyroyal.

MARY  
Pennyroyal kills parasites and will disguise the  
taste.

VOICE  
Rue.

MARY  
Rue. Dampens sexual desire.

VOICE  
Ergot.

MARY  
Ergot Kernels. High in alkaloids. A mild toxin.

VOICE	MARY
And Poppy... to ease the pain.	And Poppy... to ease the pain.

*She has finished her creation. The child laughs  
once more.*

MARY  
Hidden in a glass of water she'll never know the  
difference. She'll finally be safe. And you'll finally  
go away!

*She pours the concoction into Clara's glass and  
the voice stops abruptly.*

WHICH FLOWS DIRECTLY INTO

8  
*FANNY appears.*

FANNY  
What have you done?

MARY  
I've just saved her.

FANNY  
How is this saving her?

MARY

I've fixed it. The exchange of life. No one has to die now.

FANNY

You're destroying yourself, Mary.

MARY

I'm not. This is it. This is how I fix things and stop feeling so goddamned bad all the time.

FANNY

Do you remember the last summer before Clara was sent away to school? We went to play in that park on the Thames.

MARY

Of course I remember, Fanny, I —

FANNY

You were a lot happier then.

MARY

I was a child.

FANNY

You were yourself. This isn't you.

MARY

Who am I supposed to be? Something closer to the kid I was when we played with Mrs. Baxter's nephew?

FANNY

Exactly. It was fun! Remember? That one weekend that we went and it was so windy —

MARY

His hat flew right off his head and into the river, I remember.

FANNY

Your father had just published Mom's journals—

MARY

About how she tried to drown herself after your father left her.

FANNY

But someone jumped in and saved her. You wanted to jump in and go save the hat but Mrs. Baxter stopped you. Do you remember what she said to you?

MARY

You can't jump in, girl. You're just like your mother and Wollstonecraft women don't float.

FANNY

But you just slipped past her and jumped in anyway.

MARY

I remember it. Mrs. Baxter was so surprised... her nephew wanted to kiss me afterward but I told him no because I didn't want to.

FANNY

That's the version of my sister that I need. The one that was strong and kind. You're not her.

MARY

I am! I'm still standing up for what I believe in. I'm trying to save our sister.

FANNY

If you want to save her you'll let her make her own decision.

MARY

She can't. She's just a kid!

FANNY

She's not! She's eighteen. You're scared and it's selfish.

MARY

Stop trying to change my mind. You're not even real.

FANNY

I am right in front of your eyes and you still don't believe that I'm here.

MARY

You're not real.

FANNY

I am. You're writing my resurrection for crying out loud!

MARY

You're just in my head.

FANNY

And that is just as real for you as me being flesh and blood.

MARY

You're just in my head. You're just in my head! YOU'RE JUST IN MY HEAD!

*Silence.*

Why won't you just go away?

FANNY

There's still time to save your relationship with your sister. You should try and do that.

*FANNY vanishes.*

MARY

Fanny. Fanny wait! I didn't mean it! Come back!

*CLARA enters.*

CLARA

Mary? Were you calling for me?

MARY

I...

CLARA

Our last fight got a little out of hand. I said some things that I didn't really mean. And I definitely didn't say them how I meant to.

MARY

Thank you.

CLARA

If I trust you with one more thing, will you help me?

MARY

What's wrong?

CLARA

Byron left.

MARY

What do you mean?

CLARA

Like left, left. Permanently.

MARY

I'm sure he'll be back.

CLARA

He packed a bag.

MARY

He can't just leave like this.

CLARA

Well he has. I've been thinking and... I think that I should tell him.

MARY

You do?

CLARA

You're right about it being a powerful card that I can play and if he's leaving then I'm running out of time.

MARY

It's good that he'll hear it from you. But do you think he'll-

CLARA

He'll do the right thing. I've been thinking and I'm positive that he would.

MARY

I sure hope so.

CLARA

You don't know how like I do, Mary. You've never been with him the way I have.

MARY

You're right. I absolutely haven't, but I –

CLARA

It's different for us. We are having a child. We are bringing life into the world and that's magical.

MARY

But it's also dangerous.

CLARA

Please, not this again.

MARY

The exchange of life is real! And –

CLARA

Not for me. Not the way you think. Our family isn't cursed. You just had some rotten luck. If I ask Byron to marry me, and tell him about the child.. If I tell him to do it for the child then he will. I know it.

MARY

But Clara, he –

CLARA

So we are going to go looking for him, drag him back here, sit him down and make him listen to me.

MARY

We'll never catch up with him in this weather.

CLARA

If we leave right now we can still make it.

MARY

It's storming like hell outside!

CLARA

Right, like that's stopped you before?

MARY

That was different. Fanny asked me to, and your life was in danger.

CLARA

I'm the one asking you now. I'm going with or without you so come with me, or don't.

*BYRON enters, sopping.*

MARY  
Byron!

CLARA  
Have you gone crazy?

BYRON  
Maybe a little.

CLARA  
What's going on? I can help you through it if you just  
tell me.

BYRON  
I'm going to be a father.

CLARA  
What did you say?

BYRON  
You're having my child.

CLARA  
How do you know that?

BYRON  
Mary told me.

*Another Chasm opens.*

CLARA  
Mary told you.

*It widens.*

How could you?

MARY  
I was only trying to help.

CLARA  
I don't care.

MARY  
He needed to know.



CLARA

You promised you wouldn't tell.

MARY

I know but-

CLARA

No. No buts! That's not your secret. How dare you take that from me!

BYRON

Please, it wasn't her fault.

CLARA

Of course it was her fault!

BYRON

She wasn't trying to hurt you.

CLARA

Well she did.

MARY

Clara, you have to understand-

CLARA

I do understand. You're the one who doesn't seem to get it.

MARY

Clara, I've been thinking, and I decided that I'll look after you. You can stay here with me until you have the child.

CLARA

Marry me.

BYRON

What? I... I can't, no.

CLARA

Then no.

MARY

You can't be serious.

CLARA

I'm totally serious. Marry me. Prove that this child will be your priority.

BYRON

It will be. I'll take care of it here.

CLARA

This is my child, Byron. I won't leave her. Not for anything. Not even with her father.

BYRON

You don't have —

CLARA

Stay out of this.

BYRON

Clara, what are you planning?

CLARA

I'm not planning anything. What I do now depends entirely on what you say. Pease, please marry me. You don't have to love... not right away. But maybe you will one day and —

BYRON

I can't.

CLARA

Why the hell not?

BYRON

Because I love someone else.

*Beat.*

CLARA

Mary?

BYRON

No.

MARY

God no!

CLARA

Then who?

BYRON

It doesn't matter, Clara. Because I don't love you.  
And you'll never be able to give me the things that I  
need.

CLARA

I need a drink.

*CLARA takes a long sip of water. MARY knocks the  
glass out of her hand.*

CLARA (cont.)

What the hell?

MARY

The water... it's poisoned.

CLARA

What?

MARY

I... I was going to terminate the pregnancy.

CLARA

Mary!

MARY

You just heard him. I was right. He doesn't love you,  
Clara.

CLARA

We are so beyond that right now. You just tried to  
kill my child.

MARY

I stopped you!

CLARA

Maybe not soon enough.

MARY

You're my sister, I was only trying to save you.

CLARA

You don't get to decide that.

MARY

I was keeping you safe.

CLARA

You were keeping me safe?

MARY

I was trying to do the right thing. I was playing it smart!

CLARA

Shut up! Just shut up! I am sick and tired of you playing it smart. I am so fucking tired of it because you know what, Mary? It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter if you think my decisions are smart because they're mine! But you just can't accept that can you? It is so sad. It makes me so sad. And you, Byron. I can't decide whether I admire you, because you finally stopped trying to be the smartest person in the room, or if I hate you, because I think you're really stupid. But you know what? If both of you keep this up, you're always going to be the smartest person in the room because you'll be the only person in it. So here's how this is going to go. I'm going to leave. Not today, but soon. I'm going to raise my daughter on my own and neither of you will see either of us ever again. Unless you tell me right now that you'll come with me.

BYRON

You can't be serious.

CLARA

I'm completely serious. I'll be fine. I don't need anyone. Look at what a terror my mother was. There's no way I could possibly be worse.

MARY

Clara...

CLARA

I wish we could do this another way. I tried.

MARY

I'm so —

CLARA

You don't get to finish that.

MARY

I only want to help.

CLARA

I think you lost that opportunity when you tried to kill me child. Byron, this is your last shot.

BYRON

I'm sorry.

CLARA

Then this is goodbye, I think.

(to Mary)

My child will never know her father, and it's your fault. I wish this could have been different.

BYRON

Clara. Don't ruin everything.

CLARA

I'm finally doing the right thing.

*CLARA exits.*

BYRON

(Rushing after her)

Now listen, Clara. Why won't you see reason?

*FANNY appears.*

FANNY

You're not going to chase after her too?

MARY

I've done that before. Look where it brought me.

FANNY

At least you realize it.

MARY

Aren't you supposed to support me?

FANNY

I've tried. I'm tired.

MARY

I'm tired, too. I can't dive after the hat anymore. Wollstonecraft women don't float.

FANNY

You're not like mom. Mom never killed anyone.

MARY

Don't bring the children into this.

FANNY

You were blinded by what happened with your daughter.

MARY

This wasn't just about her!

FANNY

What then?

MARY

It was about you, too.

FANNY

Don't start.

MARY

And it was about Mom! She died because of me. Life and Death are the same for us. For all the women in our family.

FANNY

You have a living sister!

MARY

And I was trying to keep her that way.

FANNY

Then you should have taken care of her. Respected her decisions. Honored her life.

MARY

I do. That's why I treat her like I do. All I want is for her to live!

FANNY

Then honor your life, damn it!

*Something cracks.*

MARY

You mean like you honored yours? Do you think I would feel this penitent if I didn't honor life? You're the one who threw your life away!  
You – You destroyed me. I would have given you everything. I stayed for so long, Fanny. You could have left with us that night! I tried to get you to see that! You would have been safe. I gave you my life – I have been giving you my life for the past year. I did everything I could to keep you alive, saved you for as long as I could. I gave you an exit, and you refused to take it. I am responsible for your life and you repaid me with murder. You killed yourself, Fanny.

FANNY

It was my choice?

MARY

It was your choice. It was selfish. It was hurtful. And it was not my fault. It was not my fault.

FANNY

Does it feel good to say that out loud?

MARY

It does.

FANNY

You know that's all I've been trying to get from you this whole time.

MARY

I know.

FANNY

I miss you.

MARY

I miss you too. The dark and terrible thing.. It was me.

FANNY

Oh, Mary. That was just a dream. Dreams can be arbitrary.

MARY

I guess they can.

*FANNY hands MARY the copy of Phantasmagoria.*

MARY

(cont.)

What do you want me to do with this?

FANNY

Whatever you need. Just know that your story isn't a dance. It's messy, and it's painful and its-

*MARY rips a page out of it and throws it into the air. Fanny catches it.*

Very nice.

*Another page.*

FANNY (cont.)

Good! This is good!

*MARY creates a storm of pages, exorcising her need for the book. Once they begin to settle, Mary sighs.*

MARY

That felt good. I don't need it anymore. I think you can have it back now.

FANNY

Thank you. Any chance you want to pass on the dress, too?

MARY

It's a nice dress. I have a feeling Clara may need it.

FANNY

She takes after you.

MARY

We take after each other.

FANNY

I'm proud of you.

MARY

Thank you.

*They embrace.*



MARY

(cont.)

Writing this story isn't going to bring you back. I realize that now.

FANNY

I'm glad.

MARY

But it can be how I remember you. Write for the women you care about. That's what you said to me.

FANNY

It was.

*BYRON pokes his head in the door.*

BYRON

She's packing upstairs. There was no way I could get in the room.

MARY

I think we just have to let her go.

BYRON

And you're okay with that?

MARY

Of course not. But it's not my place to tell her what the right thing to do is. I already gave her my advice and she didn't want to take it. Not all women are my responsibility.

BYRON

Who let you think that?

*Beat. MARY glances at FANNY.*

I'm joking.

FANNY

Cheeky bastard.

*FANNY fades into the background.*

MARY

So you're in love with my husband? Have you told him?

BYRON

Not yet. You said it was hard to talk to him about these things.

MARY

It is.

BYRON

You were wrong about his poem, by the way.

MARY

Oh was I?

BYRON

It's a hymn... not an ode.

MARY

Interesting. And that means he doesn't love you?

BYRON

Of course not. He worships me.

MARY

I'm sorry; I don't subscribe to the church of intellectual beauty. How should I pray to it on your behalf?

BYRON

Very funny.

MARY

I'm sorry. For being wrong about so much.

BYRON

You're amazing to me.

MARY

I'm far from perfect.

BYRON

You can be wrong and perfect at the same time.

MARY

I should hope so.

BYRON

Because you were wrong about something else, too.

MARY

Oh, really?

BYRON

You said that I was incapable of love, but regardless of what Percy feels I know that I love him. And I love you, too.

*He does. It is not romantic.*

MARY

Thank you.

BYRON

What for?

MARY

I think I figured out what was wrong with my story.

BYRON

And what's that?

MARY

Life and death aren't the same thing. Not like I thought. By trying to control everything I was... killing it, in a way.

BYRON

So?

MARY

So I had this thought... to bring Fanny back to life I'd have to go dig her out of a graveyard, and I doubt that'd be pretty. It would be frightening, for both Frankenstein and his... monster.

BYRON

No longer his son?

MARY

I think the readers will get it.

BYRON

So your writer's block is fixed.

*CLARA and FANNY appear. An idea. A memory.*

MARY

Like any good ghost story, it begins with a storm.

CLARA

To be great and good  
was the commandment  
given to me by my  
sister.

FANNY

To be great and good  
was the commandment  
given to me by my  
sister.

*MARY raises her quill and a storm of words comes  
flowing out. Text explodes from her pen as the  
ideas catch fire and Frankenstein is brought to  
life. It is a release.*

VOICES

Beware, for I am fearless and therefore powerful!

There is Love in me like you have never seen

I could not understand how men who knew of good and  
evil could hate and kill one another.

What can stop the determined heart and resolved will  
of woman?

Soon these miseries will be extinct!

There is a love for the marvelous, a belief in the  
marvelous, intertwined in all my projects.

My spirit will sleep in peace.

My dear sister.

My dear sister.

My dear sister.

ALL

My dear sister – My swelling heart involuntarily pours  
itself out thus –

*A breath. A long breath. Mary starts to exit.*

FANNY

Mary, where are you going?

MARY

It's late. I'm tired. And my son has been waiting for a long time. The words can wait another day.

*She exits. There is a brief moment of acknowledgement from the others.*

END OF PLAY

### **Lesson 1: My First Collaborators Were Books**

My initial fascination with Mary Shelley's journey towards writing *Frankenstein* began with her surrounding environment. My focus was dedicated to Villa Diodati and the community of writers that inhabited it during the summer of 1816. The original draft of *Phantasmagoria* explicitly depicted a tumultuous relationship between Mary and Percy, complicated by an on-stage tryst between Percy and Lord Byron. Byron's romantic entanglements took center stage, while Mary's struggle with self-blame held her down in perpetual inaction for the majority of the script. Mary was living in a world where things simply happened to her, which creates a sense of stagnancy on stage. I knew that this would be a challenge in rehearsals and would make it difficult to pursue a full collaboration in production. Like my original version of the Mary Shelley character, the script was stuck.

By this point, I had already committed to the project and had submitted my proposal to work this particular script as my thesis project but I was coming to the realization that I didn't like it anymore. I first went to my adviser Jiréh Breon Holder to discuss the next steps and he reminded me that just because it was a historically influenced play, didn't mean it had to be a living room drama. While the

performance draft retained some elements of living room drama, I began an endeavor to push the boundaries of the form from the original draft. My first step in the process of re-invigorating my work was to re-engage my source material.

In order to make *Phantasmagoria* ready for table reads and rehearsal, I needed to deepen my research and find some other aspect of Mary Shelley's story to inspire my creativity and lead me to the heart of a play that I wanted to share with the world. Before I started over, I needed to decide what aspects of the original draft were essential to the play *Phantasmagoria* would become. In this draft, Jane (Clara) Clairmont has been gossiped about and condescended to for the whole script. Here, she professes her love for Byron, who immediately rejects her:

Byron

Are you not terribly sad, Jane?

Jane

Of course I am.

(Clutching her stomach)

But I will not allow you to break me.

There's too much life in me to throw it away on your rejection.<sup>1</sup>

While this exchange did not make it into the later drafts of *Phantasmagoria* it keyed me in to the importance of Clara's pregnancy as the primary complication in Mary's quest to be both great and good. The idea of Clara taking agency over her body and the life she wanted to lead was essential to the world I wanted to create, even if her exit from the play is tinged with an element of doubt. The other significant development in the original draft was that Byron and Mary's friendship was born out of a sense of intimacy created by mutual intellectual respect.

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<sup>1</sup> From an unpublished draft of *Phantasmagoria* pg.56

With these feelings in mind I plunged back into my search for new voices that would invigorate my creative output, especially those that informed Mary's relationship with Clara. In this way, some of my first collaborators were books. One of the prominent players in this search was *The Life and Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, Volume 1 (of 2)*, by Florence A. Thomas Marshall. By digging through excerpts of Mary's journals and correspondence I would be better suited to infusing her voice with my own in Mary's dialogue. When Mary described her sister Jane she was often described as being "a source of much annoyance" (Marshall, xi). In the time period preceding their departure from England, Percy says that he hoped Clara had "a resolute mind" indicating her sensibility to be flighty and changeable (Marshall, 99). Mary claims that Clara "imagines" she is treated "unkindly," but despite the implied hysteria, Mary is always able to "leave her tranquil" (Marshall, 102). In my script, Mary often refers to Clara as "ridiculous"<sup>2</sup> or "stupid,"<sup>3</sup> an ostensibly reductive way to express Mary's annoyance. I invited a legitimate sentiment from Mary's diaries, but altered the language to remind the audience that at this point, historical Mary is still a teenager. Mixing ideas from the literature with my own personal fictionalizations mirrored the process of working with my collaborators because my ideas and impulses were in conversation with the publications of other authors.

In the script, Mary's skepticism of Clara's intellect and ability creates a sense of unease, and, in regards to her plan, Clara asks Mary to "fix it. Make it better. That's

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<sup>2</sup> See pg. 18

<sup>3</sup> See. Pg. 54

what you do”<sup>4</sup>. In the second flashback scene as Clara is attempting to reclaim agency for herself Mary accuses her of a similar petulance, telling her that running away is “insane”<sup>5</sup>, which is an intentional criticism of Clara’s ability to care for herself. Clara is often treated as though she is hysteric or foolish even when she is attempting to make informed adult decisions. But Clara’s persistence shows us that the strong and independent side of her character is genuine, and indicates that her final monologue is a step towards a truer version of herself.

However, it was the discovery of Fanny Imlay that influenced the largest change from the original draft to the performance draft. I first saw Fanny Imlay Wollstonecraft mentioned in *The Life and Letters...* She was described as being “devoted and unselfish, only anxious for others to be happy and ready herself to serve any of them” (Marshall, 25). Fanny was essentially a non-presence who even her close friends, like Aaron Burr, described as “very fine” but having “scarcely a discernable trace of the mother,” meaning that she lacked the fire and wit for which her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, had become a celebrity in America (Marshall, 21). But it was *Mary Shelley, Romance and Reality* that first revealed to me the darker side of Fanny Imlay’s life. Emily Sunstein depicts Fanny as a “notorious bastard” that one could “pity yet scorn” (Sunstein, 20, 30). She was the first author I read that openly discussed Fanny’s depression, yet she was still only mentioned in brief passages. I began to gather information about her through a conglomeration of fleeting references until I stumbled across Janet Todd’s biography, *Death and the*

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<sup>4</sup> See pg. 22

<sup>5</sup> See pg. 62



*Maidens: Fanny Wollstonecraft and the Shelley Circle*, one of very few biographies dedicated to Fanny Imlay.

*Death and the Maidens...* tells the story of Godwin's oldest daughter through the perspective of those around her. Excerpts from family diaries, letters from those who ingratiated themselves with the Godwins, and some authorial speculation on behalf of Todd generate the most fully formed picture of Fanny Imlay that I have come across to date. However, the book still lacks an important part of the story: Fanny's voice. It contains very few passages that were penned by Fanny herself because after her suicide, many of her diaries and letters were destroyed. Their absence feels profound, but Todd's biography flourishes in its exploration of the relationship between the three sisters. It brought me to the understanding that even though the girls were separated, historically speaking, it was important that all three be present in my script. This is where I discovered the heart of the revised *Phantasmagoria* and I endeavored to explore the love and friendship between the sisters as a cornerstone for the plot.

Accomplishing this would mean taking more liberties with the historical fact and pushing the text away from my dictatorial writing impulses. My adviser, Jiréh Breon Holder directed me towards playwrights like Sarah Ruhl and Jen Silverman who create magical and visceral experiences in historically influenced scripts by writing stage directions that serve as a love letter to artists, as opposed to a field guide for performing the text. In the original draft of *Phantasmagoria*, one of the scene transitions was highly choreographed in language:

Late that night. There is a flash of lighting and  
a loud crash of thunder, which is immediately

followed by intense laughter offstage. JANE dances into the parlor, BYRON sits down at the piano and begins to play. He is tipsy, not drunk. JANE continues to dance. PERCY stands off to the side, trying to be inconspicuous in his watching of BYRON'S hands. MARY is with them. She reads. As BYRON reaches the end of the song MARY enters and stands by the door. The song finishes and JANE collapses into a chair, laughing and smiling. BYRON crosses to the dry bar and pours a glass of cognac. He begins to cross to JANE but MARY puts down her book and intercepts him, downing the contents of the glass immediately.<sup>6</sup>

By my second completed draft, such scene transitions had been pared down tremendously:

Fanny's suitcase lies on the floor, open and empty. It's contents spread across the ground. An ocean of Fanny. FANNY watches as MARY swims in her private ocean, clutching *Phantasmagoria* to her chest. BYRON enters.<sup>7</sup>

This stylistic change was indicative of my efforts to let go of the fixed image I had in my head and open the opportunity for an artist to put their influence on the moment. Once I had distilled the more essential elements of the script I had the liberty to invite my future collaborators to embellish, rather than enforcing exactly how a moment should look or feel. By relinquishing such dictatorial stage pictures I was learning how to write a script rather than a production. Silverman and Ruhl taught me that there was value in this kind of writing because I could create an environment that was more welcoming to other artists and would increase the likelihood of production, which is the ultimate goal for a playwright.

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<sup>6</sup> From an unpublished draft of *Phantasmagoria* pg. 13

<sup>7</sup> See pg. 65

However, despite all of these changes, one element remained constant throughout every draft of the play and this was the title. *Phantasmagoria*, like the stories written at Villa Diodati, is a ghost story. Every draft has been full of shades and shadows looming over my version of Mary's consciousness. The art form of *Phantasmagoria* was a genre of shadow puppet theatre that used reverse projection lanterns and ventriloquism to tell horror stories, many of which had a particular emphasis on the process of galvanism, the re-animation of dead tissue. Because of this trend in the genre I felt very strongly that *Frankenstein* and the *Phantasmagoria* art form shared thematic interests, and I wanted to represent the conversation between styles in the script. In original draft Byron confronted Mary about the similarities between *Frankenstein* and *Dance of the Sorcerers*, but I wanted the second draft to represent the art form more strongly, which is one of the ideas that I held on to throughout the script's development. By the rehearsal draft I had included the presence of more literal shadows and included disembodied voices as homage to the ventriloquism present in *Phantasmagoria* plays.

After engaging with my source material again I was officially invigorated as an artist and had a solid conceptualization of the script I wanted to write. I kept one page, and the title of the original draft and began work on the second. I started to illustrate a world that was centered on Mary's relationships with her sisters and how I imagined that they affected the result of her own writing experiment: *Frankenstein*. These primary source materials helped prepare my script for collaboration. They gave me the creative energy I needed to push the project

towards a company of artists that would lead the script from the individual playwright's mind to a fully fledged play.

## **Lesson 2: Balancing History**

Although *Phantasmagoria* is strongly influenced by historical text and logical inference, one of its primary conceits is that it is a piece of fiction. Historical fiction is a challenging genre because the playwright now has an obligation to balance their personal interests and speculations with historical fact. The writer must decide what pieces of historical information are valuable to the world they are creating and which pieces are non-essential. In some cases, the playwright may embellish on historical moments or completely fabricate the characters' mentalities, actions, or emotional responses for narrative benefit. This was an important part of the process of writing *Phantasmagoria* because the plot was almost entirely speculative. I learned that my duty was not to accurately represent the history, but to create a fully developed world for the company to inhabit.

However, when deviating from history a playwright must make decisions that make sense to an audience that is educated on the source material so they are not taken out of the play by fictional ideas that are too far removed from their own historical understanding. An effort must also be made not to assume too much background knowledge, or the less familiar audience members may feel that the text is inaccessible. This was a balance that I struggled to find throughout the entire writing process, and while I believe that the production of the material was strong,

and audience responses were generally positive, in further workshops of the script I will work to engage both groups of audience members in a more specific and deliberate manner.

One of the moments where I feel the history and the narrative of the script were well balanced was in my representation of Fanny Imlay. Historically, Mary's half-sister did not die until she did so "by her own hand and Swansea (October 9)," 1816, and it is assumed that *Phantasmagoria* is taking place at some point in late August or mid-September (Marshall, xii). I had already determined that Fanny's presence would be necessary to tell the story I was interested in telling but there are many ways to accomplish this without necessarily bending the timeline. I chose to depict Fanny as a ghost because I was exploring my own impressions of what might have influenced *Frankenstein*. When Mary first started writing, the story was a mere "few pages of a short tale" (Shelley, "introduction"). Afterward, she set the project aside until Percy insisted that she expand it. It took two more years to prepare the novel that the audience would know. By this time, Fanny had already passed away, and I believe that it is likely that the emotional influences of this loss became a vital part of the book's expansion.

One of my primary suppositions was that Mary's fascination with resurrection was influenced by the deaths that were accumulating around her. Before the story's inception Mary had lost her first-born daughter, who she named after Fanny. Between *Frankenstein's* inception and the first publication, Mary also lost the adult Fanny, Harriet Shelley (Percy's first wife), and her second daughter who she named after Clara. Mary appeared to be writing an intentional subversion

of motherhood that manifests itself in themes of death or depression caused by isolation, especially from family members. In *Frankenstein*, the monster tells Victor that, “all men hate the wretched; how then must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things! Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us” (Shelley, 81). The bond between creature and creator is the same bond between mother and child. Both of Mary’s daughters who passed away were named after her sisters, and both died shortly after birth, which led me to infer a greater fear or reticence about childbirth and motherhood due to its bastardization in *Frankenstein*. Although this idea may not have ever truly existed for Mary it became central to the conflict between her character and Clara in *Phantasmagoria* and my decision to handle the material in this way came from my reading of her novel.

In *Phantasmagoria*, Mary tells Clara that motherhood is “hard. So much harder than [she] thought it would be”<sup>8</sup>. She tells her this in an attempt to convince Clara that she is not prepared for motherhood, which is a powerful position for a character to take. It activated the narrative I was building even though it is unlikely that the historical Mary Shelley ever told Clara this, particularly because Mary was very often cheered up by the presence of children. However, if my own primary source material was coming from *Frankenstein*, then it was more narratively interesting to include a tension between creature and creator. I attempted to draw attention to this early in the script when Mary shockingly suggests that Dr.

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<sup>8</sup> See pg. 52

Frankenstein “has got to be male.”<sup>9</sup> The character of Mary highlights an intentional lack of feminine energy in *Frankenstein*. However, in the future I believe it would be beneficial for me to focus on how that lack of feminine energy affects the world of Mary Shelley’s characters and the idea that there is some difference between creating life and being a mother.

Another one of my inferences about the historical figures off of which I based my characters was the assumption that Byron had an investment in securing his legacy. One of the tools that Mary uses to convince Clara to manipulate Byron is an “appeal” to his “fatherly side”<sup>10</sup>. Byron had left England forever just four months after his daughter’s birth and described the departure in his poem *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, where he referred to her as his “fair child! / ADA! Sole daughter of my house and heart” (Byron, 1-2). It was significant in this case that Ada Lovelace was Byron’s only legitimate child, which is why he had such high hopes for her.

Annabella, his wife, passionately discouraged Ada from the arts to protect her from falling into her father’s lifestyle. This makes Mary’s idea to offer him the opportunity at a second legitimate child much more enticing and pragmatic. If we understand this as an audience member then it is easier to support Mary’s plan, and it makes her betrayal of Clara’s trust that much more heartbreaking.

However, this thought does hit a hitch, historically speaking, in that Byron would only have been able to divorce Annabella and marry Claire Clairmont by an act of parliament, and Byron would not have been able to return to England in order to accomplish this. It became simpler to think of marriage within the script as an

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<sup>9</sup> See pg. 17

<sup>10</sup> See pg. 23

expression of love and devotion, rather than a legal situation, which is why my characters are able to talk about it casually in a way that seems plausible. It is possible that audience members who were familiar with Byron's political situation may have been taken out of the play by this major plot point, which is why in the future I would attempt to ingrain my reasoning for this decision within some of Mary's dialogue. If the historical Mary Godwin can leave London and start calling herself Mary Shelley as an expression of love and devotion to Percy without the legal documentation, then it stands to reason that the character of Clara Clairmont can expect a similar outcome from her relationship with Byron, even if this would not have been historically possible.

Another Byron moment I embellished was the reference to Byron and Percy's foray onto Lake Geneva in scene four. This particular boat adventure is infamous because Percy fell out of the boat and Byron saved him from drowning. It was on this boat that Byron wrote the third canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and Percy began writing *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*. While *Hymn...* was much more probably about Percy's intellectual relationship with Mary, the sexual imagery in the poem was too narratively delicious in conjunction with the rumors that Byron was "essentially gay" (Shulevitz, *I Love Not Woman the Less, but Man the More*). Because of this, I narratively posited that *Hymn...* was written for Byron, as it develops the off-stage relationship between Byron and Percy, and modernizes Mary's struggles as a woman who was fundamentally monogamous, but supported and lived with a sexually prolific partner. However, the specific details of the adventure were intentionally left out because although they are entertaining, they would not greatly



affect the relationship between Byron and Mary in the scene.

Instead Mary hints at “what happened between the two of [them.] The poem [Percy] read to [Byron.] What happened afterward.”<sup>11</sup> It is possible that Mary is referring to something sexual, but it is also possible that she is simply referencing Percy’s accident and a particular kind of intimacy that comes from saving someone’s life. The benefit of this kind of ambiguity is that the scene works either way. Those who are knowledgeable with what happened historically are satisfied but Mary’s implications are thinly veiled enough that an unfamiliar audience member will not feel left behind because of their lack of knowledge. Although I was not acutely aware of this dichotomy among audience members when writing the scene, this was a moment where both parties were taken care of.

However, because I was the only party in the room who had thoroughly researched the historical figures, I often served as both playwright and dramaturge for the production. Because of my passion and interest in the subject it was difficult to resist the urge to provide more information than was needed for the play, which was a point in which isolating my role as playwright was not successful. Having my historical knowledge as a resource seemed like a helpful tool in rehearsal, but the efficacy of my historical alterations was not properly tested because I was able to answer questions in the room, as opposed to supporting them with textual evidence within the script. It would be dishonest of me to assert that the entirety of the play was successful in addressing the needs of a two-fold audience in this way.

It is also difficult to measure the greater success of the script based on the

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<sup>11</sup> See pg. 43

impulses of a single director. Palmietto rarely referenced historical information if it was not explicitly mentioned in the script, but cast members like Kayla Fallick and Elizabeth Johnson did partake in some of their own character research to expand their understanding of the characters' internal life. If I had been working with a more dramaturgically minded director, historical deviation may have come under greater scrutiny. Despite this, the process that I went through in producing *Phantasmagoria* made me more confident in saying that the world of the play starts with what's on the page, rather than a collection of historical facts.

Giving myself permission to negotiate with fact was one of the most liberating and important discoveries that I made as a writer during this journey, particularly considering my continuing interest in historical fiction. Certain pieces of historical information may not need to be included and their omission might not need to be justified unless it contributes significantly to the quality of the text. This was very much the case with my characterization of Fanny and Byron. However, in other instances, certain historically informed decisions require further exploration with the company, as with my characterization of Clara and Mary's failure to meet the commandment of being both great and good. As a playwright I would want to say that the world we are concerned with is the world on the page, but this becomes difficult when acting decisions may be informed by historical fact. Moreover, before the play was performed I was largely unaware of the necessity of taking care of the audience members with different levels of historical knowledge. Although there were moments of success in the script, as it continues to develop I will take particular care to address what the implications are of the deviations from history in

order to create a script that is more balanced.

### **Lesson 3: Pragmatic Challenges**

Beyond simply writing a script, I had to address some of the practical challenges of turning the script into a play. This meant bringing on a specific team of collaborators with whom I would be working to translate the two-dimensional world on the page into a multi-dimensional experience for the audience. Jiréh Breon Holder organized a meeting with Lisa Paulsen (director of the Playwriting Center of Theater Emory), Malina Rodriguez (Assistant Technical Director of Theater Emory), and myself. It was very clear that a full production was an ambitious goal without the institutionalized support of an existing production company. Our collective solutions were to reduce the manpower necessary to produce the play by searching for a site-specific location, and to hire a professional producer and director that could tackle much of the administrative work and guide the transition from a script to a fully formed play, which was the most essential part of my research.

The first challenge was to build a production team that would prevent me from sacrificing the script because I was attempting to produce the play on my own. Emory alumnus Amanda Camp was brought on as a producer. Throughout the process she organized three separate table reads, managed communication between all of the outside organizations with whom we were working (including rehearsal/venue reservations), and put together the remainder of the production company. Camp assembled a large portion of my artistic team, including our

assistant stage managers, sound, lighting, and properties designers, which took a great deal of work out of my hands.

Because she has been a trusted colleague in the past, Camp also performed some dramaturgical duties before we entered rehearsals. She was able to provide artistic support in the table reads that occurred before the production's director was brought onto the team. Camp was heavily invested in Clara's arc and took notes tracking thematic elements that she noticed in the second draft like sight vs. blindness and talk of heaven and hell. While the sight and blindness motifs largely fell to the wayside, I ended up leaning into Byron's religious sensibilities, and how they might have affected Mary's understanding of Fanny's suicide. "Byron's attitude to religion is often misunderstood... Byron had done nothing to earn the 'reputation of an atheist'" (Cochran, 1). This is why Byron is the character who asks Mary if "Fanny is in heaven"<sup>12</sup>. Although Mary did *not* have deeply religious sensibilities she surrounded herself with religious theory and criticism, and it was narratively helpful to have Mary question a religion where her sister would not be in heaven because on the off chance that Christian theology is correct, this would be "the only time [they] have"<sup>13</sup>. Camp's contribution led me to believe that this was another situation where the narrative benefits of embellishing my impressions about Mary's influences outweighed the need for historical accuracy. Even if it was a theatrical invention, introducing this theological lens heightened the stakes of Mary's need to be with the ghost of Fanny, and this realization was brought forward by Camp's

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<sup>12</sup> See pg. 70

<sup>13</sup> See pg. 78

unexpected dramaturgical contribution, proving that inviting her perspective into the work was not only a pragmatic decision, but also an artistically fruitful one.

Elements of pragmatism became a challenge when the decision was made to produce *Phantasmagoria* site-specifically. Even after the departure from my original draft, my vision for the show included incredibly realistic storms, surreally colored lighting looks, and a plethora of nooks for people and objects to hide since my representation of Fanny's ghost looms over most of the dramatic action in the script. I hoped to push the world of the play more towards a surreal dream, taking place entirely within Mary's head. When the decision was made to produce the show in an existing library space my initial impulse was to pare down the technical demands of the show. My brain immediately compartmentalized theatrical effects to theatrical spaces. The transitions that I was taking great care to craft artistically almost disappeared because I was concerned about the pragmatic challenges of site-specific theater rather than the liberation of not needing a scenic designer, construction crew, or painters. Camp, Holder, Paulsen, and director Nichole Palmietto reminded me that my duty as a playwright was to write the script, to determine what living in the world would sound like and where the audience would be taken. It was the production team's job to create the visual effects of the world based on the clues I had left in the writing. Letting myself be a dramatist and writing the art of the script rather than writing the production of the play was an example of when I forced myself to give up control and trust that the other artists would bring their ideas to the table in a big way, which was a huge facet of a fully collaborative process.

Despite my concerns, I wrote a script that was full of storms, swirling shadows, and shifting chronology because that was the world I needed to create. Miraculously, the production still included color cues, flashing lightning, various storm ambiance, and ethereal voices that haunted the room from many different locations. Neither the production nor the script ended up being the surreal fantasia I had hoped it would be, but despite this, many of the production elements exceeded my wildest expectations and created a space that felt innately theatrical. Although the art that the full team was able to accomplish in the Oxford Road Living Room was astounding, we still needed to prioritize our investment in particular elements.

As I have mentioned, *Phantasmagoria* is a historically influenced piece, but is not intended to be a true period play. It contains intentional anachronisms in the language and even though the words exist at an elevated level they are modern. There is something delightful about Mary proclaiming that her guilt about Fanny's death is "paralyzing. It sucks"<sup>14</sup>. In order to efficiently play the anachronisms, and knowing that we would be in a modern space, we decided that the only period elements should be the things that are closest to the actors: costumes and properties. The other elements, like sound and lighting did not need to maintain an authenticity to the period as long as they maintained an authenticity to the script. But even though the modern environment was alluring in production, it did create some complications with the writing itself.

Period drama and living room drama (plays that happen entirely in a single room of a house) are very closely associated with one another as genres of theatre

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<sup>14</sup> See pg. 68

and in my endeavor to step away from making *Phantasmagoria* a period piece, I also hoped to step away from only utilizing a single location in the script. I believe this was more successful in the writing than in production. In the script, characters transition fluidly from their present to their pasts, immediately transporting themselves from the library of Villa Diodati, to the sisters' childhood home, to the streets of London in the middle of a rainstorm. Because the play is a fictionalization of Mary's mind and her internal conflict I had hoped that the feeling of the location might exist farther outside of the literal than was chosen for this particular production.

After Mary reveals Clara's pregnancy to Byron "*a chasm opens*"<sup>15</sup>. While Palmietto decided to interpret this as an acting beat, I believe there could be a production of this script where pieces of Mary's world are literally disappearing or cracking as she loses sight of herself. However, because the play occurred in a living room it would have been nearly impossible for the audience to forget that they were in a living room. My intended departure from living room drama was not aided by the fact that, with limited exception, characters very rarely use tools other than their words to get what they want. As the script continues to develop, I intend to further explore the means by which I can break down the stagnancy of living room drama in *Phantasmagoria* and I believe that to accomplish this I will have to adopt even more vividly surreal decisions.

Despite this criticism of the work, and the challenges of having a location imposed upon a script, the process of accommodating that imposition was still

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<sup>15</sup> See pg. 73

beneficial to my growth as a playwright. It forced me to focus on the script as opposed to the production elements that were not my purview. By reducing my administrative workload I was able to expend more intellectual energy on the process of rewriting in rehearsals rather than managing the whole production. In many ways, I learned that writing “pragmatically” is not necessarily a practical choice for the development of a script because it inflicts production demands upon the writing, which has the potential to be artistically stifling.

#### **Lesson 4: The Strength of Voices that Were Not Mine**

The most profound absence that I felt in the original draft of *Phantasmagoria* was the absence of Mary’s voice, but inviting a wealth of voices and opinions into the development of the script helped determine the most effective presentation of the world I intended to create. I drew upon the advice and expertise of the theatrically minded people with whom I surrounded myself, and I took intentional strides to directly represent the voices of the characters and their influences in the dialogue. Although I would retain sole authorship and decision rights concerning the script, I challenged myself to bolster the strength of the writing by encouraging a Socratic dialogue between Palmietto, the actors, and myself. This confirmed for me that the process of turning a script into a play is a highly social one, and involves a multitude of eyes and voices to contribute to the process.

In order to highlight thematic similarities between *Frankenstein* and *Phantasmagoria*, I added quotes from *Frankenstein* into the aural landscape of my



script at the points where I felt that the overlap was strongest. However, in order to earn this motif throughout the play, I had to establish that it was part of the world early on. Mary's first line is "To be great and good was the commandment given to me by my mother,"<sup>16</sup> a derivative alteration of "to be great and good was the precept given me by my father," which was included in a brief journal passage from *Mary Shelley, Romance and Reality* (Sunstein, 9). Because the play begins this way, we are hearing the voice of both Mary the character and Mary the historical figure stating what is essentially the major dramatic question of *Phantasmagoria*: will Mary be able to meet the commandment of being both great and good?

The next time we hear a direct quote from *Frankenstein* it is in the transition between scenes four and five<sup>17</sup> as Mary is spiraling back into the past. Quotes like "There is something at work in my soul, which I do not understand," "I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend," and "hers was the misery of innocence" foreshadow Mary's fall from grace, and that her guilt and fear are what drive her towards her attempt to force Clara's miscarriage, just as it is the monster's fear and isolation that make him violent (Shelley, 8, 81, 71). In *Phantasmagoria*, Mary craves guilt. She feeds off of it out of a need to feel responsible for Fanny's death because that is the only way that she will be with her daughter.<sup>18</sup> Voices swirl through the rest of the scene, hitting on themes of isolation and desolation. While Mary searches for Clara she hears, "I was a shattered wreck, --the shadow of a human being" (Shelley, 159). Because of her betrayal of Fanny, Mary feels that she is

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<sup>16</sup> See pg. 13

<sup>17</sup> See pg. 56

<sup>18</sup> See pg. 78

personally responsible for the depression that would eventually lead to Fanny's suicide. In *Frankenstein*, Victor recollects his emotional state while first escaping his monster and the guilt he feels for bringing his creation into the world. Their experiences and mental states feel comparable in this moment. By adding pieces of text from the novel that is percolating in Mary (the character's) mind, I was able to add a level of authenticity to the piece that did not exist based on my voice alone. It enhanced the theatricality of these moments and therefore drew attention to the deviation from the rest of the script's language, refocusing the story on Mary and the destruction of her mental state as she loses the ability to make earnestly good decisions.

In the revision phase of *Phantasmagoria*, between the original draft and the rehearsal draft, Mary was very rarely dethroned from her position of power in the room. Her intelligence kept her afloat, and even in her emotionally vulnerable moments she was always in control. This is problematic for a script because it creates a stagnant piece of drama. In one of the first table reads, Camp prodded that if my goal was to take Mary Shelley out of the realm of the legendary I would have to let her be wrong. Mary's character was already overbearing and struggling to give up control when she needed to, but it wasn't until I received this comment that I started to push Mary's character towards a more archetypal anti-hero. Allowing her to make bigger mistakes activated the plot. The breaking point for Clara used to be the discovery of Mary's betrayal of trust, however, by leaning into Mary's darker impulses I was able to conceive of her decision "to terminate the pregnancy"<sup>19</sup>. This

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<sup>19</sup> See pg. 91

decision heightened the stakes for all of the characters at the end of the play and gave Mary a great but terrible decision to climb towards. In essence, it made the whole play more actable for Mary's character, which was a point at which I believe the final product succeeded, and one with a value I had not necessarily anticipated.

Palmietto, and actor Elizabeth Johnson, believed that part of the feminist tragedy of Mary Shelley is that her significance as a literary figure makes her feel unapproachable. By letting Mary win all of the time I had been treating her with a reverence that made her seem like a legendary figure instead of an intimately human one. However, if I allowed myself to free the plot from my historical knowledge then I could write a better play that was more earnestly for contemporary women than a historical play would typically be. Ironically, it seemed that in order to humanize Mary, I would have to invent an anti-hero narrative and increase the volume on the character's flaws. Like the resurrection of Frankenstein, Mary's terrible decision in the script was a mix of what seemed like science and magic:

VOICE  
Tansy oil.

MARY  
Tansy oil to make the blood bitter.

VOICE  
Pennyroyal.

MARY  
Pennyroyal kills parasites and will disguise the taste.

VOICE  
Rue.

MARY  
Rue. Dampens sexual desire.

VOICE  
Ergot.

MARY  
Ergot kernels. High in alkaloids. A mild  
toxin.

VOICE	MARY
And poppy to ease the pain.	And poppy to ease the pain. <sup>20</sup>

The voice, an evil and twisted version of what the character imagines her daughter's voice may have sounded like, compels her to one of her most powerful and heart-wrenching moments of the script. Adding the poison to Clara's water signifies Mary's spiritual death, which affirms that Clara's decision to regain independence is the right one, even if there is an element of doubt about her ability to raise the child. Clara's exit became the penultimate event to the true climax, where Mary was granted a similar moment of catharsis by accepting her guilt for alienating Clara, and rejecting guilt for Fanny's suicide. I strongly believe that the climax of the play would not have been taken as far or been as impactful if my collaborators had not given me permission to let Mary fall.

However, this particular decision is an especially polarizing one, since Mary goes too far in her attempt to protect her sister. It is likely that for many audience members this makes her completely unforgivable, which means that her moment of catharsis at the end of the play might not matter. The realization that her real crime is the way she behaved towards Clara and not any role she may have played in

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<sup>20</sup> See pg. 80-81

Fanny's suicide becomes insignificant. This is an unintended consequence of how far I took Mary's fall from grace. Although I do believe that Mary as a character should not be exempt from making large mistakes, in future development of the script it might be worth letting her reveal her mistake before Clara "*Takes a long sip of water*"<sup>21</sup> so the audience can have legitimate chance to forgive her. My goal for the moment is to show the audience that Mary has failed in her quest to be both great and good, but retain some sense of understanding that the expectations put upon powerful women are incredibly difficult to accommodate.

Similarly, I made an attempt to balance the feedback of my collaborators while maintaining complete authorship over the text. In the initial table reads, discussions about the script addressed specific questions that I posed to the readers much like the playwriting workshops with which I had become accustomed. However, there came a point in the process where I began to welcome prescriptive comments because I discovered that part of my duty as a playwright was to recognize when a moment was not working and listen to a second opinion if necessary. While I was always at liberty to reject a suggestion, I found that a second pair of eyes from readers like Palmietto and Holder was incredibly helpful in determining when individual lines or parts of lines were superfluous. This is not to suggest that the cuts would not have been made eventually, but rather an acknowledgement that a second set of trained ears is an incredibly effective tool in pruning a script.

Throughout rehearsals, Palmietto and I made a particular effort to ensure

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<sup>21</sup> See pg. 91

that characters were responding directly to each other, rather than inserting a tangential idea before answering the question they had been asked or reacting explosively to previous comments. When Mary describes her love for Percy, Byron asks her:

BYRON

Why are you telling me this?

MARY

~~You asked.~~

BYRON

~~I wasn't expecting you to be honest with me.~~

MARY

~~I'm honest~~ because you get it.<sup>22</sup>

The text in the middle was cut because the essential piece of information, that Byron was not expecting Mary to be honest with him, was an actable moment. I was so caught up in writing Mary's wit that I neglected to let her answer the question. Cutting these lines made the moment more intimate, and more compelling for the actors in the room.

It was one of Palmietto's suggestions to target Byron's need to secure his "legacy" after Annabella Byron "Took [his daughter] away"<sup>23</sup>. This decision gave Byron a more concrete reason for returning at the end of the play and energized Mary's advocacy for Clara to reveal her secret because she had a particular plan to follow. The editing process became much more immediate because of the other voices in the room and the communal desire to answer questions thoroughly and efficiently. Seeing changes immediately rather than waiting weeks or months for a

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<sup>22</sup> See pg. 68. ~~Text~~ indicates lines cut per Palmietto's suggestion

<sup>23</sup> See pg. 73

table read was a new and exciting part of bringing the script to full collaboration that I had not been able to experience before as an undergraduate playwriting student. Having the full company of actors in the room through most of the rehearsal process allowed me to see multiple versions of a scene on their feet before deciding which pages would remain. Hearing lines and edits multiple times in a single evening simplified the process of making decisions about the text because it allowed for multiple opportunities to consider a change. This let me to be judicious with my edits in a manner that I had not experienced before, even in the pre-rehearsal table readings of this script.

Though it was a privilege to work with a team of actors who were willing to let me play with the script, going to full production also meant that it was necessary to exhibit restraint as we approached the end of the rehearsal period. I was obligated to put the pen down and stop editing so the actors would have the opportunity to memorize and prepare their best work for the audience. This was the first time I was required to exhibit restraint as an editor and force a sense of completion despite the urge to continue working. It was in this part of the process that I realized the necessity of a second full production before a script is ready for publication.

Although the whole process was an incredibly valuable learning experience, I also had to accept that the script was not quite as ready for production as I hoped it would be. This fact comes with surprising pros as well as cons. The positive side is that the additional talent in the room took the script in stride and prepared a very solid performance. However, the strength of my collaborator's artistic skill may

have also served to cover up choppy transitions. A moment at which designers, advisers, and actors rarely batted an eyelash once we entered rehearsals was the following exchange between Byron and Mary:

BYRON

No buts. You're the smartest person I've ever met. And more than that, despite all of your circumstances, you're kind. That's better than I can do.

MARY

You're kind.

BYRON

To you. But I have lived a very charmed life.

MARY

Not Entirely. You're estranged from your daughter. Hasn't that been hard?<sup>24</sup>

Mary has just come from a moment of intense self-deprecation and in the course of these four lines has made the decision to enact her plan to get Byron to marry Clara. My thought process, and the thought that Palmietto expressed to the actors, was that Byron's compassion has proved to Mary that he is capable of being a father and worthy of Clara's interest but the change happens so suddenly in the text that I believe an additional line or two may yet be necessary before the second beat is earned. Despite this, the actors were able to extend the fade from the first acting beat to the second in a way that was not as jarring to see performed as it is to read. This shows that good collaborators can unintentionally fix a lot of problems in a script without edits being made, particularly when moments are too abrupt or too repetitive. However, I believe that there is an even more important lesson to be

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<sup>24</sup> see pg. 71-2



derived from this because it proved that the script wasactable by a team of young performers who could earnestly live in the world of these characters for an extended period of time.

Characters exist as vehicles for actors to fill with their own ideas and experiences. Acting is a very fluid thing because a performer's job is to mold their experiences to the shape of the character, much in the same way that fluids take the shape of their container. The playwright's text builds a core understanding of the character and constructs the container that the actors are required to fill. Essentially, the script becomes the primary source material for any production of the text. In the particular instance of *Phantasmagoria*, although the script is certainly in need of a second production before it could be considered complete, my collaborators were able to effectively use the script and operate on the same basic assumptions about the play.

Although it was not entirely finished, the success of the script so far is largely indicative of the significant presence and strength of voices that are not mine. In the particular instance of this script, the specific insight of outside eyes was essential, because my mind had been working on the world of this script for three years. A fresh team of minds elevated the writing beyond its previous capabilities. Working with Nichole and Holder also trained me to be more aware and receptive to moments that needed to be cut. I gained experience in letting go of notions that were too personally influenced and learning what moments were worth defending for the sake of creating a world that was genuine and important to me as a playwright. These are skills that can only be developed through practice. As I

continue to work with actors and directors my voice will both strengthen and grow more accustomed to compromise, which is an important factor in the generation of new work because playwriting is a highly social and company-oriented medium.

### **Lesson 5: Moving Forward**

Before embarking on this endeavor my experience as a playwright had only covered the first of two important steps. I knew how to write the ideas in my mind on the page effectively, but I had never experienced the process of bringing the script from the page into stage. This is essential to the job of a playwright because without an audience it is impossible to have theater, so without a production a play is simply an unproduced script. Over the past year I have experienced the entire process from inception to closing night. I experienced the tremendous difference between knowing something theoretically and experiencing it in practice. Now, with more functional knowledge of what a full collaboration is like, it raises the question: Where will I go from here?

Like Mary Shelley with *Frankenstein* I will take a break from working on *Phantasmagoria* before pursuing a second production. Other projects that have been forming in the back of my brain are itching to come to life and I will pay homage to that creative impulse to prevent my work on *Phantasmagoria* from being too stale, which I believe would be a detriment to the script and its progress so far. Instead, I will use the tools that I have gained from this process and apply them to whatever my next piece may be.

Firstly, I will allow myself the freedom to take space from projects and return to them when I feel ready, or when the creative impulse is triggered by a new piece of source material or other inspiration. I will continue to nurture the script by not rushing into a production and ensuring that it is truly ready for a rehearsal process before submitting it. In order to accomplish this I will use my network of artists to expand the intensity and duration of my development process. Because a large portion of what I learned about the script itself came from the first week of rehearsals I would attempt to bring a room of collaborators together for a seven-day workshop in order to recreate that first week. This would ensure that the product I was offering at the beginning of the rehearsal process would be

When writing a historical play, I will take greater strides to negotiate with history, and beyond simply accounting for the past, I will account for the present. If my script deviates from historical fact I will make sure that all deviations are earned and serve a thematic purpose within the script. When I do return to *Phantasmagoria* I would like to explore the current cultural significance of portraying the typically hysterical Clara as the budding voice of reason. It will become necessary to consider more fully how the script I am writing fits within the current socio-political climate of its audiences and I believe that taking another look at the climax of the play will be a good place to begin this discussion.

I will write for the art in the script rather than the necessity of production. When returning to *Phantasmagoria* I will utilize even more profound elements of surrealism to create a world that feels even less attached to physical space and time. The work will excite my collaborators because it challenges them in exciting ways

without solving problems for them. I will invite the voices of others to influence my thought process in order to make the script feel genuine, but I will not give up the aspects of the play that are important to. The script will provide strong vessels for the actors to fill, and, as I did through this first production of *Phantasmagoria*, I will continue to make them stronger throughout the course of rehearsals.

Although the process of producing *Phantasmagoria*, like any artistic process, was imperfect, it was also invaluable to my growth as a writer and theater artist. Acknowledging the flaws and reflecting on the process taught me what it takes to leave the solitary activity of writing a script and having total control, and how to engage fully in the collaborative process where a playwright has to relinquish some control to others, in order for the production to live fully on stage.

### **Annotated Bibliography**

Byron, George Gordon. "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage - Canto III." *KNARF Project*, University of Pennsylvania, [knarf.english.upenn.edu/Byron/charold3.html](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Byron/charold3.html).

The poem that Byron penned while on Lake Geneva with Percy Shelley, it contains references to Byron's daughter Ada.

Cantor, A. Paul. "Mary Shelley and the Taming of the Byronic Hero: "Transformation" and *The Deformed Transformed*." *The Other Mary Shelley*. Edited by Audrey A. Fisch, Anne K. Mellor, and Esther H. Schor. New York, NY: Oxford University Press 1993. 89-107 Print.

Cantor describes Victor Frankenstein as aggressively attempting to remove the female from her role as a mother, and the resulting criticism of this behavior is a critique of Mary's Romantic contemporaries and the Byronic Hero. My attempt was to portray Mary the character as a tame Byronic Hero whose gravity does not come from a sexual energy but an intellectual energy.

Cima, Gay Gibson. *Performing Women: Female Characters, Male Playwrights, and the Modern Stage*. N.p.: Cornell UP, 1993. Print.

Cima's collection of essays provides a subjective academic perspective on how male playwrights like Strindberg and Ibsen have written female characters, where they have done so effectively, and how they can improve where they did not. She discusses how Strindberg's most successful characters are "silenced by the sheer weight of repeating the waking dream itself" (75). Clara implies that Mary has had her dream about Fanny many times. When Mary is thrown back to her memories of Fanny and Clara in scenes three and five she is being forced to relive the moments she regrets most and the compulsion of her nightmares has followed her into the waking world.

Peter, Cochran. "Byron's Religions. Introduction" *Cambridge Scholars Publishing*, 2011, [www.cambridgescholars.com/download/sample/58119](http://www.cambridgescholars.com/download/sample/58119).

Cochran prefaces this collection of essays about Byron's shifting religious practices. He outlines the chronology of Byron's religious education and some of the events that led towards his changeable perspective on religious practice and theology. The article informed a lot of the philosophically oriented conversations between Mary and Byron.

Ellis, Ferguson Kate. "Subversive Surfaces: The Limits of Domestic Affeciton in Mary Shelley's Later Fiction." *The Other Mary Shelley*. Edited by Audrey A. Fisch, Anne K. Mellor, and Esther H. Schor. New York, NY: Oxford University Press 1993. 220-235 Print.

Ellis explores the continued theme of the horrors of maternal bonding throughout Mary Shelley's oeuvre. I believe that this indicates a certain lack of resolution or ambiguity in her personal life after the publication of *Frankenstein*. This is likely because of Mary's physical illness and the losses in her family that she would continue to experience. However, avoiding a sense of resolution in *Phantasmagoria* did not feel appropriate to the world we wanted to create. It would have been cruel and decidedly anti-feminist to watch Mary suffer on stage for over an hour without giving her a moment of emotional catharsis or an opportunity for change.

Gittings, Robert. "Part one: Claire and the Shelleys." *Claire Clairmont and the Shelleys 1798-1879*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press 1992. 3-66 Print.

A biography of Claire Clairmont's childhood and initial friendship with Mary and Fanny, chronicling her life from her entrance to the family through the death of baby Allegra. The selection spends a few chapters discussing the summer of 1816 and how it affected her future relationships with Byron and the Shelleys. The book glossed over Claire Clairmont's decision to change her name, which caused some personal confusion throughout the process. However, it did provide me with the sense that a lot of strain was put on Mary and Claire's relationship throughout their stay in Geneva. This informed the end of Clara's arc and I decided to include Mary and Claire's later estrangement as part of the play.

Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. "Horror's Twin: Mary Shelley's Monstrous Eve." *Madwoman in the Attic, The: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. N.p.: Yale UP., 1979. 213-47. Print.

Gilbert and Gubar interpret Frankenstein as a Romantic reading of Milton's "Paradise Lost". This essay dives into the way women respond to clusters of misogynistic themes in male writing, particularly in stories about Hell. Gilbert and Gubar address this idea, connecting it to Mary's feelings about her dead mother and her romance with Percy. This birthed the conversation between Mary and Byron in scene six about whether or not Fanny is in heaven.

Hill, John M. "'Frankenstein' and the Physiognomy of Desire." *Hill, "Frankenstein and the Physiognomy of Desire"*. University of Pennsylvania, 2003. Web.

Hill examines "Frankenstein" as an exploration of Promethian Sin, meaning desire and particularly the desire of exclusive love between a child and its mother. In *Phantasmagoria* Mary's "prow of a ship in summer" speech is indicative of the difficulty she experiences in letting go of her desire for exclusive love with Percy. I interpret Hill's explanation of Promethian Sin as containing an element of hubris, by asserting that the mother should be the sole proprietor of her child's affections. Mary demonstrates a similar level of hubris in claiming that her current suffering is her "punishment...For Fanny. For [her] daughter."<sup>25</sup>

Kahane, Claire. "The Gothic Mirror." *The (m)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*. N.p.: Cornell UP, 1986. 334-51. Print.

Kahane examines the tradition of Female Gothic literature, and the ways in which the gothic novel is congenial to the Female imagination. Gothic tales tend to include large houses with terrible secrets and women who are either trying to become like their mother or trying desperately to not be like their mother. Neither Mary nor Clara has an especially positive relationship with their mother and both take issue with being compared to their mother throughout the play.

Mellor, Anne K. *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters*. N.p.: Routledge, 1989. Print.

Mellor focuses on Mary Shelley's lack of a stable loving family, and her attempt to fabricate that both in her life and in her fiction. While Mary's was fairly fond of her father and spent a great deal of her life caring for him, there was a time where her family structure was falling apart. This creates a dramatic sense of urgency in their escape, which is why the chronology of the journey out of London takes on some historical inaccuracies.

Mossman, Mark. "Acts of Becoming: Autobiography, *Frankenstein*, and the Postmodern Body." *Frankenstein: Interrogating Gender, Culture and Identity*.

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<sup>25</sup> See pg. 46

Edited by Anjana Sharma. New Dehli, India: MacMillan India Limited, 2004.  
80-98 Print.

Mossman addresses Mary Shelley's novel as piece that is grotesque and sewn together, and can therefore be read from a perspective of ability and disability, and health and illness. This pertains to Byron's own fears of disability and Mary Shelley's familial difficulty with depression as a form of disability. Psychological disability and depression are physicalized in *Phantasmagoria* by the decision to not let Mary leave the stage until the end of the play, when she begins to overcome the feeling of being trapped by her guilt.

Palmietto, Nichole. *Director's Note. Director's Note*, Phantasmagoria Program, 2018.

This was the published director's note that appeared in the program for the run of *Phantasmagoria* in the Oxford Road Living Room from February 22<sup>nd</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup>.

Ruhl, Sarah. *Eurydice*. N.p.: Methuen Drama, 2010. Print.

Sarah Ruhl's play exists outside of time and mythology even though it deals with mythological figures. Her stage directions are transcendent and I have modeled my stage directions after her method in order to create a more artistically engaging landscape.

Ruhl, Sarah. *In the Next Room, Or, The Vibrator Play*. N.p.: Theatre Communications Group, 2010. Print.

Sarah Ruhl's historical play about love, sexuality, and the treatment women in the early electrical era was one of the plays that I read specifically for this project. She balances the cast in terms of gender but effectively tells a story about a historical female. This particular piece is also more for women today than it is about women in the late nineteenth century.

Russell, Ken, director. *Gothic*. Vestron Pictures, 1986.

As one of the most popular film adaptations of the Romantic's visit to Villa Diodati, it was important to me not to recreate a story about Mary Shelley that has already been told and consumed in such a popular medium.

Shelley, Mary. "Frankenstein." *Frankenstein, by Mary Shelley*. The University of Adelaide Library, 05 Mar. 2014. Web.

This edition of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was published in 1831 and is the first revision to the text made since its original publication in 1818. The voices that Mary hears in *Phantasmagoria* come directly from her text. They serve as a literal representation of her voice in my play and are used in places where thematic moments of *Frankenstein* and *Phantasmagoria* line up in conversation with one another.

Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft. "Introduction." *Wollstonecraft Shelley, Mary*, Romantic Circles: University of Maryland, 1 May 2009,  
[www.rc.umd.edu/editions/frankenstein/1831v1/intro](http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/frankenstein/1831v1/intro).

Mary's introduction to the 1831 Publication of *Frankenstein* is one of the few first hand accounts of the inception of *Frankenstein*. The introduction was what initially drew my interest to the place in Geneva, and became less directly significant as I deviated from the actual historical fact of Mary's initial attempt to tell the story.

Shelley, Mary, Paula R. Feldman, and Diana Scott-Kilvert. *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844*. Vol. 1. N.p.: Clarendon, 1987. Print.

This text was essential to the development of my understanding of Mary Shelley as a character. This book is a collection of her and Percy's thoughts during the early years of their marriage. It covers the time period from Mary learning of her pregnancy through the death of Percy and her decision to stay with Byron.

Shelley, Percy. *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*. Edited by Neil Fraistat. Compiled by Donald H. Reiman. New York, NY: Norton, 2002. Print.

The collection of Percy Shelley's notable poetry and prose provides great insight to the political and social sensibilities of my most significant off-stage character, and his friendships with Lord Byron, Mary Shelley, and Thomas Love Peacock. It contains *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*.

Shulevitz, Judith. "I Love Not Woman the Less, but Man More." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 12 Jan. 2003, [www.nytimes.com/2003/01/12/books/i-love-not-woman-the-less-but-man-more.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/12/books/i-love-not-woman-the-less-but-man-more.html).

This article is a NYT book review for Fiona McCarthy's biography of Lord Byron which dives deeply into his sexual history with his servants, both male and female. Shulevitz summarizes the biography quite succinctly by honing in on McCarthy's primary point, which is that Byron was effectively gay and experienced a profound love for some of the young men in his life, rather than simply a sexual lust.

Silverman, Jen. *The Moors*. 2016. TS. Yale Repertory Theater, n.p.

This is a modern play featuring a predominantly female cast and suggesting time period, rather than being an explicit period piece. The play also deals with female on female competition and the rise of female writers. It addresses what women have to do in order to become a writer of note in the early nineteenth century. *The Moors* also includes an unprecedented rock murder ballad that explodes any sense of naturalism earlier in the play. Seeing Silverman's success with the piece is a reminder that just because I was writing a historical play does not mean I have to write naturalistically.

Sunstein, Emily W. *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality*. N.p.: Johns Hopkins UP, 1991. Print.

This is a biographical set of critical essays on the life and writing of Mary Shelley. This book provided insight to Mary's relationships with her two sisters and the possibilities for how her family by choice influenced her writing in ways her biological family were never able.



Todd, Janet. *Death and the maidens: Fanny Wollstonecraft and the Shelley circle.*

Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2007. Print.

This book is one of the few notable biographies of Fanny Imlay and her relationship with her father, George Godwin. This relationship heavily influences her character arc in the script that I am writing.

Whale, James, director. *The Bride of Frankenstein.* Universal Pictures Corp., 1935.

James Whale's film was one of the earliest films to address the inception of *Frankenstein* rather than simply the content of the novel. It also deviates from its source materials by fictionalizing a sequel to the original story of *Frankenstein*. This was not a narrative that especially interested me in my research, but an acknowledgment that there has been precedent for such deviations and speculations.

Whyte, Hollingsworth William. "Is anybody listening?" *Fortune Magazine.* 06,

September, 1950: pg. 174. Print.

In Whyte's most popular publication of sociological research, he discusses a sense of fundamental impossibility in effective communication.