

Staging the Shelleys: A Case Study in Romantic Biodrama

by

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Abstract

Although it has been nearly two hundred years since they lived and wrote, Romantic writers Mary and Percy Bysshe Shelley continue to haunt the theatre in the twenty-first century. However, it is not only their plays, poems, and novels that have been adapted for the modern stage. Beginning in the twentieth century, renewed interest in the Shelleys' lives led to the composition of numerous biographical plays based on Mary and Percy's personal and creative partnership. But while these nineteenth-century writers enjoyed particular moments of such interest in the 1980s, the early twenty-first century has seen this interest flourish like never before. Consequently, the turn of the twenty-first century coincided with an unprecedented increase in the number and variety of plays about the Shelleys' lives, writing, and literary legacies. As a testament to this recent resurgence, more than twenty theatrical adaptations of the Shelleys have been created and staged in the last twenty years.

But although these plays continue to feature both Shelleys, most contemporary biographical plays about the couple now privilege Mary as their focal figure and prioritize her life, writing, and perspective. In this way, these plays represent a creative corollary of a broader cultural shift in interest from Percy to Mary as a biographical subject, which was first initiated in the 1980s through the recovery efforts of Mary Shelley scholars. Consequently, while Percy was the favored biographical subject for more than a century after his death, Mary Shelley has since emerged as a Romantic celebrity and her life story is now being reimagined and retold on the contemporary stage.

With this theatrical history and active cultural interest as my point of departure, this project explores this efflorescence through a focused consideration of the Shelleys' representations through contemporary biographical plays. To that end, I investigate the

“Shelleyan project” through its representation in contemporary biographical plays—what I call Romantic Biodramas. This dissertation is therefore devoted to the critical examination of the Shelleys’ personal and authorial entanglement, as it has been theatrically imagined in the last twenty years: from 1997 to 2017. I am documenting and examining how theatrical practitioners are relating to the Shelleys, adapting their lives and writing, and practically representing them onstage for contemporary theatre audiences. Most significantly, I have not limited my research to reading the scripts for meaning. Instead, I go beyond the texts themselves to recreate material conditions of production, recover the stories surrounding these plays-in-performance, and actively contribute to the archive of existing performances.

To complete my study of these plays and recompose their performance histories, I rely on close reading of play texts and secondary sources, such as reviews, playbills, prompt books or practitioner interviews. Furthermore, my dramaturgical approach entails situating each play by looking at its unique conditions of production, such as geographical location, company mandate, or performance venue, as well as formal, generic, and stylistic elements. My exemplary performance case studies include three plays-in-production: Rose Scollard’s *Caves of Fancy* (1997) and Darrah Teitel’s *The Apology* (2011 and 2013). Additionally, my research into Romantic Biodrama also involved a creative approach to the subject through a Performance-as-Research (PaR) component of the project: the writing and staging of a new Romantic Biodrama. Accordingly, my fourth performance case study chronicles the process of bringing *Justified Sinners* (2017) to life. Finally, I include the full performance text for *Justified Sinners*, as well as key paratextual resources from its premiere production, to preserve and re-create the unique conditions of production surrounding this Romantic Biodrama.

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The Shelleys' Theatrical Afterlives

Louis Édouard Fournier's 1889 painting, entitled *The Funeral of Shelley*, is a Victorian-era reimagining of one of Romanticism's most mythologized events. On July 8th, 1822, Percy Shelley drowned in the Gulf of Spezia, along with Edward Williams and Charles Vivien. The story goes that when Percy's¹ body washed ashore near Viareggio, a makeshift cremation was staged: an infernal ceremony presided over by his eccentric friend, Edward John Trelawny,² and attended by Leigh Hunt and Lord Byron. In *The Funeral of Shelley*, Fournier's re-creation of this event both reflected, and contributed to, Percy Shelley's re-conception as an angelic, Christ-like³ figure in the late nineteenth century. The painting focalizes the image of Percy, lying on his funeral pyre and ensconced in a cloud of billowing smoke. His noble mien and peaceful expression suggest that he is perhaps not dead, only sleeping. Percy's three disciples stand at his

¹ For the sake of clarity, I refer to the Shelleys by their first names, Mary and Percy, throughout this project. However, I acknowledge that Percy was often called "Shelley" in life and is still primarily identified as such in Shelleyan scholarship. Regarding quoted materials, I endeavor to clarify to which Shelley is being referred, wherever context is not sufficient.

² Trelawny infamously described the ceremony in his *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron* (1858) and his vivid account seemingly undercut the veracity of Fournier's painted scene. For example, he discloses that "Leigh Hunt remained in the carriage," while "Byron could not face this scene" and so "withdrew to the beach," and he describes the appearance of Percy's body in grotesque terms that belie his pristine image here. But although there are notable differences between these two depictions and the legitimacy of both as historical retellings should be queried.

³ Michael Benton argues that the nineteenth century "invented an image of Shelley more as an angelic spirit than as a man of flesh and blood" and this impression is well-supported by popular conceptions of Percy from the late-nineteenth century (99). For example, responding to Edward Dowden's 1886 biography of Percy, Matthew Arnold famously characterized Percy as "a beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain" (203-4). Additionally, in his "Inaugural Address to the Shelley Society" on March 10th, 1886, Reverend Stopford A. Brooke explicitly depicted the atheist Percy as a Christ-like figure, noting that "the method Shelley laid down for attaining the perfect state is that of Jesus Christ, and this is marked by him in the strongest way" (8).



Fournier, Louis Édouard. "The Funeral of Shelley," 1889, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

right side: Byron nearest and serenely looking ahead, Hunt expressing thoughtful concern, and Trelawny at the end, bowing his head in reverent contemplation. Like Percy himself, these three figures are rendered in sharp detail that draws further attention to them, allowing them to vividly stand out from the ashen background. Behind this holy trinity, a small crowd is also depicted, though in muted colours and less refined detail. Among them, at the far-left side of the painting, is the figure of a kneeling woman with her arms crossed over her chest. This woman is widely regarded to be Mary Shelley.⁴ Although Mary did not actually attend Percy's cremation, Fournier places her in the painting as a faint background character, visibly separated from her husband by distance, death, and his inner circle of friends and supporters. As Bette London observes, Mary appears in the painting as "a kneeling figure, literally at the edge of the canvas and barely distinguishable from a shadowy mass of nameless observers" (391).

The death of Percy Bysshe Shelley and, moreover, the mythology and mystery surrounding it, inspired an almost immediate effort to immortalize the poet's life through biography and other forms of what Michael Benton terms "visual myth-making," such as Fournier's painting (98). As Romantic biographer Richard Holmes has observed of Percy's drowning and its subsequent cultural impact, "from this moment on, the dramatic death of Percy Bysshe Shelley in the Gulf of Spezia was set to become one of the most powerful of all Romantic legends" and resulted in "the 'Ariel' syndrome, with its strong implication that Shelley was insubstantial, ineffectual, physically incompetent" (*The Long Pursuit* 246; *Footsteps* 151).

⁴ The belief that Mary Shelley is represented by the kneeling woman in the background of Fournier's painting has been frequently articulated by Shelleyan scholars. In addition to London, Casaliggi and Fermanis take it as fact that it is Mary "here kneeling in the background" (2016: 200), Hay describes the painting as "complete with a kneeling Mary" (2011: 251), and St. Clair observes that "Mary Shelley—who was not present—kneels reverentially in a corner" (1977: 180).

This legend, as told through its many retellings and artistic representations, became the foundation of a staggering biographical tradition that continues to the present.⁵ First commencing with efforts from those who knew him,⁶ Percy was then adopted in turn by Victorian culture, as exemplified by *The Funeral of Shelley* (1889), 1960s counterculture, and now persists as a subject of both critical and popular interest into the twenty-first century. Consequently, just as he appears “miraculously undamaged” in Fournier’s most famous painting, Percy Shelley remains a fixture of the English literary canon, thanks in large part to the many and varied efforts to reinterpret, revisit, and recapture his life, since it ended in 1822 (*The Long Pursuit* 248).

But what about Mary? After Percy’s death, Mary was largely overlooked by her husband’s most vehement champions, except in cases where she drew their harshest ire for her own biographical and editorial attempts.⁷ Resultantly, although efforts to biographize Percy Shelley after 1822 led to the creation of innumerable works,⁸ for nearly one hundred years, the

⁵ In *The Making of the Shelley Myth: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism of Percy Bysshe Shelley, 1822-1860* (1988), Karsten Klejs Engelberg traces the early tradition of Shelleyan biography, immediately following Percy’s death.

⁶ In “Shelley Incinerated” (2008), Michael Gamer explores the immediate fallout of Percy’s death within the Shelley circle and traces the initial efforts to preserve and immortalize his legacy.

⁷ In her biography *Mary Shelley* (2000), Miranda Seymour argues that Mary’s “absolute and unconditional devotion” to Percy after his death meant that, “the Shelley she set before them was a man of whom she could never have been worthy” and that “believing that she had failed him, she encouraged the world to share her view” (561). Furthermore, she suggests that this pernicious and self-promoted image of Mary as unworthy of her husband subsequently continued into the Victorian period and was taken up by his many biographers: “They saw increasingly, as the nineteenth century wore on, a man who had been manipulated to fit his widow’s conventional views. They had read, and had believed, Trelawny’s brutal indictment of a woman he had never fully understood and whose place he was intent on usurping” (561).

⁸ The collective and individual efforts of these many “champions” have been well-documented through innumerable studies of Percy’s legacy, from the nineteenth century to the present. Early advocates of Percy’s life and writing were his friends and family, including Trelawny (1858), Thomas Medwin (1847), Thomas Jefferson Hogg (1858), and chiefly, Mary Shelley (1824; 1839). Victorian efforts to champion Percy include works by Edward Dowden (1886) and John Todhunter (1880) and culminated in the establishment of the Shelley Society in 1886. In the

role of his wife and closest collaborator⁹ in such treatments was consistently reduced or augmented. As Miranda Seymour asserts, “the cruel irony of her achievement was that, in elevating her husband, she had once again forfeited the sympathy of his admirers” (561). Despite the ubiquity of Percy as a biographical subject after his death, most of these representations omitted, vilified, or otherwise placed Mary outside the Shelley circle¹⁰ as an obscured and muted figure, just as she appears to us in Fournier’s painting. Although Mary outlived Percy by nearly three decades, many of his biographers regarded her as if she too went up in smoke on that beach in 1822, but was found to be less deserving of memorialization than her esteemed partner and collaborator. As HJ Jackson observes, “the early death of a writer lends itself naturally to a narrative of incomplete maturation” and Mary’s comparatively long life did not benefit from the same mythologizing as her husband’s (122). When she did pass away in 1851, this sparse treatment of her further extended to the lack of biographical response after her death.

twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Percy Shelley has continued to be biographized many times by individuals such as Newman Ivey White (1940), Kenneth Neill Cameron (1974), Richard Holmes (1974), Paul Foot (1980), Donald H. Reiman (1990), James Bieri (2005), and Ann Wroe (2008).

⁹ The precise nature of Mary and Percy’s literary collaboration has been the subject of critical scrutiny for many years and is a featured component of many Romantic Biodramas. In particular, *Frankenstein*’s authorship has been contested since its initial publication, with many fervently arguing that Percy deserves at least partial credit for his role in the novel’s composition. Such revisionist studies of the novel include Christopher Small’s *Ariel Like a Harpy: Shelley, Mary and Frankenstein* (1972), John Lauritsen’s *The Man Who Wrote Frankenstein* (2007), Scott Douglas De Hart’s *Shelley Unbound: Discovering Frankenstein’s True Creator* (2013), all of which re-cast Percy as its primary author. Discussion was recently reignited by Charles E. Robinson’s 2008 edition of the novel, re-titled *The Original Frankenstein*, for which he granted Percy a co-writing credit based on his detailed revisions of the text.

¹⁰ The term “Shelley and His Circle” pervades Shelleyan studies and was reinforced through the naming of the special collection of manuscripts and artefacts housed at the New York Public library in 1986: “The Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and His Circle.” As Shoshana Felman argues, “In ‘Shelley and His Circle,’ Shelley is presumed to be the natural center of attraction and of gravitation of the circle, the solar figure around which all others orbit” (134).

While Percy's sacred coterie and later generations of fans and followers took it upon themselves to preserve his image, Mary did not receive the same immediate welcome, despite her remarkable life and extensive literary oeuvre, or the fact that she was her husband's greatest advocate after his death. Percy had Mary and his many friends and fans to perpetuate his life and legacy, but she herself was not as fortunate. Consequently, while her husband's posthumous career flourished and his dream of immortality¹¹ was realized through his many literary afterlives, for over a century, Mary's literary legacy appeared to have perished with him.

Lacking Percy's early champions,¹² herself chiefly among them, Mary's biographical image long

¹¹ More than any other Romantic writer, Percy Shelley was aware of this potential for achieving fame through posterity and determined to secure future readers long after his death. As Andrew Bennet says of Percy in *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (1999), "Shelley's poetry provides persuasive, complex and often contradictory evidence for my suggestion that posterity is central to Romantic poetry and poetics" (158). In this way, Percy typified what Jackson refers to as the "posterity worship" of Romantic writers, which led such individuals to "deliberately seek lasting fame" by looking "beyond their own time and the people of their own time for a final judgment" (4).

¹² In *Those Who Write for Immortality: Romantic Reputations and the Dream of Lasting Fame* (2015), HJ Jackson provides an informative outline for understanding the key attributes and features that enable fame within and after the Romantic period. To that end, she offers "a list of categories that appear to have been necessary or desirable to produce lasting fame for the cohort of Romantic writers" (108). This "checklist" of traits includes features of an author's literary oeuvre, such as "variety of corpus," and also aspects of their individual characters or relationships, including "associates" (108;109). In addition to offering this list as a tool for determining the enduring fame of Romantic-era writers, Jackson also reframes this "checklist" of features into an evaluative metric: a "scorecard" that she used as a tool to rank these writers based on their past and present celebrity. Most tellingly, of the twenty-two features of Romantic fame that she initially outlines through her initial "Checklist," Jackson only indicates four of these attributes as "required fields" through her "scorecard" and its "systems of scoring" (110-11). These required fields are: threshold quality, threshold quantity, champions, and biography. According to Jackson's "scorecard" of Romantic celebrity, these four attributes are the only features that are essential to an author receiving fame, both during their lives and among future generations. Her "scorecard" and recognition of these required features thus lays bare an important reality of Romantic celebrity: without champions and a biographical tradition, no Romantic writer could hope to maintain a broad readership outside the nineteenth and into the twenty-first century. Champions as "societies, descendants, keepers of the flame, individual advocates" (112).

remained blurred, static, and out of focus as her appearance in *The Funeral of Shelley*.

Accordingly, in contrast with Percy's rich biographical legacy, Mary Shelley was not the subject of a full-length scholarly biography until 1989:¹³ one hundred and thirty-eight years after her death and one hundred years after Fournier immortalized her as a background player in her husband's life and death.

However, although interest in Mary as a biographical subject did not manifest until many years after her death, the late-twentieth century ushered in a new era of Shelleyan¹⁴ biography, featuring works that sought to rectify these past omissions. Beginning in the 1980s, Mary Shelley's life and writing suddenly emerged as subjects of both popular and scholarly interest. Suddenly, a slew of biographies and other critical studies were being produced¹⁵ and Mary was acknowledged in the academy for the first time as a significant Romantic and woman writer, who excelled in many forms of literary composition.¹⁶ Following so many years in her husband's

¹³ Emily Sunstein's *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality*.

¹⁴ Here, I use "Shelleyan" in a new way, representing not either Mary or Percy, but rather, both writers as collaborators in living and writing this vanguard, modernizing project. Most importantly, my use of the term "Shelleyan" intentionally encompasses both figures and implies an equality between them. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term "Shelleyan" strictly relates to Percy Bysshe Shelley. However, in my broader use of the term, I consciously expand this meaning to encompass both Mary and Percy's lives and writing.

¹⁵ These include Betty T. Bennet's publication of the first volume of Mary's complete letters¹⁵ in 1980 as well as Paula Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert's edition of her *Journals* in 1987. Additionally, widespread cultural interest in Mary's most famous novel, *Frankenstein* (1818), has been fuelled by both the popularity of the text in the English curriculum and the story's long history of well-known adaptations.¹⁵ The novel's wide readership and its characters' iconic status have, in turn, encouraged interest in the story's exceptional origin story¹⁵ and the remarkable author who conceived of them.

¹⁶ Mary Shelley composed travel narratives (*Rambles in Germany and Italy* and *History of a Six Weeks' Tour*, with Percy), novels (*Frankenstein*, *Valperga*, *Lodore*, *The Last Man*), editorial and explanatory notes (*Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*), encyclopedic entries (for *The Lives of the Most Eminent Literary and Scientific Men*), verse drama (*Proserpine* and *Midas*, with Percy), as well as many short stories.

shadow, Mary finally gained her first real advocates,¹⁷ whose collective efforts helped contribute to her present ubiquity.

Alongside these key critical efforts, interest in Mary Shelley as a biographical subject was further reflected and developed through biofictional representations. The work of Mary scholars to establish a critical understanding of her life and writing subsequently brought her into the cultural consciousness, which in turn led to creative writers producing their own innovative interpretations of her newly-recovered biography. The combined effect of these scholarly and creative reinterpretations is that Mary Shelley's life and writing have become extremely popular subjects among twenty-first-century critics, readers, and audiences. Consequently, over the last twenty years, Mary Shelley has far eclipsed her husband in popularity as a biographical subject, although biographical treatments of Percy continue to be produced in large numbers. Beginning in the late-twentieth century and exploding in the twenty-first century, these many Romantic

¹⁷ Following Mary's death in 1851, her son, Percy Florence, and his wife, Lady Jane Shelley endeavored to preserve both Mary and Percy's legacies and renew the legitimacy of their family's name. But despite their intention to champion both Mary and Percy, their efforts disproportionately favored Percy's life and writing, bringing greater renown to him and his poetic legacy. To that end, they commissioned Thomas Jefferson Hogg to write a biography of Percy, using the family's archive of papers and documents. Disappointed by the resulting work, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (1858), Lady Shelley compiled a private collection of the Shelley's personal writing, which she entitled *Shelley and Mary* (1882), as well as a carefully curated collection of the couple's letters, journals, and Percy's "Essay on Christianity," which were published together as *Shelley Memorials: From Authentic Sources* (1859). Additionally, Percy Florence and Jane Shelley commissioned two monuments that further contributed to the visual mythmaking surrounding Percy and Mary from the nineteenth century to the present: Edward Onslow Ford's "Shelley Memorial" (1893), which resides at University College, Oxford, and Henry Weekes' "Shelley Memorial" (1853-4), which is located at Christchurch Priory in Dorset. In the Ford monument, only Percy is memorialized, while Weekes' statue visually evokes the *Pietà*, re-casting Percy as Jesus and Mary as his mother, Mary.

Biofictions about the life of Mary Shelley have taken the form of novels,¹⁸ films,¹⁹ and other artistic ventures.²⁰ These artistic treatments have not only been produced in response to Mary Shelley's biography, but, importantly, each represents a creative attempt to biographize her, thus re-creating her life through text, pigment, sculpture, or image.

But although biofictional representations of Mary's life have been created across many artistic mediums in the last few decades, I argue that the theatre itself is uniquely positioned as the ideal site for the Shelleys' biographical resurrection. In *The Haunted Stage: Theatre as Memory Machine*, Marvin Carlson describes the "the physical theatre, as a site of the continuing reinforcement of memory by surrogation,"²¹ which, in turn, renders these spaces "among the most haunted of human cultural structures" (2). Elaborating on theatre's innate power to physically recall events and individuals from history, he observes that "the close association of the theatre with the evocation of the past, the histories and legends of the culture uncannily restored to a mysterious half-life here, has made the theatre in the minds of many the art most

¹⁸ Biofictional novels about Mary's life include Judith Chernaik's *Mab's Daughters* (1991), Peter Ackroyd's *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* (2008), Lynn Shepherd's *A Fatal Likeness* (2013), Suzanne Burdon's *Almost Invincible* (2014), Antoinette May's *The Determined Heart* (2015), and Sarah Stegall's *Outcasts* (2016).

¹⁹ Biopics about Mary's life include Ken Russell's *Gothic* (1986), Gonzalo Suárez's *Rowing with the Wind* Ivan Passer's *Haunted Summer* (1988), and Haifaa al-Mansour's *Mary Shelley* (2017).

²⁰ Other biofictional treatments of Mary Shelley's life include Shelley Jackson's hypertext fiction about Mary's life and writing, *Patchwork Girl* (1995), Stephanie Hemphill's biographically-inspired book of poems, *Hideous Love: The Story of the Girl Who Wrote Frankenstein* (2013), and the children's book series about Mary and Ada Lovelace, entitled *The Wollstonecraft Detective Agency* (2016-present).

²¹ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead*: employs the term "surrogation" Surrogation, suggests Roach, occurs when "survivors attempt to fit satisfactory alternates" into "the cavities created by loss through death or other forms of departure" The fit, of course, can never be exact. "The intended substitute either cannot fulfill expectations, creating a deficit, or actually exceeds them, creating a surplus" (2).

closely related to memory and the theatre building itself a kind of memory machine”²² (142).

This intrinsic link between theatrical performance and memory is especially salient in historical theatre and plays that seek to reanimate the physical presence of an individual from the past. In *Performing History*, Freddie Rokem the invitation of historical drama “implies that the repressed ghostly figures and events from that (‘real’) historical past can (re)appear on the stage in theatrical performances. The actors performing such historical figures are in fact the ‘things’ who are appearing again tonight in the performance. And when these ghosts²³ are historical figures they are in a sense performing history” (6). Carlson’s characterization of the theatre as both a “haunted space” and “memory machine,” coupled with Rokem’s description of historical drama evoking the ghostly presence of the past, help establish the theatre’s unique potential as a site of remembrance, restoration,²⁴ re-animation, and resurrection. In representing the Shelleys’ lives through their biographical treatments, Romantic Biodramas therefore employ the theatre’s unique ability to recall the spectral figures of the past and physically reembody them onstage.

Furthermore, in addition to theatre’s aptitude as a site of embodied biographical representation, nowhere have the Shelleys been more frequently biofictionalized than on the

²² In *The Audience* (1990), Herbert Blau similarly asserts the direct link between theatre and memory: “for theatre is...a function of remembrance. Where memory is, theatre is.”

²³ “Ghosting” and “ghosts” are recurring themes in theatrical studies that reflect the medium’s preternatural ability to resurrect figures, events, and plays from the past. Marvin Carlson explains that “ghosting presents the identical thing they have encountered before, although now in a somewhat different context” and observes “this ghostly, this sense of something back in the theatre (7; 143). In *Ghosts: Death’s Double and the Phenomena of Theatre* (2006), Alice Rayner identifies the popularity of ghosts as theatrical images and extends the ubiquity of this trope to the framing of theatres themselves as “ghostly place[s]:” “Ghosts, that is, pervade theatre more thoroughly than any particular instance of staging, to the extent that theatre itself is a ghostly place in which the living and the dead come together in a productive encounter. Theatre is thus fundamentally a human space where we humans encounter not only the dead who have gone before (xii) but also the images of our own mortality” (xii-xiii)

²⁴ In *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, Richard Schechner defines performance as “restored behavior” or “twice-behaved behavior” (36-37).

contemporary stage. By 2017, the Shelleys have together been resurrected onstage in more than twenty distinct plays,²⁵ with new scripts and productions being written and performed every year. Both collectively and individually, these many biographical plays about the Shelleys, which I have termed Romantic Biodramas, have helped draw Mary and her life into focus by re-animating her through theatrical representation. Through these plays-in-production, Mary has been revived onstage for countless audiences and has finally joined her husband at the center of the Shelley circle. Furthermore, accounting for her historical lack of biographical treatments, writers of Romantic Biodramas have overwhelmingly emphasized Mary in their biofictional treatment of the couple, especially in the last twenty years. Accordingly, not only are the Shelleys now being staged in theatres across the transatlantic world, but, most significantly, it is Mary who has overwhelmingly taken center stage as the focal figure of these Romantic Biodramas. To that end, nearly two hundred years since she lived and wrote, Mary Shelley has found in the theatre what Percy received immediately after his passing: a generation of champions intent of perpetuating her biographical image. Considered in this way, these Romantic Biodramas and their emphasis on Mary serve as a corrective to the biographical history established after Percy's death, as visualized through Fournier's iconic painting. After over a century of dormancy, these Romantic Biodramas have collectively worked to draw Mary Shelley out of the background, place her alongside Percy at the center of the Shelley circle, bring her into sharper focus, and, ultimately, re-animate her biographical image for contemporary audiences.

²⁵ Because of the ephemerality of theatre as an artform and the oftentimes limited records of performance, it is difficult to determine exactly how many Romantic Biodramas have been staged. Nevertheless, I have endeavored to recover performance records wherever possible and account for as many plays-in-production as could be located through publicly-available records. In Appendix: A, I offer a preliminary "play list" that documents these many exemplary performances.

With this theatrical history and active cultural interest as my point of departure, my project therefore explores this efflorescence through a focused consideration of Mary and Percy Shelley as subjects of biographical theatre. To that end, I investigate the “Shelleyan project”²⁶ through its representation in contemporary biographical plays—what I call Romantic Biodramas.²⁷ I argue that, by treating Mary and not Percy as the center of this intergenerational and interdisciplinary “Shelley circle”, these plays-in-production acknowledge her significant role in Romantic culture and the many ways that her personal and professional entanglements influenced the work of the period. Furthermore, through the transformation and displacement of Percy as the heroic center of this theatrical genre, contemporary Romantic Biodramas follow Barbara Johnson’s critical lead and instead place Mary as the central figure.²⁸ These plays thus “challenge and contradict the canonical, male-centered perception of Romanticism” perpetuated

²⁶ My use of the phrase “Shelleyan” to encompass both the lives and writing of Mary and Percy Shelley coincides with a similar critical gesture in Shelleyan studies. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the term “Shelleyan” strictly in relationship to Percy Shelley, but I open the term to encompass both figures. Furthermore, the phrase “Shelleyan project” collectively refers to the Shelleys’ lives, writing, and legacies in a manner akin to HJ Jackson’s description of the “author package” as “a compound of works, life, personality, and symbolic value” (185).

²⁷ My use of the term “Romantic Biodrama” is indebted to both Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe’s “bio-plays” and Martin Middeke and Werner Huber’s “bio-dramas.” My use of the broader term “Romantic Biodrama,” rather than “bioplays,” here reflects my conscious effort to holistically frame these plays-in-production in terms of genre and to acknowledge the collective significance of play texts, performances, production elements, and theatrical history. I am further situating the genre of Romantic Biodramas within the larger field of “Biofictions,” as again outlined by Middeke and Huber. Finally, although Romantic Biodramas can pertain to representations of other Romantic figures, my own use of the term specifically relates to the case study of the Shelleyan project in its contemporary dramatizations.

²⁸ In addition to Johnson’s work, this critical move to re-focus Mary as the central figure of the “Shelley Circle” is seen throughout contemporary Shelleyan research, such as in the essay collection *Mary Shelley: Her Circle and Her Contemporaries* (2010).

through the established paradigm of Percy “Shelley and His Circle,” instead dramatizing Johnson’s revolutionary re-conception of “Mary Shelley and Her Circle”²⁹ (Felman 138).

To complete this study, I am investigating how both Shelleys have been represented onstage in key plays and chronicling the widespread shift in focus from the Christ-like image of Percy to what Miranda Seymour terms “the newly canonized Mary” (559). To that end, I therefore offer four exemplary case studies based on Romantic Biodramas in performance. Spanning a twenty-year period, from 1997 to 2017, these plays offer insight into the theatrical manifestation of Mary Shelley’s biographical awakening. Most significantly, I have not limited my research to reading the scripts for meaning. Instead, I am going beyond the texts themselves to re-create material conditions of production, recover the stories surrounding these plays-in-performance, and actively contribute to the archive of existing performances with the writing and staging of a new Romantic Biodrama. Resultantly, I offer new insight into this emerging theatrical genre and show how dramatists and other theatrical practitioners have worked to stage the Shelleys in the last twenty years.

Despite the creation of a wave of Romantic Biodramas over the last several decades, no major study of these plays in performance has yet to be conducted. This project therefore accounts for that critical gap by exploring Romantic Biodrama and its representation of the Shelleys’ lives through a dramaturgical analysis of four exemplary performances: Rose

²⁹ *Mary Shelley and Her Circle* (2009) was Barbara Johnson’s last, unfinished work, which she was working on when she passed away in 2009, and the manuscript was collected in *A Life with Mary Shelley* in 2014. In her afterword to the text, Shoshana Felman further unpacks the implications of Mary’s Circle, as conceived here by Johnson: “it enables and affords a view of history *precisely from the margins*; a view from outside the canonic center, yet from inside Romanticism; a view enabled by a gaze that is located neither properly outside nor properly inside the circle, yet paradoxically both inside and outside it; a textual and contextual, testimonial double view; a crucially *off-centered* view, showing in addition how the literary and non-literary alike can be made to read and to rework each other” (127).

Scollard's *Caves of Fancy*, Darrah Teitel's *The Apology* (2011) and (2013), and my own play, *Justified Sinners* (2017).

“Romantic Biodrama:” Defining an Emerging Theatrical Genre

Contemporary approaches to biographical studies have allowed for a greater freedom in representational style by accounting for the biographer's subjective perspective, the emergence of new documentary resources, or the desire to produce factually-inspired works of biographical fiction. This expansion of the genre to accommodate works of creative adaptation enables my reading of these plays as representations of the Shelleyan project and acknowledges the strong biographical impulse underpinning these performances, beyond their aesthetic or sociopolitical dimensions.³⁰ Romantic biography represents a further subfield within biographical studies that attends to the particular ways that Romantic lives have been documented and received in the last two hundred years. My generic conception of Romantic Biodrama has been guided by Arthur Bradley and Alan Rawes' assertion that Romantic biography “then, is about the Romanticizing of biography and represents a call to both de-Romanticize and re-Romanticize Romantic life-writing” (xiv). Beyond their interest in the Romanticism of biography as a form, Bradley and Rawes here advocate for new biographical practices that challenge our conventional approaches

³⁰ The potential for Romantic Biodrama to be treated as a historio-biographical account of a life relies on the contemporary understanding of biography as both an objective and subjective narrative mode. My analysis therefore relies on critics whose work troubles the view of biography as strictly fact-based accounts and who are working to achieve a “modern poetics of biography” that allows for a broader understanding of the genre (Batchelor 6). These critics include Richard Holmes, who describes biography's hybridity as “Fiction married Fact, without benefit of clergy,” which resulted in the creation of “a brilliant bastard form” (“Inventing the Truth,” 15). This foundational understanding of biography as a “brilliant bastard form” defined through the “unavoidable relativity” of fiction and fact informs both the overarching conceptual framework of my project and my approach to analyzing these individual performances (Schabert 10). Also addressing biography's generic heterogeneity, Michael Benton argues that biography has always been a “hybrid” since its composition is “the verifiable facts of history crossed with the conventions of narrative” (35).

to how we write and receive the Romantics' lives and writing. In doing so, they "set a challenge for future Romantic biographers" (xvi) by encouraging them to "escape the influence of certain monolithic Romantic ideas or assumptions" through the discovery of "other ways of being Romantic" (xii). In this regard, the practices enacted in *Romantic Biography* set the tone for my own research into Romantic Biodrama as a thematic and formal deviation from "the traditionally conservative form of Romantic biography" that once pervaded the discipline (xv). Consequently, my project contends that Romantic Biodrama, as a generic hybrid of biographical theatre and Romantic biography, best answers this call to "de-Romanticize" and "re-Romanticize" the form. These dual aims are accomplished through the eschewing of traditional representational practices in favor of performance modes that formally reflect the Shelleys' vanguard, modern approach to life and writing.

Furthermore, the emergence of biographical theatre as a defined genre with major socio-political implications has been comparatively recent, despite the impressive catalogue of exemplary performances. Accordingly, although historical drama boasts a large body of scholarly work,³¹ plays specifically featuring characters based on real-world figures have received little critical attention for many years. However, despite its recent nascence as a field, biographical theatre has been the subject of several recent, major studies, conducted by theorists and practitioners alike.³² Contributing to this view of biographical drama's formal and generic hybridity, Werner Huber and Martin Middeke observe that the use of historical information in

³¹ Such texts include Richard L. Palmer's *The Contemporary British History Play* (1998) and Herbert Lindenberger's *Historical Drama: The Relation of Literature and Reality* (1975), in which he argues that the term *historical drama* implies a tension between fact and fiction: "the first word qualifying the fictiveness of the second, the second questioning the reality of the first" (x).

³² These include works by Ursula Canton, Freddie Rokem, Sherrill E. Grace, Jerry Wasserman, Deirdre Heddon, and Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe.

“bio-dramas” as “signs, symbols, or metonymies representing a reality beyond themselves” reaffirms the important roles both fact and fiction play in the genre (*Biofictions*, 135). In their introduction to *Biofictions: The Rewriting of Romantic Lives in Contemporary Fiction and Drama* (1999), Huber and Middeke elaborate on this viewpoint with their assertion that a strong biographical portrait is not dependent on a realistic or entirely fact-based representation of its subject.³³ Instead, they argue that biographical dramatists may “make use of the historical material, may play with it, may even invert it, if necessary, and still arrive at a heuristically impressive and plausible interpretation of that life” (19). This acknowledgement of a range of possible approaches underscores the genre’s invitation to “transcend the mere provision of factual information” and highlights the variation within the archive of existing performances (“Biography in Contemporary Drama,” 135). Katherine Lyall-Watson reinforces this view in her assertion that the genre has been granted exclusive permission “to fly separate of the strictures that society imposes on much other biographical endeavour” (i). Attributing this greater freedom to “theatre’s role in society, its ‘liveness’ and temporality, its reputation and marginal status and the number of filters placed between the original subject and the eventual audience,” Lyall-Watson claims that practitioners of biographical drama are consequently let “free in a way that very few other forms of writing about real events or real people are free” (51). My conception of Romantic Biodrama owes much to this view of biographical drama as an exceptionally “free” theatrical genre, both in terms of its relative openness to alternative approaches and the

³³ Kirk A. Everist echoes this view of biographical drama’s comparative freedom in his statement that theatre is “an act, not a fact.” He further elaborates that “theatre thrives in this deceiving gap, bringing not final closure but a condition of dynamic suspension” (357-58). This observation of the theatre’s tendency to deny closure usefully informs my reading of these Romantic Biodramas, as this form of narrative evasion pervades several of my case studies and, indeed, may be identified as a generic trope.

comparative newness of its critical tradition. Without a strict set of conventions or guidelines and bolstered by a more fluid understanding of biography's hybrid form, biographical drama presents opportunities for innovation in both biography and performance studies, as well as grounds my study of Romantic Biodrama as a developing genre.

The Origins of Romantic Biodrama through Exemplary Plays in Performance

Although this focal shift in scholarly and popular emphasis from Percy to Mary can be seen by looking at trends in traditional literary biography, it also pervades more formally innovative or consciously creative biographical treatments. In particular, recent interest in the life and writing of Mary Shelley has led to the composition and staging of many new plays about the Shelleys' lives and relationship. Such plays themselves are not recent phenomena; the first biographical plays about the Shelleys were written in the mid-twentieth century and these early play texts reflected the period's persisting interest in the life and legacy of Percy. Conversely though, contemporary Romantic Biodramas, especially those written since the start of the twenty-first century, have mirrored the broader shift from Percy to Mary as the period's focal biographical subject. Consequently, plays about Romanticism's most famous couples now predominantly emphasize the life, writing, and experiences of Mary, while Percy is frequently absent, scrutinized, or posthumously re-embodied through his wife's memories. In many ways then, these recent developments in Romantic Biodrama represent an inversion of the biographical tradition first initiated after Percy's death in 1822, as visually symbolized through Fournier's iconic painting. Whereas Percy was the more famous and biographized of the pair for over a hundred years, most contemporary dramatizations of the Shelleys' lives now cast Mary as the focal figure and often flank her with members from her own inner circle, such as her stepsister Claire Clairmont or her half-sister Fanny Imlay. Accordingly, Percy remains as an

important presence in these plays, but Mary is overwhelming centralized through plots regarding her writerly process, her pregnancies, her relationship to her parents, or her perception of their marriage. Considered in this way, these contemporary Romantic Biodramas are not only creative biofictional treatments of the Shelleys' lives and writing, but they also collectively constitute a reclamation effort to reanimate a Romantic life that was long overlooked.

To better understand recent developments in Romantic Biodrama as a theatrical genre and contextualize the shift from Percy to Mary, it is first necessary to establish a historical outline, based on recoverable plays-in-performance.³⁴ While this is by no means an exhaustive summary of the genre and its many plays, these exemplary performances offer insight into its general trajectory and emerging themes.³⁵ In surveying the genre, it is necessary to note that the first Romantic Biodrama ever written and the first ever staged both focused on the life of Percy. Written in 1936 and 1965, these plays were composed prior to Mary Shelley's biographical renaissance and their treatment of her reflects the era's emphasis on Percy and comparative antagonism of Mary. Furthermore, both plays cover the same period, from Percy's time at Eton College in 1809 to his death in 1822, and feature large casts of characters. Finally, both plays conclude in a sentimental fashion with commemorative monologues from Percy's friend and aspiring biographer, Edward John Trelawny, who is portrayed in far greater detail than Mary.

³⁴ In tracing the history of Romantic Biodrama as a burgeoning theatrical genre, one must necessarily contend with the ephemerality of theatre and the limitations of the documentary record. Consequently, my identification of specific plays or performances as the "first" of their kind bears the important caveat that not all theatrical events leave the same records of performance. As a result, the potential for other plays or productions to challenge the primacy of these examples is ever-present and must be acknowledged.

³⁵ Additionally, while I trace a general chronology of Romantic Biodrama in this section, I begin with a discussion of plays that focalize Percy, which entails some slight deviation from the timeline.

The first recorded Romantic Biodrama is Elma Dangerfield's³⁶ *Mad Shelley: A Dramatic Life in Five Acts* (1936). *Mad Shelley* spans the period from 1809, while Percy was at Eton College, until his death in 1822. Notably, the sprawling story features at least fifty-four characters. In her "author's note" for the play, Dangerfield acknowledged that the script in its present form was not suitable for staging: "I would also like to mention that I fully realise the Play as it stands is too lengthy for Stage Production, and would require to be cut considerably before presentation" (7). Correspondingly, at present, there is no documented production of *Mad Shelley*. Significantly then, the first documented Romantic Biodrama, written in England and widely published in 1936, presently remains as a closet drama.

It was not until 1965 that a Romantic Biodrama received its first theatrical production. Ann Jellicoe's *Shelley; or The Idealist* was performed at the Royal Court Theatre in London, England on October 18th, 1965. The playwright was also the director of the premiere production and the three-act play featured twelve actors, who together played thirty-one characters. In her introduction to the script, which was published with the play in 1966, Jellicoe explained her interest in Percy and characterized him as a "tragic hero:" "he was a great man destroyed by his own tragic flaw: his blindness to the frailty of human nature" (18).³⁷ But despite this conception of Percy as unaware of "the frailty of human nature," he remains the unequivocally heroic centre of the play, "the idealist," while Mary plays a subservient and, at times, antagonistic role. Important to our consideration of the genre's development, Jellicoe also explained in her

³⁶ In addition to a playwright, Dangerfield was a British politician, writer, and secretary then director of the Byron Society (1971-2006).

³⁷ Jellicoe further elaborated that "Shelley worked out his own definition of goodness, his own ideals, but they were based upon abstract logic and reason and came increasingly into conflict with the realities of human nature, until the point was reached when those involved were liable to be deeply hurt" (18).

introduction to the play how she made creative decisions, regarding selection and editing, to create the story. She explained that “selecting the episodes of his life and arranging them dramatically implies stress and bias and so it should; this is a play not a work of scholarship” (18). But although she acknowledged the delineation between “a play” and “a work of scholarship,” she did note that she “tried to extract the truth of his life while stressing the points I wanted to make; events are sometimes telescoped but they are true to their inner nature” (Jellicoe 18). However, Jellicoe explained that, where she was “most free, because the facts are not known,” was in her depiction of the relationship between the Shelleys, especially towards the end of Percy’s life:

It is known that there was trouble. Trelawny’s evidence that Mary only really appreciated Shelley when she had lost him, Shelley’s own veiled (18) remarks, and Leigh Hunt, a kind and tolerant man, refusing to give up Shelley’s heart to Mary after burning, all show that in the eyes of their most intimate friends Mary had behaved badly. Shelley’s poems, his nature, and Jane’s claims in later life are evidence that the situation shown in Act Three Scene One³⁸ is not without foundation. (19)

Jellicoe’s interpretation of the documentary record surrounding the Shelleys’ relationship is primarily derived from external accounts. Notably, she bases her observation that “there was trouble” and that “Mary had behaved badly” on tenuous claims, such as “Trelawny’s evidence,”

³⁸ In Act III, Scene i, Mary expresses her belief that Percy is in love with Jane and blames him for her present misery: “I hate that house! I hate that house! Are you in love with her Percy? She’s so stupid. You put things on them, Percy, that they haven’t got. You see it all as brave, virtuous, noble, strong...And we cannot go back. Percy can’t we go back? Ah, the abomination! You thought you could change the world and here I am tied to you. You write and no one reads. No one reads! A great prophet. At home they pick up your books with tongs. And you thought you could change the world. Look at the misery you’ve dragged me into, sitting here at the end of the world, waiting to miscarry” (106).

the fact that Leigh Hunt, “a kind and tolerant man” spurned her after Percy’s death, and “Jane’s claims in later life.” Supplementing these suspicious accusations from Percy’s circle after his death, Jellicoe also evokes Percy’s “poem” and “his nature” to defend her belief that Mary had mistreated him. Although Jellicoe’s introduction to *Shelley; or, The Idealist* eschews biographical responsibility, explaining that it is “a play” and not “a work of scholarship,” the fact is that Jellicoe’s creative decisions, along with their “implied stress and bias,” reflect a critical reading of the Shelleys’ biographies. Furthermore, in addition to being informed by the biographical legacies of Mary and Percy, as Jellicoe clearly states she was, her Romantic Biodrama is itself a biographical treatment of the Shelleys that perpetuates a particular view of them and their relationship; namely, that Percy was a “tragic hero” while “Mary had behaved badly.” In this way, *Shelley; or, The Idealist* both emerged from and actively contributed to mid-twentieth-century attitudes towards the Shelleys, especially the minimization and antagonization of Mary that dominated the period’s treatments. Further, because plays live on through remounts and new productions, Jellicoe’s play, which was staged as recently as 2014 at Fanshawe College in London, Ontario, has the power to keep this false conception of the Shelleys alive.

My third and final exemplary Romantic Biodrama that focuses on the life of Percy Shelley is also, presently, the genre’s most famous and frequently-produced play: Howard Brenton’s *Bloody Poetry*. Before writing *Bloody Poetry* in 1984, Howard Brenton was already a prominent, vanguard figure in the London theatre scene. Brenton himself identified the Romantics as historical analogues for British dramatists combatting conservatism in the late twentieth century and his affection for Percy pervades his biographical representation in *Bloody*

Poetry.³⁹ His interest in the Percy pervades his heroic characterization in the play, which begins with him speaking words from many of his poems, including “Mount Blanc” (1816/17), “England in 1819,” “Men of England” (1819), “Ode to Heaven” (1819), and “On Death” (1816). Additionally, the play concludes with Percy’s drowning, which is acted out onstage and again narrated by Percy through a flurry of his own lyrics.⁴⁰ Finally, the script itself begins with an epigraph from Richard Holmes’ formative biography *Shelley: The Pursuit* (1974): “Shelley’s life seems more a haunting than a history,” which explicitly situates the play in terms of Percy’s life and legacy (6). Considered together, these framing materials indicate the fixed centrality of Percy Shelley to *Bloody Poetry*. While Mary is included in the play as a member of Percy’s coterie, she rarely speaks except to accuse Percy of having an affair with Claire.⁴¹ Brenton does not limit himself to historical facts and biographical details in his Romantic Biodrama. Consequently, dates are changed, chronology is often reversed, events are added or overlooked, and conversations are created to cater to Brenton’s overt artistic, sociopolitical, and personal interests. The result is a Romantic Biodrama that openly contests and combats historical

³⁹ Moreover, Huber and Middeke also observe that “there are obvious points of identification between contemporary English playwrights and the Romantics” and specifically identify Percy Shelley and Lord Byron as the epitomization of the “restless rebellion of the artist against conventional authority, the pursuit of ideal love, the powers of vision and imagination, and an unconditional search for freedom” (*Biofictions*, 133). They further extend this interest into contemporary Romantic Biodramas, arguing that these revolutionary artist-heroes are also “attractions for the dramatist of the present” (*Biofictions*, 133).

⁴⁰ Percy’s closing monologue in *Bloody Poetry* is comprised of text from “The Mask of Anarchy,” “The Fugitives,” “The Flight of Love,” “To Constantina, Singing,” and *Prometheus Unbound*.

⁴¹ While Brenton’s integration of Percy’s poetry into his dialogue allows his language to be lyrical, Mary’s confrontation of Percy is surprisingly coarse: “Oh, come on, come on! You wrote it, two weeks ago, after Claire sang us Mozart. And three nights ago you told me you wanted to sit up. “To write.” Don’t think you were a-writing, my dear, you were foing a-down Claire’s many a-winding river. In your boat. No?” (67). She then tells him that “a woman, heavy with child, can with comfort and pleasure, have a man from behind. I should know” and asks him “have you been spraying Lord Byron’s baby’s head?” (67; 68).

authority and instead foregrounds the artist, Percy Shelley here as Brenton's dramatic avatar, as an agent of social change. *Bloody Poetry* and its enduring popularity are proof that not every play that focalizes Percy does so by openly vilifying Mary, although it does grossly minimize her by reducing her role to that of her husband's wife. It is also proof that there exists the possibility of creating plays that focalize Percy's life, so long as others tell Mary's story. However, the reality is that, although Brenton's play is presently the most famous and frequently-staged Romantic Biodrama, it is also the most recent example of one that emphasizes Percy over Mary. That the last documented play about Percy was written in 1984 reflects the dominance of Mary Shelley as a biographical subject in the last twenty years. Percy does continue to be featured as a prominent character in Romantic Biodramas but, at present, he has not reappeared as either Jellicoe's "tragic hero" or Brenton's poet-hero in a new play since 1984.

So, if Percy has receded somewhat into the background, or at least started sharing center stage with Mary in the intervening years, then when did this theatrical trend begin and what form did these new Romantic Biodramas take? While Romantic Biodrama's first examples emerged from a biographical history that privileged Percy over Mary, the 1970s and 80s brought with them new plays that told the story of *Frankenstein* through the life of its creator. As I detailed earlier in this introduction, this period bore witness to unprecedented interest in Mary Shelley and her writing, beginning with advancements in the academy and spreading from there. The confluence of scholarly interest in all things "Mary Shelley" and cultural interest in *Frankenstein*, through its near-constant adaptations⁴² in popular media, led to a desire for more

⁴² *Frankenstein's* adaptation history is well-documented and have helped preserve and propagate the novel's rich cultural legacy for nearly two hundred years. The first cross-medium adaptation of *Frankenstein* was produced in 1823, Richard Brinsley Peake's *Presumption; Or, The Fate of Frankenstein*, and the story quickly became a favored subject of theatrical adaptation throughout the transatlantic world, a trend that continues today. Following the novel's first filmic adaptation

stories about the novel, as told through the woman who wrote it. This interest permeated film, leading to the creation of *Frankenstein* adaptations that brought Mary into the story, such as *Frankenstein: The True Story* (1973) or *Frankenstein Unbound* (1973). Furthermore, it also resulted in films about the “Haunted Summer” of 1816, during which Mary conceived of *Frankenstein* at the Villa Diodati while at Lake Geneva. These films all increased Mary Shelley’s growing profile in popular culture and introduced viewers to her life through her fiction. But while these filmic adaptations were indeed popular in the period and garnered a broad viewership, plays that specifically focused on Mary’s life were also a major innovation of the 1970s and 80s. Furthermore, while filmic treatments of the Shelleys in this period time largely relied on *Frankenstein*’s own legacy as a film subject to draw audiences, these plays focused on various other aspects of Mary’s life outside her conception of the novel. These included her marriage, her sometimes-fraught familial relationships, and her literary work outside her most famous novel.

The first recorded play that focused on Mary Shelley, rather than Percy, was written and staged in Canada in 1978. Mary Humphrey Baldrige’s *Genesis: The Mary Shelley Play* explicitly announced its Mary-centric narrative through its title. In addition to the first documented play that focalized Mary’s life and writing, Baldrige’s play was also widely performed across Canada and the United States into 1980s,⁴³ which allowed many audiences to

in 1910, it gained an even broader viewership and subsequent adaptations of *Frankenstein* have been created for film, print, and other art forms ever since.

⁴³ After its premiere production at Theatre Calgary in 1978, *Genesis: The Mary Shelley Play* as staged at the Poor Alexander in Toronto in 1985 and then received two university productions at Ryerson and Western University. The play was then revised and staged in New York at the Neighborhood Playhouse School of Theatre by Deep River Productions and Evergreen College in Olympia Washington. Finally, its Calgary production in 2017 was staged by Artists’ Collective Theatre.

learn about her life through Romantic Biodrama. Furthermore, in 2017, the play received a new production in Calgary, where it was first staged in 1978. In Baldrige's play, Mary's centrality is not enforced through Percy's comparative silencing, nor his vilification. Instead, Mary emerges as a fully-formed dramatic character through the revelation of her private thoughts to the audience. Throughout the play, the conversation between Mary, Percy, Claire, Byron, and Polidori is interrupted several times by Mary's "interior monologues" (2), during which "the action of the play stops" and both "a lighting change and cessation of sound" are used to draw attention to Mary. These confessions to the audience do not disturb the group's conviviality, but Mary's candid descriptions of her fears and apprehensions undercuts the play's apparent levity. For example, in her first monologue, Mary tells the audience:

I want to leave. I want to leave before something happens. Their voices pick away at me. Take little chunks out of me. I want to leave! Why do you want me to stay, Shelley? Why don't you understand how much I want to leave, to get away from Byron and Polly and— I want to distance myself from Claire. How did that happen? How did I let that happen? Let her come with us! I want to turn on you all! Run across the room, throw open the window, and let the rain pelt in! I want to run out into the wet and darkness, and stumble home, dragging my skirts! (13)

As this monologue demonstrates, Mary's confessions do not paint her in strictly heroic terms. Instead, Mary's centralization as the play's focal figure and audience's intermediary relies on her flawed nature and vulnerability. These revealing monologues show Mary's reservations and re-cast the events that led to her conception of *Frankenstein* as anxiety-inducing and torturous for her. In *Genesis*, Mary Shelley emerges as the play's focal figure through her concerted efforts to

distinguish herself from her circle. The play's form itself further highlights Mary by allowing her to break the fourth wall and directly appeal to the audience.

This first documented Romantic Biodrama that focalized Mary as its main character helped set a precedent for the many other plays that would soon follow. While Dangerfield, Jellicoe, Brenton, and others like them have used Percy's exceptionalism or heroism as the basis for their plays, Romantic Biodramas that focus on Mary often allow her to speak directly to the audience and appeal to them through her relatability. Consequently, the very thing that precluded Mary from Romantic biographies and Biodramas for many years, her personal flaws and her vulnerability as a writer, have become a point of entry for contemporary dramatists to bring her to life onstage. For example, four years after Baldrige's play premiered in Canada, another play about Mary Shelley's life and writing was performed at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Scotland. Liz Lochhead's *Blood and Ice: The Story of the Creation of Frankenstein* again focalizes the experience of Mary Shelley by depicting the events of the "Haunted Summer" of 1816 through Mary's memories and flashback scenes. Lochhead's decision to have Mary share her story with the audience and to frame the events and other characters through her memories of them focalizes Mary's experience and gives her greater autonomy through the telling of her own story. Like *Genesis*, *Blood and Ice* continues the trend of bringing Mary forward as a figural interlocutor between the Romantics and their world and contemporary audiences. The success of this approach is demonstrated through the continuing popularity of *Blood and Ice*, which was restaged many times after its premiere production, including a 2003 production at the Royal Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh. Furthermore, the script was published in 1985 with a re-edition in 2009, which further extended the play's readership.

Following the emergence of Romantic Biodramas that focalized Mary Shelleys in the 1970s and 80s, the twenty-first century has seen an efflorescence of interest in new plays that follow this same approach by placing Mary at the drama's center. Furthermore, the choice to centralize Mary by having her address the audience in some form has remained as a favored approach that presently pervades Romantic Biodramas. In recent years, the breadth of plays about the Shelleys has spanned across different forms and genres and these performances have been staged across the transatlantic world. For example, in 2001, Canadian playwright Pauline Carey opened *Don't Talk to Me of Love* in New York City.⁴⁴ The play featured Mary Shelley as the narrator of her parents' love story, allowing her to directly address the audience and offer metatheatrical commentary on the play itself. In 2002, two distinct operatic productions were staged in the United States and Scotland, entitled *The Mary Shelley Opera* and *Monster: An Opera in Two Acts*, respectively.⁴⁵ Both operas integrated the story of Mary's life with the plot of *Frankenstein*. Again aligning the lives of the Shelleys with the story of *Frankenstein*, Ann Bertram's 2007 play *Frankenstein Incarnate: The Passions of Mary Shelley*⁴⁶ was produced and staged by feminist theatre company Theatre Unbound in the United States. In 2010, Emily Dendinger's *Hideous Progeny*⁴⁷ imagined a link between Mary Shelley's inner world and outer

⁴⁴ *Don't Talk to Me of Love* was first performed at the Looking Glass Theatre New Works Forum.

⁴⁵ *The Mary Shelley Opera* was written by Allan Jaffe, Deborah Atherton, and Stephen Hannock and produced by Parabola Arts and debuted at the New York Society for Ethical Culture. *Monster: An Opera in Two Acts* was written with music by Sally Beamish and the libretto by Janice Galloway. It was produced by Scottish Opera and the Brighton Festival and performed at the Theatre Royal in Glasgow.

⁴⁶ *Frankenstein Incarnate: The Passions of Mary Shelley* was first performed in St. Paul, Minnesota at the Neighborhood House.

⁴⁷ *Hideous Progeny* was produced by Livewire Chicago Theatre and staged at the DCA Storefront Theatre in Chicago.

life, while Helen Davis' *Frankenstein: The Year without a Summer*⁴⁸ was staged at the Shelley Theatre in Boscombe, the converted former residence of Mary and Percy's son, Percy Florence. Helen Edmundson's play *Mary Shelley* (2012) was developed for Shared Experience theatre in England,⁴⁹ a movement-centered company with a strong education-mandate. *Mary Shelley* is a family docudrama that integrates surrealist and expressionistic elements into the Shelleys' lives. As the title suggests, Mary is the undeniable center of the play and the main relationship is between her and her father, William Godwin, not her and Percy. In 2013, Catalyst Theatre debuted their play *Birth of Frankenstein*, a site-specific performance staged at St. Luke's United Church in Toronto, Canada.⁵⁰ *Birth of Frankenstein* literalizes Romantic biography's potential for theatrical resurrection by calling forward the spirit of Mary Shelley through a séance at the beginning of the performance. Also in 2013, Brooklyn-based performance collective, Radiohole, staged their postdramatic meditation on *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley, and their cultural legacies. Entitled *Inflatable Frankenstein*,⁵¹ the performance showed the experimental potential of Romantic Biodrama to "break out of the closed circle" of accepted modes of representation, employing an on-stage DJ, innovative technologies, intertextual use of the Shelleys' writing, and an inflatable creature made of grocery bags (St. Clair 226).

⁴⁸ *Frankenstein: The Year without a Summer* was produced by Dorset Corset Theatre Company. In this production, double-casting was used to visualize the symbolic link between figures from Mary Shelley's life and writing.

⁴⁹ *Mary Shelley* premiered at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds and was subsequently given a touring production across England.

⁵⁰ *Birth of Frankenstein* was written by Adriano Sobretudo Jr, Matthew Thomas Walker, and Claire Wynveen.

⁵¹ *Inflatable Frankenstein* was performed at The Kitchen in New York City and created, conceived, and performed by Eric Dyer, Maggie Hoffman, Erin Douglass, Joseph Silovsky, Aaron Harrow, Mark Jaynes, and Ryan Holsopple.

This brief list of twenty-first-century Romantic Biodramas is by no means comprehensive or complete. Every year, new plays about the Shelleys lives are written, staged, and remounted across the transatlantic world. This history of contemporary Romantic Biodrama through exemplary plays in performance helps to lay the foundation for my own project and establish this burgeoning theatrical genre. Having laid the foundation for my research into contemporary Romantic Biodrama, I now transition to my own project and the four exemplary plays in performance that for the basis for my study. To this ever-growing list of plays-in-production, I therefore add the performances that I have selected to investigate further in this case study: *Caves of Fancy* (1997), *The Apology* (2011 and 2013), and *Justified Sinners* (2017).

Research Questions

My study of the Shelleys' theatrical afterlives and, in particular, Mary's re-emergence as a key biographical subject, is guided by the following research questions: Why has Mary's life become a major theatrical preoccupation in the last twenty years? How have contemporary theatrical practitioners, especially in Canada, conceived of Mary and Percy's relationship and how can their interpretations help to elucidate the Shelleys' lives and writing? And finally, what can the theatrical medium convey differently than traditional literary criticism and how can both approaches be effectively combined to elucidate the Shelleyan project? Led by these questions, my dissertation is devoted to the critical examination of the Shelleys' personal and authorial entanglement, as it has been theatrically imagined in the last twenty years: from 1997 to 2017.

Objects of Study

I have selected from the existing archive of documented Romantic Biodramas to form a set of interdisciplinary and interrelated case studies. These studies highlight important interests and concerns relating to the Shelleyan project and the dramatization of the Shelleys' lives in

contemporary theatre. Together, they illuminate attempts to represent Mary and Percy and collectively synecdochally represent continuing efforts to biographize Mary. More broadly, they underscore the continuing ability, function, and role of theatre in reflecting and reflecting on contemporary issues. Further, such productions are rooted in highly-particular local contexts and represent salient kinds of theatrical operation, including Fringe collectives, vital civic institutions, and provincially-funded establishments. Further still, although the diversity of Romantic Biodrama spans the transatlantic world and includes productions from England, Scotland, and the United States, significantly, I have chosen three performance case studies based on plays that were written and staged in Canada.

My decision to discuss performance case studies from Canada emerged in part through my own placement and geographical context. As a student-researcher at a Canadian university, the resources most readily available to me were all in Canada. Furthermore, my decision to write and stage a new Romantic Biodrama necessarily tied that case study to my Canadian context. But beyond the influence of my personal and professional circumstances, the decision to focus on Canadian plays primarily resulted from the fact that many Romantic Biodramas were written and performed in Canada. More pressingly, these Canadian Romantic Biodramas demonstrated an almost uniform emphasis on Mary Shelley as their focal subject. Finally, as I already laid out in my discussion of Romantic Biodrama's history, the first recorded play-in-production that focalized Mary's life story was Mary Humphrey Baldrige's *Genesis: The Mary Shelley Play* (1978), which was first staged in Calgary before being performed across Canada and the United States. For this reason, Canada was at the forefront in terms of writing and performing Romantic Biodramas that centralized Mary's life and writing. Taken together, the primacy and popularity of these Romantic Biodramas in Canada directly informed my decision to strictly study Canadian

performances. In addition to my geographical focus, I limited my timeframe to cover a twenty-year period: from 1997 to 2017. Although Romantic Biodrama is a nascent theatrical genre that did not formally begin until the mid- to late-twentieth century, I wanted to focus on recent developments and trends by focusing on performances from throughout the past two decades. In addition to covering a significant span of time between performances, my timeframe is bookended by the bicentenary of Mary Shelley's birth in 1777 and the staging of my own Romantic Biodrama.

To further reflect the diversity of the couple's many theatrical representations, my constellation of case studies has been selected from a variety of production contexts. My first object of study is *Caves of Fancy* (1997), which was commissioned for an academic conference and staged in a university setting. Second, *The Apology* first debuted as a Fringe production in 2011 before being expanded, reimagined, and remounted for a professional company in 2013. And finally, my own play, *Justified Sinners*, began as an experiment in writing and staging Romantic Biodrama and was privately staged at my university through department and committee supports. In each of these biographical interventions, I examine how theatrical practitioners have re-animated the Shelleys. By analyzing each play in performance, I then chart the development of the Shelleys as theatrical subjects and, ultimately, offer a new vantage point for viewing their lives and writing in both a historicized and contemporary context

Methodology

In recent decades, employing the theatre as a means of research and interpretation has become an increasingly used critical methodology. Consequently, this project treats dramatization as a way of reporting research and interpretation alongside more conventional forms of scholarship and criticism. I therefore consider these plays not only as printed texts, but

also in production and as experienced by audiences. Such production moments constitute the living “text” of these re-presentations and re-experiences of the Shelleyan project as an ongoing and living one. While I acknowledge the immediacy and transiency of theatrical performance, I have closely working with the resources that can be obtained to retrace connections, as can be recovered.

To complete my study of these theatrical representations and recompose each play’s performance history, I have relied on the entire available documentary record, including play texts and secondary sources, such as reviews, criticism, biographical treatments, playbills, prompt books, or practitioner interviews. Working to collect, curate, and gather meaning from these materials, I have employed a diverse array of research methods, specifically: textual analysis, production analysis, theatre history, comparative analysis, and oral history. The combined use of these methods to gather and report meaning informed my primary methodological approach for this project: dramaturgical analysis. Each of my performance case studies was completed through dramaturgical analysis and its associated research methods. Furthermore, in addition to dramaturgical analysis, I also employed a secondary methodology, Performance-as-Research, to study and gain practical insight into the staging of Romantic Biodramas. To explain how these methodological approaches informed my study of the Shelleys in contemporary theatre, the following section unpacks how this project and the research methods I employed align with both dramaturgical analysis and Performance-as-Research.

Methodology 1: Dramaturgical Analysis

Throughout the terms’ histories, “dramaturg” and “dramaturgy” have denoted a broad range of roles and associated practices.⁵² Just as theatre itself constantly expands and evolves, so

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too have approaches to dramaturgy changed to reflect shifting performance modes.

Consequently, my dramaturgical work in this project has required an adaptive approach that accounts for traditional approaches, as well as emerging practices, epitomized through monikers such as “new dramaturgies” or what Bruce Barton terms “‘interactual’ dramaturgy.”⁵³ In *Dramaturgy: A Revolution in Theatre*, a foundational text in the field, Mary Luckhurst outlines the two most common associations with the term *dramaturgy* and what the role of *dramaturg* has meant in the theatre since the mid-twentieth century. First, she notes that the term dramaturgy refers to “the internal structures of a play text and is concerned with the arrangement of formal elements by the playwright—plot, construction of narrative, character, timeframe and stage action” (10). The second definition of dramaturgy goes beyond the text itself to “refer to external elements relating to staging” and she explains that “this second sense marks interpretation of the text...the underlying reading and manipulation of a text into multidimensional theatre” (10; 11). Taken together, the role of the dramaturg traditionally involves the observation and analysis of both “the internal structure of a play text” and “external elements relating to staging.” The dramaturg therefore takes on the role of imaginative facilitator, interpreter, and communicator who studies the innerworkings of a dramatic work and, in turn, enables the creative team to bridge the gap between the play text and its physical realization onstage.

A direct extension of the role of the dramaturg within a theatrical production is dramaturgical analysis as a research practice. This approach involves the critical consideration of the play text, its subsequent performance, and the interrelationship between them as distinct yet interconnected. To begin, Patrice Pavis defines “dramaturgical analysis” as both “the reading of

⁵³ This innovative approach to dramaturgy, with an eye to reenergizing new performance modes, can be seen through Fleishman (2014), Nelson (2013), and Barton (2015).

a text and the way...the analyst, receives, interprets and describes the performance, usually in words, by reconstituting its principles of composition” (148). This definition outlines some of the key practices associated with dramaturgical analysis as a methodology: the researcher offers a “reading of a text” with the aim of “reconstituting its principles of composition.” In *Dramaturgy and Performance* (2016), Cathy Turner and Synne Behrndt build on this understanding of dramaturgical analysis and expound on what the approach entails. “Dramaturgical analysis necessitates an articulation of a work’s architecture,” they assert, later adding that it then requires “an analysis of the orchestration of elements within an overall architecture” (29; 35). This description of dramaturgy as “a work’s architecture” aligns with both Pavis’ definition regarding the “principles of composition” also mirrored through Magda Romanska’s description of dramaturgy as “a comprehensive theory of dramatic structure” (2). In each case, dramaturgy refers to the complex, interrelated systems of meaning that underpin and animate a theatrical work, which then become the objects of study in dramaturgical analysis. Furthermore, the foundational need to analyze and assess “the orchestration of elements within an overall architecture” in dramaturgical analysis, as Turner and Behrndt describe them, requires researchers to go beyond the play text itself and to consider the dramaturgy of the performance and its many constituent parts. Outlining the necessity to consider both the play as a performance text and its practical realization, Turner and Behrndt explain that “contemporary views of dramaturgical analysis tend to stress the consideration of the performance as a whole and emphasize that, in looking at a work’s dramaturgy, we need to consider how all elements interact” (37). Consequently, dramaturgical analysis of a play does not rely on the reading of a script as a literary text, but instead considers it as a working, living performance text that is fully realized through its staging. To that end, dramaturgical analysis necessarily accounts for the

many and varied elements of staging, such as design, production context, and performance history, to provide a thorough and accurate representation of a play-in-performance.

My project employs dramaturgical analysis as my primary methodological approach. In adopting this approach, I not only utilize traditional approaches to dramaturgy that consider the formal elements of plays-in-performance, but I also reflect current innovations in contemporary dramaturgy by attending to what Cochrane and Trencsényi describe as “the inner flow of a dynamic system” and allowing my dramaturgical analysis to reflect the distinct character of each Romantic Biodrama (xi). Accordingly, each of my case studies represents an attempt to critically document and analyze both “the internal structures of a play text,” as well as the dynamic energy that animates each play-in-production (Luckhurst 10). Furthermore, in addition to studying the texts themselves and investigating their “principles of composition,” I am extending my critical gaze to consider the elements of staging associated with each play in performance (Pavis 148). In doing so, I conceive of these Romantic Biodramas in performance in terms of what Willmar Sauter calls the “theatrical event.” In *The Theatrical Event: Dynamics of Performance and Perception* (2000), Sauter defines the “theatrical event” as comprised of both “(internal) communication,” the text itself, and “(external) context,” the component parts of its physical realization onstage (2). His holistic conception of the “theatrical event” directly aligns with my own multifaceted approach to reading play texts alongside their production elements.⁵⁴ Consequently, my use of dramaturgical research as my primary methodological framework has therefore involved a variety of methods and practices, aimed at re-creating the conditions

⁵⁴ My holistic analysis of plays and their staging reflected through my use of the term “Romantic Biodramas” in this study, instead of the textually-limited “Bioplays” or “Bioscripts,” reflects my concerted effort to address the larger field of “drama” throughout this project, as comprised of the many elements associated with plays-in-production.

surrounding each play-in-performance. These methods include: textual analysis, production analysis, theatre history, comparative analysis, and oral history through practitioner interviews.

Textual Analysis

In keeping with my reliance on dramaturgical analysis as my primarily methodological approach, I am performing textual analysis of each play text. Importantly, my reading of each script does not entail a thorough close reading of the play as a literary work. In their discussion of dramaturgical analysis, Turner and Behrndt identify a shift in the treatment of scripts from the “written play” to the “performance text:” “The complex inter- and cross-disciplinary dramaturgies that have emerged in the twentieth century have also led to an emphasis on live performance and the performance text, as opposed to the written play” (34). By reading scripts as performance texts with an eye to their staging, I am primarily considering how they operate as theatrical scripts. In keeping with this approach, I resist reading these plays as literary productions that exist outside of their practical applications in the theatre. Instead, my textual analysis of each Romantic Biodrama focuses on what Luckhurst refers to as “the arrangement of formal elements by the playwright,” including “plot, construction of narrative, character, time-frame and stage action” (10). This analysis is conducted in the “Reading” section of each case study and offers an inventory and analytical discussion of the main features identified in these play texts. For example, I expand on which characters appear, the period of time covered in the course of the play, and any distinguishing features, including formal, generic, and stylistic elements. This “analysis of the orchestration of elements within an overall architecture” is therefore consistent with my primary methodological approach and allows me to consider each Romantic Biodrama as a working performance text that is best understood in relation to its practical staging (Turner and Behrndt 35).

Furthermore, in keeping with my project's focus, my textual analysis also pertains to both how and what each playwright or company has chosen to include, critique, emphasize, or overlook in their treatment of the Shelleys' lives and writing. This aim requires me to consider questions, such as which members of the Shelley circle are featured in the play? Are any of the Shelleys' literary works presented through the play and, if so, which ones and how are they integrated? Which events from the Shelleys' lives are represented through the play? And, most importantly, how are Mary, Percy, and their relationship characterized through the play? To accomplish this textual analysis, I again draw from the work of researchers in the field of dramaturgical analysis. More specifically here, I employ practices and strategies discussed by researchers of biographical theatre to determine how to read these plays as both performance texts and biofictional accounts. Ursula Canton's *Biographical Theatre: Re-Presenting Real People?* (2011) is of particular significance to my reading of these play texts. Acknowledging that realism and historical accuracy are not the objectives of every biographical play, Canton suggests a "functional approach that concentrates on describing the way in which people differentiate between different worlds and observes how they attribute different degrees of truthfulness to them" (19). This "functional approach" in appraising biographical theatre accounts for Biodrama's formal hybridity and emphasizes how dramatists imbue performances with "degrees of truthfulness," rather than evaluating their achievement of complete historical veracity.

In much the same way, my own appraisal of each performance involves a focused study of the relationship between historical texts or primary sources and their theatrical treatment in each case study. This "functional approach" to textual analysis requires me to observe how each Romantic Biodrama works to biographize the Shelleys, including taking note of observable

discrepancies between a play's depiction of events and the known histories of the Shelleys' lives.⁵⁵ Importantly though, my documentation of digressions from the established documentary record is intended to indicate intentional departures and I regard these differences as creative choices, rather than mistakes. This reading strategy allows me to consider each Romantic Biodrama in light of the concerted choices made by a creative team, instead of evaluating the apparent success or merit of each play based solely on the apparent faithfulness of the adaptation. Consequently, by adopting Canton's "functional approach" to biographical theatre for my own textual analysis, I evaluate each performance in terms of how it dramatizes the Shelleyan project, the effectiveness and clarity of its expression, its relationship to larger trends in contemporary Romantic Biodrama, and its artistic realization as both a performance text and a play-in-production.

Production Analysis

In their discussion of dramaturgical analysis and its related methods, Turner and Behrnt explain that although "a script is a composition in itself and therefore capable of dramaturgical analysis," "such analysis is likely to provide hints and starting points for a development of the work into a performance" (39). As a result, they suggest that "a dramaturgical analysis of a written text is therefore somewhat provisional," since "there are aspects of text in performance (for example, its vocalization) that can only fully be explored through and in reference to live performance itself" (39). My dramaturgical analysis of these Romantic Biodramas in performance goes beyond the limitations of the page to consider how these plays have been

⁵⁵ My establishment of the documentary history of the Shelleys' lives is derived through collective consultation of biographical accounts. However, as this project has laid bare, biographies themselves are not entirely objective, factual documents. As a result, the apparent "truthfulness" of any account, or even multiple accounts, is difficult to deduce.

realized on the contemporary stage. Rather than limit my study to textual analysis, my exploration of these plays-in-production requires me to engage with the circumstances from which they emerged. Thus, to complete my production analysis, I have extended my critical lens to include the material conditions associated with each of my four plays in production.

Theatres and companies each operate with different kinds of missions, funding, organization, and professional commitments. Inevitably then, with their different forms of politics and practices, they did different things with their converging treatments of the Shelleyan project in each of my exemplary performances. My set of case studies therefore situates each play by looking at its unique conditions of production. To that end, my production analysis includes the documentation of each play's geographical location, production company and mandate, performance venue, financial resources, rehearsal process and facilities, design, and promotion. Furthermore, I have researched and recorded the reception of these plays wherever possible, thereby offering valuable insight into changing attitudes towards the Shelleys and helping to situate each dramatization within its own unique performance context. By both documenting and analyzing key staging elements from each premiere production, I offer greater insight into the physical realization of these plays in performance. Additionally, I elucidate how the Shelleys were practically re-animated onstage through technical theatre elements and other staging practices. Furthermore, I account for the many ways that the physical realization of a play augments, enhances, or otherwise alters a new performance text. And finally, by considering the many interconnections between play and performance, I therefore treat Romantic Biodramas as "theatrical events" through which text, staging, and reception collaboratively make meaning (Sauter 2).

Theatre History

Because my project concerns the study of “theatrical events” that took place in the past, my dramaturgical analysis must consider these plays through the lens of theatre history. In their introduction to *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance* (2011), Baz Kershaw and Helen Nicholson articulate “ephemerality/materiality” as a foundational “theatre/performance binary” (10). Expanding on how theatre researchers contend with this binary, Maggie B. Gale and Ann Featherstone argue that “the viability of archiving an essentially ephemeral cultural form at all has led to debates over the possibilities, problematics and available practices of documenting both performance and our experience of it” (19). This “ephemerality/materiality” binary presents a unique challenge to dramaturgical analysis: re-imagining an ephemeral event through limited material traces and reconstructing performance through written communication. Although my most recent Romantic Biodrama was staged during this research process, each of my case studies requires me to re-create the conditions of a past performance, using many of the same approaches that govern theatrical research from the distant past. For example, in *The Politics of Performance in Early Renaissance Drama* (1998) Greg Walker articulates the challenge faced by theatre historians at large: “trying to re-create three-dimensional events from the two-dimensional evidence of written records. This is always to some degree a speculative venture” (6). While the comparative recency of my plays-in-production provides me with more evidence and materials from which to draw, the challenge of imagining “three-dimensional events” from textual evidence and then, in turn, communicating my findings through description is something with which I have contended. To negotiate how these inherent challenges, I have worked to situate my theatrical histories through of these Romantic Biodramas using the “conceptual framework for historical representation, as articulated and applied through *Representing the Past: Essays in Performance Historiography* (1989). In their introduction to the collection,

Charlotte Canning and Thomas Postlewait identify five primary ideas that “help historians to construct the historical conditions, institutions, attitudes, and values that provide the spatial and temporal coordinates for the historical actions and events” (2). These concepts are “*archive, time, space, identity, and narrative*” (2). Rather than offering prescriptive definitions of each concept in relation to performance histories, they elaborate that “these ideas set in place epistemological modes of comprehension that guide historical inquiry and understanding” and that “by means of these ideas, which serve the task of historical representation, historians conceptualize both the general and specific features of the past” (9).

These five primary concepts, archive, time, space, identity, and narrative, have subsequently informed my own representation of historical performance in this project and allowed me to help recover and re-enact these Romantic Biodramas. Adding to Canning and Postlewait’s five primary concepts, my study of these plays in performance also relies on a consideration of “place.” My decision to treat Romantic Biodramas from a single country necessarily requires me to consider the implications of place and geographical location in my re-creation of these plays-in-production.⁵⁶ As I will elaborate in my chapter breakdown, each of my

⁵⁶ In response to an audience question during *Justified Sinners*’ September 1st talkback, I discussed the important role that geographical location plays in the staging of Romantic Biodrama. Specifically talking about the writing and staging of my play, I acknowledged that performing *Justified Sinners* outside England required me to provide necessary background information on the couple’s lives and writing:

Studying Romantic Biodramas, I realized that producing a play in Canada versus producing a play about the Shelleys in England has very different implications. There is more of a necessity to ‘explain’ before then ‘tearing down.’ So many people need to be acquainted with the Shelleys in the process. For so many people, this may be their first introduction to the Shelleys or to some of their biographical information, so there is a necessity to be both didactic, in terms of demonstrating and outlining some information, and to then question it at the same time, which is a bit of a tough double maneuver (502).

case studies begins with an articulation of the available *archive* associated with the play in performance. Additionally, as my discussion of production analysis has already laid out, I identify the specific contexts of each performance, thus accounting for both the *time* and *space* relating to these productions. Finally, questions of *identity* and *narrative* pervade my study of the biographical representation of the Shelleys, the documentation of oral histories through my practitioner interviews and, lastly, my own participation in the composition and staging of a Romantic Biodrama. Resultantly, although the “ephemerality/materiality” binary associated with performance requires me to re-construct individual and ephemeral performances through material evidence, I employ these five tenets throughout the project to help convey specific information about each of these play’s histories. Most significantly, through my dramaturgical analysis, I work to re-cover, document, and analyze each production’s material conditions to enable readers to better imagine the ephemeral performance that took place.

Comparative Analysis

My investigation of each of these dramatizations is further nuanced by comparison and contrast. Although my chapters are primarily presented as self-contained performance case studies,⁵⁷ my consideration of different Romantic Biodramas collectively constitutes a comparative analysis. Taken together, these individual case studies offer distinct vantage points of the Shelleys as biographical subjects in contemporary theatre. By juxtaposing these four performance case studies and considering the different ways that they treat their subjects, this dissertation aligns with Richard Holmes’ conception of “Comparative Biography.” For Holmes, the study of a biographical subject and his or her various and evolving treatments requires the

⁵⁷ Because *The Apology* received two premiere productions in 2011 and 2013, my treatment of each production constitutes two separate, yet interconnected, chapter-length case studies.

creation of “virtually a new discipline” unto itself, which he terms “Comparative Biography” (“The Proper Study” 16). Comparative Biography involves “the handling of one subject by a number of different biographers, and over several different historical periods” with the ultimate objective of deciphering how a biographical subject has been variously represented and then ultimately received by diverse readerships or audiences (“The Proper Study” 16).

My project makes use of Comparative Biography⁵⁸ by reading different dramatizations of the Shelleys produced under disparate conditions and during a twenty-year period across Canada. The guiding premise for my research, that each dramatization offers a unique contribution to our continuing cultural understanding of the Shelleyan project, similarly underpins the motivation behind practicing Comparative Biography. Taking up Holmes’ view of biography as the progeny of when “Fact married Fiction,” my execution of Comparative Biography, through my individual and collective consideration of four performance case studies, further illuminates the varied and many ways that the Shelleys’ lives and writing have been represented (“Inventing the Truth,” 15). By considering how each play-in-performance was written and staged and placing them beside one another, I have been able to discern differences in individual approaches to playwriting, directing, design, acting, dramaturgy, etc. Resultantly, this project’s status as a Comparative Biography of the Shelleys in contemporary theatre has further contributed to my dramaturgical analysis by offering a myriad of approaches to theatre making, which have comparatively evaluated.

Oral History

⁵⁸ In “The Biographer as Archaeologist” (2002), William St. Clair similarly posits that Romantic biographers and biographical critics should adopt an approach that is methodologically akin to archaeology. He argues that archaeology “progresses by adding the results of one detailed study to another so that, gradually, the picture of the past which emerges from on-going research is more secure” (220).

A central component of my dramaturgical analysis of Romantic Biodrama is the use of practitioner interviews to create oral histories⁵⁹ regarding each play-in-production. Canning and Postlewait argue that all historical studies of performance “require documentation: access to and use of the historical archive (in its many manifestations, from public records to personal memories and oral reports)” (11). To better study how the Shelleys’ lives have been staged in contemporary theatre, I thus determined that it was imperative to contact individuals involved each play-in-production to gain insight into their experiences of bringing them to life onstage. This methodological approach was informed in part by my early work on *Caves of Fancy* and my realization that very little information remained about the play-in-production, aside from the introductory materials to the published script in *Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley: Writing Lives* (2001). This limited documentary history encouraged me to consider the ways in which my project could document, chronicle, curate, and more importantly, recover and preserve undocumented materials relating to each play in performance. Resultantly, practitioner interviews became a key research method I employed for this study, which required me to produce oral histories relating to each play-in-production. In keeping with Penny Summerfield’s conception of “oral history as ‘recovery history’” (48), I have therefore worked to uncover stories and insights relating to these Romantic Biodramas to better frame and elucidate their performance histories.

My use of oral history as a theatrical research method aligns my project with current developments in theatre and performance history.⁶⁰ In *Place, Writing, and Voice in Oral History*

⁵⁹ In *Re-Thinking History* (1991), Keith Jenkins and Alun Munslow assert that “‘history’ is really ‘histories,’” since each history is individually re-constructed and remembered anew through individual interpretations (4).

⁶⁰ For example, see Jim Mienczakowski (1995), Nick Kaye (1996), Pam Schweitzer (2006), Duška Radosavljevic (2013), and Dominic Johnson (2015).

(2011), Shelley Trower explains that “scholars of performance are increasingly drawn to oral history as an allied discipline with a mutual interest in the live encounter,” which has in turn encouraged researchers “to approach an oral history interview as performance” (172). She accounts for this recent trend in theatrical oral histories by elaborating that, “given the unique synergy and structural similarities between performance and oral history, it is perhaps little wonder that a considerable number of oral history projects have of later turned their attention to the particular histories of performance, especially those of the theatre and related artistic practices” (173). Trower’s observation that many recent oral history projects center on “the particular histories of performance” acknowledges the growing number of projects that employ oral history to formally mirror and subsequently recreate the “live encounter.” In her introduction to *Remembering: Oral History in Performance* (2005), Delta Pollock similarly observes this salient connection between oral history and theatre studies. Like Trower, Pollock articulates an innate connection between the field through their shared interest in vivid the re-creation of history: “Oral historians and performance scholars/practitioners are increasingly discovering shared and complementary investments in orality, dialogue, life stories, and community-building or what might more generally be called *living history*” (1). This identification of “*living history*” as the goal of both oral history and performance studies establishes a natal link between both fields and establishes their shared goal: to “engage participants in new and renewed understandings of the past” based on a view of history as ever-growing, ever-changing, and ever-evolving (1). Based on this critical understanding of oral and theatre histories as intrinsically linked by their shared interest in “*living history*,” I employed research methods associated with oral history for my own theatrical study.

To complete my research, I conducted interviews with practitioners involved with the composition and staging of my four plays-in-production. For all four productions, I contacted each member of the creative team, as listed in production information⁶¹ available online through each company's respective websites. In terms of how I got in touch with each practitioner, I therefore relied on publicly available information and the help of theatre companies to connect me. In "Oral History as a Research Method" (2013), Penny Summerfield observes that "most oral history projects use a sample that has been gathered opportunistically, that is via personal contacts and through publicity of various sources" (51). While the individuals I sought to contact for my study were selected based on their involvement in my chosen productions, I must here acknowledge that my ability to get in touch with them was only enabled through publicly-available resources through academic and theatrical institutions. Additionally, in the case of *Caves of Fancy*, the fact that I had attended the University of Calgary as a student and knew some of the individuals involved in the production undoubtedly facilitated my contact with them. Furthermore, my own involvement as the playwright and co-dramaturg for *Justified Sinners* gave me greater access to the other individuals involved in the play's staging.⁶² But although these existing connections gave me greater access to practitioners to complete my interviews, my ability to collect responses still depended on individual interest or availability. Consequently, for

⁶¹ In the case of *Caves of Fancy* where no playbill remains, I relied on the production information included with the paratextual materials in *Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley: Writing Lives* (2001).

⁶² Yow also asserts that, in conducting oral history, "we cannot—and do not wish to—pretend to complete objectivity" (2). For my project, while I acknowledge the influence of my pre-existing relationship with some of these practitioners and my own subjectivity in this project as interviewer, playwright, and researcher, my effort to document the process of staging Romantic Biodrama from both a theoretical and practical perspective has required me to become personally involved in the project and draw meaning from my own experience.

various reasons,⁶³ I was not able to interview every individual involved in each production. However, I was successful in making contact and collecting responses from most of the creative team involved with each play-in-production, including both the playwright and director in each case. The result is that each chapter in this study features the perspective of eight individuals involved with the play in performance.

Importantly, my interviewing of human subjects for this project necessitated ethics approval through the Research Ethics Board⁶⁴ at the University of Alberta, which I secured in advance of conducting my practitioner interviews. My ethics approval not only permitted me to approach theatrical practitioners and solicit their participation in this study, but also ensured that they were informed of how their responses would be employed, publicly disseminated, and preserved through this project. Consequently, each individual I consulted was provided with a detailed outline of the project, including any potential risks, applications, and protocols for withdrawing their responses, if they chose to do so. These steps helped ensure that necessary protections were put in place to ensure the comfort of my interviewees.

Additionally, I consciously permitted flexibility in my interview approach, allowing practitioners to respond through written or oral communication based on their own preference. In *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, Valerie Raleigh Yow conceives of oral history as an inherently collaborative methodology that relies on the “shared authority” of interviewer and interviewee (2). Elaborating on the implications of this “shared authority,” she explains that, “although the interviewer brings to the interviewing situation a

⁶³ Such reasons included a lack of follow-up responses from potential interviewees, inability to locate necessary contact information, or that participants had passed away.

⁶⁴ More specifically, Research Ethics Board 1 (REB 1), which administers interview-based studies, granted my ethics approval for this project.

perspective based on research in a discipline, the narrator brings intimate knowledge of his or her own culture and often a different perspective. The interviewer thus sees the work as a collaboration” (2). For my approach, part of establishing “shared authority” in these oral histories was ensuring that interviewees were comfortable with both the questions themselves and the form the interview took. Consequently, although geographical constraints largely precluded in-person interviews, I offered practitioners the opportunity to respond through an email or telephone interview. In cases where no preference was expressed, I opted to conduct e-mail interviews and, importantly, most individuals responded using this medium.⁶⁵

My decision, along with those made by individual interviewees, to primarily employ e-mail interviewing has significant bearing on the type and quality of responses received. Although communicating with respondents over e-mail extended the timeframe for my interview process,⁶⁶ I found the responses gathered to be especially thorough and insightful. The decision to conduct oral history projects using e-mail interviews, or “online asynchronous interviewing” is becoming an increasingly popular approach (Meho 1284). In “E-mail Interviewing in Qualitative Research: A Methodological Discussion” (2006), Lokman I. Meho summarizes the possible benefits of conducting oral history through e-mail interviews:

⁶⁵ Only two interviewees chose to respond over the telephone, rather than over email: Dymphny Dronyk and April Viczko. With their permission, I recorded our conversations and subsequently transcribed them in full. Additionally, again with participant permission, I employed the talkback responses from members of the creative team involved with *Justified Sinners* for my discussion of the play-in-production. Throughout that chapter, I acknowledge whether comments were made during the talkback or communicated through subsequent written interviews, so as to highlight the important contexts and intended audiences for each response.

⁶⁶ I began conducting e-mail interviews in May 2016 and received my last response in October 2017. Commenting on the timeframe associated with e-mail interviews, Meho notes that “the time period required to collect e-mail interview data varies from one study to another. This variation occurs because it may take days or even weeks before a respondent replies to an e-mail message” (1288).

Overall, e-mail interviewing offers an opportunity to access, in an interactive manner, participants' thoughts, ideas, and memories in their own words. It allows the recording of many anecdotes that participants share to enhance the accounts of their experiences. It also allows participants to construct their own experiences with their own dialogue and interaction with the researcher. E-mail interviewing is additionally empowering to the participants because it essentially allows them to be control of the flow of the interview...enabling them to answer at their convenience and in any manner they feel suitable. (1291)

Meho's description of the possible benefits of e-mail interviews, versus in-person or telephone, helps articulate the reasons behind my own decision to primarily rely on this format. Because my project aims to re-create the conditions of theatrical performance, in part through practitioner accounts, allowing individuals time to collect their thoughts and carefully consider their responses was vitally important. In the case of *Caves of Fancy*, for example, individuals were required to recall memories of participating in a production from twenty years earlier. In *The Research Interview: Reflective Practice and Reflexivity in Research Processes* (2016), Steve Mann explains that one of the benefits of e-mail interviews is that they allow "the interviewee more time to control both when they want to respond as well as the quantity of the response." Furthermore, he notes that "the asynchronous e-mail interview can provide more thinking time for the respondent (not having to respond on the spot)" (99). By primarily conducting my practitioner interviews over e-mail through questionnaires, I hoped to allow respondents more time to recall their memories and experiences with a production.

Additionally, because the interviewees responses would be included in this dissertation, I wanted to give them the opportunity to formally articulate their ideas and insights through

writing. Meho asserts that a distinctive feature of e-mail interviews is that they give a respondent the opportunity to self-reflect and self-edit their own words so that they have control over their account: “the asynchronous electronic communication’s capacity to provide the opportunity for reflection and editing messages before sending them contributes to the production of a closer fit between ideas, intentions, and their expression in writing” (1291). Because these practitioner responses were cited and integrated into my study, along with secondary criticism, I wanted to offer individuals the chance to write their own responses, thus giving them control over how their words would appear in the project. To acknowledge the distinct differences in style and form between oral and written communication, I indicate wherever an interview response was not conducted over e-mail, such as the talkback responses gathered from *Justified Sinners*.

Finally, one of the necessary components of conducting my practitioner interviews over e-mail was that I needed to create a bank of self-explanatory questions,⁶⁷ which I could then tailor to individuals. Early in the research process, I generated a set of questions for directors, playwrights, actors, dramaturgs, and designers, which I could then alter to the specific requirements of a play-in-production. For example, in my interview with Brendan McMurtry-Howlett, the actor who played Percy Shelley in *The Apology* (2011), I asked five questions about the play and its staging process:

1. How did you get involved with *The Apology* and which elements of the script initially attracted you to the project?

⁶⁷ According to Meho, the inability to immediately explain or clarify questions over e-mail requires interviewers to be especially considerate of how and what they ask. He elaborates that e-mailed interview questions “must be much more self-explanatory than those posed face-to-face, with a clear indication given of the response required,” thus demanding “meticulous attention to detail, with attempts to reduce ambiguity and improve specificity while avoiding the narrowing of participants’ interpretations and, thereby, constrain their responses” (1290).

2. What did the dramaturgical/rehearsal process for this production involve?
3. How do you think *The Apology*'s inclusion as part of the Next Stage Theatre Festival influenced the staging of the play? (i.e.: with regards to your performance experience, viewership, scheduling, performance space, etc.)
4. How would you describe Percy Shelley's characterization in *The Apology*, as portrayed by you?
5. How would you characterize the relationship between Mary and Percy Shelley in your production of *The Apology*?

In creating my questions in this case, and for each e-mail interview, I tried to narrow my focus to the individual's specific role within the production. I wanted to prompt answers relating to how they got involved with the project, how the staging process worked, and their response to their character or the play itself without being too prescriptive. As this set of questions helps demonstrate, my e-mail interviews were comprised of only a few succinct and broad-based questions about the play-in-production, which then allowed individuals to respond as briefly or as detailed as they saw fit to do. Generally, these questions produced highly-detailed and lengthy responses and interviewees consistently went beyond the confines of the question to speak broadly about their experiences. Ultimately, these practitioner interviews, and the oral histories they helped produce, became an essential component of this study. The ability to recover the impressions and experiences of individuals who participated in the staging of these Romantic Biodramas offered invaluable insights into both the plays as working performance texts and their practical performance onstage. Consequently, the process of interviewing theatrical practitioners for this project became a key research method that meaningfully supported my dramaturgical analysis.

Methodology 2: Staging Romantic Biodrama as “Performance as Research”

As the preceding section outlined, my primary methodological approach for this study was dramaturgical analysis, for which my methods included textual and production analysis, theatre history, comparative analysis, and oral history. In addition to studying these contemporary plays in performance through dramaturgical analysis, my second methodological approach involved the application of my theoretical understanding of Romantic Biodrama to the writing and staging of a new play. Consequently, while three of my four performance case studies examine existing performances that were staged before the commencement of my project, my final case study marks a methodological departure by documenting the process of creating a new Romantic Biodrama and, ultimately, bringing it to life onstage.

My decision to write a Romantic Biodrama and actively participate in its staging is consistent with an emergent methodological approach: practice-based performance research. In theatre and performance studies, the theatre is both a laboratory for critical research and the site of creative experimentation. Resultantly, researchers in the field employ the theatre to test ideas, make discoveries about established and new works, and share their findings through public performance and later works of scholarship. In recent years, such “imaginative uses of methods that trouble the boundaries between creative practice and critical analysis” have been increasingly employed and acknowledged as a formal methodology: “performance as research” (Kershaw and Nicholson 2). *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance* (2011) outlines the tenets of “performance as research” (PaR) as a methodological approach, demonstrating its practical applications through performance case studies.⁶⁸ In the chapter “Practice as Research:

⁶⁸ Baz Kershaw provides an earlier articulation of the PaR model in a book chapter entitled “Performance as Research: Live Events and Documents,” included in *The Cambridge*

Transdisciplinary Innovation in Action,” co-editor Baz Kershaw explains that PaR “indicates the uses of practical creative processes as research methods (and methodologies) in their own right, usually, but not exclusively in, or in association with, universities and other HE institutions” (64). Building from this definition, he elaborates that “practice as research in the performing arts pursues hybrid enquiries combining creative doing with reflexive being, thus fashioning freshly critical interactions between current epistemologies and ontologies” (64). Kershaw’s description of PaR both acknowledges the work of artist-researchers as practice-based scholarship and distinguishes such ventures from theatrical performance in general. PaR entails a rigorous research process involving the use of the theatre to test hypotheses or answer research questions. In this way, PaR is theatrical research praxis that relies on the recognition of “practical creative processes as research methods (and methodologies) in their own right.”

In choosing to write and stage a Romantic Biodrama as PaR, I not only had to create a performance text, but I also had to begin my creative process from a point of critical inquiry. PaR is defined by the “the centrality of *creativity* to its research methods,” but the foundation for this creative exploration is establishing which questions you want answered through this project and to consider how PaR can offer unique insights (Kershaw 65). Kershaw identifies several key aspects⁶⁹ of all PaR projects, beginning with “starting points,” which he describes as “the *questions* to be answered” (65). For my own Romantic Biodrama as PaR, my first starting point

Companion to Performance Studies (2008). In it, he introduces PaR as a “collection of specific research methods able to elucidate all types of performance” (26).

⁶⁹ Following these “starting points,” my subsequent participation in the staging of a Romantic Biodramas as PaR required me to consider Kershaw’s other constituent features of this performance methodology. These included “aesthetics” since, Kershaw observes, PaR is “always beholden to artistic traditions,” “locations” because “all performance and theatre is bound by location in space in time,” “transmission” or “the means by which any knowledge/ understanding/ insight it produces are communicated is always multi-modal,” and “innumerable key issues” that arise through the project (66).

related to a gap that I perceived in the recoverable archive of contemporary Romantic Biodramas. In considering these plays in performance, I was struck by the fact that I could not find an example that focused on the interpersonal and professional entanglements of the Shelleys by depicting them alone together onstage. Although they are perhaps Romanticism's most famous couple, why had the Shelleys' never been portrayed alone together in a Romantic Biodrama and what would such a play reveal about them and their dynamic? Curious to see what such a Romantic Biodrama would look like, I set out to create a two-character play that offered an intimate look at their relationship, without the intervention or commentary of any outside figures. My second starting point was an interest in creating a performance text from the Shelleys' own words. In reading these many Romantic Biodramas, I was struck by the infrequent use of the Shelleys' literary works within the scripts. Scenes were often included that showed Mary reading some portion of *Frankenstein*, but the rest of their literary oeuvres rarely made appearances. More commonly, playwrights instead deployed the Shelleys' writing or ideas to inform the characters' sentiments in the play, although the words themselves were only infrequently integrated into the text itself. Consequently, my second starting point for my PaR project was the question: how could a Romantic Biodrama emerge from the Shelleys' own writing? Furthermore, what story could their writing tell and how could I balance my own voice with theirs to create something new for the stage? Finally, as a student-researcher of Romantic Biodrama, I wanted to gain practical insight into the writing and staging processes. I was speaking about these plays in performance, but I was interested to know if my theoretical understanding would affectively translate to the practical staging process. Thinking critically about myself and my own subjectivity, how would my critical understanding inform my ability

to produced Romantic Biodrama and, in turn, how would such an experience subsequently inform my research?

Another important component of conducting PaR is integrating personal response and critical analysis to the discussion of the project. This requires the artist-researcher to be both self-reflexive and deeply analytical, accounting for the discoveries made through their participation as well as evaluating the project outcomes. Theatrical artist-researchers have increasingly acknowledged their own participatory role in performance-based research projects, thus allowing their accounts to further benefit from their direct involvement and their critical insights. In *Blood, Sweat, and Theory: Research through Practice in Performance* (2010), John Freeman observes that many researchers now document and disseminate such self-reflexive responses as part of their formal. Such responses necessarily eschew objective representation and allow the artist-researcher to discuss the performance experience and their subsequent discoveries in personal and necessarily subjective terms:

Within the study of theatre, drama and performance we are seeing researchers paying focused attention to the knowledge of their own creative and cognitive processes...It is this fusing of the creative and the cognitive that is at the heart of practice-based research developments, marking as it does a shift from seemingly objective reporting to more overtly perspective-acknowledging *reportage*, and from observations of others to reflections of self.” (xiii)

As Freeman’s description here conveys, many artist-researchers are now leaning into the hybridity of their dual roles by treating “their own creative and cognitive processes” as material of critical and creative significance. This “fusing of the creative and the cognitive” necessarily underpins my own discussion of *Justified Sinners*’ composition and performance. Rather than

attempting to discuss my participation in a Romantic Biodrama in strictly objective terms, I follow Kershaw and Freeman's examples for my method of presentation and discussion for that case study. Consequently, my decision to participate in the creation of a Romantic Biodrama as PaR also entails a shift in my methodology for reporting and analyzing the play in performance. Accordingly, while I maintain the same form and continue to employ dramaturgical analysis for this case study, the "seemingly objective reporting" that I do elsewhere in the project necessarily gives way to "perspective-acknowledging *reportage*." Resultantly then, my choice to participate in the staging of Romantic Biodrama as PaR not only entails a new methodological approach to my subject, but also informs my method of using first-person "reportage" in that case study.

Chapter Breakdown

Although my four performance case studies represent very different approaches to staging the Shelleys, I have largely maintained the same format⁷⁰ for each of my chapters, to better offer a comparative reading of each play-in-performance. Each of my performance case studies begins with an account of the available archive.⁷¹ Because each play was produced under disparate circumstances, the recoverable documentary history of each is very distinct and my analysis reflects these differences. For example, my ability to access materials relating to *Caves of Fancy*'s 1997 production was limited compared to the 2017 staging of *Justified Sinners*,

⁷⁰ Notable exceptions to this approach include the performance text for *Justified Sinners*, my discussion of the backstory behind *Caves of Fancy* and the "Writing Lives" conference, or my two-part treatment of *The Apology*, but elsewhere I have attempted to streamline my formatting wherever possible.

⁷¹ In "The Space of Memory: In an Archive," Carolyn Steedman defines "the archive" as "a name for the many places in which the past (which does not now exist, but which once did actually happen; which cannot be retrieved, but which may be represented) has deposited some traces and fragments" (67). This definition and the understanding of the archive as traces from the past which can now be represented has informed my own conception of Romantic Biodrama's living archive of plays in performance.

especially given my own involvement in the latter production. By accounting for the available archive and the connections that could be recovered in each case study, I worked to catalogue my source materials and offer insight into the existing history of each play-in-performance. From this discussion of my chosen archive, I offer a plot synopsis of each play. One of the limitations of my research project is that many of my primary sources are not publicly available. For this reason, it was necessary to offer an overview of each script to better acquaint readers with the plot and characters featured in each play. I then begin my discussion of each play-in-production by offering insight from each playwright into the writing process, followed by a brief section devoted to “reading” the play text. In conceiving of this project, I was determined to avoid providing a close reading of each script as a literary text, since I was primarily interested in how they have been staged. In keeping with this aim, my “reading” section for each play is an attempt to further elucidate formal elements, thematic interests, and other key aspects of each play with an eye to how these features have informed the play’s subsequent performance. From this discussion of the text itself, I move to studying each play in performance by detailing the staging process behind four premiere productions.

In each chapter, my discussion of the Romantic Biodrama in performance begins with establishing the production context, including the performance space, geographical location, theatre company, and other material conditions, as well as the process of assembling the production team. After establishing these foundational details, I chronicle each production’s script development and dramaturgical process, rehearsals, design, and ultimate realization onstage through performance. Because each of my exemplary performances was produced under different conditions and the archive of materials associated with each is different, each chapter necessarily features variances in these sections. For example, while I could not recover any

reviews or production playbill for *Caves of Fancy*, I was fortunate to benefit from a wealth of design materials that informed my study. Conversely, because *The Apology* received two premiere productions that were recently staged, the archive associated with both plays-in-production features a large collection of reviews and critical responses from which I could draw. Consequently, although I maintained the same approach for each performance case study by cataloguing the key script and production elements, my results and analysis necessarily varied in response to the available archive of materials for each Romantic Biodrama.

My first chapter treats my earliest Romantic Biodrama: Rose Scollard's *Caves of Fancy* (1997). While my study of contemporary biographical plays about the Shelleys led me to initially consider discussing plays strictly written and performed during the twenty-first century, 1997 marked a benchmark year in the cultural and biographical histories of Mary Shelley: the bicentenary of her birth. This key event was celebrated with an academic conference that gathered scholars of Mary Shelley and her mother, acknowledging the year as the shared setting for both Mary Shelley's birth and Mary Wollstonecraft's death. The "Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley: Writing Lives" conference was both the impetus and setting for my first performance case study. In addition to the exceptional production context of this Romantic Biodrama, *Caves of Fancy* literalizes the figural shift from Percy to Mary that currently pervades the genre by never presenting Percy onstage. However, as this chapter explores, Percy's physical absence in the play does not entail his omission and his unseen presence continues to haunt the lives of Mary, Claire, and Fanny. Although never shown, Percy remains a key player, continuing to dominate the lives and actions of the sisters as they negotiate the trials and tribulations of their fraught lives.

Chapters Two and Three represent a two-part study of a Romantic Biodrama in performance. My interest in premiere productions of these plays presented me with a challenge when it came to Darrah Teitel's *The Apology*: how to discuss a play that exists in two versions and received two premiere productions. *The Apology* was first staged in Toronto in 2011 and, following the re-conception and expansion of the script, premiered again in Calgary in 2013. To trace the development of this Romantic Biodrama and chart the evolution of both productions, I have completed a joint study of *The Apology*'s two premiere productions, beginning in Chapter Two and continuing into Chapter Three. *The Apology* reframes the Haunted Summer of 1816 in distinctly modern terms. The Shelleys and their coterie are depicted as youth in revolt, experimenting with sex, drugs, and philosophy. Teitel employs the established documentary record as a jumping-off point for her depiction of the group, but takes a hard turn to create an imaginative work of biofiction that is defined by its overt "intra-theatricality."⁷² For the play's second iteration and premiere production, Teitel punched up the modern overtones of Mary, Percy, Byron, and Claire's authorial and personal entanglements and exploded the conventional form of historical drama. Re-locating the characters into the twenty-first century for the play's second act, Teitel literalized the modernity of the Shelley circle. Furthermore, by re-locating

⁷² Introduced in *The Theatrical Event: Dynamics of Performance and Perception* (2000), Sauter's theatricality spectrum reflects his study's larger focus on the "theatrical event," as characterized by both "(internal) communication" and "(external) context" (2). More specifically, I am working with Sauter's configuration of the relationship between the world outside the theatre, which he identifies as the "life world," and the world created onstage, termed the "world of the play," as existing along a spectrum, rather than in strict binary opposition (10). To distinguish between different approaches to representation, he then identifies the two poles of "extra-theatricality" and "intra-theatricality" to indicate performances that more clearly reflect the conditions of the "life world" or the "world of the play," respectively (10). In *Literary Biography* (2009), Benton further develops this view of "the genre's hybrid nature" in his statement that biographical writing should be thought of as "ranging along a continuum whose two poles might be labelled 'documentary biography' and 'aesthetic biography'" (37).

their relationship to our contemporary context, *The Apology* interrogated the Shelleys' fraught interpersonal dynamic and allowed for the full realization of a thoroughly-modern Mary onstage.

In Chapter Four, I shift my focus to discuss my own participation in the writing and staging of a new Romantic Biodrama. *Justified Sinners* was written over a two-year period, from 2015-2017, and staged at the University of Alberta in Edmonton in 2017. Inspired by the creative potential of writing a play that focused on the Shelleys' relationship and employed their writing as its textual basis, I wrote *Justified Sinners* as a creative complement to this critical research project. However, it was not until it was written that the play could finally come to life through performance. Through the support of my supervisory committee, the Department of Drama, and faculty, students, and alumni from The University of Alberta, this experiment in writing and staging Romantic Biodrama ultimately resulted in a new play-in-production. This chapter therefore charts both processes, as written from the perspective of a student-researcher turned playwright-dramaturg. *Justified Sinners* joins Mary Shelley at an important moment in the Shelleys' relationship and a crucial juncture in the creation of Percy's literary legacy: 1824, the year Mary's edition of *Posthumous Poems* was published. Through Mary's "textual mourning," Percy is brought back to life again as the ghostly apparition of a paper boy, comprised of words and memories (Schor 6). In *Justified Sinners*, pages of writing are revealed to be "memory-haunted material products" that can reveal the figural presence of their author (Carlson 165). Through the alchemy of language and the magic of memory, Mary resurrects Percy's presence onstage, for her and the audience. And although she preserves and protects Percy's legacy through the publication of his collected works, she uses her new-found strength as his biographer and editor to ask him all the questions that remained after his death. In this way, *Justified Sinners*

literalizes Mary's textual resuscitation of Percy and re-casts *Posthumous Poems* as an "effigy in the physical absence of the beloved" (Roach 40).

Deviating from the form of my preceding chapters, Chapter Five is the physical manifestation of my creative research into Romantic Biodrama: the performance text for *Justified Sinners*. Just as *Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley: Writing Lives* (2001) concludes with the script for *Caves of Fancy*, I end my project with the complete text of my own Romantic Biodrama. Including the performance text itself as part of my dissertation supplements my discussion of the writing and staging processes and allows readers to consider how these choices were ultimately realized through the script itself. Furthermore, in the same way that I read *Caves of Fancy* as part of *Writing Lives*, I offer this complete text as an integral part of this study and the larger work of my doctoral project. Importantly, this "performance text" version was the one used for *Justified Sinners*' premiere production in 2017 and the inclusion of this particular draft is an effort to better reflect the play in performance. Theatrical scripts are objects in flux that evolve with each production and can be edited and reimagined many times over. This version of *Justified Sinners* is certainly not the first, and likely not the last iteration of this play text. However, this is the draft performed by the actors who debuted these roles in 2017.

Finally, my project ends with a conclusion that reflects on the results of my case studies. In it, I discuss the current state of Romantic Biodrama, as represented through my exemplary performances. Additionally, through the perspectives of theatrical practitioners, I consider why precisely the Shelleys remain a subject of interest for theatrical adaptation. I then further contextualize Romantic Biodramas' biographical treatment of the Shelleys within broader cultural interest in the couple at present, especially Mary. Finally, I look ahead to Romantic Biodrama's next stages and consider future developments in this burgeoning theatrical genre.

Caves of Fancy

In August 1997, an international academic conference was held at the Calgary Institute for the Humanities at the University of Calgary to commemorate both the bicentenary of Mary Wollstonecraft's death and the birth of her daughter, Mary Shelley, in 1797. Entitled "Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley: Writing Lives," the conference included papers that explored a wide variety of issues and themes relating to the famous mother and daughter and their works, ranging from the relationship between *Frankenstein* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* to the "politics of autobiography" at play in both women's writing.⁷³ But in addition to the broad assortment of topics that were critically discussed, the conference also featured one presentation that creatively approached this theme of "Writing Lives" by using a highly innovative and unconventional form for an academic conference. The result, *Caves of Fancy*, is an original, three-act play that was commissioned for performance at the "Writing Lives" conference.

In *Caves of Fancy*, playwright Rose Scollard creates a kind of theatrical séance where both the characters within the play and the audience themselves take part in a dramatized resurrection. As the drama begins, Mary Shelley, Claire Clairmont, and Fanny Imlay attempt to call forth the spirit of Mary Wollstonecraft by using a magic word: "imagination." But instead of bringing back Wollstonecraft, the sisters inadvertently evoke *Frankenstein's* Creature. The Creature remains throughout the play as a shape-shifting figure who embodies familiar figures, while also portending tragedy for the young women.

⁷³ These papers are, respectively, Charles E. Robinson's "A Mother's Daughter: An Intersection of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*" and Gary Kelly's "The Politics of Autobiography in Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley." Both essays are featured in *Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley: Writing Lives* (2001).

Although *Caves of Fancy* is an imaginative departure from traditional historical realism into decidedly more fanciful territory, the play also critically examines the lives and writing of its subjects. Aided by the involvement of the conference organizers, who would later become the editors of the subsequent critical edition in which the play appeared, Scollard created a Romantic Biodrama that demonstrates the medium's potential for both creative and critical exploration. Resultantly, much like the critical papers presented at the conference, *Caves of Fancy* also investigates questions of Romantic life/writing as they relate to the intergenerational Wollstonecraft-Godwin-Shelley family. And furthermore, through Romantic Biodrama's potential to re-animate these figures and their ideas, Scollard worked to bring new life and immediacy to these well-studied concepts and offer a new approach to exploring the Romantics through performance.

However, despite the reported success of the play as part of the conference, it is important to state that *Caves of Fancy* has not received a subsequent staging in the twenty years since it was first performed in 1997. Furthermore, at present, the only history of the play-in-production is briefly contained in the paratextual materials for the 2001 collection of essays that was published after the conference and included the script for *Caves of Fancy*. For example, in their introduction to *Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley: Writing Lives*, the book's editors, Helen M. Buss, David Lorne Macdonald, and Anne McWhir, succinctly describe the process that went into the play's composition and staging:

During the year before the conference, in conjunction with the Markin-Flanagan writer-in-residence program at the University of Calgary, Rose Scollard wrote her play, consulting with members of the English and Drama departments at the university and with the editors of this volume. Through an intensive series of workshops, the play's

director, Brian Smith of the Department of Drama, worked with Scollard and with a group of scholars, student actors, and production staff to bring the play to life. (7-8)

While this description provides a point of departure for studying the play-in-performance, it is far from the whole story of *Caves of Fancy*, especially given the drama's exceptional origins, staging, and afterlife, which are only hinted at in this brief account. Questions then remain about how the play happened, why it has not been re-staged despite initially playing to an audience of many of the world's preeminent Romantic scholars, and indeed, how the performance itself even looked. Since the play has never been re-staged, no reviews exist, and only a single image of the 1997 production is available online through Scollard's personal website, contemporary readers and dramaturgs would be left wondering what the performance was like, beyond the framing the text's editors give us. This lack of information presents a barrier to entry that not only discourages returning to Scollard's text, but, if left unaddressed, leaves a notable gap in the history of contemporary Romantic Biodrama, especially in Canada.

Working then to account for this yet untold story of the play-in-performance, this chapter unpacks the processes of writing, workshopping, staging, and publishing that went into *Caves of Fancy* by recovering available connections with its only production in 1997. Through it, I am then endeavoring to dislocate *Caves of Fancy* from the limiting confines of closet drama by re-reading the play as a working performance text. By bringing together the perspectives of those who helped create and stage the play, I hope to re-trace the circumstances and conditions that led to its creation and staging. Ultimately, I am seeking to re-enact *Caves of Fancy*'s own featured resurrection and to "bring the play to life" again by identifying and exploring the forces, conditions, and collective efforts that first animated it (Buss, Macdonald, McWhir 8).



“Image of the Original Production of *Caves of Fancy*, Featuring Iam Coulter as Claire Clairmont, Anne Marie Herberts as Mary Shelley, Vicki Stroich as Fanny Imlay, and Curt McKinstry as The Creature,” Rose Scollard’s Personal Website, RoseScollard.com, 1997.

The Archive

In working to document the processes of writing and staging *Caves of Fancy*, I encountered a very limited archive of resource relating to the play-in-production. Because the play was staged in 1997, prior to the ubiquity of the internet, little remains in terms of a public, digital footprint and adjusted search criteria still provided almost no results. Furthermore, because the play was staged at the University of Calgary during the summer, and not during the mainstage season, the same performance archive was not preserved or made publicly-accessible. To begin reconstituting the conditions of performance, I therefore turned to the introductory materials for *Writing Lives* to help me understand how the play happened and the production credits included gave me a list of individuals whom I could contact for more information. Here I

must acknowledge the significance of *Caves of Fancy*'s production context at the University of Calgary on my ability to recovery information about the play-in-performance. Because I was a student in both the Departments of English and Drama at the U of C from 2007 to 2011, I personally knew many of the individuals involved with *Caves of Fancy*. For example, Dr. Anne McWhir, one of the conference's organizers and co-editor of *Writing Lives*, was my supervisor for my Master's thesis about *Frankenstein*'s first theatrical adaptation. Brian Smith, the production's director, was my acting professor and the director of Brenton's Romantic Biodrama *Bloody Poetry* at the university, for which I was the visiting dramaturg in 2014. Finally, Gavin Semple, the production's designer, was my theatre design professor, which made it possible for me to contact him, despite his retirement from teaching. These close working relationships enabled me to contact individuals involved with *Caves of Fancy*'s 1997 staging and informed my ability to discuss the production, despite the limited archive that was previously available.

Despite the access that these professional and academic connections afforded me, the limited availability of resources relating to the play-in-performance meant that my analysis in this chapter is largely limited to *Writing Lives* and its expository introduction, the script itself, and the remembered accounts of members of the creative team reflecting twenty years removed from the staging process. Accordingly, these limited resources, and the temporal distance between the writing and staging of *Caves of Fancy* in 1997, the collection of materials in 2013 and 2014, and the chapter's composition in 2016 must necessarily be acknowledged. To re-create the play-in-performance, my analysis then primarily relies on interview responses from individuals involved in the play's composition and initial staging. Accordingly, this chapter relies on responses collected between 2013 and 2014 from *Caves of Fancy*'s playwright, Rose Scollard, the production's director, Brian Smith, the designer, Gavin Semple, two of the

conference organizers and subsequent editors of *Writing Lives*, Anne McWhir and Helen M. Buss, current chair of the Calgary Distinguished Writers Program, Dymphny Dronyk, the Reeve Theatre's technician, Brian Kerby, and the actors who first played Fanny Imlay and the Creature, Vicki Stroich and Curt McKinstry, respectively.

While contacting members of the creative team, I was extremely fortunate to discover that the production's designer, Gavin Semple, had kept and maintained so many materials relating to the performance. Consequently, theatrical ephemera, such as rehearsal photos, notes and drawings from an early production meeting, designs for projections are here preserved and employed to bolster my critical analysis. Furthermore, prior to Semple's involvement, I was only able to find one photo of the play-in-performance and so his stunning collection of production photographs gave me a better sense of how the performance looked. Finally, because he generously gave me permission to include these materials in the case study, not only does my study benefit from these photographs, notes, sketches, and blueprints, but they are also preserved and propagated here for future readers. Resultantly, this chapter not only draws from information found in the recoverable documentary record relating to *Caves of Fancy*, but this study actively works to reclaim as of yet undocumented materials, resources, and personal accounts.

Plot Synopsis

*Caves of Fancy*⁷⁴ begins with Mary Shelley, her step-sister Claire, and her half-sister Fanny attempting to bring Mary Wollstonecraft back to life through a theatrical séance.⁷⁵ In the

⁷⁴ As the play's opening stage directions in the 2014 PGC script explains, "the play is freeform in structure and, although the scenes have been defined and named, the action flows from one to another without break" (4). Accordingly, although the events of the play are chronologically represented, they are presented as a series of loosely-connected vignettes that quickly jump from own temporality or location to another.

⁷⁵ Although the exact date at the play's beginning is not disclosed, we are told that Mary is pregnant with her first child. This likely sets the opening scene after the Shelleys returned to

opening scene, entitled “The First Resurrection,” the sisters attempt to invoke her presence by repeating the magic word “imagination” (243; 244). But something goes wrong and they instead conjure up *Frankenstein*’s Creature: a shapeshifting entity masquerading as Wollstonecraft who appears to them in “a ragged military redcoat over corsets and blue trousers” (245). Although the sisters know the Creature is not Wollstonecraft and are immediately repulsed by his appearance and grotesque language, they soon forget he is there and become immersed in imaging their futures: Fanny pines after “romance” and “children” (247), Claire seeks “Adventure” “and Sex” (247;248), and Mary desires “Fame” before acknowledging that she really wants “all of it. Adventure, Children, Fame” (248). From these initial declarations, the play follows Mary, Claire, and Fanny as they each try to achieve these dreams and chronicles the occasional triumphs and many tragedies that meet them on their journeys.

Following the attempted resurrection at the beginning of the play, *Caves of Fancy* immediately interrupts Mary’s dream of children with the “Death of an Unnamed Daughter:” the first of death’s many appearances in the story, which is here represented through the Creature taking the bundle of fabric used to represent the child and then shaking “*the bundle with a flourish. It’s empty*” (248). After immediately establishing the centrality of death, and the Creature’s association with it, in the sisters’ shared stories, the play transitions to Claire, Byron and the beginning of their own romantic relationship, including the fateful events at the Villa Diodati in 1816. At this point, Mary and the Creature come together to recall his conception in words that directly recall the language of *Frankenstein*: “I sickened as I read of the day when I received life. Cursed creator! Why did you form a monster so hideous that even you turned from

England in September 1814, since Fanny is present in the scene and Mary gave birth to her daughter on February 22, 1815.

me in disgust?" (225). This return to *Frankenstein*, and the Creature's, origin story quickly gives way to another tragedy: Fanny's suicide. Here, her 1816 death is presented as a marriage between her and the Creature, which aligns with her own loneliness, isolation, and outcast state with that of *Frankenstein's*, and *Caves of Fancy's*, maligned monster.

After Fanny's death, the play moves to its second act, which involves a change in setting to Italy, a temporal shift,⁷⁶ and a change in Mary's mindset: "*Several years have past. MARY, in her mid twenties now, is lost in reverie*" (260). After her death, Fanny joins the Creature to continue haunting the play, sometimes interacting with Mary and Claire and other times directly addressing the audience about Mary: "She pretends it's adventure but it's really death. A funeral procession" (260). In Act Two, Mary and Claire's earlier dreams of family, fame, children, and adventure are all destroyed by what Claire refers to as "the phantasmagoria of life with the Shelleys" (262). During this act, Claire gives birth to Allegra, loses her to the Italian convent, and then finally loses her completely. Mary loses all but one of her children, leading Claire to conclude that "the getting and losing of children" is "a common theme in the Shelley household" (262). Finally, the act ends with Mary and Claire finally losing Percy when he drowns at sea. As the second act concludes, Claire laments that "we could have all been so happy" (269) and Mary expresses her fear that despair will continue: "How dark, how very dark the future seems. I shrink in fear from the mere imagination of coming time" (273).

The play's third and final act again begins with a change⁷⁷ as Mary is no longer a young woman and is afflicted with illness: "I wrote of death and death stole my loved ones. I wrote of

⁷⁶ The exact setting of Act Two is not specified, but the Shelleys left for Italy on March 12, 1818 and Percy's died on July 8, 1822. Furthermore, Mary's conversation with Leigh Hunt towards the end of the act could be set during the year she lived with the Hunts after Percy's death.

⁷⁷ Again, although the year is not specifically noted in the third act, Mary did contract smallpox in 1828, the same year she began a flirtation with Prosper Mérimée and Claire returned from

plague and pestilence struck. I wrote of monsters and from my mirror an exquisitely ugly woman, pockmarked and scabbed, peers out at me” (275). The act shows Mary’s harrowing bout of smallpox, her brief flirtation with French Romantic Prosper Mérimée, and her reunion with Claire after her return from working as a governess in Russia. During their conversation, Mary discloses her continuing financial dependency on Sir Timothy and the two argue about Percy, with Mary blaming Claire for ruining her last days with her husband. Intercut with their conversation is a shared resolution between Fanny and the Creature to reinvent themselves; to not come back as they were, but as “something rich and strange” (281). Accordingly, the Creature reappears to the audience as both the movie monster he became in the 1931 film *Frankenstein* and as the theatrical character he evolved into for the gothic melodrama *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein* (1823). Fanny similarly experiences an evolution, electing to don the redcoat the Creature wore at the beginning of the play when he appeared to the sisters as Mary Wollstonecraft and proclaiming of her mother “it was in that time of despair and fear that she pushed through to something different. She was broken down and remade. She took a lover. She had a child. Her ideas shifted into new patterns” (284-85). Newly clothed in her mother’s surrogate uniform and armed with her strength, Fanny presents her sisters with a book of Virgil’s writing and invites them to cast their fortunes using the *sortes Virgilianae*.⁷⁸ Mary and

Russia. Furthermore, it is revealed that Timothy Shelley, Percy’s father, is still alive, which places the action prior to April 24, 1844.

⁷⁸ As the introduction to *Writing Lives* explains, “the play’s final scene, in which Claire, Mary and the sibylline figure of Fanny engage in the *sortes Virgilianae* (pointing to a random passage in Virgil and interpreting it as a prophecy), sums up the play’s focus on what Scollard calls ‘reading the fragments’” (17). In his *Defence of Poesy* (1595), Sir Philip Sidney’s expounded on the tradition and its significance as a form of bibliomancy:

Among the Romans a poet was called *vates*, which is as much as a diviner, foreseer, or prophet...And so far were they carried into the admiration thereof, that they thought in the chanceable hitting upon any such verses great fore-tokens of their following fortunes

Claire ask they book how two women are supposed to live, knowing they face incredible odds. The response they are given is “they advance and expose their lives to obvious danger,” a sentiment that Claire associates with Wollstonecraft’s worldview (291).

At this point, the Creature steps in for the last time to directly address their audience. He acknowledges that the audience likely wants to know what happened next for Mary and Claire, but asserts that it does not really matter because “Mary’s life will be seen by posterity as a little heap of obscure moments with one great book resting at the top” (291). Although he observes that some members of the audience will “try to reach around me and haul her into the future,” he will always “be there, standing between you” (291). He ascribes his prominence to the many interpretations of him as a character, his originality, and his ubiquity, attributing his creation as “Mary’s monster” to “a million little glistening resurrections of all her dead and all her lost desires,” saying to the audience “But I could be yours. Couldn’t I?” (291). Looking at the sisters, he determines that they are “doomed to disappointment and mediocrity” and he justified his callousness by asking “would Iago have sympathy for Shakespeare? Would Satan revere Milton?” (292). However, Mary herself is given the final word as she says, “take on the word and hang the consequences. I like that very much” then “*strokes the Creature’s face and runs back to join her sisters*” (292).

“Writing Lives:” The Conference

As the introduction to this chapter has already noted, *Caves of Fancy*’s origin story begins at a rather exceptional place: at a university. Additionally, the script itself was not only a commissioned work, but it was also written for a unique performance context: the “Mary

were placed; whereupon grew the word of *Sortes Virgilianæ*, when by sudden opening Virgil’s book they lighted upon some verse of his making. (106)

Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley: Writing Lives” conference. For these reasons, to begin charting the history of *Caves of Fancy*, it is necessary to start by looking further into the circumstances that led to the formation of this conference and to explore how the unique idea to create and stage a full-length play was first conceived.

From its initial inception, “Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley: Writing Lives” was intended to be a different kind of academic conference. Later writing about how they developed the idea behind “Writing Lives,” the conference co-organizers,⁷⁹ Helen M. Buss, David Lorne Macdonald, and Anne McWhir, described the process as having been “a collaborative venture” from the start (*Writing Lives* 7). But while having more than one individual working in concert to organize a conference is far from exceptional, what is notable is that Buss, Macdonald, and McWhir not only came together to create a space for academic and creative discussion to flourish, but that they used their own collaboration as interdisciplinary colleagues as the model for the conference format.

Held at the University of Calgary in 1997, the “Writing Lives” conference brought together many of the world’s top Mary Wollstonecraft and Shelley scholars to discuss the interrelationship between these famous figures as women, writers, revolutionaries, and mother and daughter. Dr. Anne McWhir, one of the conference organizers and Professor of English at the University of Calgary at the time, explained how the conference came to fruition and the confluence of circumstances that led to its focus on the writers, whom she identified as “the Marys.” McWhir described the conference’s genesis as being the result of “mostly coincidence

⁷⁹ Helen M. Buss, David Lorne Macdonald, and Anne McWhir, the conference co-organizers for the “Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley: Writing Lives” conference, are hereafter referred to together as “the organizers.” When referencing their role as co-editors of the subsequent volume, *Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley: Writing Lives*, they will be collectively referred to as “the editors.”

and good luck,” noting that both she and her colleague, the late Dr. David Lorne Macdonald, were working on “the Marys” at the time. While she was “finishing up an edition of *The Last Man* for Broadview,” Macdonald “had just published *The Vindications* (with Kathleen Scherf, also for Broadview).” As they were completing their critical editions, McWhir and Macdonald discussed the possibility of staging a conference about the lives and writing of both women, to coincide with the upcoming “bicentennial of Wollstonecraft’s death and Shelley’s birth” and to reflect the growing “interest in both Wollstonecraft and Shelley” that they had both observed at the time. In their early discussions about the form a conference surrounding “the Marys” might take, McWhir and Macdonald began conversing with another colleague from their department: Dr. Helen M. Buss.

At the time, Buss was also a professor in the Department of English at the University of Calgary. Characterized by McWhir as “a highly energetic scholar of life-writing,” Buss joined her and Macdonald in their discussions and quickly became involved with the “Writing Lives” conference. Buss explained that while she is not a “Romantic specialist,” she believes that she was “taken on board” by McWhir and Macdonald because she “specialized in memoir and had an interest in Godwin’s memoir as a starting point for the modern memoir.” Additionally, she noted that McWhir and Macdonald both “expected a lot of feminist-based proposals” and that “they wanted my input on those because of my openly feminist works.” Finally, Buss was also a playwright whose interest in dramatic studies kept her in close contact with the Department of Drama and the theatre community in Calgary. But beyond Buss’ own subject expertise, and her self-acknowledged aptitude for “putting out the kind of fires that conferences ... can cause,” her role in the project speaks to a larger, foundational component of the “Writing Lives” conference that is especially key when discussing the inclusion of *Caves of Fancy* as a focal element of the

event. Instead of creating an academic conference that was exclusively organized and attended by individuals from the same background, who were working in the same field and shared the same critical focus, the conference organizers used their own early discussions as a jumping off point for how they wanted “Writing Lives” to operate. More specifically, McWhir pointed to the organizers’ own interdisciplinary interests as a contributing factor in the decision to expand the conference focus to account for other academic disciplines, subject positions, and ultimately, different forms of expression than those typically seen in a conference setting. She explained that the initial idea for “a conference that would extend beyond narrow academic specialties” first “emerged out of hallway conversations,” like those between her, Buss, Macdonald. These “hallway conversations” first led to the conference’s conception and, as the organizers worked to develop “Writing Lives,” it would continue to form the basis for how the conference would be conducted. Consequently, while a conference about Mary Wollstonecraft and Shelley could expect to attract Romanticists, like Macdonald and McWhir, these early and fruitful talks they had together with Buss continued to inspire the group and led them to make a concerted effort to bring different individuals, faculties, and fields into conversation through the “Writing Lives” project.

This decision to consciously cultivate a sense of collegial conversation continued to influence Buss, Macdonald, and McWhir as they developed their plans for the “Writing Lives” conference. McWhir explained that, as the organizers envisioned what they wanted the conference to look like, they “imagined an event that would be more inclusive and celebratory than many academic conferences, attracting a cross-disciplinary, inter-generational audience.” The idea of creating a meeting of academics that is more “celebratory” than staid eschewed typical conference expectations and speaks to the organizers’ desire to create a different kind of

“event.” McWhir’s assertion that the group sought to attract a “cross-disciplinary, inter-generational audience” for “Writing Lives” reiterates their initial aim to continue fostering that same enthusiastic and engaged sense of “hallway conversations” between colleagues that initially sparked the idea for the conference. Furthermore, this mission statement would later be the inciting force behind the commission and staging of *Caves of Fancy* as both a “cross-disciplinary” and “inter-generational” project that brought together students and professors from the larger university community. In this way, it is not only important to note that *Caves of Fancy* was produced and staged as part of a conference, but to observe that it was only made possible by the specific kind of conference that the organizers wanted “Writing Lives” to be.

To then foster this sense of inclusiveness and to bring together “cross-disciplinary” and “inter-generational” participants, the organizers actively encouraged student involvement and worked to bring in individuals from departments across campus. McWhir explained that this was a conscious decision from the start, noting that “from the beginning, we set out to include student papers...and to stir up interest beyond the English Department.” She observed that this not only contributed to the inclusive and celebratory nature of the conference, as she perceived it, but also inadvertently contributed to fundraising. Speaking further to this initiative, she explained that the broad inclusion of students across campus “turned out to be a good way of raising small amounts of money all over campus,” although she conceded that she did not “think that was our original motivation.”

This effort to bring in participants from different departments, disciplines, and levels of experience not only provided additional opportunities for fundraising and increased broader interest in the “Writing Lives” conference across campus, but it also opened the door to allow an entirely different kind of presentation to take place at the event, one that did not fit within the

normal parameters for academic conference submissions. Consequently, the organizers mission to foster a more inclusive, inter-generational, and inter-disciplinary environment at “Writing Lives” would ultimately lay the groundwork for their composition and staging of a Romantic Biodrama, a play that would creatively treat the concept of “writing lives” as it related to Wollstonecraft and Shelley. The resulting play would not only be staged through the Department of Drama and bring together student-actors and professors, but it would also receive dramaturgical support from the Department of English, thus embodying the conference’s collaborative, intergenerational, and interdisciplinary spirit. But in order to write the play that would eventually become *Caves of Fancy*, the organizers had to find a playwright who they could commission to compose an original script about “the Marys” and who would creatively reimagine their lives and writing through the theatrical medium. With an eye to fostering emerging perspectives on the subject, while also working under the limitations of budgetary constraints, the organizers approached another individual who would already be joining the Department of English the following year: The University of Calgary’s incoming “Distinguished Visiting Writer.”

The “Distinguished Visiting Writer”

When Rose Scollard was commissioned to write a play for the “Writing Lives” conference, she was already set to work with the University of Calgary as part of the Calgary Distinguished Writers Program. The Calgary Distinguished Writers Program, or the Markin-Flanagan Distinguished Writers Program, as it was also known at the time, is an initiative out of the Department of English at the University of Calgary that began in 1993 and continues to the present. In addition to offering a writer-in-residence position to an emerging Canadian author, the program also features an invitation-only position within the department, referred to as the

“Distinguished Visiting Writer.”⁸⁰ From 1997 to 1998, this prestigious position was held by Rose Scollard, a professional playwright and co-founder of Maenad Theatre Productions, a feminist theatre company established in Calgary in 1987.

The current program website explains that the DVW is invited to take part in the program by the steering committee and that individuals hold the position for varying lengths of time, depending on various circumstances. In Scollard’s case, she held the position for a year, which allowed her to not only finish the script for *Caves of Fancy* in that time, but to also participate in the play’s dramaturgical development and subsequent staging. Dymphny Dronyk, the current chair of the Calgary Distinguished Writers Program, expanded on what Scollard’s role as DVW entailed: “with our distinguished visiting writer we work to create interfaces and opportunities for the public to be able to experience the richness that they bring to the community in that short timeframe that we now have them.” She also explained that, although the changing literary landscape has forced the program to evolve since its inception in 1993, Scollard “was still part of the beginning of our program when it was still feasible to have people stay that long and support them in that way.” Speaking further to the kinds of additional supports that were available to Scollard as the distinguished visiting writer in 1997, Dronyk listed “space to work, printers, supports, contacts, facilitating that kind of outreach into the community, and maybe even providing rehearsal space.” These supports, which were afforded to Scollard as the DVW, would in turn benefit *Caves of Fancy*’s composition and subsequent staging. Addressing her experience as the DVW at the University of Calgary and how it affected the writing process for *Caves of Fancy*, Scollard explained that once she officially began her residency, she had already “been writing the play for almost a year and still hadn’t come up with a third act.” She credited the

⁸⁰ Hereafter abbreviated as “DVW.”

supports offered to her as DVW for providing her with “time and space to reflect on the play, and interested and knowledgeable people to provide feedback.” She emphasized her gratitude to people from the program, as well as the English and Drama departments, who she said, “totally supported my fantasy.”

McWhir elaborated on the initial decision to bring the DVW on as part of the “Writing Lives” conference. She conceded that she was “a bit skeptical at first” about the possibility of staging a play as part of the conference, but she became very excited after meeting Rose and seeing how much “serious reading and research was going into this project,” she “became very enthusiastic.” McWhir also pointed to the real material realities associated with this decision, explaining that that they “needed to be inventive about funding, of course” as they looked to find a playwright and Scollard’s role within the department as the DVW would allow for greater access to resources. Because the production took place as part of a summer conference, it did not receive the same financial benefits enjoyed by performances that are part of the Department of Drama’s mainstage season. Additionally, because *Caves of Fancy* was only one part of the “Writing Lives” conference, any financial aid allocated to the project from the Department of English had to cover the entire event, not just the production. Consequently, due to the limited departmental supports for *Caves of Fancy*, the resources the project received through the Calgary Distinguished Writers Program were essential to the composition and subsequent staging of the play. Speaking further to the financial realities of staging the play, McWhir acknowledged that the chair of the Calgary Distinguished Writers Program at the time, Jackie Flanagan, was an “important force behind the play,” even recalling how she “had to screw up my courage to ask for more money.” Although McWhir characterized Flanagan’s response as “incredibly gracious and generous,” her emphasis on the financial constraints associated with the project underscores

the material realities associated with producing the play and highlights the importance of *Caves of Fancy*'s production context to our reading of the play in production. But in addition to the financial benefits associated with the decision to bring Scollard on as part of "Writing Lives," McWhir also explained that the decision was again consistent with the conference's collaborative ethos. She elaborated that they "wanted to encourage a kind of creative/scholarly symbiosis," and that bringing Scollard on allowed them to integrate the DVW into the work being done within the department in a way that integrated both creative experiment and critical research. Once Scollard was brought on board and financing for the project was jointly secured through the Department of English, the Department of Drama, and the Calgary Distinguished Writers Program, Scollard and the conference organizers began discussing ideas for what a play about "the Marys" could possibly look like.

Writing *Caves of Fancy*

Having been commissioned with the task of creating a script based on the conference's theme of "writing lives," Scollard began working with the organizers to develop a sense of the kind of story they could tell about "the Marys" through Romantic Biodrama. Early in the writing process, Scollard would frequently meet with them and posit possible ideas, based on her own research. McWhir elaborated on the script development process, noting how it began with her, Macdonald, and Buss spending "quite a lot of time just talking with Rose." In these early discussions, McWhir characterized Scollard as "marvelous to work with," noting how she "read everything she could get her hands on, asked questions, and tried out ideas." Significantly, McWhir also described the sense of excitement they all felt as they began to imagine how these historical figures, ideas, writing, and events could be re-imagined for the theatre. She described the feeling of watching the story come together in these preliminary conversations and recalled

the thrill of seeing what they had “thought about in the context of academic argument taking imaginative flight.” McWhir’s assertion that working on the development of the script gave “imaginative flight” to traditionally “academic argument” underscores the importance of Romantic Biodrama as a site for creative exploration and a forum for experimental thought. She further built on this idea of *Caves of Fancy* as both a creative and critical project by emphasizing that this “experience gave us all some insight into the Shelleys’ creative lives” by providing a unique opportunity for “a kind of merging of serious reading and conversation with wild speculation!” This description of the research and script development process as the “merging of serious reading and conversation with wild speculation” helps situate *Caves of Fancy* as both a biofictional reading of “the Marys’” lives and writing and an imaginative work of dramatic fancy. Consequently, this characterization of the composition process directly recalls *Caves of Fancy*’s position as a contemporary Romantic Biodrama: a creative, biofictional account of the Shelleys lives and writing. However, as this section explores, the extent to which *Caves of Fancy* adheres to the available documentary record of Wollstonecraft and Shelley is reflected through what Scollard chose to omit, emphasize, or even invent.

During the play’s research and development period, Scollard consulted a variety of primary sources that influenced her understanding of the Wollstonecraft-Godwin-Shelley family and informed her writing of *Caves of Fancy*. In terms of non-fiction from the period, she specifically identified Mary’s journals and Claire’s letters, as well as Godwin’s *Memoirs of the Author of ‘A Vindication of the Rights of Woman’* (1798) and Wollstonecraft’s *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796) as useful sources. Furthermore, she recalled reading Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley’s fiction, especially Shelley’s *The Last Man* (1826), and consulted many “biographies of Mary, Percy, Claire and

their contemporaries.” Addressing whether there were any specific examples from these texts that stood out to her, she recalled a passage from Wollstonecraft’s writing that stood out to her, in which she “described her encounter with mummified corpses and the extreme revulsion and horror she felt on viewing them.”⁸¹ Scollard’s interest in this passage, and especially the emotions of “extreme revulsion and horror” Wollstonecraft expressed at seeing this image of feigned life, is especially useful to us when we consider the themes of death and resurrection in the play. Finally, the title of Scollard’s play, and indeed the drama’s central notion of the “cave of fancy,” is a direct reference from the writing of both Mary Wollstonecraft and Shelley. In their notes to the published play text, the editors explain that the title *Caves of Fancy* notably “conflates ‘The Cave of Fancy,’ the title of an incomplete prose tale by Mary Wollstonecraft, included in her *Posthumous Works* (1798), and ‘Fields of Fancy,’ Mary Shelley’s original title for what eventually became her novella ‘Mathilda’ (1819)” (292). Accordingly, by titling her play *Caves of Fancy*, Scollard not only made dual-reference to the writing of both Marys, but also explicitly drew attention to an example of the intergenerational influence between mother and daughter that continued after Wollstonecraft’s death. Furthermore, by evoking the two women’s writing in the play’s title, Scollard also positioned herself within a continuing line of influence from Wollstonecraft’s “Cave of Fancy,” to Shelley’s “Fields of Fancy,” to her own *Caves of Fancy*. Considered together then, this myriad of primary sources that Scollard consulted gives greater insight into which texts provided the historical foundation for her creative departure in *Caves of Fancy*.

⁸¹ From *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796): “When I was shewn [sic] these human petrifications, I shrank back with disgust and horror [...] The grandeur of the active principle is never more strongly felt than at such a sight; for nothing is so ugly as the human form when deprived of life, and thus dried into stone, merely to preserve the most disgusting image of death” (95).

From this research work and her early discussions with the organizers, Scollard created a script that told the story of “the Marys,” but went about it in a somewhat unconventional way by following a loose chronology and eschewing key events from many Romantic Biodramas, such as the Villa Diodati, Mary Shelley’s courtship with Percy, or indeed, any part of Wollstonecraft’s own life or death. Working from the commission to compose a play about the lives of Mary Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft, Scollard went beyond biographical realism to produce a drama that is as much a work of fancy as it is the retelling of established fact. Buss, Macdonald, and McWhir explain in their introduction that the play “dramatizes episodes” from the lives of Fanny Imlay, Claire Clairmont, and Mary Shelley “from about 1814 (when Shelley and Percy eloped) until the 1830s” (16). However, despite the apparent chronology this timeline would imply, they reiterate that the play is “far from a linear account of events” (7). In their introduction, the editors observe the effect of this focal shift, explaining how the play revisits Wollstonecraft’s death and re-casts that “primal scene” alongside Fanny’s “suicidal imagination in 1816” (7). Consequently, in this sense, *Caves of Fancy* re-stages “the scene of Wollstonecraft’s death” so that it is not only “the last of a tragedy,” but also “the beginning of another generation’s story that overlaps and intersects with the past” (Buss, Macdonald, McWhir 7). Read in this way, *Caves of Fancy* dramatizes the relationship between Wollstonecraft and Shelley less through straight chronology or shared life events, and more by positioning Shelley’s story as the next chapter in her mother’s own life and legacy. Consequently, although the play itself does not take place in 1797, it still directly aligns Wollstonecraft and Shelley’s share story by dramatizing the sense of loss, transition, and attempted resurrection that marked that fateful year in both women’s lives and continued to characterize Shelley’s life and writing.

Scollard went on to discuss her character development process for *Caves of Fancy* and explained how she dealt with the challenge of creating dramatic portraits based on well-known historical figures. Although she first remarked that she is “not sure what my process was or ever is,” she did assert that she often attempts “to sift the research and the characters with the things I find, the things they’ve said, etc.” Speaking specifically to her experience writing *Caves of Fancy*, she discussed how her characterization of Mary, Claire, and Fanny was grounded in what she perceived to be the relatability of the characters, since “the three women were straightforward characters with hopes and dreams and sorrows like all of us.” Of these three women, Mary Shelley is focalized in the drama. In addition to the fact that *Caves of Fancy* was commissioned for a conference based on Shelley and her mother, she is undeniably the focal figure of this trio, both in their treatment in life and their enduring legacies. Addressing Mary Shelley’s centrality to the Wollstonecraft-Godwin-Shelley family, Scollard discussed how her distinct position in her family and experiences as a woman, writer, mother, daughter, and wife made her a fascinating dramatic character to create. She began by suggesting that, due to her conditions, relationships, and cultural context, Mary Shelley was uniquely positioned to be “a conduit for all the scientific ideas and breakthroughs of the time.” She further elucidated that this was because she grew up “in her father’s house where she was exposed to the most current scientific ideas and the people who were having them.” Additionally, Scollard also asserted the importance of Mary’s marriage to Percy Shelley to her conception of the character, noting that Mary threw off “societal constraints” by “eloping with Percy Shelley, who himself was deeply engaged in scientific experiment and new ideas.” Building from this idea of Mary Shelley at the epicentre of this intergenerational Romantic family and the beneficiary of this confluence of creativity, Scollard spoke in specific terms about the precise image of Mary Shelley that

informed her characterization in *Caves of Fancy*. Scollard recalled that her conception of Mary, which she used as the basis for her dramatic character in her play, was the “image of her being struck by the lightning of all those ideas and galvanized into producing the great metaphorical archetype that immediately caught the public imagination of Shelley’s day and has persisted in doing so to the present.” Scollard’s stated interest in Mary Shelley as metaphorically “struck by the lightning of all those ideas” and subsequently “galvanized” into producing the enduring archetype of Frankenstein and his Creature defines the dramatic portrait of the character that she sought to create through *Caves of Fancy*. Her stated interest here in Mary Shelley’s circumstances, relationships, and her most famous literary endeavor highlights the dual-roles that Shelley plays within *Caves of Fancy*: as inheritor of knowledge and creator of *Frankenstein*. However, this emphasis on Mary’s relationships as a source of influence over her and her creative process becomes especially interesting in this play, since so few of her loved ones are theatrically realized onstage.

Reading *Caves of Fancy*

In looking at the *dramatis personae* for *Caves of Fancy*, primarily comprised of Mary, Claire, Fanny, and the Creature, there are three omissions from the Wollstonecraft-Godwin-Shelley family that immediately stand out: William Godwin, Percy Shelley, and, perhaps most notably in this case, Mary Wollstonecraft. Of these three focal figures from Mary Shelley’s life, her father, William Godwin, receives the least amount of focus in *Caves of Fancy*. Despite being the father to Mary and still being alive during the events of the play, he does not factor into the drama in any significant way. And unlike Wollstonecraft and Percy Shelley, who are still key figures despite their absence, Godwin is notably omitted and acknowledged only through cursory mentions. Even though Scollard cites Mary’s upbringing in “her father’s house” as a major

influence on her development, both as a person and a dramatic character in *Caves of Fancy*, Godwin is conspicuously absent from the drama and is only ever referenced by the Creature in strictly negative terms.

But while Godwin is largely unmentioned and entirely unseen in *Caves of Fancy*, Wollstonecraft occupies a unique position within the play as both a key figure and the source of the inciting incident, while never being seen onstage. Although the character initially seems to appear in the opening scene, as part of “the first resurrection” during which Mary, Claire, and Fanny attempt to bring her to life as “the key” to “nourishment,” “consolation and strength,” it is quickly revealed that they have mistakenly conjured up *Frankenstein’s* Creature instead (243). Although the Creature claims to be Wollstonecraft, attributing his unusual appearance to Godwin’s mistreatment and telling them “this is your father’s fault. He made a monster of me,” they quickly detect that the Creature is counterfeit and abandon him (245). Other than the Creature’s parody, the closest reference the play comes to embodying Wollstonecraft onstage is through Fanny’s recollection of her mother’s death, although here the limitations of Fanny’s memories prevent a full picture of the character from emerging, as seen through Fanny’s assertion that she “had all these pictures in my head of her...But now I can’t seem to see any of them” except her death (258). Scollard’s decision to only show Wollstonecraft onstage through the perverted image of the Creature’s impersonation or the faded recollections of her daughter is a significant choice, especially given the play’s inclusion in the “Writing Lives” conference. Despite being one of the conference’s two focal figures, Wollstonecraft is not directly embodied within the drama, despite the sisters’ attempt to resurrect her in the opening scene. While she noted that the commission had been to write a play about the two Marys, Scollard explained that “apart from Fanny imagining her deathbed scene, I thought it best to reveal her through the

memories of the three women.” She explained the rationale behind this choice, observing that because Wollstonecraft “was a seminal influence on” Mary, Claire, and Fanny” she instead “chose to have this reflected in their trying to conjure her up at the beginning of the play.” Scollard’s justification for her decision to show the effects of Wollstonecraft’s life and writing on the sisters highlights the character’s important dramatic role within the play, despite her never being embodied onstage. Coupled then with the performance’s staging as part of the “Writing Lives” conferences, Wollstonecraft’s posthumous role in *Caves of Fancy* as both a continuing influence over the girls and the subject of their attempted resurrection allows her haunting presence to be felt throughout the drama and necessitates our viewing of the play with her in mind. Similarly, while Wollstonecraft’s absence paradoxically heightens her presence within the drama by showing her enduring posthumous influence, there is yet another character who is never seen onstage, but who plays a key dramatic role within *Caves of Fancy*.

While Godwin is only briefly referred to in the play and Wollstonecraft is only ever seen through impersonation, fading recollections, and her continuing influence, Percy Shelley is never seen nor staged in any form. This marks an important departure from the tradition of contemporary Romantic Biodrama by omitting Percy’s onstage appearance entirely. Scollard explained what informed this decision, noting that she “liked the idea of the three women, an archetypal concept really, balanced against the protean shifting Creature.” But while Percy’s absence could suggest that he does not play a role in *Caves of Fancy*, it instead speaks to the character’s pervasiveness, mystery, and nearly god-like omnipotence within the drama.

Throughout *Caves of Fancy*, Percy Shelley is referenced eighty-nine times. Furthermore, every character talks about him and his name appears in nearly every scene. More important though is the nature of the conversations about Percy, which center on the unseen figure’s imagined

reactions to the characters' life events, his unquestionable virtue or skill, or his alleged love for each of the women. In one exchange between Mary and Claire, the two sisters argue about the nature of Percy's character and affections:

CLAIRE: I didn't notice you coming in to take her part. Self righteous prig. I don't know how Shelley puts up with you!

MARY: Shelley and I are soulmates, we dream together, we write together.

CLAIRE: You don't realize that Shelley can't be bound to just one woman. He is creature of the air. Of the universe. He's a spirit of the ether.

MARY: I am perfectly aware of Shelley's nature. (251)

As this exchange demonstrates, despite never appearing onstage, Percy is a central figure in *Caves of Fancy*. The two sisters use Percy's love and attention to justify their own self-worth and argue over who better understands his true "nature." In another scene, the Creature launches into an extensive presentation to the audience about Percy and his many accomplishments, emphasizing that "he is a man of exquisite reason and considerable science" (263). The effect of this near-constant discussion of the absent Percy is that he remains omnipresent, unquestionable, and nearly infallible within the drama, at least in terms of the characters' conception of him. In "The Presence of Absence: Catalytic and Omnipresent Offstage Characters in Modern American Drama," Safi Mahmoud Mahfouz speaks to the significance of the unseen character within the theatrical tradition and emphasizes the continuing "presence of an absent character" (392). She asserts that "when a playwright includes such a figure who is never observed, but is only referred to by those we can see onstage, it is to motivate or significantly alter them" (392). Consequently, she concludes that "absent characters, whether dead, missing, or imaginary, are causal figures" because "they motivate the actors to take a certain course of action and advance the plot" and

that, in turn, “their absence may make them appear more powerful to us” (392). This characterization of the absent character as a “causal figure” whose absence “may make them appear more powerful to us” is consistent with Percy’s heightened role within *Caves of Fancy*, despite his never appearing onstage. Scollard herself provided further justification for omitting the character that reiterates the absent Percy’s position of power in the play: “Shelley was so internalized by the three women that their comments and memories and feelings about [him] made treating him more physically unnecessary.” This explanation that Percy “was so internalized by the three women” to the point that “treating him more physically” was “unnecessary” underscores the importance of the character to *Caves of Fancy*, despite his absence onstage. Ultimately then, by keeping Godwin, Wollstonecraft, and Percy Shelley offstage, Scollard grants each of these characters, but especially Percy, almost mythic status within *Caves of Fancy*. This conscious exclusion in turn lends a sense of gravitas to the play’s domestic drama and alludes to the constant inter-generational influences that pervaded the Wollstonecraft-Godwin-Shelley family.

Finally, while writing *Caves of Fancy*, Scollard set out to explore two recurring themes in the lives and writing of the Wollstonecraft-Godwin-Shelley family: death and resurrection. Beyond the play’s position as a resurrection narrative, in the same way that Romantic Biodramas symbolically “resurrect” their historical subject matter through the life/stories they endeavor to tell, *Caves of Fancy* explicitly opens with an act of resurrection. And although a figure from Mary Shelley’s fiction is resurrected instead of one from her life, the notion of “resurrection” is returned to throughout the play. Accordingly, resurrection is referenced and even deliberately attempted throughout the play, whether in “the first resurrection” as the action begins or in the second-act visit to the *Gabinetto di Fisica* where Mary declares that she can feel “Resurrection

almost at our fingertips” (243; 265). By the play’s final act, resurrection becomes the drama’s focus as Mary struggles to persevere through the trials and tribulations of life and loss. As the act begins, the incantation-like chants of Claire and Fanny swirl around a weakened Mary as they list off “Pestilence,” “Darkness,” “Clarity,” and “Death” before finally ending with “Resurrection” (274). Furthermore, in the third act, the Creature’s repeated refrain of “a million little glistening resurrections” (274; 291) itself recalls his own “little resurrection” that was attempted in act two (264). While discussing how she went about determining which events from the characters’ lives she wanted to include in the play, Scollard spoke of death and resurrection as important themes for this Romantic family. She explained that this observation led her to focus on “the deaths of Mary’s children, the death of Fanny Imlay, the death of Claire’s child, and of course Percy Shelley’s death” as major dramatic events in the play.

Speaking to how she perceives the ideas of death and resurrection in *Caves of Fancy*, Scollard noted that while she felt as though she was “resurrecting the subject in other work,” in terms of reintroducing audiences to lost or forgotten authors, for *Caves of Fancy*, she felt that “the characters, especially the two Marys, were well known.” But while she did not feel the same need to “resurrect” the subject here, in terms of audience familiarity, she did note that the theme of resurrection “was an important one” for her. She went on to explain how her research into the family and their frequent encounters with death led her to consider how the theme of resurrection could be imaginatively explored through the play. She observed that “so many of Mary Shelley’s loved ones died” and, in reading Mary’s writing, she felt that “there was always a feeling that it was her greatest wish to resurrect them, especially in the passage where she fantasizes bringing her baby back to life.” In *Cave of Fancy*, Scollard pointed to “the conjuring of her mother in the first scene” as a sort of dramatized wish fulfillment based on Mary Shelley’s desire to resurrect

her loved ones throughout her life. Scollard remarked that from this opening scene, this same sense of the “piecing together of dead parts into a whole and investing them with life” continued throughout the play, so much so that “even the Creature has a try at it.”

As this discussion of *Caves of Fancy*'s composition has explored, Scollard's treatment of the conference theme, “Writing Lives,” went beyond biographical realism to reimagine the unique connection between “the Marys.” By consulting a breadth of primary sources and working in collaborative consultation with the conference organizers, Scollard was then free to build on this critical foundation and creatively dramatize the posthumous relationship between Mary Wollstonecraft and Shelley. *Caves of Fancy* demonstrates the strength of this bond between mother and daughter by casting Wollstonecraft, along with Godwin and Percy, as one of the unseen, yet ever-present characters within the play. Finally, Scollard also emphasized two key themes that she perceived in the lives and writing of the Wollstonecraft-Godwin-Shelley family, namely death and resurrection, and explained how the play literalizes the family's experience with death by staging an attempted resurrection onstage and returning to the idea throughout through the symbolic presence of *Frankenstein*'s Creature. Accordingly, in reading the script for *Caves of Fancy*, Romantic Biodrama's key features can be seen at work: a basis in the lived histories of these famous figures, the need to carefully curate which events, characters, or texts are included or emphasized, and the free integration of the characters' lives and writing. However, while the script for *Caves of Fancy* certainly bears the hallmarks of the genre, the question remains as to how this play was initially staged and how the creative team collaboratively brought this Romantic Biodrama to life.

Caves of Fancy: From Page to Stage

Once Scollard had completed a working version of the script, along with the support from the conference organizers, it was then time to assemble the cast, crew, and other creative personnel who would help bring the play from page to stage. The production was directed by Brian Smith, a professor in the Department of Drama and the Head of Drama at the time. Smith was a key figure in the initial development of the script into a performance text and was involved in the process from its early workshopping, to its eventual staging. According to the introduction to *Writing Lives*, Smith “worked with Scollard and with a group of scholars, student actors, and production staff to bring the play to life” (8). Smith expanded on this brief account, beginning by noting that, once the script was created and the cast of student-actors was assembled, they initiated their own research and development process by first performing “a simple staged reading at Lunchbox Theatre” to see how the script read and to start imagining how it could be staged. This important step not only allowed the cast and crew to begin envisioning how the play would work in performance, but it also gave Scollard and the organizers the chance to finally hear the play read aloud for the first time, which helped them to make necessary changes before rehearsals commenced.

Following this staged reading, the entire creative team continued developing the script, while concurrently beginning the formal rehearsal process for the conference performance. This overlap between script and performance development allowed the playwright, conference organizers, cast, and crew to continue working together throughout the entire process of bringing *Caves of Fancy* to life, as both a working play text and as a theatrical performance. Smith explained that, even though Scollard “provided a complete script” at the beginning of the rehearsal process, she also “attended many of our rehearsals and engaged freely with us in an investigation on how the play could live in time and space.” As Smith emphasized, the open

dialogue between the different members of the creative team meant that “the play and the author’s understanding of it underwent changes as we worked toward a creative realisation of the play-in-production.” Additionally, McWhir spoke to the active role that the conference organizers played in the rehearsal process, explaining that they “sat in a semi-circle of chairs in a large rehearsal space and watched, listened, thought, reflected, and sometimes offered suggestions.” Taken together, these accounts speak to the sense of continuous discussion between different members of the creative team, which allowed them to continue developing *Caves of Fancy* as both play and performance. Consequently, this ongoing sense of collaboration between the project’s researchers, writer, and theatrical artists allowed *Caves of Fancy* to continue benefitting from the conference organizer’s initial desire for “Writing Lives” to foster interdisciplinary work across campus.

This sense of collaborative development and the bringing together of unique perspectives continued throughout the play’s rehearsal process and ultimately became a defining feature of the production. Although the conference organizers initially bolstered this sense of collaboration, other factors also influenced *Caves of Fancy*’s unique creation process. First, Smith explained that because the play was not part of the Department of Drama’s mainstage season, and was instead “a special project undertaken in the spring after classes ended,” that they were afforded greater opportunities for creative exploration. While this status as a “special project” meant that they did not enjoy the same financial freedoms as shows within the mainstage season, Smith emphasized the creative benefit of this unique position. He elaborated that, because the production took place “outside the pressures of our season, the project enjoyed both the freedom and the challenge of experiment.” In addition to the play’s staging outside the department’s

September to April mainstage season and the greater time and freedom this allowed, the production was also influenced by Smith and his ongoing interest in theatrical collaboration.

Smith helped contextualize his work on *Caves of Fancy* within his own directorial approach. He explained that, at the time that he was working on the project, he was “especially interested in the creative atmosphere that surrounds and supports a theatre performance in its development.” Smith further elaborated that, for *Caves of Fancy*, he was particularly interested in how his “creativity as a director could intersect with that of the actors and designer,” which led him to become “deeply engaged with the work of the wonderful cast,” as well as the production’s designer, Gavin Semple. Smith’s stated interest in exploring and developing the project’s “creative atmosphere,” especially in terms of facilitating the discoveries made by the actors and designer, is an important point for us to consider in our reading of *Caves of Fancy* as a Romantic Biodrama. Especially in the staging of historical fictions, maintaining a sense of historical realism or faithfulness to the established documentary record often becomes a major directorial preoccupation. But rather than prioritize the play’s historical setting and adapt his approach to suit the biographically-inspired material, Smith instead worked to cultivate a creative environment from which the group’s own discoveries could emerge. Notably then, for Smith, *Caves of Fancy*’s historical basis did not become his directorial interest in the production. Instead, his own explorations into the “creative atmosphere,” as it both “surrounds and supports” a performance, became his focus as a director and professor to his student-actors. Smith further elaborated on how this emphasis was reflected in the work he did with the production, outlining how he was “very interested in trying to create a particular sensory environment that would suggest the period but also provide a charged theatrical space evoking the sense that history lives again.” Additionally, he noted that developing a sense of this “particular sensory environment” is

what he privileged most in the process, and that for him, “this was more important” than a “particular knowledge of the characters, their narratives and their literary lives.”

However, although Smith’s own priority was to cultivate a supportive creative atmosphere for his colleagues and students to work in, he did emphasize that he was only permitted time to focus on this atmospheric work because of the involvement of the conference organizers throughout the process. He explained that, in terms of his understanding of the characters’ historical basis and the play’s nineteenth-century context, “that knowledge and understanding” came to him from the conference organizers “who provided informal dramaturgical support and organized the conference *Writing Lives* where the theatrical realisation of the work was showcased.” Having Buss,⁸² Macdonald, and McWhir involved with the project and being afforded the opportunity to consult with them for research and dramaturgical support allowed Smith, the actors, the designer, and the playwright to engage more freely in the exploration of the characters and ideas of *Caves of Fancy*. Through the organizers’ involvement, the play and the production were both grounded through their subject expertise, thereby allowing the entire creative team to benefit from this collaboration of the traditionally academic and the artistic.

In their accounts of the play’s rehearsal process, the participating members of both the Department of English and Drama spoke highly of their experience collaborating on *Caves of Fancy* and acknowledged how both sides benefitted from this interdisciplinary work. Speaking about the environment during the production’s development, McWhir recalled that the rehearsals

⁸² Although Buss explained she “was not involved in the play production, which was largely Anne McWhir’s task,” she did recall that she “may have introduced Anne and Rose as Rose was a friend from the days when my own play, *Gertrude and Ophelia*, was produced by Maenad Theatre, a feminist theatre company in Calgary.”

were always coloured by an “attitude of respectful and enthusiastic collaboration.” As an example of this pervasive sense of “respectful and enthusiastic collaboration,” McWhir pointed to an instance when she was inspired by a scene that was being rehearsed by Smith and the actors. Inspired by their work and surrounding discussions, she “went off to find Fanny Mendelssohn’s piano music—some of which was used (anachronistically) for the eventual production.” As McWhir fondly remembered, “this kind of spur-of-the-moment enthusiasm followed by immediate experiment was typical of the process.” Smith pinpointed this same moment of collaboration with McWhir, when she pulled songs as sources of inspiration, as a memorable interaction that reflected the production’s collaborative environment. He explained that he was “particularly grateful” to her “for introducing me to piano music of the period—some by female composers—that stimulated my imagination and contributed to the rich theatrical environment we were able to devise.” These examples of interdisciplinary collaboration in the play’s rehearsal process harken back to the initial idea that the conference organizers had for “Writing Lives:” to create a celebratory event where individuals from different backgrounds and disciplines could meet to discuss the lives and writing of “the Marys.” As shown through recollections by participants in the productions, like this shared memory from Smith and McWhir, they felt that these exchanges allowed both sides to reconsider these canonical writers in a new way through a different disciplinary lens. Ultimately, the characterization of *Caves of Fancy*’s staging process as a collaborative and celebratory exchange is most strongly conveyed through McWhir’s appraisal of the rehearsals as “some of the most exhilarating sessions I’ve ever experienced in the university setting.”



Simple, Gavin. "The Rehearsal Process for *Caves of Fancy* at the University of Calgary," 1997, Calgary.

These photos feature the production's cast, Anne Marie Herberts as Mary Shelley, Iam Coulter as Claire Clairmont, Vicki Stroich as Fanny Imlay, and Curt McKinstry as the Creature, director Brian Smith, playwright Rose Scollard, and two of the conference organizers, Anne McWhir and David Lorne Macdonald.



Character Case Study: Re-Animating the Creature

This section marks a brief interlude in the chronological retelling of *Caves of Fancy* in performance to provide a more focused character study of one of the play's key dramatic figures. Significantly, although the play was commissioned for inclusion in the "Writing Lives" conference, it is not Mary Wollstonecraft, nor even Mary Shelley who most inspired Scollard's writing of *Caves of Fancy*, but instead a figure from Shelley's fiction: *Frankenstein's* Creature. Addressing how she arrived at the focal concept for the play, Rose Scollard noted that "the central idea of *Caves* was always the 'creature,' the great gift to us from Mary Shelley's imagination." But despite the centrality of the character to *Caves of Fancy*, the play's lack of subsequent staging means that questions now remain about the theatrical viability of the Creature as a character. For example, how exactly do you theatrically realize a character that is defined through symbolism and abstraction? And furthermore, how could an actor take on the challenge of playing a "shape changer" who is primarily defined by his liminality? Due to the character's dramatic and symbolic significance within *Caves of Fancy*, it is necessary to then address the Creature as a key component of the play-in-performance. By accounting for how the character is conceived in the narrative, and then exploring how he was then adapted for the stage, we can get a better sense of how *Caves of Fancy* was theatrically realized.

The Creature is at the centre of the drama in *Caves of Fancy*. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that the Creature situates himself center stage in the play as its aspiring leading man. Although *Caves of Fancy* is about the intersections between Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley, it is the Creature that asserts himself, oftentimes through direct appeals to the audience, as the drama's focal figure. The editors of *Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley: Writing Lives* describe the character in their introduction as a "shape changer who at various points (and

sometimes simultaneously) plays the roles of Mary Wollstonecraft, Byron, Frankenstein's creature, Fanny Imlay's demon lover, Leigh Hunt, the actor playing the monster on the early-nineteenth-century stage, Prosper Mérimée, and Mrs. Mason (16). This characterization is consistent with Scollard's own description of the Creature as "a protean presence who takes on the personas of all the other characters in the play." The editors further discuss the Creature's dramatic function within the play, noting how he operates as "chorus, as critic, and as comic counterpoint to his own evocation of death, loss, and loneliness. His many roles allow the character to operate within the world-of-the-play, while he also helps to construct the narrative, guide audience attention, and function as a figural stand-in for the playwright as biographer. The editors elaborate that the Creature's central purpose extends beyond the character's apparent tasks or objectives within the play to serve as a symbolic reminder of "the difficulties and ironies of conjuring and writing life" (16). In this way, in addition to being a direct import from Mary Shelley's fictional oeuvre, the use of *Frankenstein's* Creature in this context also provides, for them, an 'obvious metaphor for the scholar and playwright's work,' since the character's direct appeals work to actively influence audience perception (16).

But despite the character's significance to the overall narrative, it remains even more uncertain as to how an actor would variously portray this "chorus," "critic," and "comic counterpoint." While the Creature certainly comes across as a fascinating character when reading the play, due to his many comedic monologues, costume changes, and breaking of the fourth wall, how this would have worked in practice is yet unclear. Curt McKinstry was the actor who played the Creature in the premiere production of *Caves of Fancy*. As a student of the Department of Drama at the time, McKinstry had never taken on an acting challenge like playing the Creature before. Now working as a professional actor, McKinstry recalled the unique

experience of portraying the character and remarked that “the Creature was very unlike any other character” that he has ever since portrayed. McKinstry described how he viewed the Creature and his dramatic role in *Caves of Fancy*, explaining that “much like the creature in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, I saw the Creature as being a pastiche of all the other characters in the play.” He further developed on this idea of the Creature as “pastiche” by explaining that the character was ostensibly “a collection of each character’s memories, both past and present.” Resultantly, McKinstry found that he was “frequently playing aspects of the other character’s journeys out for them,” an effect which he described in terms of “holding up a mirror to them, so to speak.”

When it came time to develop his character through the play’s rehearsal process and research into the role, McKinstry explained that “there was no solid character analysis that I could do” because, unlike the three sisters of the play, the Creature does not have the same biographical basis and his depiction in the play is only loosely informed by his appearance in *Frankenstein*. The Creature’s shifting identities present an additional challenge in the play by requiring the actor to also play numerous fictional and historical figures. Speaking to the added challenge of then having to adopt these identities while also remaining in character as the Creature, McKinstry recalled that “the historical aspect of the characters was difficult at times.” He further explained that, to inform his realization of these famous figures, he “often had to rely on the playwright to inform me” and that because of the “limited amount of time” that they had to “get the play on its feet,” he often “just had to ask for direction in that area.” This acknowledgement of how the production’s timeline affected his character development is another important aspect to consider in discussing the play-in-performance, as is McKinstry’s crediting of Scollard as an active support system for the actors during rehearsals. Returning to

the question of what he did to negotiate the character's shifting identity or respond to the circumstances of a given scene, McKinstry explained that he often needed to "alter my vocal quality and physicality." He attributed this change in vocal or physical performance to "exploring the given circumstances and the character's desires" and noted that this alteration would render the character transitions more legible for both him and the audience. Semple explained how the Creature's costuming similarly accommodated these quick transitions from one scene or identity to another. He recalled that they "wanted to keep the costume base as 'neutral' as possible so as not to conflict with other costume pieces we added for different scenes and characters played by that same actor." This neutral base allowed McKinstry to quickly put on simple costume pieces that, in addition to his vocal or physical changes, would delineate his character's adopted personas. For example, the Creature's imitation of Wollstonecraft at the beginning of the play required McKinstry to don a "ragged military redcoat over stays and blue trousers," while his portrayal of the Creature from *Frankenstein's* first theatrical adaptation in 1823, *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein*, required him to apply the character's iconic "blue makeup" (245; 278).

As the description of the character from Scollard and the editors and McKinstry's account all suggest, the Creature plays a unique dramatic role in *Caves of Fancy* as a guide for the audience, a stand-in for the playwright as biographer, an import from Mary Shelley's fiction, and an adaptive shape-shifter who becomes a variety of secondary figures in the drama. By looking at how this exceptional character was written in the play, and then considering how he was ultimately realized through staging, we can gain greater insight into how *Caves of Fancy* was practically adapted from a script to a play-in-performance. Furthermore, in addition to the information that we can glean for McKinstry, as the only actor to ever play the character, the

additional references here to how costume design also helped bring the character to life bring us to the importance of design as a key component of *Caves of Fancy* and its premiere production.

Setting the Scene: Designing *Caves of Fancy*

Returning now to the larger question of how *Caves of Fancy* was adapted for the stage, we must now address the topic of design to see how the production looked and how the play was finally realized onstage. For this production, design was integral to the theatrical realization of Scollard's concept for *Caves of Fancy*. However, because the remaining record of the play-in-performance is so scant, getting a sense of how the play looked in production has relied on speculation, based on the play's descriptive stage directions. Accordingly, the following two sections endeavor to recreate the production's design concept through images, accounts, descriptions, and critical resources that can help us to visualize how the production looked.

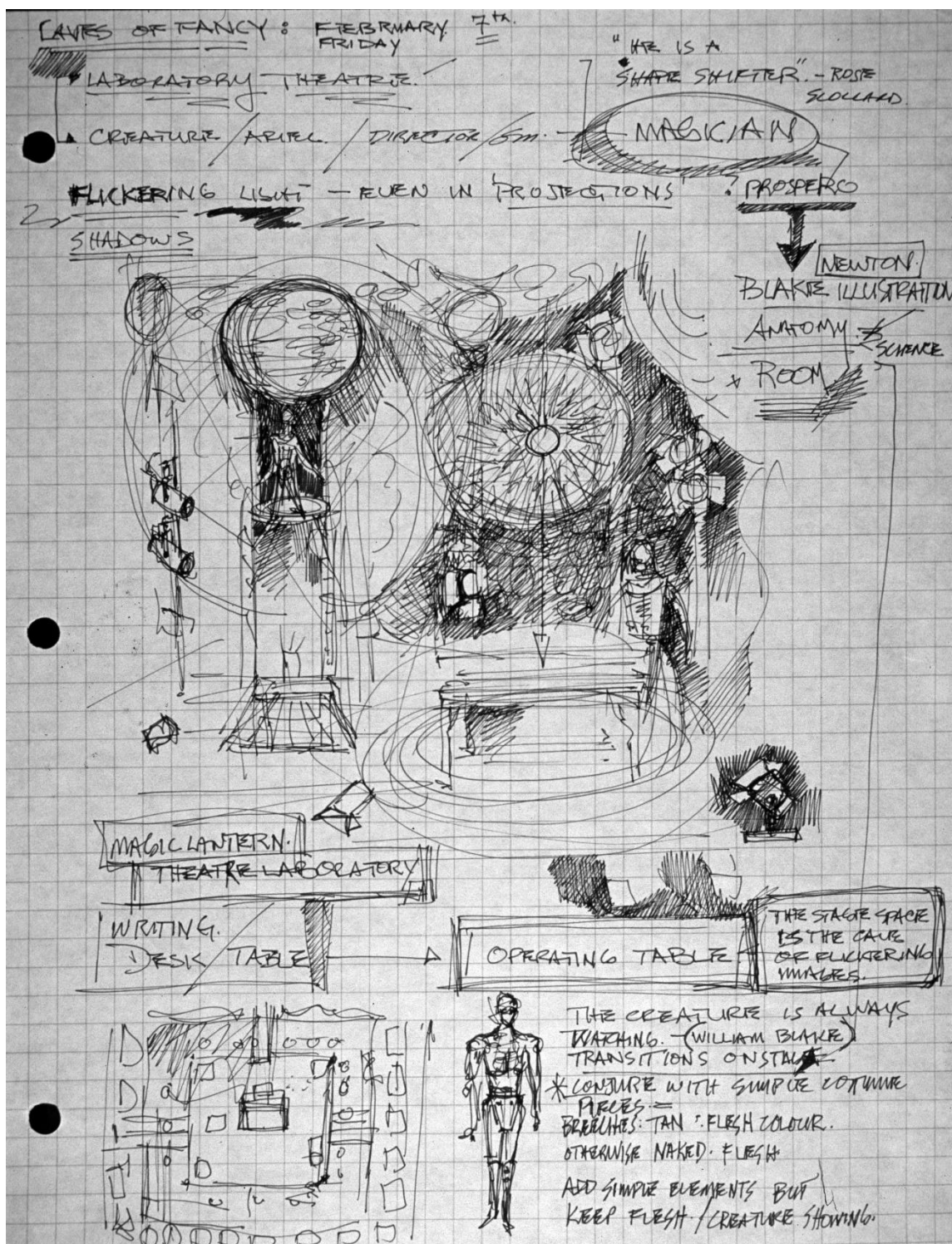
Discussing how she approaches the issue of design when writing her scripts, Scollard explained that she does not "necessarily think about what a play is going to look like but what it's going to feel like." Resultantly, in keeping with the production's emphasis on co-operative creation, Scollard relied heavily on her collaboration with the play's designer, Gavin Semple, to determine how the production would ultimately look. At the time, Semple was a professor in the Department of Drama, as well as a long-time professional theatre designer. As the play's lighting, set, and costume designer, Semple played a key role in the staging of *Caves of Fancy*. Furthermore, as the designer for the play's premiere production, Semple's work is described in the stage directions of the published script, which will greatly inform how readers or future directors will continue to encounter the play.

Speaking to which sources served as a point of inspiration for the play's design, Semple explained that he was "reacting primarily to the script as source and inspiration for most of the

design ideas.” He explained how treating *Caves of Fancy* as his point of departure led him to consider other outside influences, since “as you read through the script, references to Shakespeare’s Prospero lead to echoes of Blake’s illustration of Newton, anatomy and science, and so on.” Scollard recalled that Semple was “extremely sensitive to the writing,” and that he would notice specific cues in the play even though, in terms of stage directions or design notes “not much of this was written into the script.” For example, Scollard remembered that she was “astonished” when Semple “said he had an idea that a desk might be a good central and centering place for Mary.” She emphasized the appropriateness of this design choice, stating that “even though there is no mention of a desk in the script,” she herself had long thought of Mary’s desk as “an almost magical totem in her life.”



Blake, William. “Newton,” 1795–1805, Tate Museum, London.
 In addition to Blake’s relevance to the play as another Romantic writer, his “Newton” also informed the colour palette and overall aesthetic of Semple’s projections.

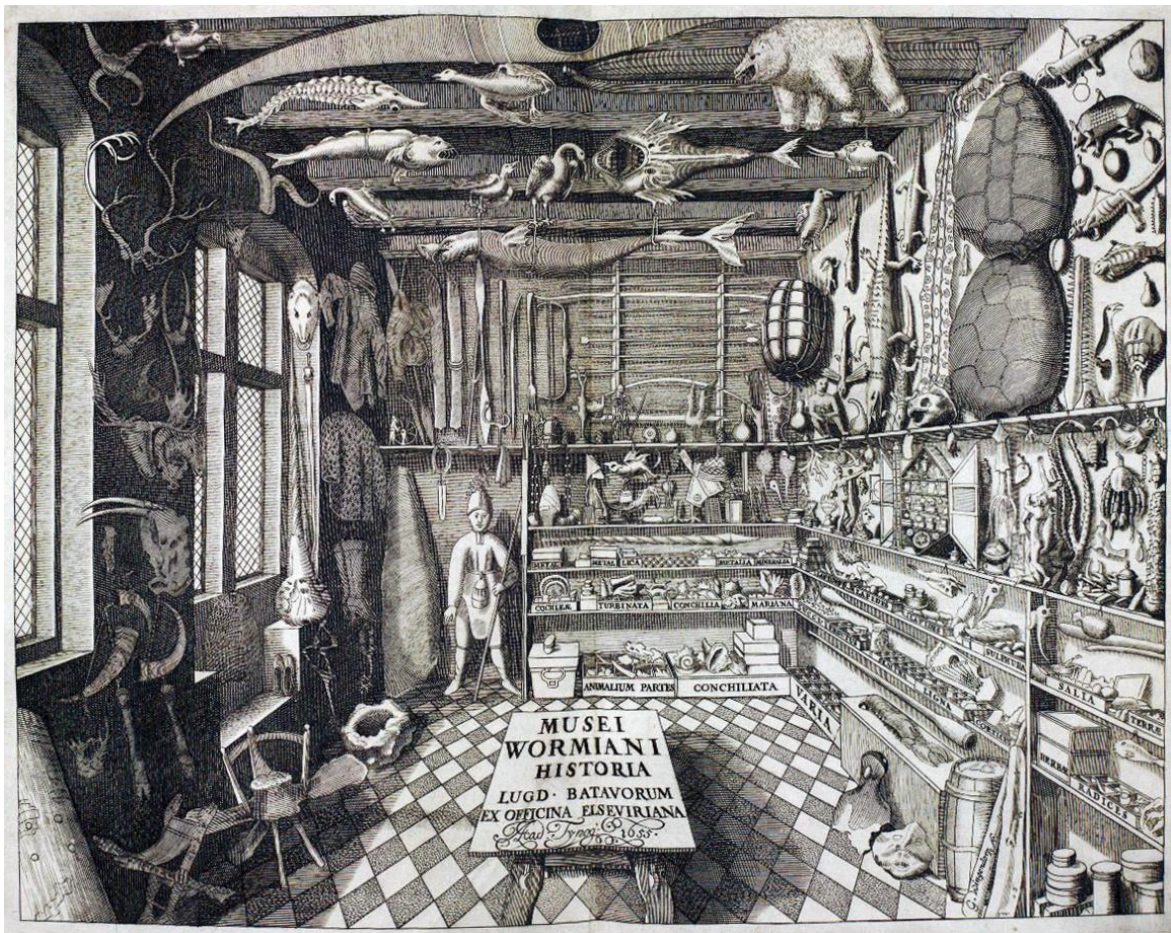


Sample, Gavin. "Sample's Early Design Notes from a Production Meeting on February 7th,"
1997, Calgary.

These notes include reference to many design components that were ultimately integrated into the final production, including the magic lantern, the writing desk as operating table, and the conception of the stage as "the cave of flickering images."

Out of these discussions regarding how the play could be realized onstage, Scollard and Semple decided on two central concepts from *Caves of Fancy* that would shape the overall design of the premiere production: the “cabinet of curiosities” and the “cave of fancy.” Semple elaborated on the importance of these ideas to his design work for the production, describing how “The cave of shadows and fantasy – Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave* questioning all knowledge and interpretations of “reality” – and the cabinet of curiosities became primary metaphors for the theatre space designed.” First speaking to the idea of a “cabinet of curiosities” as a metaphor for the production design, Scollard recalled that while she was writing *Caves of Fancy*, she “was fascinated, at the time, with the idea of the cabinet of wonders, or curiosities.” Within the play, Mary Shelley similarly evokes this metaphor to describe what she encounters through her “descent” into her imaginative realm: “If you were to take this dark journey down with me, you would come suddenly upon a cabinet of wonders” (260). As Maria Zytaruk explains in her article “Cabinets of Curiosities and the Organization of Knowledge,” cabinets of curiosities or wonders were “a type of non-specialized collection that flourished in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries” (2). “Assembled during a time of increased trade and travel,” these private collections were forerunners of the modern museum and brought together disparate items that an individual would accumulate and subsequently display (Zytaruk 2; Latham and Simmons 95). But despite their role as antecedents to modern museums, cabinets of curiosities were elaborate private collections that were more often intended to delight and impress, rather than to edify or instruct. Relating this idea back to *Caves of Fancy*, in their introduction to *Writing Lives*, the editors compare the Sibyl’s Cave from the preface to Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man* with the cabinet of curiosities, noting that each is “a Gothic space inhabited by the dead” (17). In the play, this description is reflected through Mary Shelley’s own characterization of the cave of fancy, the

site of her attempted resurrection of Wollstonecraft, as akin to a cabinet of curiosities. Accordingly, her description of the spaces not only references the myriad of objects these collections would contain, but also underscores the Gothic implications of the cabinet of curiosities as a haunted space that contains artefacts of both life and death: “memories spread out like engravings clipped from books, thoughts iridescent and shimmering like butterflies, hopes like infants dreaming in glass jars, dressed in beads and old lace — life and death in their little dried out faces (260).



“Frontispiece for *Museum Wormianum* showing Ole Worm’s Cabinet of Curiosities,” 1655, Smithsonian Institution Libraries, Washington DC.

This interpretation of the cabinet of curiosities as a space that is inherently linked to questions of death, mortality, and the afterlife is a recurring notion in the play and a frequent subject of broader critical discussion. Zytaruk asserts that the cabinet of curiosities, and its attempt to reproduce or reanimate conditions of living, subsequently imbues these displays with “specific anxieties about humankind’s susceptibility to temptation and about the body’s inevitable decay” (3). Furthermore, she claims that these cabinets served as a kind of memorial that “like, elegy, functioned as a mechanism for consolation” (5). Building on this reading of these collections as sites of remembrance that both preserve and destroy what they seek to immortalize, Olga Stefan argues that the contents of the cabinet of curiosities were curated “for the sole purpose of creating an illusion of possessing a perfected, unspoiled version of the world seen in simultaneity” and that this false replication of the conditions of living extends to the forced alignment of relics from different periods with “artifacts often lacking real referents (fantastic animals, myths, phantasms)” (3). The resulting effect is a melange of the living and the dead, the mythical and the historical, the real and the imaginary.

Sample and Scollard’s reference to the cabinet of curiosities as an inspiration for *Caves of Fancy* and the “theatre space designed” necessarily evokes these characterizations and challenges us to read their theatre space in similar terms. Considered together, these critical interpretations of cabinets of curiosities as sites where a keen collector brought together disparate artifacts, some “real” and others imaginary, to create a kind of diorama as a living sepulchre is an intriguing choice of metaphor for a theatrical design. *Caves of Fancy* itself certainly fits in with this notion of imagined resurrection, since the play not only reanimates Mary Shelley and her sisters directly alongside her most famous fictional character, but it also positions them as would-be resurrectionists of Wollstonecraft. Additionally, the sense of eclecticism that underpins

the cabinet of curiosities also continued through the design for *Caves of Fancy*'s production and can be seen in the mixing of influences from different time periods or aesthetics. In practice, this meant that the performance was punctuated by moments of disrupting the theatrical illusion, including breaking the fourth wall and changing costumes onstage in view of the audience. And while the costuming intentionally evoked a dreamy, Romantic aesthetic. Similarly, despite the play's early nineteenth-century setting, anachronistic elements were employed throughout. For example, the production's music evolved as the play progressed, from the subtle use of Fanny Mendelssohn's piano music early on to the choice to end the play with "glaring lights" and "raucous music," specifically Alice Cooper's song "Feed My Frankenstein" (292). This collision of the realistic and the fantastic, the historical and the contemporary, or the dead and the living was a foundational feature of the production design, which consciously recalled the sense of assemblage and assortment represented by the cabinet of curiosities. Consequently, by identifying the cabinet of curiosities as a central metaphor for the play-in-production, Scollard and Semple helped to underscore these same paradoxical aspects at work in both *Caves of Fancy* and its production design.

Creating the "Cave of Fancy"

From the cabinet of curiosities, we then move to the second metaphor Semple and Scollard used to describe the production's design concept: the titular "cave of fancy." As Semple discussed, this concept of a "cave of fancy" was a key component of the production's design from the beginning, in terms of the theatre itself and the effect he wanted to create. In looking at the play, caves of all kinds recur throughout as primary settings, portals to imagined discourse with the past, or even as sites of oracular revelation. In their introduction to *Writing Lives*, the editors assert that "caves as inner space—womb, imagination, memory—recur in the play" (17)

and whether it is through the “Gabinetto Fisico of Act Two” or reference to Sibyl’s Cave from the preface to Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man*, caves are central to the story (17). However, the recurrent use of caves throughout the play presented a very real, practical design challenge that Semple had to negotiate for the premiere production: what exactly do these “caves of fancy” look like and how do you go about creating this unique setting onstage?

To create a cave-like environment for the production, which would both accommodate the recurring theme of caves in the play and create a more intimate performance environment, Semple set out to transform the theatre. One of the main challenges in creating the feeling of a cave for the actors and audience was that the play was performed in such an open space: The Reeve Primary Theatre at the University of Calgary. Brian Kerby, the theatre’s technician who also worked on implementing the design for *Caves of Fancy*, described the dimensions of this large, black-box theatre: “The Reeve Primary is a hexagonal room that is seventy-eight feet from top to bottom of the hexagon and eighty feet across at its widest point.” These large dimensions and the theatre’s open-concept design presented a unique challenge to Semple in terms of evoking a sense of cave-like intimacy for the actors and audience. Semple recalled the difficulties associated with creating this atmosphere in the large yet versatile space, explaining that he did not want “the Reeve Theatre architecture to swallow up this intimate play.” Working to create a more intimate space for *Caves of Fancy*, Semple and the creative team “agreed to limit the size of the playing space,” which helped create an “intimate theatre cave.” The decision to reduce the playing space meant that the play’s action was confined to a much smaller area of the Reeve Theatre. This not only helped evoke the sense of an “intimate theatre cave” onstage, but also fostered a sense of closeness, interconnectedness and, at times, an inescapability between the characters within the play. In addition to limiting the size of the playing space,

Semple and the team also agreed to limit the theatre's viewing space to "a single row of audience on three sides." As the stage directions for the play describe, "*The stage area is a simple rectangle surrounded on three sides by the audience. The fourth recedes off into the darkness of the backstage area*" (244). This drastic reduction of the theatre's viewing space to only three single rows of seating on three sides of the stage meant that fewer audience members could attend a performance of *Caves of Fancy*, but it further contributed to the overall sense of intimacy between the performers and the audience themselves. Brought together through the reduction of both spaces, the actors and audiences no longer occupied two distinct areas, since the theatre's raked seating was not used and they were all placed on the same level. Consequently, by reducing both the playing and viewing spaces so that the actors and the audience were brought into closer quarters, Semple and the creative team laid the foundations for the sense of closeness and intimacy that they wanted to foster in the large black-box theatre, which would then form the basis for the cave-like design of their production.



"The Reeve Primary Theatre at the University of Calgary," 2017, School of Performing and Creative Arts Facilities Website, SCPA.ucalgary.ca.

Having limited the theatre's playing and viewing spaces, Semple drew the audience and actors even closer together by enclosing them all using fabric. To begin, as the audience members entered the theatre, only the three single rows at the front of the viewing space were available, while the rest of the seats were curtained off. This created a more intimate theatre-space, but also meant that, from their entrance into the Reeve Theatre, the audience was already enshrouded in drapery. This presence of fabric also extended to the stage itself, since the play began with the set covered in a large piece of fabric. The stage directions in the script describe the appearance of the set as the audience entered the theatre and the effect it elicited: "*The stage is draped over with gray, filmy material. The effect is abstract and dreamy, the furniture under the drapery making unidentifiable but provocative shapes*" (243). Semple described this "gray, filmy material" as "an enormous 'dustcover' over the entire stage" and explained that its use at the top of the show "seemed appropriate for the 'cave-like setting' that he was working to create. But as the play began, this so-termed 'dustcover' was not simply pulled away to allow for what Semple called the 'revelation of the set.'" Instead, that same material remained throughout the performance and became the final component in the creation of the "intimate theatre cave" Semple set out to establish for the production.

As the stage directions describe, Mary and her sisters begin the play by invoking the spirit of Wollstonecraft in a scene entitled "The First Resurrection." Their use of the magic word "imagination" allows them to begin what Mary describes as a "descent...a tunnelling down to that sweet treasure dome" (243). This conjuring subsequently causes the "cave of fancy" to finally and fully be realized onstage, as indicated by the stage directions: "*As they murmur repeatedly the word 'imagination' there is a stirring, and the drapery covering the set begins to rise. It forms a tent-like canopy over the stage and creates for the audience the effect of being in*

a tent or airy cavern” (244). In this crucial moment, the “gray, filmy material” covering the stage not only lifted to reveal the set and the stretched-out figure of the Creature, but throughout the play, it remained above the stage as a “tent-like canopy” (244). As the stage directions describe, this canopy played a key role in the full realization of the production’s cave-like environment, since its hovering presence over the playing and viewing spaces created “for the audience the effect of being in a tent or airy cavern” (244). Brought together through the reduction of the playing and viewing spaces, surrounded on three sides by drapery, and now huddled together under the “tent-like canopy,” the actors and audience were now fully enclosed in the production’s “cave of fancy.”

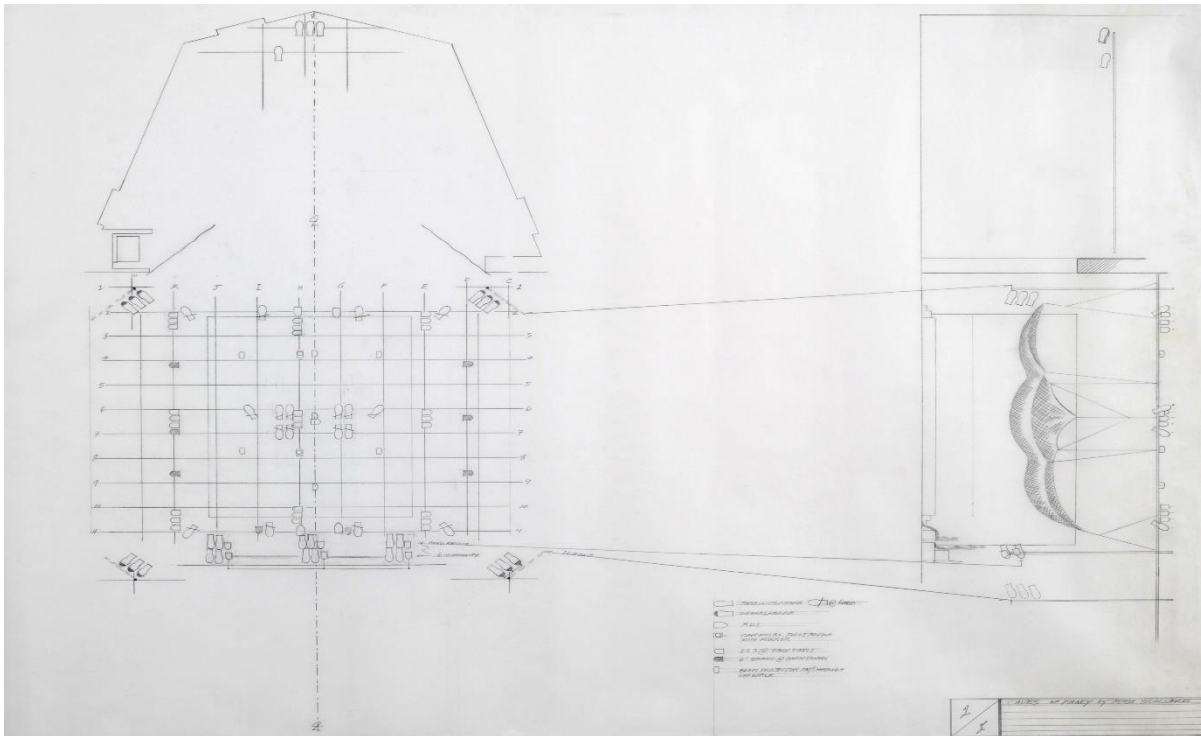


Semple, Gavin. “The Reeve Primary Theatre After the Canopy was Lifted off the Set During the ‘First resurrection’ of *Caves of Fancy*,” 1997, Calgary.

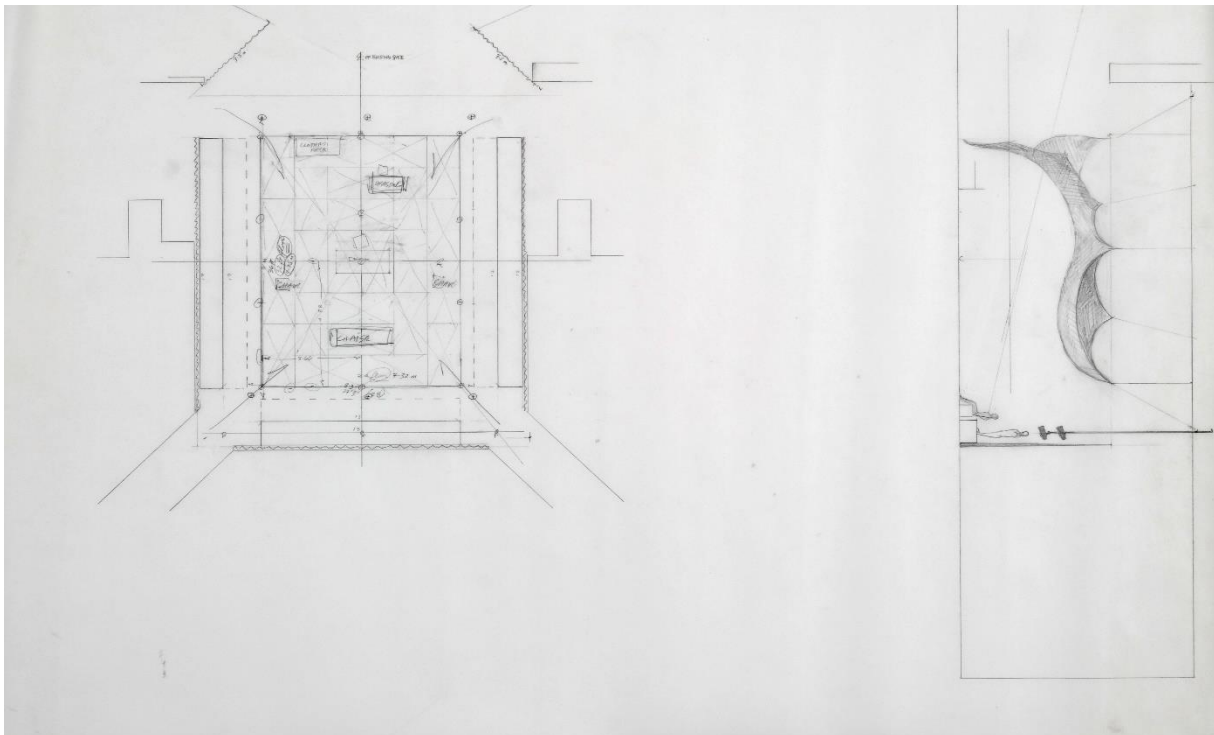
Discussing the set and this canopy further, Semple explained that “the drape (cyclorama, canopy, sailcloth) was the screen above the stage that also acted as a light source.” Kerby also spoke to how this canopy was created for the performance and how it was rigged to be lifted above the stage and hang there for the duration. Kerby first explained that the canopy was made of rip-stop nylon and was made up of “multiple fifty-nine-inch panels sewn together making it a

minimum of thirty feet by thirty feet but it could have been as large as forty feet by thirty feet.” Kerby then disclosed that, to rig the canopy so that it could be lifted above the stage, “there were rings sewn on to the edges and corners of the fabric so we could tie off nylon sash cord and then some other rings sewn in at points in the interior of the canopy.” These rings allowed them to “haul the whole thing into the air” from the theatre’s grid, which Kerby noted is “twenty-eight feet from the floor to the bottom of the lowest pipe.” Using the grid’s fly system,⁸³ Semple explained that they were then able to “pull up at the interior points to different heights, giving a very three-dimensional surface.” This allowed the canopy to not simply hang flat over the stage, but to also have a sense of dynamism and movement, which became especially important for lighting. Kerby elaborated on how the canopy was rigged, noting that, because of “all the lines we had attached to the canopy,” they were then “able to lift or drop each line to a different height so that its shape would change throughout the play.” Despite the ability to easily move and adjust the drape’s positioning, Semple noted that the canopy, “once raised from covering the set like a skin, and revealing the playing space and the Creature, was stationary for most of the play and activated once during the action, as directed by Brian Smith.” He explained the function of this stasis, noting how “resisting moving that large ‘image generator’ too much made its second move a memorable moment.” Commenting on the effect of this “second move,” he recalled how “the space quite literally breathed when the rope rigging lurched it upwards as if by a gust of wind.” This description of the canopy’s movement in terms of breathing highlights the sense of vitality created on stage through the canopy and the active role that it played as a key set piece in the production.

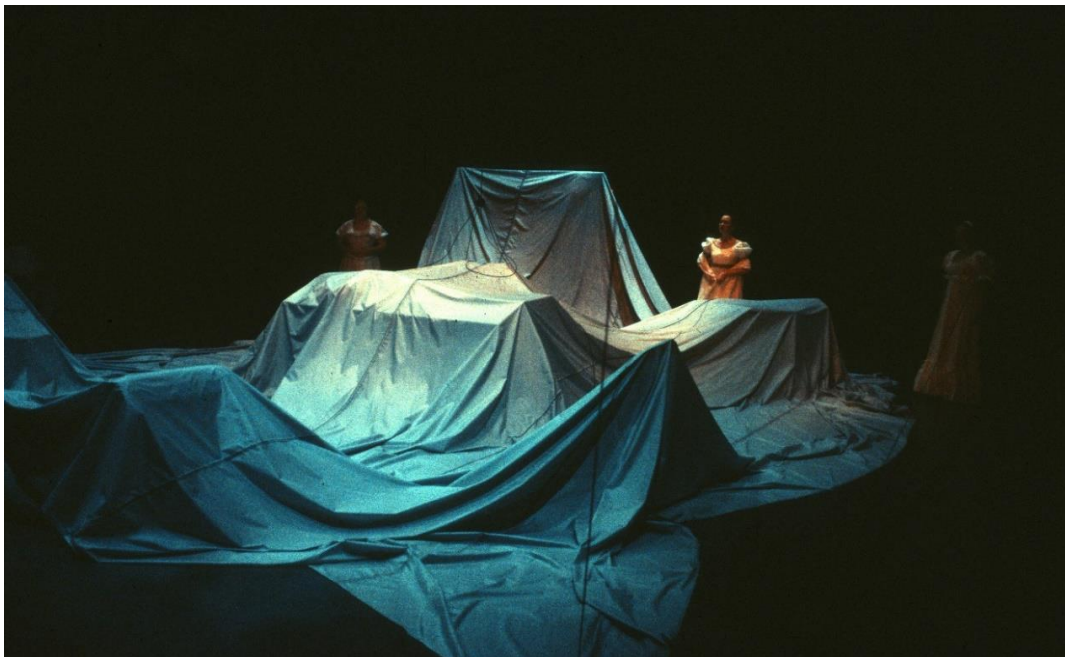
⁸³ A “fly system” is a theatrical rigging system that utilizes battens, cables, pulleys, and counterweights in order to fly components such as lighting, scenery, soft goods, etc. overhead” (Hopgood 277).



(Above) Semple, Gavin. "Lighting Effects Plan for *Caves of Fancy*," 1997, Calgary.
 (Below) Semple, Gavin. "Theatre Ground Plan for *Caves of Fancy*," 1997, Calgary.
 In both plans, note the presence of the canopy and its importance to both the production's lighting and overall staging.



Speaking further to the canopy's effect within the production, Semple explained that, once the "dustcover" rose and was "flown above the stage," the "'cyclorama' had the effect of a sailcloth...and sky." Additionally, he situated the visual style of the canopy within a distinctly Romantic artistic aesthetic, noting how this effect was intended to emulate "the moving and moody cloud formations of so many 'Romantic' nineteenth-century paintings." This use of "nineteenth-century paintings" as a point of inspiration for the canopy also informed costuming for the production, since Semple noted that the "the costume silhouettes and the props were kept as close as we could to an early nineteenth-century world" by using the same billowing fabrics and soft lines as he had with the canopy. Further contributing to the canopy's sky-like appearance was the use of fabrics throughout the production that had "colour-capture surfaces with their light warm, off-white tones re-enforcing any lighting effects in the scene."



Semple, Gavin. "Photo of 'The First Resurrection' showing the 'dustcover' over the set," 1997, Calgary.



Semple, Gavin. "Photo of the Canopy Being Raised above the Set," 1997, Calgary. The canopy revealed "*a large, gray table centre stage*" and, "*stretched out on it, the figure of the CREATURE*" (244).

Semple highlighted the importance of this fabric choice to the production, explaining that the use of materials with "colour-capture surfaces" allowed him to make the canopy into "a soft, dream-like object with the use of a variety of different coloured light sources striking all or part of the drape from above." By raising a mutable, breathing canopy over the stage that was not only a "soft, flexible" covering, but also light-reflective and backlit, Semple had created a surface that could be transformed into what he called a "dream-world illustration screen." Accordingly, this key decision to employ fabrics with "colour-capture surfaces" that re-enforced "any lighting effects in the scene" allowed Semple to not only use the canopy to create a cave-like environment, but to also explore how it could be used as "a surface on which to project."



Semple, Gavin. "Lighting Effects on Canopy in *Caves of Fancy*," 1997, Calgary. These photos demonstrate how the canopy was dynamically employed to evoke different settings or moods in the production. For example, here we see how the canopy was projected with a pattern emulating the structure of the brain, the outline of a window, or a blue colour wash to set the tone for each scene.

The idea to include images projected onto a screen in the production was first conceived while Scollard was composing *Caves of Fancy*. While she was writing, Scollard was inspired by the opening scene from Federico Fellini’s 1976 film *Fellini’s Casanova*, which she recalled “seemed to have the tone and look of how I perceived the play.” She explained that she would watch the scene when “writing the play” and recalled giving it “to Gavin Semple when we were discussing the set and costume design.” Scollard specifically recalled that “the scene takes place on a beach at night, very mysterious as I remember it, and there was a part where images are projected on the wall of a tent.” For Scollard, this scene not only inspired the overall “tone and look” of *Caves of Fancy* as she was writing it, but it also gave her the initial idea to integrate projection into the play. In addition to the influence of *Fellini’s Casanova*, Scollard also identified Mary Wollstonecraft’s own writing as an inspiration for the projections, citing a scene from “The Cave of Fancy” “where moving images are projected on the wall of a cave.”



“Screenshots from the opening scene of Federico Fellini’s film *Fellini’s Casanova*,” 1976, Universal Studios.

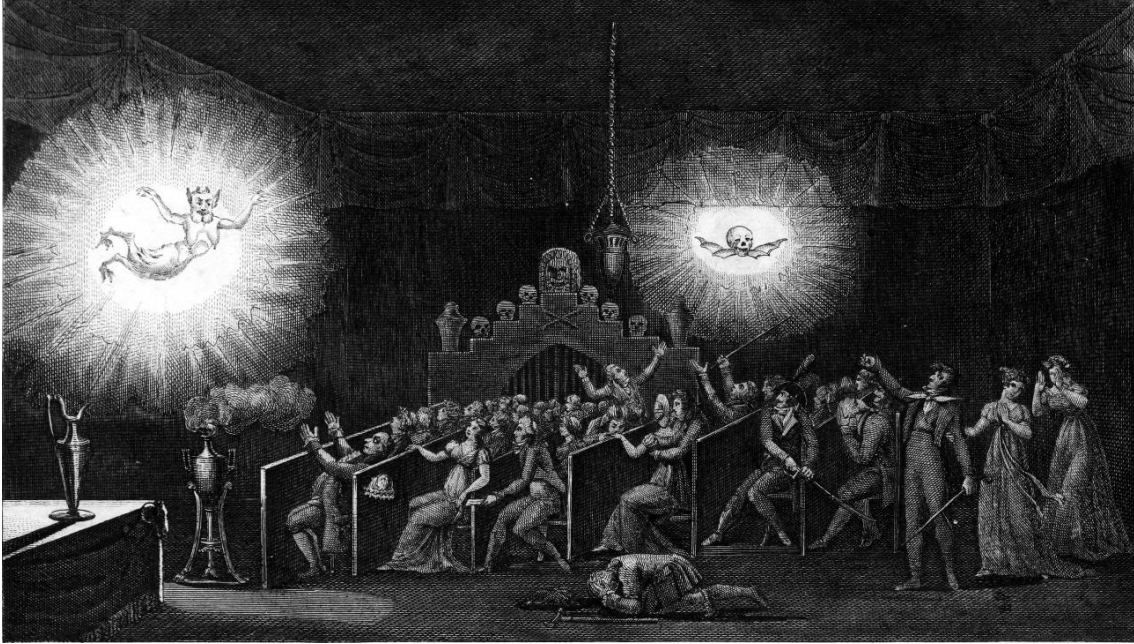
Finally, beyond the influence of these two works, Scollard also recalled that she was intrigued by the “phantasmagoria as well,” which she noted was “very popular in Mary’s day.” Similarly, Semple also referenced a technology related to the phantasmagoria, “the magic lantern,” as both a source of inspiration and a model for how he could practically create projection effects in their production. In addition to being a popular form of entertainment in nineteenth-century England, Mary’s direct connection to the “phantasmagoria” and its influence on her conception of *Frankenstein* made this decision choice even more apt. In her 1831 introduction to *Frankenstein*, Mary explains that the group’s reading of ghost story collections, including *Fantasmagoriana* (1812), led to the commencement of their famous ghost story competition.⁸⁴ In *Sexuality and the Gothic Magic Lantern* (2014), David J. Jones reiterates the salient connection between Mary Shelley and the phantasmagoria, as articulated through the 1831 introduction: “‘The Death’s Head,’ one of the volume’s stories, relates how a real ghost intrudes upon an impromptu phantasmagoria” and then *Frankenstein* “refers to a ‘magic scene’⁸⁵ from lantern shows” (271). These references here to the “phantasmagoria” and the “magic lantern” require further contextualization to better situate our understanding of these related innovations and to then see how this idea was then adapted and realized through *Caves of Fancy*’s premiere production.

⁸⁴ In the introduction, Mary explains that “it proved a wet, ungenial summer and incessant rain often confined us for days to the house. Some volumes of ghost stories, translated from German into French, fell into our hands” (348). In D.L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf’s *Broadview* edition of *Frankenstein*, they note that Mary is here referring to *Fantasmagoriana*, which was anonymously published by Jean Baptiste Benoît Eyriès in 1812 (50).

⁸⁵ Describing his initial successes in creating life, Victor explains “Not that, like a magic scene, it all opened upon me at once: the information I had obtained was of a nature rather to direct my endeavors so soon as I should point them towards the object of my search, than to exhibit that object already accomplished” (18).

To begin, the magic lantern was an image projector that was introduced in the eighteenth century and continued to be used until the early twentieth century. In his article “Phantasmagorical Wonders: The Magic Lantern Ghost Show in Nineteenth-Century America,” X. Theodore Barber characterizes the magic lantern as “the predecessor to today’s slide projector” and explains how the magic lantern “used transparencies made of glass onto which the images to be projected were hand painted, photographic slides not being employed until the mid-nineteenth century” (73). While the magic lantern was also employed for educational purposes, its primary use was for entertainment and magic-lantern shows were popular theatrical events by the late eighteenth-century. In *Gothic Machine: Textualities, Pre-Cinematic Media, and Film in Popular Visual Culture, 1670-1910*, Jones describes the magic-lantern shows and the technology that enabled them: “Magic-lantern shows, of course, relied on the development of a range of highly specialized lanterns and other devices in terms of slides, burners and props” (11). Significantly, as Jones notes, this technology was already imbued with a sense of the occult from early on, since “these projections were often promoted and sometimes seen, as the word ‘magic’ suggests, as a form of conjuration, even necromancy” (11). In the late eighteenth century, this magic-lantern technology would be used to create images and scenes that not only had latent connections to “conjuration” or “necromancy” but that explicitly evoked these occult associations to conjure up scenes of Gothic terror for audiences. These magic-lantern horror shows were referred to as “phantasmagoria.”

The term “phantasmagoria,” or “fantasmagorie” as it was originally termed in France, is accredited to the technology’s chief innovator: Etienne-Gaspard Robert, more widely known by his stage-name “Robertson.” While Robertson was not the first artist to employ the magic-lantern technology to create theatrical phantasms for audiences, his name became synonymous with the



“Frontispiece from Volume 1 of Robertson’s *Mémoires récréatifs, scientifiques et anecdotiques du physician-aéronaute*,” 1831, Brigham Young University, Provo.



“Illustration from F. Marion’s *L’Optique*,” 1867, Librairie de L. Hachette de Cie, Paris.

These illustrations both depict Robertson’s “Fantasmagorie” when it was performed at the Couvent des Capucines in Paris in 1797. Notably, this performance was staged the same year as the death of Mary Wollstonecraft and the birth of Mary Shelley. In the image below, note Robertson on the left-hand side creating the phantasm with his Fantoscope. (147).

immensely-popular form and his shows were a mainstay in Paris by the end of the eighteenth century. In *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-First Century*, Marina Warner explains that “the phantasmagoria derived directly from the camera obscura and magic lantern shows” and used a projector based on those technologies, called the Fantoscope, to produce a “Gothic horror spectacular” for the audience (147). Using the Fantoscope to create his theatrical illusions, Robertson would produce shows that featured “spectral illusion, morbid, frequently macabre, supernatural, fit to inspire terror and dread, those qualities of the sublime (Warner 148). In looking at how Robertson would produce these phantasmagoria, Warner acknowledged the importance of Robertson’s decision to “dispense with the conventional theatre’s raised stage, the puppet show box, and the proscenium arch”

By removing the features of the theatre’s architecture that distanced the audience from the stage, including the raised stage, the puppet show box, or the proscenium arch, Robertson allowed the viewers to become more fully immersed in the spectacle. Notably, this same effect was similarly elicited in *Caves of Fancy* through the decision to bring the playing and viewing spaces together and create a sense of intimacy between actors and audience, which helped create a more immersive experience. From this decision to bring the audience closer to action, Robertson then “concentrated his lighting sources and effects in the projector itself by placing it behind a large flat screen light a theatrical scrim (Warner 147).

Returning now to *Caves of Fancy*, a modern reworking of the magic-lantern technology, and the phantasmagoria display that it would ultimately be used to create, played key roles in both the play and the production’s design concept. In the script, the Creature presents his own phantasmagoria to the audience, after first providing an explanation of how the effect is produced: “A shaft of sunlight feeds into the scope and is projected into a darkened room. [...]

There are charlatans who exploit these mechanics and create ghost shows, projecting images from people placed in another room into a cloud of smoke — so that the dead seemed to be revived” (263). The Creature’s description of this technology coincides with his own application of it, as “*engravings appear on the overhead canopy*” to depict what Claire refers to as “the phantasmagoria of life with the Shelleys” (263; 262).” But what did the engravings look like and how was this effect produced onstage?

Semple provided a description of how the images were made and which images were created for the phantasmagoria effect. In terms of how he created the projection slides themselves, Semple explained that “the slides for the larger projectors were printed on acetate from collages” that he had made from “photographic copies of books about dissection and archives of text remnants.” Having created these photographic collages, Semple combined these images with an assortment of other visuals, including “an interior window light source, anatomy/dissection images, a variety of texts of different languages, ship and scientific instruments.” Taken together, the effect of this mixing of text and image created a sense of pictorial collage, a veritable *Frankenstein’s* Creature or a “cabinet of curiosities” of visual styles and sources, rather than a single unified image. In this sense, Semple’s phantasmagoric images were themselves monstrous creations, sutured together from various outside sources to forge a disjointed image that was more expressionistic than realistic, adding a sense of Gothic fragmentation to the projections.

Speaking to how they translated these images from acetate to canopy projections, Semple and Kerby detailed the process of emulating the magic lantern through modern technology and, in turn, emulating the effect of the historical phantasmagoria. They began by explaining how the canopy was used as a projector screen that could not only reflect light, but also images. Kerby

first reiterated how the choice of fabric for the canopy, rip-stop nylon, allowed them to also use it as a projection screen. He further noted that, because rip-stop nylon is translucent, they “could rear project images onto it that the audience could see from below” in much the same way that Robertson did for his own phantasmagoria.



Semple, Gavin. “Projection Images Used to Produce the ‘Phantasmagoria’ Effect in *Caves of Fancy*,” 1997, Calgary.

To then light the fabric and project the images onto it, they employed “a combination of Gobos,⁸⁶ scenic projectors and a Kodak slide projector.” Semple also explained how the production’s financial limitations affected their projector budget and that, because they “worked within a limited budget” for *Caves of Fancy*, “that meant using two of our existing theatre projectors (four-by-five-inch slides) plus two thirty-five-millimetre carousel slide projectors.” Semple explained the difficulties associated with the smaller slides, recalling how “the thirty-

⁸⁶ In *Lighting Technology* (2001), Brian Fitt and Joe Thornley define a “Gobo” as “a mask placed in the gate of a profile spot to shape the beam. It is a simple form of outline projection” (251). The term “Gobo” refers to the fact that the mask “goes before” the lens it modifies.

five-millimetre slides were not as effective (small images of ships, an old projector, and other curiosities) and because of the size and intensity they were not seen by the entire audience.” Semple asserted that, because the effect of the phantasmagoria is most evocative “when that image engulfs a very large portion of a stage,” they needed to use mirrors to enlarge the smaller images produced by the thirty-five-millimetre slide projectors. As Semple explained the “projectors had to be kept level” and they were directed at mirrors that were hung at a forty-five-degree angle to the projector. Finally, the mirrors would then “redirect the image downwards onto the suspended drape.” The lengthy process described here demonstrates how Semple emulated Robertson’s use of the magic-lantern technology to create the phantasmagoria effects for *Caves of Fancy*. Working within budgetary constraints that limited them to resources already available in the theatre, Semple and Kerby used mirrors, scenic projectors, Gobos, and acetate images to produce a phantasmagoria effect that transformed the theatre’s cave-like setting into a “cave of fancy.”

As the preceding two sections on design have demonstrated, the premiere production of *Caves of Fancy* not only adapted the play for performance, but also inflected key themes from Scollard’s script and brought new and exciting visual elements to the story that significantly enhanced the performance. Continuing in the same spirit of collaboration, the production’s designer, Gavin Semple, worked closely with Scollard to create a design concept that reflected the complexity of the characters and themes from her play. Together, the playwright and designer arrived at two primary metaphors for “the theatre space designed” that not only complemented the script, but also paid homage to the historical moment of its subject: the “cabinet of curiosities” and the “cave of fancy.” From there, Semple worked to practically realize these two overarching concepts and accomplished this task through the integration of

various stylistic features and aesthetics, the creation of an intimate cave-like environment, and the conjuring up of a phantasmagoria for the audience. The result was a design that not only emerged in response to Scollard's play, but that also made the play-in-production even more remarkable. Now that the stage is set, we turn to the performance itself to get a sense of the experience from the perspective of both actors and audience members.



Semple, Gavin. "*Caves of Fancy* in Performance, Demonstrating the 'Phantasmagoria' Effect in Practice," 1997, Calgary.

Impressions from *Caves of Fancy* in Performance

The premiere production of *Caves of Fancy* was performed twice at the University of Calgary in 1997: first in May in anticipation of the conference staging, and then again in August as part of the “Writing Lives” conference. One of *Caves of Fancy*’s most unique attributes as a Romantic Biodrama is certainly its staging at an academic conference, especially since that now means that the play’s only audience was primarily comprised of Romanticists and other subject experts. Two of the production’s actors, Curt McKinstry and Vicki Stroich, who played the Creature and Fanny Imlay, respectively, spoke to the unique experience of performing the play in this unusual context.

In addressing how the play’s conference setting influenced her work as an actor, Stroich explained that she is “sure that the academic conference made a big impact on many on the creative team” but for her, “as a young acting student,” she confessed that she was “just thrilled to be working on a play with some professors and actors a year or two ahead that I thought were really awesome.” However, speaking to her memories of performing for the conference audience, she did recall feeling “proud that people from around the world were seeing the play and our work on it.” As a university student-actor at the time, Stroich explained that she was “used to an audience of other students” and so she felt that performing in this unique context came with “a sense of pomp and circumstance.” This sense of remembered pride and the acknowledgement of the “sense of pomp and circumstance” Stroich felt at the time highlights the production’s unique context, especially for the student-actors involved. Accordingly, we can see how *Caves of Fancy*’s inclusion in the “Writing Lives” conference not only informed how the script was written, developed, rehearsed, and designed for, but also how it was ultimately realized onstage. McKinstry similarly spoke to what it was like performing *Caves of Fancy* at an

academic conference and recalled that the thing that stood out to him most was “just how educated everyone was with the subject matter.” He elaborated that performing for an audience of Romanticists meant that “there was a keen insight” among the audience members that he thought “most theatre goers would not necessarily have.” Speaking further to how this perception of the audience’s shared expertise affected his performance, he noted that “to a certain degree, this was somewhat intimidating.” Primarily, he attributed this sense of intimidation to the feeling that his “insight into the characters may not be as thorough as those that were watching” and that his own interpretation of the character would not be valid. But despite this perceived discrepancy, McKinstry recalled coming to the realization that he “just had to trust what I had discovered through exploring the internal journey of the character.”

Although these accounts were given nearly twenty years after the performance, they both speak to the unique challenges and opportunities associated with staging a play as part of a conference. Stroich and McKinstry’s recollections of how it felt to perform as student-actors and their perceptions of how the play’s inclusion in “Writing Lives” influenced their experience with the production provide valuable insight into the process of performing this Romantic Biodrama for a primarily academic audience. Speaking from the point of view of someone who saw *Caves of Fancy*, Buss recalled that she “enjoyed its performance as did many of the attendees at the conference.” Due to personal matters, McWhir was unable to attend the play’s staging at the conference. And although she noted that she “enjoyed it very much” when she saw it performed outside the conference context, she conceded that, because her “immediate involvement was over,” she “felt a bit detached” from the performance. She attributed this sense of detachment to the innate connection between *Caves of Fancy* and the “Writing Lives” conference. Because “the original context had been so important” to McWhir, as one of the conference’s organizers and

dramaturgs, seeing the production removed from its conference setting had a distancing effect for her. This sense of detachment that McWhir recalled feeling again highlights the importance of *Caves of Fancy*'s conference setting, to both the play's composition and subsequent staging. This experience of seeing the play removed from its intended setting, and the sense of detachment McWhir felt as someone who had actively contributed to the production, not only speaks to the inherent ephemerality of theatre as a performance medium, but, more pressingly here, hints at the natal link between *Caves of Fancy* and the "Writing Lives" conference. Importantly then, perhaps this acknowledgement of a possible disjuncture between the play's distinct performances and the perception of a discernible difference when it was not presented in the conference setting, not only applies to McWhir's personal experience, but also gives us a clue as to why the play has not been re-staged since its premiere production.



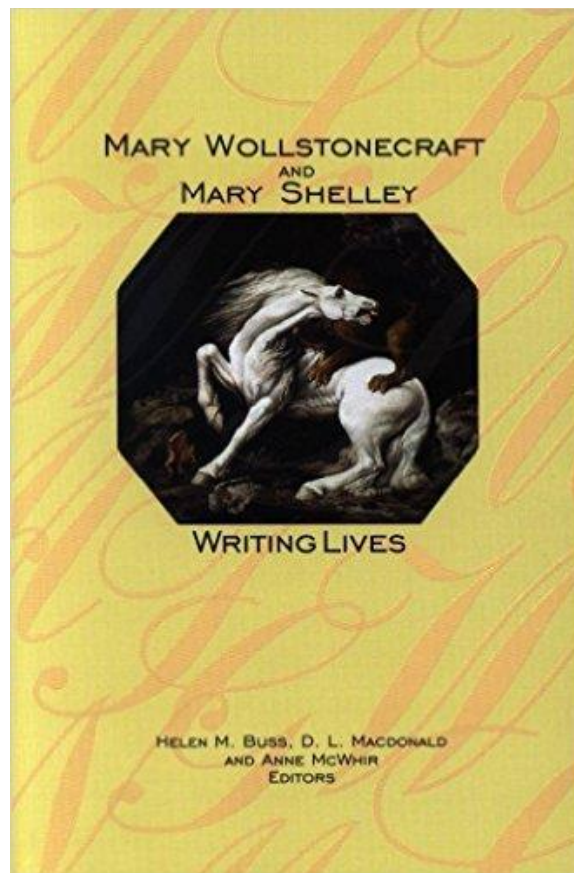
Semple, Gavin. "*Caves of Fancy* in Performance," 1997, Calgary.

Writing Lives: The Book

Although *Caves of Fancy* has not been staged since that 1997 production, the play text itself does live on in print, thanks to the continuation of the “Writing Lives” project into the publication of a book based on the conference. Following the completion of the conference, an edited collection of papers and the script for *Caves of Fancy* was compiled for publication by the conference organizers. Published by Wilfrid Laurier University Press in 2001, *Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley: Writing Lives* was edited Helen M. Buss, D.L. Macdonald, and Anne McWhir. Having started the project as the conference’s organizers, Buss, Macdonald, and McWhir were afforded the opportunity to reflect on their experience, provide their own insights on the process, and preserve their efforts in manuscript form. Consequently, their dual roles as conference organizers and book editors afforded them the rare opportunity to present their own brief account of ideas and inspirations behind the conference and the play.

In their introduction to *Writing Lives*, the editors reiterated the importance of collaboration in their shared venture, from the conference’s initial planning, to its organization, to the ultimate publication of the volume. Specifically, they noted that they had “worked collaboratively as editors, writers, playwright, and scholars” to create a collectively-created text that stands “as reflection on and experiment in life writing” (17). Furthermore, they articulated their hope that the parts of the book would “provide and integrated and cohesive reading of fragments even while they consider life writing from many different perspectives” (17). According to Buss, Macdonald, and McWhir, the resulting book was then “a collaborative volume,” which is “integrated by diverse creative and scholarly energies” (8). This continuing emphasis on collaboration highlights the guiding principle behind the “Writing Lives” project, from the conference, to the writing and staging of *Caves of Fancy*, to the resulting book.

Furthermore, the volume's editors specifically addressed *Caves of Fancy* and the influence that their work on the play-in-production subsequently had on the editing process for *Writing Lives*: “this experience of participating in life writing as a scholarly project overlapping with imaginative re-creation helped to shape our understanding of the book we wanted to edit” (8). In the introduction, Buss, Macdonald, and McWhir also spoke to how *Caves of Fancy* brings together many of the themes and issues that are addressed throughout the rest of the book by asserting that Scollard “brings Shelley and her circle to life in a play that interweaves many of the themes and issues that run through the essays: issues of life writing, feminist revisionism, creative work as allegorical autobiography, and even textual scholarship” (16).



Macredie, Leslie. “Cover Design for *Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley: Writing Lives*,” 2001, Waterloo.

Elaborating on the relationship between *Caves of Fancy* and the “Writing Lives” project, they continued to reflect on how the play itself was born out of points of intersection and intertextuality, observing that the script itself “densely intertextual, drawing on Wollstonecraft’s and Shelley’s writings and on those of their circles to evoke their lives and their work through their own words.” (16). Looking back now on how she perceives the play text as interacting with the critical articles in the collection, McWhir reiterated these some ideas regarding the play’s key role within the volume. She started by returning to the central idea of “writing lives” and observing how the notion itself “is obviously both literary and biographical.” She then related these dual implications back to *Caves of Fancy* by observing how Scollard “practically obliterates the distinction” between the literary and the biographical in *Caves of Fancy* through her creative integration of elements from both “the Marys” lives and fiction.

Finally, McWhir shed greater light on the decision to conclude *Writing Lives* with the script for *Caves of Fancy*. She noted that, although the play is placed at the end of *Writing Lives*, it is not “the culmination of the book.” However, she asserted that it does belong at the end “because it is deliberately syncretic, reflecting on how we write about lives and on what it means to live a writing life.” McWhir’s assertion here draws attention to *Caves of Fancy*’s position at the end of *Writing Lives* and highlights how this positioning is intentionally reflective of the fact that the play merges together different readings and interpretations of the underlining idea of “writing lives.” While she observes that *Caves of Fancy* is not “the culmination of the book,” her reading of the play as “deliberately syncretic” and demonstrative of both “how we write about lives” and “what it means to live a writing life” highlights the play’s dual roles as a Romantic Biodrama that is both about Romantic writers and reflects the work of writing Romantic biography. Considered in this way, it can then be argued that *Caves of Fancy*’s role within the

“Writing Lives” project is to use the theatrical medium to bring renewed attention the conference and the subsequent volume’s interest in Romantic lives and writing, both in terms of how the Romantics negotiated these ideas and how we as readers, writers, or dramatists interpret them.

Caves of Fancy’s Afterlife

As has hopefully become clear through this chapter, the story of how *Caves of Fancy* was developed from out of “hallway conversations,” to the early research of primary resources, to rehearsal and design, to performance, and ultimately to publication, involved a great many individuals working in collaboration to bring this Romantic Biodrama to life. But after charting the play’s development and acknowledging all the individuals who had a part in its development, the question as to why the play’s story ends with its publication as part of *Writing Lives* becomes even more pressing. After so much collective effort, a successful run, and broad publication, why did *Caves of Fancy’s* story end there?

Perhaps one explanation links back to McWhir’s own recollections of feeling “a bit detached” when she saw the play outside the conference setting, noting how “the original context had been so important” to her. Indeed, maybe because the play was commissioned, developed, staged, and published as part of the “Writing Lives” project, it remains deeply imbricated within that specific setting and performance context. It is worth noting that Scollard’s own explanation for why the play has not received subsequent staging has some basis in the perceived distance between the script and readers unacquainted with its original production context. When initially asked how composing a play for an academic conference influenced her writing process, Scollard responded that “apart from the final scene where the creature is definitely addressing an academic audience I didn’t think it influenced me much.” While it could be argued that *Caves of Fancy’s* extensive dramaturgical support, university staging, and commission for an audience of

largely academics rendered the subject matter a bit rarified or abstract for an audience unfamiliar in the “the Marys” lives and writing, the play’s final scene further widens this already existent gap by explicitly acknowledging the original conference audience as the play’s intended viewership.

Speaking directly to the audience of conference attendees, many of whom had presumably devoted their lives to studying Mary Wollstonecraft and Shelley, the Creature chided them in his closing monologue for “still wanting to pull them forward” (292). The specificity of the play’s intended audience is emphasized here through the Creature’s proclamation that he, as a character, is “a virtual Frankenstein’s monster of interpretation” and he specifically attributes this perceived problem to the audience members, telling them that he can “imagine there are a number among you tonight guilty of adding to the patchwork” (291). By concluding the play with a direct address to the audience that not only self-reflexively acknowledges the construction of “the Marys” lives and writing as the play’s biofictional subjects, but also holds the audience culpable for wanting to “haul” these figures “into the future,” Scollard inevitably locks the play within the specific conditions of its initial production. The decision to not only address and describe a highly-specific audience for the play could prove alienating for readers or audience members who are not part of this specific group and the play’s inclusion within *Writing Lives*, which is itself a highly specialized critical volume, may serve to underscore the play’s inaccessibility for a broader reader/viewership. Although this specificity may have given greater resonance to the premiere production and reflects the script’s critical engagement, this final scene and its strong identification of an intended audience inevitably limits the play’s possible readership and brings up the larger question of accessibility for *Caves of Fancy*.

While Scollard herself did not consciously perceive any difference in writing the play for a conference setting, aside from the Creature's closing monologue, she did concede that others perceived a similar sense of specificity in the script and could not imagine staging the play without those same conditions of production. She recalled her experience after the 1997 production and the response she received from one literary manager: "when I sent the play out the following year, I had a really rampantly angry letter from a literary manager saying the play was useless, specific to an academic audience only." That a Romantic Biodrama elicited such outright scorn for its specificity and academic aims speaks to the potential pitfalls of the genre itself and the dangers of the Shelleys remaining locked within the academy. Furthermore, although *Caves of Fancy* was staged relatively recently, in 1997, the popularity of Mary outside universities has greatly advanced since then and one cannot help but wonder if that reaction would be different today. Importantly though for the story of *Caves of Fancy*, that "rampantly angry" letter had a lasting affect on the play and greatly contributed to its current lack of follow-up productions. In response to this reaction, Scollard admitted that she was "quite taken aback" and resultantly, that she has "not really promoted it much since." Although the question of whether *Caves of Fancy* is too much a product of its initial conditions of production to be restaged is perhaps a matter of debate, Scollard's explanation that having the play described as "useless" and "specific to an academic audience only" caused her to avoid promoting it indicates the important role that this interpretation has played in the script's theatrical afterlife, at least thus far.

Ultimately though, no matter what the reason for why *Caves of Fancy* has not been staged since 1997, there is nothing to say that it will not be revisited and reimagined by practitioners in the twenty-first century. In 2014, the play was digitized and made more broadly

available for purchase through the Playwrights Guild of Canada, which could lead to greater accessibility and increase the likelihood of a second production. But perhaps geographical location is responsible for some of the play's perceived inaccessibility and the script would fare better in England, where the Shelleys are generally better known. Or maybe the play and its biographical basis could serve a pedagogical purpose as part of a course on the Wollstonecraft-Godwin-Shelley family. Whatever the case, *Caves of Fancy* certainly has artistic and academic merit, both as a Romantic Biodrama and an original play text, and there is still much to be explored in it through subsequent staging.

Speaking to how she sees *Caves of Fancy* as addressing our contemporary moment, Scollard observed that "life in many ways is a process of continuous loss: people we love slip away; our hopes and dreams often do as well; our powers fade." She explained how this theme, which underpins the play's interest in death and resurrection, remains "a constant of any society and time period." In terms of how we can contend with this "process of continuous loss," Scollard posited that *Caves of Fancy* explores the consequences of two possible approaches, both of which Mary Shelley takes in the play. As the play begins, the first "answer for Mary lay in the cave of the imagination, a descent down into its purifying depths." But by the play's end, Mary instead resolves "to keep on living, in spite of her losses, as though many other hopeful and wonderful times lay ahead. And to be unafraid— 'Take on the world and hang the consequences'" (292). Scollard concluded by suggesting that both of Mary's strategies in the play "are feasible approaches to modern fears and obstacles" that contemporary readers and audiences can similarly relate to and adopt in their own lives. Although the play's historical background, conference setting, and subject specificity all mark it as an object of interest for Romanticists, its exploration of the themes of family, death, and resurrection are applicable for

all audiences and make this play as relevant today as it was when it was first written twenty years ago. Perhaps then this story about the desire to transcend death will itself be bound for a new theatrical afterlife in the twenty-first century.

The Apology (2011)

Darrah Teitel's *The Apology* is a one-act play about the Shelley circle that reimagines the events of the "haunted summer" of 1816 as a highly-political teenage sex romp. At the same time, it is also a two-act drama that relocates the group into the twenty-first century to show the contemporary implications of their progressive lifestyle. Similarly, *The Apology* was first staged in Toronto in 2011. However, it also premiered in Calgary in 2013. It debuted as both a fringe show and as a large-scale, corporate-funded performance and, accordingly, its premiere production received both very little funding and generous financial backing from a major pipeline supplier.

In considering *The Apology*'s compositional and performance histories, what emerges is a tale of two scripts, two productions, and two premieres. In January 2011, *The Apology* first debuted as a one-act play in the Next Stage Theatre Festival, a winter fringe festival held annually in Toronto. Two years later, Teitel had added a second act to the play that relocated the action to the twenty-first century and the revised script was slated for production at Alberta Theatre Projects (ATP) in Calgary. Resultantly, in March 2013, *The Apology* debuted again and this time it was part of ATP's Enbridge playRites Festival of New Canadian Plays, which is sponsored by the Calgary-based energy company Enbridge, Inc. Although the play had appeared onstage in Toronto only two years earlier, its 2013 staging was similarly touted as the play's "premiere" production. Because the play was given two distinct premiere productions, with different performance contexts, budgets, geographical settings, viewership, personnel, and even versions of the script, it presents a unique opportunity as a comparative case study by drawing attention to the importance of these factors in the staging of Romantic Biodrama.

This chapter chronicles *The Apology*'s twinned origin stories by documenting the history of its two premiere productions in 2011 and 2013. To that end, I will be charting the play's

development and subsequent staging to investigate how the play evolved between these productions. To accomplish this analysis, I will continue to rely on the play-text itself⁸⁷ and practitioner interviews from those involved with both productions. Additionally, both productions received a broad viewership and press attention, which have also informed my discussion of the play-in-performance. Finally, promotional and paratextual materials associated with each production, such as press releases, posters, or playbills, also offer valuable insight into how these performances were framed and supported by outside apparatuses that come to bear on the theatrical experience and how the play itself was received. I begin with the text itself by providing a plot summary of the play and considering Teitel's compositional process before then moving on to the play-in-production to explore how it was adapted for the stage and then subsequently extended and remounted two years later for its second premiere.

In both iterations of the play, *The Apology* employs the Shelley circle as historical antecedents for contemporary sexual politics. In one press release for the its Calgary production, ATP provided the following synopsis of the play: "The setup of Darrah Teitel's *The Apology* is like ancient fan fiction: Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, Mary Shelley and Claire Claremont [sic] are in a polyamorous relationship and they head to a castle to write poetry, do drugs and make love."⁸⁸ This conception of the play as "ancient fan fiction" contemporizes the play's subject matter while also highlighting Teitel's irreverent and revisionist approach to the depiction of the Shelleys' lives and writing. Furthermore, when the play was staged in 2013, the production carried a warning of "nudity, sexuality, and strong language." This disclaimer is consistent with

⁸⁷ Because *The Apology* has not yet been published or made widely available, I am working with the rehearsal script from the play's 2013 production.

⁸⁸ This synopsis was picked up and subsequently run by various publications across Canada, including *The Vancouver Sun*.

the references to sex and drugs in the play's synopsis, but the fact that no such warning accompanied *The Apology* when it was first staged in 2011 reflects a change in the play itself, its productions, or the viewership and promotion that suggests a major difference between its distinct premieres. From this jumping off point, this chapter unpacks the key similarities and differences between the two versions of *The Apology* by mapping the history of both productions. Ultimately then, by comparing the staging and subsequent responses associated with these two productions, I hope to underscore the dynamic nature of *The Apology* and to draw attention to the near-constant processes of revision, re-staging, and re-interpretation that define Romantic Biodrama as a theatrical genre.

The Archive

Among the major performance case studies in this project, *The Apology* is a unique example of a play with two premiere productions. Consequently, it also has two interrelated archives of materials associated with each version of the play-in-performance, both of which are accounted for in this critical study. The result is that *The Apology*'s archive of available and currently recoverable materials is quite expansive, especially considering the play itself has not yet been published. Because *The Apology* was staged very recently, in 2011 and 2013, there is a wealth of materials available online regarding each production. For example, both Factory Studio Theatre in Toronto and the Martha Cohen Theatre in Calgary have technical information guides available online that detail the dimensions and guidelines associated with each theatre, both of which informed by discussion of *The Apology*'s staging. Furthermore, because each staging was presented as part of a theatre festival, I could consult a breadth of resources about each production context, as well as access information about each company, their history, or their mandates. Additionally, both productions' high-profile staging as part of a festival generated a

great deal of press and critical responses, all of which have also informed my study. These responses included previews, reviews, interviews, and other press for *The Apology* and spanned digitally-published personal accounts to nationally-distributed newspaper features. To accurately reflect the collective response to these plays-in-production and their promotional materials, I have referenced all available press and each review that I could recover for the play, which included seven production reviews for *The Apology*'s 2011 production and ten reviews for its 2013 re-staging.

In addition to the breadth of publicly-available materials associated with the two distinct versions of the play's text and two complete theatrical productions, *The Apology*'s geographical location in Canada, specifically in Toronto and Calgary, allowed me greater access to resources from the creative team behind each production. I secured a copy of the play's rehearsal text from Alberta Theatre Projects, which has informed my discussion of the script itself. However, because this is a rehearsal script, and not a published and prepared document, it is necessary to discuss it with the understanding that it remained an object in flux throughout both productions. Additionally, both Alberta Theatre Projects and the Next Stage Theatre Festival provided me with a copy of the playbill for each production, which will inform my discussion of the promotional and framing materials associated with each staging.

This case study continues my methodological approach adopted throughout my project by employing practitioner accounts from individuals who helped create and stage *The Apology* as my primary resource for re-constructing the history of this play-in-performance. Again here, the play's two premiere productions required me to consult with individuals involved with each staging of the play. After soliciting the participation of as many members of each creative team as I could, based on contact information and availability, I engaged with eight individuals

involved in the staging of *The Apology*. Speaking to their experience with *The Apology*'s first production in 2011 are playwright Darrah Teitel, director Audrey Dwyer, actor Kaitlyn Riordan, and actor Brendan McMurtry-Howlett. From the second premiere production in 2013, we again have Darrah Teitel, as well as director Kate Newby, costume designer April Viczko, actor Jamie Konchak, and dramaturg and ATP Executive Director Vicki Stroich. Finally, because I attended a performance of *The Apology* during its 2013 production, I must inevitably account for my own bias as an audience member, although I will not be explicitly asserting my personal perception of the play-in-production.

***The Apology*: Plot Summary**

The play opens with the core foursome of Mary and Percy Shelley, Claire Clairmont, and Lord Byron directly addressing the audience.⁸⁹ The group engages in a choral refrain of the phrases “the horror” (2) and “unfit parents” (3) while repeatedly describing their situation as a “horror show” (2, 3). As this introductory sequence progresses, their shared confessions to the audience take a turn from outlining their accolades, such as “we give birth to ideas” (2) or “we all became famous” (3), to their admissions of having “left our children” (3), “killed our wives” (3), and “fucked and bugged and smoked and drank” (4). This introductory sequence provides useful exposition and acquaints the audience members with the characters, while also offering insight into some of the events that will occur in the play, setting the tone for the piece, and hinting at the kind of language that is used throughout.

⁸⁹ The stage directions for this scene indicate that the characters are “*ghosts from the 19th Century*” (2). This idea is never explicitly addressed in the play itself, or in either of the productions, and it is unclear if this is true of the entire play or just this opening sequence.

The first act of *The Apology* is loosely based around Mary, Percy, Claire, and Byron's time in Lake Geneva during the so-termed "haunted summer" of 1816.⁹⁰ However, rather than chronicle the specific events or surrounding this infamous meetup or accounting for the story's other key members,⁹¹ Teitel employs the premise of a Romantic sojourn to the continent as a forum for the core group and their attempts at writing, discussions of sociopolitical issues, or explicit engagements with one another. The act begins with Mary and Percy preparing to leave home so that they can be together, although Mary acquiesces and allows her step-sister, Claire, to join them on their journey. Meanwhile, Percy invites his new lover, Lord Byron,⁹² to come with them too and the group disembarks together for Byron's father's house by Lake Geneva.⁹³ Upon arrival, the group engages in a bacchanal of sex, drugs, and writing that dominates the play's first

⁹⁰ The exact historical setting at the beginning of the play is difficult to determine and, because there is no explicit indication of the year or time within the play or its stage directions, it can only be approximated through latent textual evidence, which often provides contradictory information. For example, in one early scene, Percy tells Byron that he was "booted out" of Oxford "last year" (10). Shelley was expelled from Oxford in 1811, which would set the action in 1812. However, Shelley did not meet Mary until 1814 and Byron until 1816. Additionally, in the previous scene, Mary tells Claire that Percy is twenty-one-years-old, which implies the year as 1816 (the year that the group congregated at Lake Geneva). However, it is later stated that Mary will be "eighteen in three months," which firmly sets the action in 1815 (14). The question of the play's setting is further complicated by the promotional materials, which all assert the year as 1814. While Mary, Percy, and Claire travelled to the continent in 1814, their infamous "haunted summer" with Lord Byron at Villa Diodati took place two years later, during "the year without a summer" of 1816.

⁹¹ Notably, John Polidori, who was also in attendance at the Villa Diodati as Byron's physician, is among those neither featured nor mentioned in either version of *The Apology*.

⁹² Percy and Byron did not meet until 1816 in Geneva. Additionally, there is no biographical substantiation of any sexual relationship between the two.

⁹³ In addition to the play's unclear setting, there are many other changes that notably depart from established historical fact. For example, much is made of the fact that Byron's father "owns" the university Byron is attending (although it is not named in the play, Byron attended Cambridge). Mary tells Byron that his father had Godwin's "teaching placement revoked" (11) and, while in Geneva, Mary tells Shelley that they are staying in Byron's "father's house" and she complains that "we live off his money," again referencing Byron's father. Historically speaking, Byron's father, John "Mad Jack" Byron abandoned his infant son after squandering Byron's mother's fortune. Additionally, Byron's father died in 1791, well before the action of *The Apology*.

act. As the first act continues, the stakes of their experiment are raised considerably and the inevitable human costs of the group's lifestyle begin to weigh on them. Mary and Claire both become pregnant, while Percy receives news that the wife he has abandoned in England has taken her own life after seeing a photo of him, Mary, and their daughter, Clara, in the newspaper.⁹⁴ Soon enough, jealousy starts to set in and, after the death of their infant daughter and Percy's attempt to "replace" her by adopting an orphan, Mary separates from Percy by declaring that he is "a monster" and telling him "I don't want to live with you any more. I'm exhausted by you" (58). At the same time, Byron urges Claire to abandon Mary, Percy, and their experimental approach to living and writing, for the sake of her and their future child. Claire refuses, causing Byron to leave, and Percy also sends her away. The first act ends with the group torn apart and their temporary, utopic society an apparent failure. In the 2011 production of *The Apology*, the story ends here in this moment of collapse and disillusionment. However, in the 2013 version of the play, this low point comes before an act break, after which the story and its characters are in a very different time and place than when and where we left them.

Act two picks up "*Three years later and far into the future*" (60). Now relocated to a more contemporary setting, the foursome again continues to grapple with persisting issues of jealousy, personal relationships, and conflicting politics. Mary and Percy are revealed to be in a polyamorous relationship and Mary has also begun a sexual relationship her accountant, Tom. *Frankenstein* has become a commercial and critical success and developed into a feature film.

⁹⁴ Percy describes the photo as showing him with "Mary and happy baby Clara at the book launch party, looking like a happy baby family." He explains of the photo that "it got printed in the papers back home. Next to the review of *Frankenstein*" (46) and he blames Mary for "her fucking book launch party that she needed to have with all her famous literati friends" (50). However, in addition to the fact that photography was not commercially introduced until 1839 and book launch parties are a more contemporary practice, *Frankenstein* was initially published anonymously in 1818 and Percy was assumed at first to be the book's author.

Mary's next project, writing her mother's biography, continues to cause her great emotional strife, as she finds it difficult to understand her mother's actions and tell her story. Meanwhile, Claire receives word that Byron is seeking custody of the couple's daughter, Allegra, while he is living abroad in Italy with another woman. Percy is sent to try and convince Byron to relent, but Byron, perceiving Percy's attempts as a betrayal, refuses to do so and recommits to gaining custody of Allegra. Mary and Tom offer to adopt Allegra from Claire so that they can offer her daughter the perceived protections that money and married parents can provide, but Claire refuses their help and instead escapes to Russia with Allegra. Mary's relationship with Tom ends after they disagree about the nature of "womanhood" and have the same fight that led to the end of her relationship with Percy in the first act (106). After the breakup, Mary also decides to abandon her mother's biography, conceding that she instead wants "to make the same mistakes every woman makes, including you. Because, who really listens to their mother, anyway? (107). Finally, Mary and Percy reconcile as Mary tells him that she is pregnant again. The play concludes with the two deciding to leave for Russia to join Claire and Allegra and Percy confidently proclaims, "We are still so young!" as they set out on their journey (109).

Writing *The Apology*

The Apology was written by Darrah Teitel, a Canadian playwright and outgoing political activist. Since graduating from the National Theatre School of Canada, Teitel has continued to write plays while also working in Canadian politics for the New Democratic Party. According to her biography on the Canadian Artists' Representation website, an organization for which she is the Advocacy and Communications Director, Teitel is currently "working on Parliament Hill for the official opposition's critics for the Status of Women and Indigenous Affairs," a position she has held for the past five years. Teitel's dual work in politics has greatly informed her work as a

playwright, as exemplified through *The Omnibus Bill*, a play-in-progress⁹⁵ that combines documentary theatre and original fiction to tell the story of the 1969 omnibus bill in Canada.

In discussing what initially inspired her to write *The Apology*, Teitel identified several early influences on the play. First, in an interview with *The Gauntlet's* Sean Sullivan, Teitel asserted that she first became intrigued with the idea of writing a play about the Shelley circle “while browsing a souvenir shop in Stratford Ontario with a friend.” Teitel explained that “the souvenir shop sold novelty mugs with caricatures of different famous writers: five mugs with men, one mug with women. The women’s mug contained Charlotte Bronte, Emily Bronte, Jane Austen, Sylvia Plath, and Mary Shelley.” She elaborated on what struck her about the images on the mug: “I was looking at all these dim, famous female writers and was like, ‘Jeesh, they were all miserable.’ Every last one of them had a horrible life in reality.” Teitel told Sullivan that her friend “corrected her, pointing out that Shelley had a wonderful marriage.” Sullivan noted that, from this initial interest, “Teitel was then inspired to start digging into the writer’s life.”

But although she initially became interested in the Shelleys through this serendipitous encounter, it was not until Teitel began researching them further that she realized there was something that deeply appealed to her about the couple and their coterie. In an interview with Ruth Myles for *The Calgary Herald*, Teitel explained that she was reading a biography of Mary Shelley when she encountered “one line that mentioned that she and Percy and (Lord) Byron and Claire (Clairmont, Mary’s stepsister) and some of their friends were polyamorous, basically.” Teitel recalled that the key passage from the biography “put it that they were in an open marriage, that they believed in free love, and it didn’t really keep talking about it at all. It left it

⁹⁵ *The Omnibus Play* was given a staged reading in 2017 as part of the TACTICS Workshop Series at Arts Court in Ottawa.

at that. I was like, ‘Aroo?’ What?’” Teitel explained to Myles that this suggestion that the Shelleys might have engaged in polyamory piqued her own interest in that subject. She elaborated that polyamory intrigued her “from a feminist perspective” “because it’s a philosophy of sexuality that admits that sex is political and it’s a way of trying to emancipate women.” Consequently, she asserted that “the fact that these young rock stars were doing it in 1816 was interesting, but then I found out that Mary’s mother and father were doing it as well.”⁹⁶ Teitel did not recall which biography this passage was from, but this reference to free love and the possibility that the Shelleys had an open marriage became the inciting spark for *The Apology* and would form the basis for the play and its exploration of Romantic polyamory within the Villa Diodati group.

This early discovery during her preliminary research of the Shelleys led Teitel to continue reading about the couple and begin writing the script for *The Apology*. Speaking to me about her research process and which sources were most useful for her as she began drafting the play, Teitel said that she “did a tremendous amount of primary and secondary research on these guys” both before and during the playwriting process. She specifically recalled encountering one text mid-way through the writing process that completely changed her conception of the characters and greatly informed her development of the narrative from that point on: “only after I had already written the majority of the first act, my partner found a book that was just published called *Young Romantics* by Daisy Hay.” Published in 2010, Hay’s *Young Romantics* is a

⁹⁶ While it is true that William Godwin’s *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), and Percy Shelley’s notes to “Queen Mab” (1813) all articulate the belief that marriage represents a form of “legalized prostitution,” it is necessary to note that there is no biographical substantiation that proves that this view translated to the writers’ own practice of polyamory. Additionally, there is no evidence of any such sentiments in Mary Shelley’s own writings, personal or otherwise.

prosopography of the second-generation Romantics that emphasizes “the interlinked lives of a group of writers, all of whom were characterized by their youth, by their idealism, and by a particularly passionate engagement with politics, art, and the romance of intellectual adventure” (Hay xiv). Teitel had an immediate and positive reaction to Hay’s book and recalled thinking “fuck, she wrote the whole history in one slim volume that I have been chasing for years.” She described this discovery as “infuriating, but also wonderful” and noted that she found *Young Romantics* particularly fruitful for her understanding of Claire’s character. She observed that: “[Hay] had recovered a lot of Claire’s writings and through them I was able to see that I had made up all sorts of things about Claire’s character that were spot on true.”⁹⁷ Consequently, Teitel recalled feeling “extremely connected to the characters after reading Daisy’s book.” Ultimately, she attributed this sense to the feeling that her characters “had been communicating to me from the dead this whole time” and that she “needed this new piece of historical research to show me just how deeply I understood them.”

Reading *The Apology*

Although the first act of *The Apology* is set in the early nineteenth century, the language used in the play is distinctly modern and is marked by contemporary phrases and references. Additionally, coarse language features prominently in the play; the rehearsal script contains seventy-eight uses of the word “fuck” in some form and “shit” appears twenty-three distinct times. Addressing what inspired her to write the dialogue of *The Apology* using distinctly

⁹⁷ In *The Apology*, Claire’s major revelation comes in the form of a monologue she delivers to Byron about her past and her new life as “a philosopher” (54). In it, she explains that, before her mother married William Godwin, Claire “got an old, ugly lover,” as “wenches of my ilk are like to do,” and she states that “I was a slut since I was tall enough to look a man in the eye” (54). However, historically speaking, Mary Jane Vial Clairmont married William Godwin in 1801 when Claire was only three years old.

modern speech, Teitel began by disclosing that she “actually began writing in old English” and that she still has “a draft that’s historically accurate somewhere.” However, she said that this initial linguistic choice “was distancing me from the characters, who were SOOOO [sic] modern in their sensibilities” and so she instead “wrote a draft in all modern language” to try and bring a sense of immediacy and currency to the characters. From there, Teitel “settled on something in between” period and contemporary language for the play’s first act, while the second act is “just set today” and the language used is “not anachronistic at all.” Teitel explained her rationale for using modern language throughout the play by stating that she “wanted them to be from the nineteenth century, but to sound, as they would have sounded: extremely young, hip and vibrant.” She disclosed that she does not think she is “a good enough writer” to create that effect “without using some of my own linguistic references,” and so modern phrasing made its way into both the first and second acts of the play, despite the time jump between the act break. Consequently, contemporary phrases are used throughout the first act, despite its historical setting. In one jarring example of this, Lord Byron says to the group “so she’s allowed to insult me, to insult my dick, but I can’t say one--! Ah! Fuck y’all!” (24) and in an earlier post-coital scene, Byron asks the sisters “who—is—your—Daddy?” (15). Phrases such as this, that underscore the characters’ modernity while simultaneously broadening the gap between them and the first act’s nineteenth-century setting, appear throughout *The Apology* and contribute to the play’s distinct form of discourse.

In addition to the play’s modern language, a marked feature of *The Apology* is the intersection of sexuality and politics, both in terms of the characters’ theoretical discussions and their practical explorations. Speaking to Jon Kaplan, Teitel articulated an important point about her intention behind the play, which is essential to its critical consideration: “I always wanted to

write a show that begs the question of where art ends and pornography begins.” This key insight not only provides a better understanding of Teitel’s intention in writing *The Apology*, but also helps contextualize the play’s often frank and unadorned depiction of sex. Accordingly, the overt sexuality of *The Apology* is not only emphasized through the play-in-production, but it is intentionally and explicitly written into the script itself. For example, in a scene tellingly entitled “Inventing the Orgy,” *The Apology*’s sexual fixation culminates in a seemingly-inevitable *ménage à quatre* between the four main characters. The stage directions detail the encounter and its aftermath in certain terms: “*PERCY encourages GEORGE and MARY into each other’s arms. He brings out a notepad and a pen. CLAIRE removes her blouse and kneels at PERCY’s feet*” and, later in the same scene, “*CLAIRE rises naked out of the primordial heap of bodies covered only in a sheet.*” (20). Despite Teitel’s stated desire to create a play that questions the line between art and pornography, she offers another possible rationale to Kaplan for the play’s overt sexuality, suggesting that “the audience has to be turned on by the experiment, or they’ll never sympathize with the people and theories they talk about and try to live.” Within the play itself, Teitel has Mary Shelley articulate a similar position in her justification of Percy’s antagonistic treatment of her: “he attacks me because he wants to provoke me. He wants me to...feel. He wants to turn me on” (105). In both Teitel and Mary’s justifications, arousal, provocation, and empathy are conflated. This decision to create a play intended to provoke and titillate the audience, as a means of garnering sympathy for the characters’ views, presents a unique and difficult challenge for those staging the play-in-production and the success of this in practice will be addressed later through both practitioner interviews and audience responses.

Furthermore, in *The Apology*, politics and social issues are treated as explicitly as sexuality and, as Kaplan observes, “the play is as much about politics as it is about sex.” Most

prominently though, *The Apology* contends with questions of sexual politics and gender issues, although economic disparity and social privilege are also frequently addressed, especially through Claire and Byron's custody battle in the second act. Teitel explained to Kaplan that, when researching the Shelley circle, she "hook[ed] into the material through feminism." She elaborated that she saw "Mary and Claire as trying to emancipate themselves, but getting caught in attempting to reconcile emotions, theory, maternity, and politics. It's a feminist quandary that many still face." Teitel reiterated the centrality of gender and gender issues in the play in her conversation with me, noting that "it's what the whole play is about. I can't even start naming all the ways the play is about gender." Most often, the play addresses these issues in the form of a dramatized debate between the four key characters that, much like the play's explicit sexuality, is as intentionally provocative as it is entertaining. In the first act, these politically-charged discussions allow the group to directly contend with a variety of issues that remain pertinent in the twenty-first century, including pregnancy, sexual norms, social autonomy, gender roles, and abortion. For example, in a scene entitled "The International Conspiracy," Mary and Claire joke about women's sexual power over men, to which Byron responds that they "sound like witches and you're starting to scare me" as they joke about the captivating power of women over men (22). From there, a lengthy argument develops about the fact that Byron has lost interest in Claire, having told her that she is "like some rabid dog begging for food" (22). But when Mary takes umbrage with Byron's distaste for Claire's overt desire, the broader social implications of Byron's actions subsume the personal realities of the situation:

GEORGE: Don't start. It's none of your business what I like or dislike. Unless you want to make it your business...

MARY: There's something political about this...

CLAIRE: Now, you've done it, George. You've offended her. She's going to yell at you.

GEORGE: It's political if I lose an erection?

MARY: I'm not sure... (23)

Mary eventually pinpoints the “political” problem she perceives with Byron’s sentiment: that he wants Claire “to give the appearance of lust, but not to *actually* feel it” (23). But in this instance, and indeed throughout the play, the characters’ actions are attributed to greater powers or larger systems that have caused them to act out and Mary ends by telling Byron that it is not his fault, but that “it’s more...the world” (23). This frequent allusion to social or political forces that have informed the characters and their behaviors is a key component of *The Apology* that only becomes more pronounced after the time-jump into the present in act two. For example, in only the first few pages of the act two, Mary Shelley speaks numerous lines with explicit political overtones: “single mothers deserve more money, not less” (62), “I’m not adorable. I’m asking you a question and I think I’m paying you to answer it” (66), “that’s a chauvinistic attitude” (66), and “it’s like an invasive species, your capitalism” (67). The play’s explicit politics and the attribution of the characters’ actions to larger social systems positions *The Apology* more as a dramatized political allegory than a Romantic Biodrama. The play’s emphasis on polyamory as a political system, in addition to a sexual one, reflects Teitel’s own stated views of the subject and informs the characters’ words, actions, and foundational features. Resultantly, although the play does not appear to be as overtly political as Teitel’s *The Omnibus Bill*, *The Apology* employs the members of the Shelley circle as actors within a contemporary political drama.

As this exploration of some of the key features of the script has emphasized, *The Apology* exemplifies Romantic Biodrama’s creative potential by radically reworking the established historical record and relocating the Shelleys to a contemporary setting. Although the play’s first

act is set in the nineteenth century, its modern language, overt sexuality, and political focus distinguish *The Apology* as a distinctly modern re-working of the Shelleys' biographies that highlights the continuing currency of their circle's lifestyle, writing, and ideas. From this discussion of the play's script, we now move to the play-in-production to begin assessing how this text was adapted for the stage. Since *The Apology*'s performance history includes two distinct premieres, we begin with the first of these productions at the 2011 Next Stage Festival.

Setting The Stage: The Next Stage Festival at Factory Studio Theatre

When *The Apology* was first staged in 2011, it was performed from January 5th-16th as part of Toronto's Next Stage Theatre Festival (NSTF). Speaking to how he thought *The Apology*'s inclusion as part of the Next Stage Theatre Festival influenced the staging of the play, actor Brendan McMurtry-Howlett stated that it affected it "big time." In discussing how she thought *The Apology*'s inclusion as part of the Next Stage Festival influenced the staging of the play, actor Kaitlyn Riordan similarly noted that "the Next Stage Festival was an excellent first venue for the show, as it has the capability to garner a lot of media attention, which it did." The NSTF is produced annually by the Toronto Fringe Festival and runs for twelve days every January. It first began in 2008 and, according to the festival website, was originally created to "encourage artists who have previously participated in any CAFF⁹⁸ member festivals to move beyond the summer production model and showcase their work to a wider audience." While the NSTF typically features ten productions, only eight plays were staged when *The Apology* premiered in 2011. Although NSTF is a Fringe production, contrary to CAFF rules and the fringe

⁹⁸ Canadian Association of Fringe Festivals, or CAFF, was formed to protect the "four guiding principles" of Canadian fringe festivals: non-juried artist selection, all ticket revenues are returned to artists, artist control of content, and easy accessibility for all audiences and artists to participate in fringe festivals (CAFF Website).

festival model of non-juried submissions, the plays included as part of the NSTF are “chosen by a jury of industry leaders” (CAFF website). Additionally, while works featured as part of NSTF are occasionally re-staged from earlier Fringe performances, the festival website indicates that most shows are instead “new works by established Fringe artists who have demonstrated the passion and tenacity to take their work to the next stage.” Among these new works created by returning artists was Teitel’s *The Apology*. Teitel came to the NSTF as an experienced Fringe artist, involved in the 2003 Toronto Fringe Festival as co-writer, director, and performer in *The Seducer’s Diary* and slated to return later in 2011 as a co-writer of the play *Swoon!*. As a returning artist, Teitel was then given the opportunity to propose her script to the festival jury and, following her acceptance into the NSTF, was subsequently given a high-profile forum to display her latest project: *The Apology*.

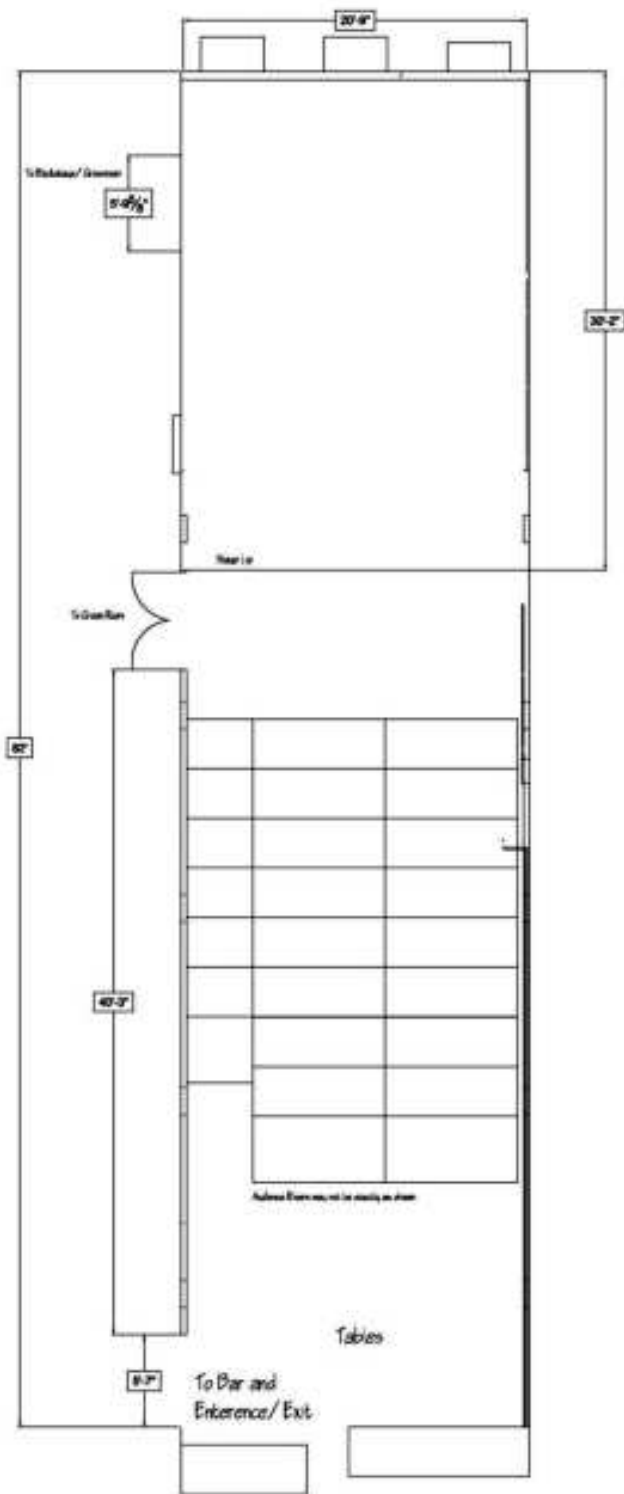


“Exterior of the Factory Studio Theatre, Before its 2014 Renovation.” Toronto Theatre Database, Linn Drolic, TTDB.ca, 2012.

“Post-Renovation Exterior of Factory Theatre in Toronto, Ontario,” Factory Theatre Website, FactoryTheatre.ca, 2014.

Unlike other Fringe-style festivals that take place across their cities in various venues, the NSTF is centralized in a single location: The Factory Theatre. The Factory Theatre is centrally-located in downtown Toronto and is a converted nineteenth-century mansion. It is home to the Factory Theatre Company, which was founded in 1970 as “the first English-language theatre in Canada to devote itself exclusively to Canadian Script” (Canadian Encyclopedia Website). The Factory Theatre has been the setting of the NSTF since the festival began in 2008 and all plays are staged in one of its two performance spaces: the larger mainstage or the smaller studio theatre. *The Apology* was performed in the Factory Studio Theatre, a black-box theatre with a maximum house size of one hundred audience members. Additionally, although Factory Studio is a black-box theatre, which implies a certain degree of flexibility in terms of how the playing and performing spaces can be adjusted, the play’s staging as part of a rotating festival lineup required adherence to the theatre’s standard setup. The theatre’s technical information package provides more information about constraints on reconfiguring the space and stipulates that although the “the audience seating risers are modular and can be reconfigured for your individual show requirements,” “reconfiguring of the audience risers from our standard setup may require 6-8 hours for a crew of 4” (1). Consequently, *The Apology*’s inclusion in the NSTF meant that, although the space itself is adaptable, the production’s creative team had to work with the “permanently installed stage at the far end of the room” (1). But even though the theatre’s rectangular shape and stage placement placed the actors at one end of the room and separated them from the audience, the Factory Studio Theatre’s intimate setting and limited seating still brought the audience and actors close together.

As the following discussion of the play-in-production demonstrates, *The Apology*’s inclusion in the NSTF played a major role in how the script was reimagined for this premiere



“Image from Factory Studio Theatre’s Technical Information Package,” Factory Theatre Website, FactoryTheatre.ca, 2012.
 Note the long, rectangular layout and the placement of the stage at the top of the diagram, which represents the far end of the theatre.

production, affecting everything from design, to budget, to promotion, and to subsequent reception. Having now established the performance context and setting of *The Apology*'s first premiere in 2011, we now move to the personnel that made up the play's creative team for a discussion of how they were brought together to work on this first premiere production.

Assembling the Team (2011)

The Apology was first produced in 2011 by Rabiayshna Productions. The Toronto Theatre Database indicates that their 2011 production of *The Apology* is only the second of the group's two productions, the first being Darrah Teitel's play *Marla's Party* in 2008, which also debuted at Factory Studio Theatre in Toronto. In comparing the cast and crew lists for *Marla's Party* and *The Apology*, what stands out immediately is that the only individual involved with both productions was Teitel herself. It then becomes apparent that, rather than a performance collective or full company, Rabiayshna Productions was instead the name given to the group assembled by Teitel to stage two of her plays. Consequently then, because Teitel was both the playwright and organizer behind *The Apology*, she became the central fixture of the production process and continued to play an active part in adapting the play from page to stage by assembling the rest of the creative team.

Accordingly, Teitel also selected the director for *The Apology*'s premiere production in 2011: Audrey Dwyer. Dwyer is a Toronto-based performer and dramaturg and, although *The Apology* is her sole directing credit, she had previously worked as an assistant director for other productions. Speaking about which elements of the script initially drew her to *The Apology*, Dwyer recalled that she was "attracted to the study of polyamory from the point of view of young theorists who had never done it before." In addition to the play's subject matter, she also noted an interest in the language itself and the challenges it presented. She explained that she

was “attracted to the language and the dialogue of Darrah's play,” elaborating that it is “lyrical and dated, yet modern and hipster-ish.” Furthermore, Dwyer was intrigued by the play and its underlying themes. She especially “loved that it dealt with transgressions, hope for the future (via open sexuality), dark content, women's issues and poetry.” Dwyer spoke on more detail about how she got involved with the production, recalling that she initially “met with Darrah one year before the play was produced” to discuss what the playwright imagined for the production. Importantly, Dwyer also recalled that Teitel had already “selected three of the actors, who had workshopped the play with her long before I arrived,” although she herself “brought on the actor who played Byron.” The fact that Teitel had already selected three of the production’s actors before choosing a director again speaks to the very active role that the playwright had in *The Apology*’s premiere production. Rather than leave the play’s casting up to the director, as is the conventional approach, Teitel had already chosen the actors that she wanted to play Mary, Percy, and Claire. Furthermore, prior to Dwyer’s involvement in the production, Teitel had already been working through the script development process, including multiple workshops and readings of the play.

In discussing how she got involved with *The Apology*, Kaitlyn Riordan, the actor who played Mary Shelley, recalled that she was “involved in a reading several months prior to the production, where the playwright took notes and used the experience to do a new draft at The Banff Colony⁹⁹ before the production.” Although she “wasn't involved prior to this” point, she did recall that “there had been readings beforehand with Natasha Greenblatt¹⁰⁰ reading Mary.”

⁹⁹ The Banff Playwrights Colony is a playwright development and residency program. Teitel attended the Colony in both 2011 and its role in the development of *The Apology* will become especially important for the play’s second iteration, since it was partnered with Alberta Theatre Projects at the time.

¹⁰⁰ Greenblatt had previously appeared in Teitel’s earlier play, *Marla’s Party* (2008).

Riordan's description here of the multiple readings that went into *The Apology* before the production began speaks to the play's lengthy development process prior to its 2011 production. Riordan explained that, after participating in one of these later readings, she was then "asked to audition for the production at The Next Stage Festival." Reflecting on which elements of the script initially attracted her to the project, Riordan noted three aspects that contributed to her interest in working on *The Apology*. First, she explained that, as a theatrical practitioner, she is "drawn to the stories of real people on stage." Second, she felt that the story of "three Romantic poets who experimented with their sexual relationships to each other" "was exciting." And finally, the prospect of "experiencing the anomaly that was Mary Shelley, who at such a young age took such big risks: diving into her romantic life while so assuredly thriving with her writing endeavours" greatly intrigued her.

Another of the production's actors, Brendan McMurtry-Howlett, became involved with *The Apology* through his own personal relationship with the playwright. McMurtry-Howlett, who debuted the role of Percy Shelley in 2011 and was also a producer of the show, disclosed that Teitel was a "close friend" at the time. He explained that they were "at theatre school together and she asked me to take part in a workshop reading of the play roughly a year before we got into the Next Stage Festival." Speaking to what initially attracted him to the project, McMurtry-Howlett disclosed that it was his friendship with Teitel, rather than his own interest in the script or its subject matter, that initially appealed to him: "to be honest, I think it was my friendship with Darrah that attracted me to the project." Speaking further to his first impressions of *The Apology*, he explained that he "initially thought the play had some flaws, but it was also flattering to be asked." He also addressed the play's focus on polyamory as a unique challenge to him as a performer, remembering that "there was also some attraction to the idea of diving into

the world of polyamory and the sexually charged nature of the relationships between characters.” He expanded on this appeal, noting that “as a performer, I am always attracted to exploring uncomfortable new territory within myself and this seemed like a fun project to do that with.”

In addition to Dwyer, Riordan, and McMurtry-Howlett, Sascha Cole was also selected by Teitel to play Claire Clairmont, while Dwyer brought in David Beazely to play Lord Byron. Additionally, a small crew was assembled that included Jung-Hye Kim as designer, Kimberly Purtell as lighting designer, and Thomas Ryder Payne as sound designer. Finally, Teitel remained on the project as a key member of the creative team. Teitel explained that she “worked closely with the cast, crew and directors as the playwright on both productions” and this close involvement continued into the play’s development and dramaturgical processes.

Staging *The Apology* (2011)

Dramaturgy and Development

After assembling the production’s creative team, the group set out to theatrically realize Teitel’s vision. But although the play had been in development for over a year at that point, the script still needed to be edited to fit within the NSTF’s strict time slots. Dwyer recalled that “the play was too long for the time slot that Darrah had applied for” and, resultantly, they only had “a seventy-five-minute time slot and we really should have been in a ninety-minute time slot.” To try and contend with the tight timeframe, Dwyer explained that they “had at least fifteen pages that we needed to cut” before rehearsals could begin. In addition to the pressing need to cut down the script for time, the process of editing the play for content also continued throughout the production, despite the play’s earlier development. And although Teitel was the central figure in the production as the playwright, organizer, and individual responsible for casting three of the production’s four actors, the addition of Dwyer as the play’s director introduced a new

perspective on the script that also influenced its development and staging. Dwyer explained that she initially “felt that the play was too wordy—that with all of the sexuality, we needed more silence, more physical tension splayed between all those words.” Therefore, to create “more silence” and “more physical tension” in the play, Dwyer asked Teitel “to create a physical scene that had a touch of text, but not very much.” As Dwyer’s statement here suggests, her involvement as *The Apology*’s director was not strictly limited to staging a faithful production of Teitel’s existing script, but also entailed suggesting cuts, additions, or re-approaching the play’s use of language. Consequently, the play’s script development process, which formally began with script readings more than a year before the 2011 production, continued well into the staging process and involved an active collaboration between Teitel and Dwyer.

Because of the need to pare the script down for time and Dwyer’s desire to adjust the text based on how it sounded during rehearsals, it became necessary for Teitel to constantly edit the play throughout the staging process. Dwyer recalled how she “spent days with Darrah talking about each character in complete detail, about her themes, about music, her influences, her biggest dreams of the play, etc.” Looking back on these important and fruitful conversations, Dwyer disclosed that these discussions helped her get a better understanding of the material and, consequently, “all of these questions helped me encourage cuts.” Dwyer spoke further to the importance of editing the text during rehearsals and explained that “with this play, as with most plays, I make cuts that satisfy the mouths of the characters.” Her guiding interest in making “cuts that satisfy the mouths of the characters” meant that Dwyer was primarily interested in how the script served discoveries made in the rehearsal hall, rather than being obliged to adhere to the play text as a set document. Additionally, Dwyer noted that “despite the fact that it was too long, I guided Darrah to make cuts that allowed the character journeys to maintain authenticity.”

Importantly, Dwyer recalled that these cuts were part of a continuous editorial process throughout the play's staging, even admitting that they were "making cuts up until the opening night." As a result of Teitel and Dwyer's near-constant editing of the script, the play's development process continued into its performance, thus requiring the entire creative team to remain flexible as the script remained in a state of flux.

As the creative team contended with adjusting the script to respond to discoveries made in rehearsal and adhere to the festival's time slot, the production's dramaturgical process was left as a more open discussion of shared inspirations than a formal process. Despite the informal nature of the production's dramaturgical process and the limited tablework or collective research done by the creative team, Dwyer characterized the process as "lengthy and intense" for her and Teitel, noting that the two "read some of the same books" and Teitel "gave me music that inspired her." Speaking as an actor in the production, McMurtry-Howlett explained that, in addition to the group's broader conversations about the play and its characters, he also had "several unofficial dramaturgical conversations with Darrah outside of the rehearsals." He specifically recalled that he was "quite opinionated about finding the narrative thread" that "dug a bit deeper than a bunch of young people having sex and having long-winded speeches about the politics of polyamory" and he sought these answers through discussions with the playwright. Importantly, while McMurtry-Howlett conceded that they did not spend "too much time on the dramaturgy of the piece, sitting around a table," he did recall that they "were constantly honing things on our feet." This sense of "honing things on our feet" became something of a recurring motif for the production process behind *The Apology*'s staging in 2011, as seen through its development, dramaturgy, and continuing into rehearsals. As this section has already shown, the script itself underwent a continual process of editorial revision throughout the staging process,

right up until opening, which meant that dramaturgy and critical discussion of the text itself had to remain similarly fluid. In this next section, we explore how the notion of “honing things on our feet” also continued into the rehearsal process.

Rehearsing *The Apology* (2011)

In considering the differing accounts of the rehearsal process for *The Apology*'s 2011 production, what emerges are distinct views of the process and individual takes on both the experience and its results. As this section demonstrates, the individual members of a production's creative team can differently perceive the same experience, thus emphasizing the importance of collecting multiple points of view on any staging process. But first, Riordan began by noting that the rehearsal process itself lasted “three to four weeks and mostly focused on staging.” While she remembered that the script did not undergo “any large changes once rehearsals started, she did recall that “the playwright was present and often did small changes throughout.” Speaking to the rehearsal process for *The Apology*, Dwyer again noted that they “had Darrah in the room during the entire process, because of the cuts that we needed to make” and explained that Teitel “was there for most days.”

Addressing the question of what the rehearsal processes involved for this production, McMurtry-Howlett said that he remembered the process “being a bit of a challenge.” He elaborated first on the production's material challenges, first recalling that they were working with “next to no money.” Because of this financial strain, they “were jumping around to different rehearsal spaces all the time with varying amenities.” Among these spaces, McMurtry-Howlett recalled that “many were not properly insulated and heated, which was a problem for rehearsing a play mostly in our underwear in December.” Additionally, McMurtry-Howlett pointed to one of the most challenging rehearsal spaces they used: the house of the playwright's parents. He

elaborated on this experience, recalling how they “also had to have a couple rehearsals at Darrah’s parents’ house, which was again pretty awkward trying to stage an orgy scene with her little brother making eggs in the kitchen twenty feet away.” McMurtry-Howlett’s description here of the challenges associated with finding a rehearsal space with “next to money” highlights the importance of the play’s performance context and draws attention to the resources needed to develop a production, even one as small as *The Apology*’s staging in 2011. Furthermore, although *The Apology* had secured a spot in the NSTF, having a venue to produce the play did not ease the strain of finding a rehearsal space, especially when budget was an issue for the small, ad hoc company.

In addition to the production’s material constraints and their effect on the rehearsal process, the play’s subject matter also influenced the staging process, beginning with rehearsals. One of the main components of the script that both Dwyer and Teitel wanted to emphasize in the production was *The Apology*’s sense of youthfulness and its overt sexuality. In an interview with Jon Kaplan, Teitel explained the importance of sexuality to the production, stating that “director Audrey Dwyer and I have encouraged the actors to investigate all realms of emotion and the dark side of their sexuality.” Teitel and Dwyer initially set out to enable this exploration through the play’s casting. Dwyer noted that they had “cast the play correctly,” since the actors were “quite young” and “their ages were perfect for the play.” But while Dwyer asserted that the actors “were definitely youthful,” she explained that she and Teitel “worked with them to heighten their sexual energy, their zest for life in a way that was open and light.”

From this acknowledgement of casting as an important part of the production, Dwyer elaborated on how she and Teitel encouraged actors to explore “the dark side of their sexuality” during the rehearsal process. She explained that this was accomplished by getting the creative

team to first discuss these concepts in relation to themselves and their own experiences. She elaborated that “we really studied ourselves: our fears of nudity, our gender biases, our ideas of who was a ‘dom[inant],’ who was a ‘sub[missive],’ who we thought we were and who we actually were in the bedroom.” She further explained that they “talked about that” at length and then “brought that to the mix in a very present way.” Consequently, instead of simply framing these discussions in the theoretical or the abstract, Dwyer asserted that they used these intensely-personal conversations to fuel the work itself: “rather than talk about all the politics all the time, I asked them to put it in the work.” She noted the perceived success of this preparatory work and stated how the actors “understood that and chose to infuse their upset, their joy and their tension about gender, etc. into their work.” According to Dwyer, this sense of energy was necessarily bolstered by the fact that “each cast member was excited about the content; polyamory to them and the beliefs behind it, the theory and the practise, really excited them.”

However, it is important to account for the fact that the success of this exploratory work was not perceived the same way by all the members of the creative team. Specifically, McMurtry-Howlett spoke to the experience of contending with the play’s sexuality as one of its actors. He began by noting that “there were definitely awkward rehearsals trying to stage the highly physical and sexual scenes.” Furthermore, he remarked that, despite the sexual nature of these scenes, their rehearsals “never felt too sexy or comfortable,” which he attributed in part to the difficulty in securing a dependable and comfortable rehearsal space. Speaking more specifically, he recalled that the varying conditions of the rehearsal spaces often impeded his ability to become immersed in the scene and he observed that “fluorescent lights in a rehearsal hall are not conducive to doing any kind of acting work in your underwear.” Addressing the rehearsal process itself in more detail, McMurtry-Howlett recalled the difficulties he had in

working through the script with what he felt was insufficient guidance, given the sensitive nature of the script. He noted that they “were all stumbling around in the dark with how to go about working on the material,” which he felt was only exacerbated by the fact that “this was the director’s first show she had directed.” Importantly, McMurtry-Howlett recalled feeling like “there didn’t seem to be a lot of thought by any of us on what the impact of this material would be and how to create a safe space to explore this material.” He elaborated on this feeling of lacking a “safe space to explore this material,” noting how he still remembered “feeling a bit like a piece of meat at times and being really uncomfortable.” Significantly, he specified that this feeling did not come from what he “was being asked to do” per se, but from under “what conditions I was being asked to do it and the reactions of the director and playwright in response.” Finally, he further reflected on the impact this had on him as an actor, stating that he imagines “that is a feeling that female actors experience on a regular basis, unfortunately.”

McMurtry-Howlett’s description of *The Apology*’s rehearsal process offers important insight into his own subjective experience of the creative process behind staging the play that is necessary to account for in our discussion of the play-in-performance. As has already been discussed at length in this chapter, *The Apology* is defined in part through its frank depiction of sexuality. However, in adapting the play for performance, the theoretical or linguistic treatment of the subject necessarily took on a practical dimension with which the individuals working on the production had to contend. Read alongside Teitel’s stated interest in exploring “where art ends and pornography begins” and her assertion that she and Dwyer encouraged the actors to explore “the dark side of their sexuality,” McMurtry-Howlett’s description of the rehearsal process and his discomfort with the experience draws important attention to the practical and human realities associated with artistic experimentation, especially in the deeply-personal and

corporeal world of theatre. His observation that he felt “a bit like a piece of meat” and that “without having a safe space” he felt “really uncomfortable” cuts through the artistic ambitions behind the production. Additionally, his assertion that his feelings of vulnerability and discomfort are akin to what “female actors experience on a regular basis, unfortunately” distressingly underscores the pervasiveness of such abuses in the context of rehearsals and keys into the often-gendered nature of such transgressions. While the other actors involved with the production either did not provide an interview or did not directly address the rehearsal process in their answer, McMurtry-Howlett’s response stands on its own as an important component of *The Apology*. And furthermore, on a broader scale, McMurtry-Howlett’s account of his experience as an actor during rehearsals for *The Apology* is an indication of the challenges associated with translating a play text into a performance but, most importantly, it stands out as a deeply unfortunate reminder of the possible pitfalls of working through sensitive material in a rehearsal setting and the necessary precautions that must be taken to ensure the comfort and safety of all involved.

As the preceding section helps demonstrate, the human costs associated with artistic experimentation, which *The Apology* explores in relation to the Shelleyan project, can easily become contemporary and continuing concerns for theatrical practitioners if proper conditions are not maintained in the staging process. Transitioning from this necessary acknowledgement of different points of view from the 2011 rehearsal process, we continue with the story of *The Apology* in performance to chart the history of the play in production. To do so, we now return to the play itself for a more focused exploration of how the Shelleys themselves. In the next section, we then focus on how the Shelleys and their relationship were developed in *The Apology* and subsequently realized onstage in 2011.

The Shelleys in *The Apology* (2011)

Although *The Apology* challenges the primacy of the Shelleys as the core romantic relationship in their circle by re-pairing Mary and Percy with both Byron and Claire, the Shelleys remain central to the drama as the only pairing that enters and leaves *The Apology* together. In the play's 2013 reworking, the Shelleys experiment with an open relationship that briefly challenges the strength of their bond but, in the play's first iteration in 2011, their union is never truly compromised, despite their sexual involvement with Byron and Claire. Speaking to me about how she would characterize the relationship between Mary and Percy Shelley in *The Apology* in 2011, Teitel described it as "kind of typical of most of the narcissist men I know who date hot hipster artsy girls, which is to say perfectly teenage/ early twenties bullshit." From Teitel's initial conception of the relationship between the Shelleys in *The Apology*, we now move to how the actors who debuted the characters in 2011 conceived of the Shelleys and their relationship to get a better understanding of how this key pairing evolved through the staging of the play.

Addressing how he would describe Percy Shelley's characterization in *The Apology*, as portrayed by him, McMurtry-Howlett began by sardonically responding "Charming. Next question?" He then explained that he "approached him as a fresh-faced optimist who felt things deeply." He elaborated on his characterization with a sense of deep personalization, explaining that "my Percy was very earnest." McMurtry-Howlett observed that Percy "believed that their experiment could change the world and the love he felt for all of them was genuine." Furthermore, he observed that Percy "didn't think too far ahead and he really needed everyone's affection to support his own self-worth. Finally, he observed that Percy in *The Apology* "wanted everyone involved and the splitting up of the group was what crushed him more than any single

relationship.” Ultimately then, McMurtry-Howlett concluded that Percy was not only part of the group, “he was the group.” Speaking to how she would describe Mary Shelley’s characterization in *The Apology*, as she portrayed her, Riordan explained that she envisioned Mary as “a strong young woman, eager to explore the world and discover her place in it.” Riordan asserted that, in Mary “we see a woman trying to define herself through the lens of her Mother’s feminism and Father’s liberalism.” She elaborated that, in *The Apology*, Mary “is testing the theories that have swirled around her all her life and delving into her imaginary world at the same time.” She also noted that “the play often dealt with her boundaries and limits” and explored how they “ultimately forced her to take a stand.” Riordan finally concluded with a broad character sketch of her Mary: “my Mary was curious, brave, savvy, suspicious, and horribly in love with Percy.”

From these two individual assessments of their characters, McMurtry-Howlett and Riordan then described how they perceived the relationship between the Shelleys in their production. McMurtry-Howlett began by characterizing the relationship between Mary and Percy Shelley in their production of *The Apology* as “a bit odd.” He elaborated on how his behind-the-scenes relationship with the actor who played Mary influenced this characterization: “the person who played Mary now runs a theatre company with me,¹⁰¹ but I remember at the time we were a bit standoffish and there wasn’t a ton of chemistry between us.” However, he observed that “in some ways, I think that kind of worked for our production.” He elaborated on this by explaining the dichotomy between the two characters, noting that “Percy was the leaping-before-you-look person and Mary was more skeptical, observant and analytical of the experiment on a far deeper level than anyone else.” Furthermore, he observed that “Percy was the one crazy enough to

¹⁰¹ Shakespeare in the Ruff, an outdoor theatre company based in Toronto’s East End, was founded in 2012 with Riordan as a founding member and McMurtry-Howlett as the founding artistic director.

create the situations they were in, but everything affected Mary much deeper,” which was what he thought “the production was about.” Speaking from the perspective of his character, he explained that “as Percy, I mostly remember it being about my relationship with the whole group rather than one clear relationship with Mary.” Explaining how she would characterize the relationship between Mary and Percy in their production of *The Apology*, Riordan explained that, to her, their relationship “felt like a very deep love.” Additionally, she asserted that it was “a young love too, where you'll do anything for the other person, even if you're a little scared of it.” In addition to their shared affection, she also felt that “they were connected by their mutual pursuits of writing, which felt like it would help them survive the action of the play.” Riordan asserted that she thinks “Percy made Mary feel safe” but she also perceived that “he wasn't able to properly empathize with her when they lost their child.” She emphasized the interpersonal and narrative importance of this loss, suggesting that “in that moment, their love felt tested in a big way.”

Through these differing conceptions of the Shelleys and their relationship, we can begin to see how *The Apology's* playwright and actors individually perceived these characters and the bond between them. For example, Teitel's description of the Shelleys emphasized the modernity of their relationship through her use of contemporary analogues, such as “hot, hipster artsy girls,” “perfectly teenage/ early twenties bullshit.” Additionally, McMurtry-Howlett conceived of Percy as defined through his involvement in the group and identified the initial lack of chemistry between him and Riordan as an important component of the production, since it drew attention to the foundational conflicts between their characters. Finally, Riordan focused on Mary's strength and desire to push boundaries during the events of *The Apology* and she conceived of the relationship between Mary and Percy in idealistic terms, underscoring its depth and youthful

passion. As these three distinct, yet interconnected, conceptions of the Shelleys help demonstrate, the theatrical realization of these characters in *The Apology* was ultimately formed through disparate, and often conflicting, interpretations. Resultantly then, these insights from the playwright and actors show how a combination of Teitel's initial conception of the characters, the actor's individual perceptions of their characters, and the relationship that emerged through the play's rehearsals and subsequent performance informed the characterization of Mary and Percy Shelley and their relationship in *The Apology*.

From this discussion of the Shelleys' conception in the 2011 staging of *The Apology* and how their relationship was realized onstage, we now move to the question of design to explore how *The Apology*'s festival setting and limited budget influenced the production's overall aesthetic.

Designing *The Apology* (2011)

When it came time to design *The Apology* and conceive of how the production would ultimately look onstage, the play's inclusion as part of the NSTF again emerged as an important influence on the creation process. Riordan explained how the play's festival-setting meant they had less access to resources, recalling that "the staging was affected because you have access to very limited tech during a festival." Because *The Apology* appeared as part of a Fringe-sponsored festival, the production only afforded the resources and materials provided to participating companies and had to operate within the set conditions of the theatre's festival setup. Additionally, the already limited capabilities of the Factory Studio Theatre, as the smaller of the spaces where the NSTF, further impeded *The Apology*'s design in 2011.

One of the design elements that was most restricted by the production's festival setting and the performance space's limited capabilities was lighting. In describing the production's

design, only Riordan mentioned the lighting, which she succinctly described as “basic.” In the technical information package for Factory Studio Theatre, the theatre’s limited technical supports are described and the limitations on lighting are clearly outlined. The package indicates that “there is no house plot or pre-hang for the Studio” and that, if any changes are made or lights are brought in, “all companies will be required to hang, focus and strike their lights within their contracted rental” (3). The fact that the theatre does not have a house plot, meaning it does not already have a set lighting grid that companies can use to execute their designs, instead requires anyone renting the space to bring in their own lights. Furthermore, beyond the obvious material costs associated with bringing in and setting up a lighting plot, the festival setting of *The Apology* meant that Rabiayshna Productions could not bring in their own lighting, since such a large-scale change would have prevented quick transitions between shows. Resultantly then, because the Factory Studio Theatre has no house plot and the festival setting prevented lights from being brought in, even if that were financially viable for a small company, *The Apology*’s 2011 premiere had only basic, utilitarian lighting.

In addition to the production’s lighting, sound was also kept to a minimum, although Riordan noted that the “sound was more developed” than the lighting. This greater development can again be attributed to the performance space and festival setting, since the theatre’s pre-set sound system allowed the company to play music or sound effects more easily. In terms of how the sound design for *The Apology* was created, Dwyer explained that Teitel gave her “music that inspired her.” From there, Dwyer noted that the music, which had first inspired Teitel, also “inspired our sound designer.” Additionally, Dwyer indicated that, because the sound designer was also one of the producers, more money and attention were devoted to sound design: “he was one of the producers, so his budget helped” them to realize their vision for the production. The

overall effectiveness of the production's sound design can be perceived through reviews of *The Apology*, which also provide useful information regarding how music was used for the performance. In one review of the production, Michelle Barker singled out the sound design, by Thomas Ryder-Payne, as an exceptional feature of the play-in-performance. She specifically observed that "the choice to use instrumental, string versions of Lady Gaga hits during transitions provided a comical modern element to the piece." Barker's acknowledgement of *The Apology*'s transitional music as a notable feature of the production highlights the key role that music played in the performance, despite the space's limited technical capabilities. Additionally, Barker's observation that the decision to use "instrumental, string versions of Lady Gaga hits" adds a "comical modern element to the piece" not only hints at a sense of whimsy and humour in the production, which was inflected by its sound design, but also indicates how anachronistic elements were used in the production itself to highlight the modernity of *The Apology*'s subject matter. Although the 2011 version of *The Apology* was a one-act play that strictly kept the action located in the nineteenth century, this discussion of sound design has already suggested how the production's design included anachronistic elements that anticipated the 2013 production's modern reworking. In addition to the use of well-known, twenty-first century pop songs as transitional music, the production also featured modern costuming that contrasted with the play's 1816 setting.

In terms of how the costume design was created for the production, Dwyer recalled that the actors "brought their own clothes, which fit the characters perfectly." In turning to reviews of the production, critics addressed the modern styling of the play's characters with Jon Kaplan describing the costuming as "modern dress (and timeless undress)," while J. Kelly Nestruck similarly noted that the actors were "dressed and undressed in current fashions." As Dwyer's

statement that the costumes “fit the characters perfectly” and these descriptions from reviews both suggest, the use of modern clothing for *The Apology* introduced another distinctly anachronistic element to the production that, like the use of string arrangements of pop songs, underscored the twenty-first-century implications of the performance. However, in addition to the modern twist the costumes brought to the production, it is again necessary to unpack the material realities of the production and how they also influenced this design choice.

Speaking to *The Apology*'s costume design, the actors themselves stressed the financial rationale behind the decision for them to bring in their own clothes, rather than any artistic reasoning. McMurtry-Howlett reiterated that they “had next to no money” and so their costumes “were basically our own clothes.” Riordan similarly echoed this sentiment, describing the costumes as “extremely minimal, due to our limited budget.” Again, what is made apparent here is the influence of budget on production design, as McMurtry-Howlett and Riordan both attribute the modern, makeshift costuming to financial limitations, rather than a pure design choice intended to comment on the play's modern sensibilities. In addition to the company's own financial limitations, the production's setting as part of the NSTF further limited elaborate costuming, since the facility itself was not equipped with any wardrobe facilities.¹⁰² Considering both the company's financial limitations and the capabilities of the theatre itself, it then becomes apparent how *The Apology*'s production context in 2011 greatly contributed to its costume design, beyond the purely creative rationale for choosing the twenty-first-century aesthetic.

¹⁰² Furthermore, the theatre's technical information package stipulates that “although there is a washing machine and dryer, these are only available to users of the Studio Theatre users if it does not interfere with the “needs and schedules of the Mainspace Theatre” (2). Additionally, it also indicates that the smaller Studio Theatre is equipped with only two “1-4 person dressing rooms” and that, although the dressing room contains an ironing board, “rental companies are required to provide their own iron” (2).

A recurring theme in discussing each of these design elements is the continued pressure of financial limitations, which was due in large part to the play's festival context and the fact that such a small company produced it. However, while these financial limitations were discussed in negative terms with regards to what they prohibited, they were also acknowledged as useful restrictions that encouraged the group to find creative solutions. For example, Dwyer noted that they "didn't have a large budget, which was lovely." Emphasizing the perceived benefits of the production's limited budget, she explained how "the sparseness of the set made the actors, their sexuality, their struggle, their physicality and Darrah's poetry the focus of the piece." Further addressing the production's design and the effect that their limited finances had on it, McMurtry-Howlett recalled that "it was helpful that we couldn't even attempt anything more fancy or clever in this production because of the budget." Speaking to how this influenced the performance space itself, McMurtry-Howlett explained that they "had not set," elaborating that "the stage we were on was also very cramped so we were limited to just using one set piece: a big red sofa." He observed that this again was probably a "useful limitation," since he thought that "with more space, one would be tempted to do something more elaborate with the set to convey the mansion setting of the play." Ultimately, because they were more limited, in terms of space, money, set, and costuming, McMurtry-Howlett observed that their "production focused more on the words, the ideas, and the relationships." As Dwyer and McMurtry-Howlett's discussion of the production's restrictive budget as a "useful limitation" helps demonstrate, *The Apology's* performance context had a major influence over the play's premiere production in 2011, since it required the company to find innovative solutions to problems and adopt creative staging practices to bring the play to life. In terms of the effect this had on the production's overall design, the creative team worked within their limited budget by using the actors' own clothing to

outfit the characters and broadcast their modern sensibilities and youthfulness. Furthermore, employing a sparse sound, lighting, and set design had the added benefit of allowing them to focus more on “the words, the ideas, and the relationships.” Consequently, since their budget and venue limited their flexibility with the production’s design, Rabiayshna Productions found creative alternatives and used select design elements to help bolster the production.

From this discussion of design, we now move to the play-in-performance to discuss how the production’s dramaturgical and rehearsal processes, casting, character work, and design culminated in *The Apology*’s premiere production. In the following section, we fully engage with *The Apology* in performance by considering both the paratextual materials associated with the production and critical responses to help re-create the performance experience, to better understand the materials used to guide audience understanding, and to get a sense of how *The Apology* was ultimately received in 2011.

***The Apology* (2011) in Performance**

Playbill and Promotion

To get a fuller sense of how audience members would have experienced *The Apology* in 2011, it is necessary to first account for the supplementary critical apparatus that supported the performance, in the form of promotional materials and audience playbills. While paratextual resources generally play an important role in framing viewers’ perceptions of theatrical performances, *The Apology*’s historical and biographical basis depends even more on these supporting materials to provide background information, historical context, or even a critical apparatus through which audiences can interpret the production. As such, these materials are an essential component of the play-in-performance that helped to convey, and indeed realize, the creative team’s intentions with the 2011 production. Consequently then, they can also help guide

us through the process of re-creating the performance experience, as well as helping us to better understand subsequent audience responses to *The Apology*. The promotional materials and playbill for *The Apology*'s 2011 production both help demonstrate how the play itself was often simultaneously positioned as both a historically-based docudrama with a salient connection to the characters' real-world counterparts or their fictional productions and a subversive, alternative, and distinctly twenty-first-century reworking of the events surrounding the "haunted summer" and its repercussions for the Villa Diodati group. Beginning with the plot summary used to promote *The Apology*'s 2011 production, we can begin to see how the play was variously framed and the ways in which the relationship between the subjects' biographies and this Romantic Biodrama were first conceived.

Production synopses provide important information about plot and indicate to audiences the kind of performance they are going to see. Consequently, these descriptions are both the audience's first introduction to the play-in-performance and advertisement intended to quickly entice and draw in viewers. *The Apology*'s entry on the Toronto Theatre Database website provides the synopsis that was originally used to promote the 2011 production: "four teenagers run away from home looking to create a free-love revolution. They just happen to be the Romantic Era's most infamous literary geniuses. Sex, drugs, and rock n' roll...circa 1816." This brief synopsis distills the plot of *The Apology* to "four teenagers run away from home" and juxtaposes the popular notion of "sex, drugs, and rock n' roll" with the play's seemingly-distant 1816 setting.¹⁰³ In only three sentences, this short description catalogues some of the play's key

¹⁰³ Notably, this identification of the year as 1816, the year that the Villa Diodati group congregated at Lake Geneva, is the only time in the play or its promotional materials that 1816 is identified as the play's setting. Conversely, the 2013 production explicitly notes that the year is 1814 in its promotional materials.



“Promotional Images for *The Apology*, Featuring Kaitlyn Riordan as Mary, Brendan McMurtry-Howlett as Percy, David Beazely as Byron, and Sascha Cole as Claire,” Toronto Theatre Database, TTDB.ca, 2011.

The actors appear shrouded only in white fabric and their intertwined bodies suggest the various romantic entanglements between the characters.

elements, such as Romantic-era writers or its nineteenth-century setting, while also juxtaposing them with distinctly modern concepts, including the distinctly mid-twentieth-century ideas of “sex, drugs, and rock n’ roll” and “free-love revolution.” By establishing this foundational tension between history and modernity or even the perceived conservatism of the literary canon and the modernity of youth in revolt, this synopsis effectively conveys the tantalizing ideological conflicts at play in *The Apology*. Consequently, this brief synopsis worked to both inform audiences about the general plotline of *The Apology* and to also entice them by referencing the production’s more subversive elements, namely its anachronisms, progressiveness, and emphasis on its subjects’ sexier aspects.

Another key component that helps frame *The Apology* in performance is the production playbill. Here, *The Apology*’s production context as part of the NSTF again influenced the performance itself, since each production in the festival was responsible for creating its own playbill. Resultantly, this meant that Rabiayshna Productions had complete control over the materials that audiences received and so, unlike the 2013 production of the play, Teitel and the rest of the creative team were entirely in charge of what the audience read immediately before watching their production. The first page of the playbill prominently features an epigram credited to Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*: “We shall be monsters, cut off from the world; but on that account we shall be more attached to one another.”¹⁰⁴ In addition to establishing an immediate link between *The Apology*, *Frankenstein*, and Mary Shelley herself, this epigram also establishes a thematic connection between the play and Shelley’s novel, one that underscores the shared

¹⁰⁴ Significantly, the Creature speaks this line in the novel, referencing the female creature whom he implores Victor to create for him. Furthermore, used in this framing context, it is worth considering if the Creature’s next line similarly applies to the damage and destruction caused by the group in *The Apology*: “our lives will not be happy, but they will be harmless, and free from the misery I now feel” (157).

concepts of monstrosity, isolation, and the joining together of a family of outsiders. Having established a salient connection between *The Apology* and *Frankenstein*, the playbill then features a director's note and playwright's note that further reinforce the relationship between these two texts and outline the creative team's intended reading of the play-in-production.

In her brief playwright's note for the production, Teitel began by identifying anarchism and feminism as "the twin pillars of this play and the characters who inhabit it." She underscored this strong assertion by noting that these two concepts are themselves "the twin pillars of personal and political justice upon which my ideology is created and they are the conflation of thoughts that begot Mary Shelley, Claire Claremont [sic], and Percy Shelley." Teitel's statement here regarding the foundational role that anarchism and feminism play in *The Apology* itself, as well her own thinking and the intellectual development of the historical Mary, Claire, and Percy, is a bold assertion that subsequently demanded audiences to read the play through these two ideologies. The power of this statement regarding the centrality of feminism and anarchism to the world of *The Apology* is not only significant to our later reading of Teitel's intentions with the play, but also served its purpose in getting audiences to interpret the production through the lens of these ideologies. When we consider critical responses to the production later in this section, the potency of this message becomes apparent, since many reviews echoed this same sentiment in their interpretation of *The Apology*. From this declaration regarding the primacy of feminism and anarchism to the play, Teitel concluded her note with a direct appeal to the audience, encouraging them to "have fun, free your imagination and allow yourself to be turned on." This sentiment mirrored her earlier statement in an interview with Jon Kaplan that "the audience has to be turned on by the experiment, or they'll never sympathize with the people and

theories they talk about and try to live” and her decision to close her playwright’s note with this invitation highlights her conviction in this belief.

While Teitel’s playwright’s note emphasized anarchy and feminism as the play’s “twin pillars,” Dwyer’s director’s note began with the play’s historical context before moving to *The Apology*’s major themes, as she perceived them. To that end, the first sentence of her note was a biographical summary of Mary Shelley herself, which positions Mary as *The Apology*’s main character and suggests that the historical Mary Shelley and her biography is foundational to the play itself. Additionally, Dwyer again referenced anarchism and feminism, but instead attributed these ideas to their supposed progenitors, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, respectively. Dwyer then indicated that “it is at this point in Mary’s life we encounter Teitel’s *The Apology*,” and she stated that what Teitel “has created is not a historical retelling of Mary’s life, but an altered view of what Mary and her friends would have experienced and explored.” She then suggests that “most history books and biographies exclude the fact that while these young people were writing literary masterpieces (including, but not exclusive to *Frankenstein*) they were exploring politically radical, anarchic beliefs, including a belief in Polyamoury [sic].” This suggestion that the play presents a version of the Shelleys that is supposedly censored or omitted from “most” historical or biographical accounts¹⁰⁵ positioned *The Apology* as a subversive work, as investigative or expository as it is imaginary. From here, the director’s note

¹⁰⁵ As early as the nineteenth century, biographies of Percy Shelley were already alluding to, or explicitly identifying, his strong political interests. In the mid-twentieth century, there was an explosion of new biographical works about the Shelleys that focused on the revolutionary beliefs of them and their circle, especially Percy. This reading of the “Shelleyan project” as a vanguard approach to living and writing has continued to be critically explored into the twenty-first century, pervading Shelleyan studies. See, for example, William Michael Rossetti’s 1870 edition of *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* or Paul Foot’s *Red Shelley* (1981).

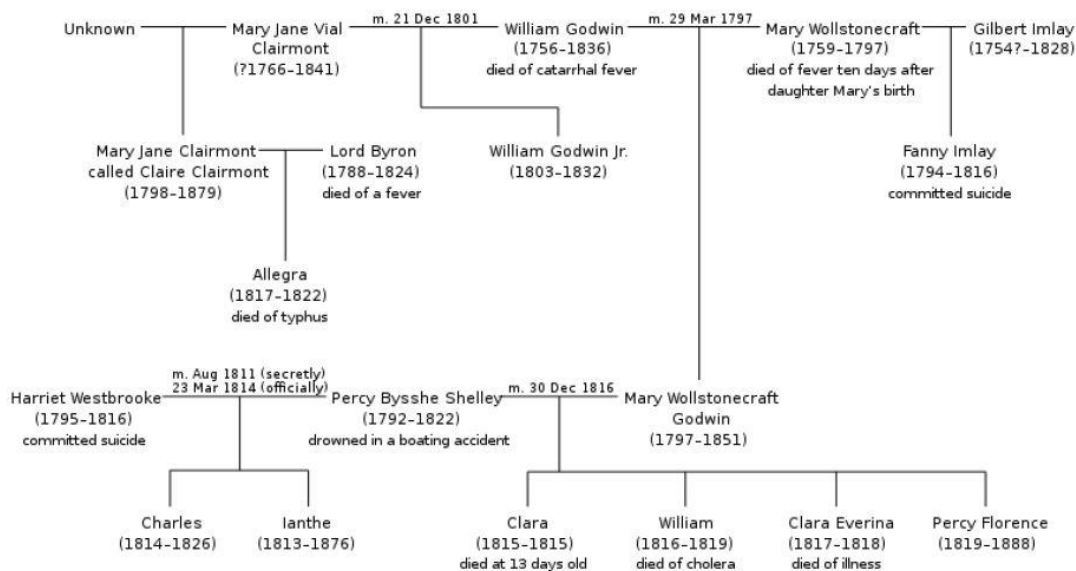
concluded with a definition of polyamory, and an effort to denotatively distinguish it from polygamy, which foregrounded that idea as a key component of *The Apology*.

Finally, under Dwyer's note in the playbill was a "Wollstonecraft-Godwin Family Tree" that outlined the connections between the characters in *The Apology*. However, because the play itself features only four characters, this family tree went well beyond the core four of Mary, Percy, Claire, and Byron and mapped out an intergenerational network that included figures as distantly removed as Gilbert Imlay, but did not mention of Percy or Byron's own familial backgrounds. Additionally, while the inclusion of a family tree is a common device used for productions of Romantic Biodramas to help clarify connections and lay out who is related to whom and how, Teitel's conscious departure from the historical record in *The Apology* inevitably created a large gap between the established genealogy referenced through this family tree and the world of the play.¹⁰⁶ Consequently then, although this family tree and its inclusion in the playbill symbolically suggested a direct connection between the play and the lives of these historical figures, Teitel's intentional skewing of the documentary record directly contrasted any efforts to re-package *The Apology* as a true-to-life retelling of historical events. Resultantly then, while the director's note in the playbill that provides historical background on Mary Shelley and the "Wollstonecraft-Godwin Family Tree" were both deployed to suggest a level of veracity and historical accuracy in the play, *The Apology*'s revisionist, anachronistic, and more historically-

¹⁰⁶ For example, in *The Apology*, Teitel omits the Shelleys' first two children, instead focusing on Mary and Claire's concurrent pregnancies with Clara and Allegra, respectively. Yet these two children appear in the family tree, as does their youngest child, Percy Florence. Additionally, within the play, this historical timeline is not as closely adhered to and Percy and Mary's wedding, Percy leaving his first wife, and the events at Lake Geneva do not take place in the same years, which further widens the gap between the events of *The Apology* and the historical record, as represented through this family tree.

inspired basis openly defy the direct comparisons between the play and the established documentary record suggested through these supporting materials.

Wollstonecraft-Godwin Family Tree:



“Wollstonecraft-Godwin Family Tree from Playbill for *The Apology*,” 2011, 2, Toronto.

Reviews and Reception

Although *The Apology*'s inclusion as part of the NSTF meant that the team was required to contend with time limits, budgetary restrictions, and a set performance space, one of the major advantages associated with the production's festival context was greater exposure and media attention. Riordan credited the play's inclusion in the NSTF for bringing greater attention to the production, noting that the festival's media interest meant that “sold out houses followed, though word of mouth was also a part of that.” Consequently, even though *The Apology*'s premiere in 2011 was produced by a small company with very little financial backing, its festival staging meant that the production benefitted from more exposure than Rabiayshna Productions would likely have been able to garner on its own. Thus, the production received a perhaps surprisingly

large and high-profile viewership for a fringe performance, which correspondingly led to many critical reviews.

Speaking to his perception of audience response to the production, McMurtry-Howlett recalled that they received “very strange reactions from the audiences.” He elaborated that although *The Apology* was “the hit of the festival,” “the audience was divided on *why* they liked it.” Based on his perception, McMurtry-Howlett suggested that “it seemed half liked it because they thought it was a satirical skewering of navel-gazing Queen-West hipsters.” Conversely, he observed that “the other half of the audience was really moved emotionally by the powerful drama of these character’s lives.” Speaking to this split reaction, he surmised that “maybe that is where it was supposed to live?” before conceding that he does not “really know, even to this day.” In considering reviews of the play-in-production, we can begin to see what McMurtry-Howlett meant in referring to “very strange reactions from audiences” and to garner some specific impressions from those who saw its initial run. Additionally, in looking at the collective critical response to *The Apology*’s 2011 premiere production, we can observe how certain tropes or themes from the play were addressed, which also offers important insight into the effectiveness of the creative team’s decisions, beyond their own interpretations or intentions.

First, many of the reviews mirrored the production’s promotional materials by highlighting the contrast between the famed Shelley circle of history and their subversive depiction within the drama as rebellious teenagers. As this chapter has already explored at length, the apparent clash between the Shelley circle’s enduring fame, canonical status, or nineteenth-century context and their youth, often reckless behavior, or their vanguard approach to living and writing is foundational to *The Apology* and how it was marketed. Consequently, taking a lead from both the play-in-production and the way it was subsequently framed,

reviewers similarly attempted to convey *The Apology*'s unexpected contrasts in their description of the play. For example, in a review for *The Globe and Mail*, J. Kelly Nestruck directly juxtaposed the tragic consequences of the group's actions in the play with their enduring cultural legacy in society by explaining that *The Apology* "slowly reveals the trail of dead children and lovers' suicides that followed in the wake of these people we now call Romantics." Similarly, Michelle Barker's review begins with an acknowledgement of the ubiquity of these Romantic figures, before cautioning that Teitel's play marks a departure from what we think we might know about them: "George Byron, Percy Shelley, Claire Clairmont, and Mary Shelley. They're all names you've probably heard. But... you've probably never seen them like this." Finally, a review in *The Torontoist* again emphasized the disparity between the group's literary celebrity and their portrayal within the play by stating that *The Apology* "finds four of the Romantic era's biggest names reimagined as hormonal teenage firebrands on a polyamorous journey of self-discovery." In each of these examples, we see a continuing attempt to cast *The Apology* as an irreverent and unexpected take on the Shelley circle and the events at the Villa Diodati in 1816. And while the play-in-production certainly warrants this characterization, it is worth noting that the framing of *The Apology* as not-your-grandmother's Romantic Biodrama was developed through the play's framing materials and that this sentiment similarly pervaded the reviews.

Furthermore, the influence of the production's supplementary materials is even more apparent in the number of times Teitel's playwright's note was referenced in reviews, both implicitly and explicitly. Specifically, reviewers directly took their lead from the playwright's note in the playbill when it came to addressing the notions of feminism and anarchism in the play, both of which were identified by Teitel as *The Apology*'s "twin pillars." In his review for *The Globe and Mail*, Nestruck noted that, in the play, "the radical feminist and anarchic ideas

bashed against one another, along with young bodies.” Additionally, Barker observed that, “since Mary’s father was one of the first proponents of anarchism and her mother was a feminist writer, both themes play important roles in *The Apology*.” Furthermore, in her review, entitled “*The Apology: A Sexy Philosophical Romp*,” Amanda Campbell suggests that the arrangement between the four characters could be described as a form of “sexual anarchy.” But while some reviews took Teitel’s assertion about the centrality of feminism and anarchism to the play at face value, others queried their role in *The Apology*. An example of this can be seen in the writeup for *Panic Manual*, which states that, despite Teitel’s identification of feminism and anarchism as the “twin pillars of this play,” “feminism seems to only really come through the sexual liberation of the two women, and anarchy doesn’t fit in at all, unless having sex with multiple partners in anarchy.” Ultimately, whether reviewers agreed with Teitel’s identification of feminism and anarchism as the “twin pillars” of *The Apology* or not, the fact that so many reviews addressed these concepts, despite their lack of explicit treatment in the play, draws attention to the influence that the playwright’s note had on forming their interpretation of the production. This key role becomes especially clear when we later consider reviews for the play’s 2013 production, for which the playwright’s note no longer mentioned feminism nor anarchism, and see how, without this same prompting, none of the production’s reviews mention either concept.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, this frequent observation of anarchism and feminism’s central role in the play can be even more clearly traced back to the influence of the playwright’s note, rather than the play itself, since “feminism” is said only once in the 2011 version of *The Apology* (25), while “anarchism” or “anarchist” is referenced twice (14, 25). In all three cases, the concepts are only indirectly treated and employed derisively. For example, Byron says to Mary “so women are allowed to be turned on or off by anything under the sun, and that’s feminism. But if I want a little rape in my fantasy, if I want to pretend for a bit like I am doing it to her, like I am making her do it—that is not the kind of taste I’m allowed to have” (25).

In addition to offering descriptions and responding to the production's paratextual materials, reviewers of *The Apology* also commented on the play itself, accounting for both the perceived strengths and weaknesses of Teitel's script. Often within a single review, reviewers applauded the play's innovation, fun, and sexiness, while also negatively regarding its more dense or pedantic moments. For example, The *Panic Manual* Review described *The Apology* as variously "sexy," "rather funny," "tragic," and "melodramatically over-the-top," while also describing the play as "quite dense," "a bit confusing," "heavy-handed," and "a bit tiring." Additionally, Teitel's writing was frequently discussed, with some critics championing her use of contemporary language, while others took issue with her characters' dialogue. For example, Nestruck described the play's dialogue as "salty contemporary language" and a review in *The Torontoist* observed that "Teitel's writing expertly merges the wit of her subjects with the tawdriness of an average prime time teen drama." The writeup in *Panic Manual* suggested that the play's dialogue "feels almost like it's too smart for its own good, particularly when the characters deliver lines comparing the creative process with having children and monsters."

But while the script itself received a somewhat mixed reception from critics, the production's acting and directing were almost uniformly praised. With regards to the production's directing, Michelle Barker asserted that "director Audrey Dwyer seems the perfect match for Teitel's intelligent writing," which was echoed by Amanda Campbell's assertion that Dwyer "captures this sense of languid sexuality perfectly" in the production. Furthermore, *The Torontoist* observed that "Dwyer's direction pulls no punches in exploring the libertarian pansexuality of the characters—and its consequences" and Kaplan similarly asserted that, along with the cast, Dwyer "captures both the laughs and the foursome's dashed utopian visions." Turning to acting, production reviews uniformly praised the performance of each member from

the ensemble. Nestruck described the group as a “solid young cast” and Kaplan noted that they were a “first-rate cast.” Nestruck specifically stated that Beazely was “a standout as a bisexual Byron,” while Kaplan acknowledged Riordan as an “ironic Mary, haunted by her famous mother’s spirit,” whom he felt “anchor[ed] the production with a nuanced performance.” Turning to other reviews, Campbell also praised Riordan’s performance, stating that she play’s Mary “a bit like an ingénue,” and that although “one may expect her to be a strong, fierce, feisty daughter of anarchist feminism,” Riordan instead portrays her as “quite a vulnerable, hesitant, inwardly intelligent girl who is at the heart of the story, but grows frustrated and full of despair.”

Additionally, Campbell spoke to McMurtry-Howlett’s depiction of Percy and noted that, in his portrayal, Percy holds “a lot of the power over all the other characters, but manifests it through his insatiable charm and subtlety.” Lastly, *The Torontoist* concluded that “the cast is fantastic” and offered a distilled characterization of each figure’s dramatic portrayal: “Brendan McMurtry-Howlett channeling the charisma of a warrior-poet as Percy Shelley, Kaitlyn Riordan hesitantly indulging as his intellectual wife Mary, Sasha Cole throwing tantrums as her insecure stepsister Claire Clairmont, and David Beazely interpreting Lord Byron as a laconic proto-hipster.” These succinct descriptors provide useful insight into how these characters came across in the 2011 production. For example, by describing Beazely’s Byron as “a laconic proto-hipster,” the review offers a useful encapsulation of the character in *The Apology*, while also exemplifying McMurtry-Howlett’s earlier suggestion that many audience members interpreted the play as “a satirical skewering of navel-gazing Queen-West hipsters.” Furthermore, in addition to providing a valuable description of how each of the characters were conceived of, and ultimately portrayed through, *The Apology*’s 2011 production, these descriptions will again prove useful when comparatively read against descriptions of these characters in reviews for the 2013 production.

Finally, speaking to the overall effectiveness of the production, the reviews again acknowledged both the perceived strengths and weaknesses of *The Apology* and, much like their appraisal of the script itself, they remained decidedly divided. For example, the review in *The Torontoist* suggested that “like the characters, the production seems somewhat preoccupied with its own scandalous cleverness.” However, despite this critique, the review concluded by conceding that, “with performances this watchable it’s a pretension easily overlooked.” Similarly, Michelle Barker also emphasized audience enjoyment and offered an overall positive take on the production, despite the play’s historical revisionism. She stated that, although *The Apology* is not “a historical account of their time in Switzerland,” it is “definitely engaging and *definitely* sexy.” Lastly, Nestruck observed that, “while the individual scenes are often very well constructed, *The Apology* lacks a driving force and a stronger directorial hand is needed.”

As these excerpts from *The Apology*’s 2011 production reviews help demonstrate, the play’s festival setting allowed the production to attract broad media attention, from smaller online-only publications to national newspapers. Furthermore, in addition to the exposure that the NSTF brought the production, *The Apology* garnered positive responses from many critics, especially with regards to the production’s acting and directing. This positive response culminated in *The Apology* receiving three Dora Award¹⁰⁸ nominations later that year for “Best New Play or New Musical,” “Best Direction,” and “Best Performance in a Featured Role/Ensemble” for the production’s cast. These nominations not only reinforce positive critical responses to the production, and align with praise for *The Apology*’s writing, direction, and the

¹⁰⁸ The Toronto Alliance for Performing Arts have presented the Dora Mavor Moore Awards, or “The Doras,” since 1978 to honour theatrical achievement in Toronto.

ensemble's acting, but they also offer one final indication of how the play's production context as part of the NSTF influenced its development by allowing it to get greater exposure and gain a wider audience. Ultimately then, despite its limited budget and small production company, *The Apology* not only received critical attention through its prominent featuring in a Toronto theatre festival, but the material realities associated with its staging context required its creative team to find innovative ways to approach the material and realize Teitel's play onstage.

*

But, of course, the story of *The Apology* does not end with its first premiere production in 2011. In fact, later that same year, Teitel was already returning to the play's script with the intention of reimagining it for a possible restaging down the road. And although she did not know it at the time, that opportunity would come less than two years later when the play was given another "premiere production" in a different Canadian city. In the next section, we continue to follow *The Apology*'s performance history by tracing the journey from its 2011 premiere production to its subsequent restaging in 2013. To accomplish this, we begin by first looking at what brought Teitel back to her play and the formative changes that took place between the two productions that would inform its second iteration.

***The Apology* (2013)**

... “*Three years later and far into the future*” (60).

Later in the same year that *The Apology* initially debuted in Toronto, Teitel returned to the script and began developing on some of the ideas she had started to explore in her one-act play. During *The Apology*'s initial development, Teitel had been playing with the idea of how she could further highlight the modernity of her characters and bring a greater sense of immediacy to the concepts explored within the narrative. In addition to her use of modern language, anachronistic references, and contemporary politics to emphasize the play's twenty-first-century compositional and production contexts, Teitel initially literalized the play's contemporary implications by ending *The Apology* with a scene that relocated the action from the nineteenth century to the present. Speaking further to this initial conclusion for the play, McMurtry-Howlett explained that “Darrah had written a different ending originally” for their 2011 production, which included “a scene that takes place in the future that was about child support and visitation rights, or something like that.” Although this original ending was ultimately cut from the script in 2011, it would later be re-added to *The Apology* after the play debuted at the NSTF. Consequently, Teitel returned to this scene and began considering how she could use it as the basis for expanding the play and further emphasizing the modern and progressive nature of the characters by continuing the narrative “far into the future” (60).

After the 2011 premiere of *The Apology*, Teitel subsequently added a second act that relocated the play's action to a twenty-first-century setting.¹⁰⁹ This major change not only altered *The Apology* from a one-act to a two-act play, but it also allowed for Teitel to treat the play's

¹⁰⁹ Although the play itself does not stipulate the exact year after the time jump between acts, modern references and contemporary technology broadly suggest a twenty-first-century setting, which was further bolstered through visual details in the 2013 production.

sociopolitical issues more directly. To accomplish the task of expanding and developing *The Apology*, Teitel again returned to the Banff Playwrights Colony, a residency program that she had earlier attended when she was initially writing *The Apology*. In discussing the play's development from 2011 to 2013, Teitel noted that her experience in the 2011 Colony was especially formative to the later development of *The Apology*. She characterized her residency there as "a really productive time" and explained that that is where she "feverishly wrote the second act of the play."

Speaking to the decision to relocate the action to present in an interview with Ruth Myles, Teitel explained that she wanted to "bring it far more down to earth, with the domestic consequences of what happened, of how they continued to deal with what they did as teenagers without giving up entirely or becoming tragedies themselves." Teitel also spoke to Sean Sullivan from *The Gauntlet* about her intended purpose in relocating the play's action to "the contemporary world:" "I am trying to make the point that we are continuously falling off the same log when it comes to women's liberation and sexual politics." These two explanations for why Teitel chose to extend *The Apology's* story into the present reflect her earlier stated interest in the modernity and progressiveness of the Shelley circle. Furthermore, this move allowed her to explore the consequences of the characters' actions through a distinctly modern lens befitting her practical political interests as a playwright. Additionally, beyond the dramatic potential that this significant time jump afforded Teitel to present the play's underlying concerns with a greater sense of immediacy and higher stakes, she also explained how the decision to relocate the play's action to the present in act two emerged from her own major life changes in 2011.

In my interview with Teitel, she candidly explained how two life events, which occurred between *The Apology's* 2011 and 2013 productions, greatly affected her decision to return to the

play and extend the narrative into the present. Furthermore, she significantly acknowledged how these events contributed to her renewed interest in the contemporary implications of motherhood and polyamory and how these concepts could be explored further through the play. First, Teitel recalled that her experience with the second production of *The Apology* was “coloured so strongly by the fact that in the first run I had a no baby and in the second run I had an infant (five weeks to four months old) hanging off of me the whole time.” Having become a mother between the two productions, she observed that she “was an entirely different person during the second run as a result.”¹¹⁰As will become more apparent when we discuss the production’s rehearsal process and the playwright’s note for the 2013 production, Teitel’s pregnancy and the experience of becoming a mother were formative to the play’s development and its subsequent restaging. Second, Teitel openly discussed how “between the first production and the time I went to Banff I had an affair with a man who is a lot like the character Tom and it stretched the limits of the polyamorous relationship I have with my partner.” In the second act of *The Apology*, the character Tom is introduced to the play as an alternative love interest for Mary, who is in a polyamorous relationship with Percy at the time. Teitel explained how, in response to her own personal experience with the “limits” of polyamory, she “wanted to write about what takes us forward in our politics and our choices of how to love, not only about how ideology only leads to despair and violence between men and women.” She further remarked how she felt this notion was more applicable to a contemporary context than the play’s original nineteenth-century setting, elaborating how “that story of optimism and moving forward seemed more appropriate

¹¹⁰ In a piece she wrote for *Quebec Writers’ Federation Writes* entitled “Writing Post-Partum,” Teitel explained that *The Apology* was initially intended to show “how cool and sexually experimental Mary Shelley was before she accidentally had babies.” However, in the piece she explained “because I had tempted fate, I fell pregnant myself.” Resultantly, she explained that “when I was at rehearsals for my play, *The Apology*, I had a nursing five-week-old in a sling.”

for today's world." By extending the play from the nineteenth century into the present, Teitel then hoped to establish and further explore the relationship between the two "competing themes of the second act:" first, that "we think we get over these questions throughout the history of feminism, but it's all the same today" and second, that "nothing changes...or maybe it does?"

As Teitel's description of the process that led her to return to *The Apology* suggests, her decision to expand on the play's original ending and extend the narrative into the twenty-first century with a new second act was the result of circumstance, life experience, and lessons learned from the play's first production. Importantly then, the decision to make another *Apology* initially emerged out of the play's original ending and was subsequently cultivated through a confluence of Teitel's personal, political, and creative interests at the time. Resultantly, by the end of 2011, *The Apology* had not only been staged in Toronto as part of NSTF, but it had also been reimagined and extended into a two-act drama that was ready to be re-staged in an entirely new production context. From here, we will now begin exploring *The Apology*'s performance context in 2013 to begin to understand the key differences between the play's two premiere productions. To do so, we begin in the following section with an investigation of the company that produced the play and the festival that featured its second premiere production.

Setting the Stage: playRites at the Martha Cohen Theatre

As we will continue to establish in the latter half of this chapter, *The Apology*'s two premiere productions emerged from two distinct performance contexts that influenced how they were developed, staged, and ultimately received by audiences. In addition to the fact that the play itself had undergone a major change between 2011 and 2013 with the addition of a second act, the 2013 production also marked a shift from a fringe-sponsored festival in Toronto to a well-funded professional festival in Calgary. In speaking to her perception of the major difference

between the Toronto premiere in 2011 and the Calgary production in 2013, Teitel tellingly remarked that “the biggest difference was money” before specifying that “there was way more money in Alberta.” She further elaborated that, contrary to her experience with the first production in 2011, “it was nice to have sets and costumes and budgets and a big nice theatre to support me” for *The Apology*’s 2013 production.” Teitel’s identification of major discrepancies in financial supports as “the biggest difference” between *The Apology*’s two premieres draws attention to one of the key differences between these productions and necessitates a more thorough exploration of *The Apology* and its production context in 2013. Accordingly, we begin our discussion of the play’s second premiere production with a more focused consideration of Alberta Theatre Projects, the company that produced the play in 2013, and the festival in which it was featured: the Enbridge playRites Festival of New Canadian Plays.

When the reworked version of *The Apology* premiered in 2013, it played from March 8th until April 6th as part of the Enbridge¹¹¹ playRites Festival of New Canadian Plays¹¹² at Alberta Theatre Projects.¹¹³ ATP is a not-for-profit theatre company that was founded in Calgary in 1972 and originally conceived as “the first Canadian theatre for young audiences to have its own home” (ATP Live: History and Archives). Over the years, the company mandate changed to the commission and production of new Canadian plays, an emphasis that still guides its programming decisions. ATP’s current executive director, Vicki Stroich, spoke about the company’s persisting interest in cultivating emerging Canadian voices, remarking that “new play development is a big part of our mission here” and has been “since we started in 1972.” Stroich further acknowledged that ATP has a long history of devoting “development resources to plays-

¹¹¹ Enbridge, Inc. became naming sponsor of playRites in 2003 until the festival folded in 2014.

¹¹² Hereafter abbreviated as “playRites.”

¹¹³ Hereafter abbreviated as “ATP.”

in-development for their premiere on our stage,” an initiative that culminated in 1988 with the creation of an annual festival devoted exclusively to developing and premiering new Canadian plays.

The resulting festival was playRites, a new works festival held every year at ATP from 1988 until 2014. Although the company was interested in developing Canadian premieres since its early mandate shift from children’s theatre to more adult programming, playRites was initiated as part of larger, city-wide arts festival across Calgary. In 1988, in anticipation of the Calgary Olympic Winter Games, the city was required by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to host an arts and culture festival in anticipation of the opening ceremonies (Bennett 133).¹¹⁴ The playRites Festival began as part of this broader arts festival and was made possible in part through Olympic funding initiatives. From its inception, playRites emphasized the creation, development, and staging of new Canadian plays, from both established and emerging artists across the country. Speaking to the festival’s format, Stroich explained that playRites was “a new play festival that ran in repertory format.” This meant that, depending on the year, between four and six plays ran “on different nights and the plays were fully produced.” Furthermore, this repertory format also meant that playRites employed a shared design team and shared actors between productions; although, as we will soon discuss, *The Apology* was given

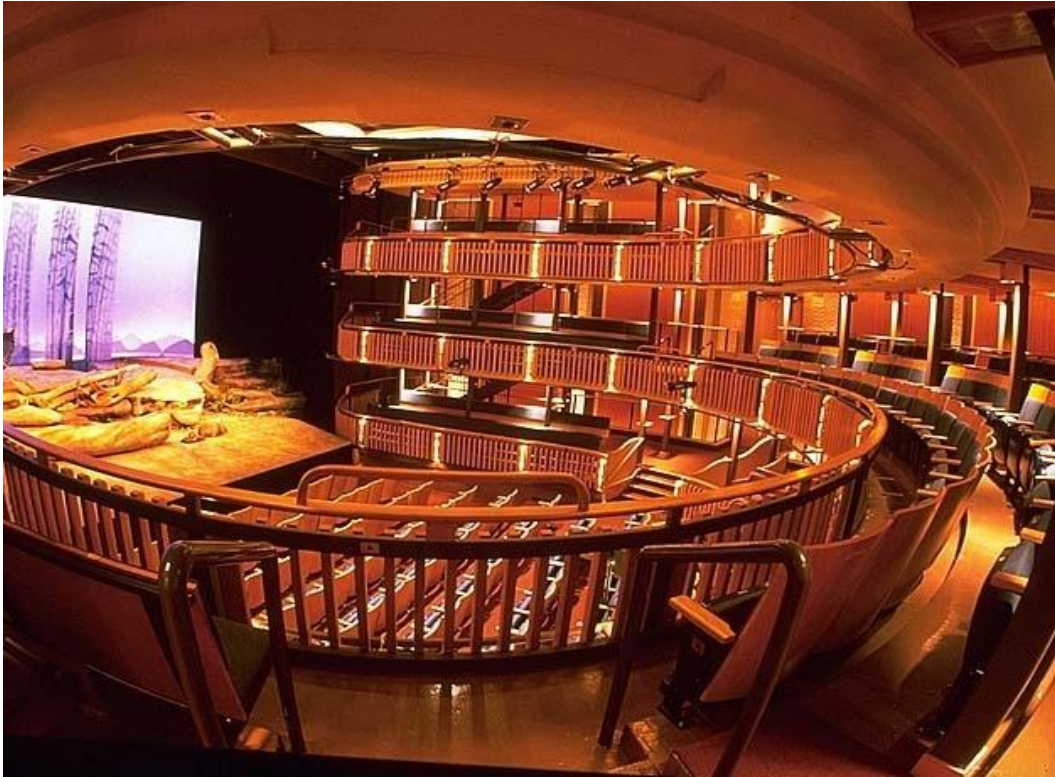
¹¹⁴ In her article “Calgary (1988): A Cultural Olympiad *avant la lettre*” Susan Bennett discusses Calgary’s Olympic Arts Festival, which was held in anticipation of the 1988 Winter Games and included the debut of the playRites Festival. Bennett explains that the initiative “ran from 13 January to 28 February 1988 and had, by today’s standards, a tiny budget of \$10 million in an overall Games cost that exceeded a billion dollars. Nonetheless, the Festival offered more than 600 performances and exhibitions that were attended by more than half a million people” (133). She elaborates that “provision of cultural programming is a requirement of a host city’s duties in accordance with the IOC’s Olympic Charter,” but also notes that “Calgary’s Arts Festival is generally agreed to be one of the first of any sizeable ambition,” since “2200 artists from 18 different disciplines were involved in the festival” (132; 133).

special treatment in this regard. Stroich outlined ATP's main purposes with playRites, noting that their "mission was two-fold." Their first aim was "to share [the plays] with our subscription and single ticket audience." Secondly, ATP also endeavored "to showcase [the plays] to theatre decision-makers across Canada and beyond for future production." While Calgary grew as a city and artistic community since the festival's early years, playRites continued to offer a unique opportunity for new and developing works to be featured. Stroich acknowledged the exceptional nature of playRites as a festival, noting that although Calgary has "festivals that are self-produced on a small scale" or "readings in development," emerging playwrights are rarely afforded the opportunity to have "a full production with the resources of a mid-size theatre company behind them." Additionally, Stroich asserted that because the playRites festival "also had a lot of prestige" associated with it, "artistic directors would be interested in reading what was programmed or attending our premieres," which made it a notable event in the Calgary theatre and arts scene. In a piece about playRites for *The Globe and Mail*, J. Kelly Nestruck also spoke to how the festival's repertory format and innovative programming made it appointment viewing for artistic directors across Canada, who would "fly into Calgary for a weekend and see four works in as few as two days. Many picked up shows for the next season—and about 65 per cent of the more than 100 works premiered at the festival have gone on to second runs."

In 2014, ATP held their last playRites festival. At the time the decision was made, the company attributed the action to both financial limitations and changes to artistic approaches since the festival began, claiming that their repertory model "doesn't suit performer-creators, collective creations or playwrights who work closely with designers" (Nestruck). During an interview with Nestruck after the announcement was made public in late 2013, Stroich stated that "we're not changing playRites because it's bad or because it's broken; we're changing it because

there are better opportunities if we work outside the festival.” In the festival’s wake, ATP has instead launched a new initiative for their 2014-2015 season in which they “now undertake to premiere two or three new plays every year as part of our regular season” (ATP Live: Play Development). This playbill, entitled “Enbridge New Canadian Plays” is the spiritual descendent of the Enbridge playRites Festival of New Canadian Plays, but it is not yet known if it will have the same success or longevity of its well-known predecessor. ATP’s website indicates that playRites “produced 115 world premiere Canadian plays in a repertory format” during its twenty-six years, *The Apology* being among them and appearing in playRites’ penultimate year. The festival’s exposure, due in part to its prestige and showcase format, meant that plays featured in playRites were viewed by broad audiences from across the country, all of which assembled in the festival’s shared playing space: the Martha Cohen Theatre.

Much like the Next Stage Theatre Festival, playRites was centralized to a single location every year and all performances were held in the same theatre. Also like the Factory Theatre in Toronto, the Martha Cohen Theatre is centrally located in its city’s downtown core, in this case, at the Arts Commons Facility in Calgary. But while the Factory Studio Theatre that saw the play’s first premiere was a black-box theatre with room for one hundred audience members, the Martha Cohen Theatre is a spacious, proscenium arch theatre that can seat over four hundred people. The technical information package for the Martha Cohen Theatre explains that the theatre’s “Georgian design takes inspiration from a time when homes were built around an internal courtyard.” It also elaborates on the significance of the Georgian period as a design influence, noting that “in that time, traveling theatre groups could perform in the outside space, with audiences hanging out their windows for a view of the action below” (2). The theatre’s Georgian-period style is particularly significant for *The Apology*, since the play’s first act is set



“Martha Cohen Theatre at Arts Common, Calgary, Alberta,”
Alberta Theatre Projects Website, ATPLive.com, 2017.



“Martha Cohen Theatre, View from Stage,” Arts Commons Website, ArtsCommons.ca, 2017.

during this period.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, the information package provides an explanation of how the theatre's Georgian design and layout directly inform audience and actor experience: "despite the Martha Cohen Theatre's full house of 418 seats, no audience member is further from the stage than in the Opera House. Seats wrap around the stage in a semi-circle arrangement, providing a variety of audience sightlines" (2). Finally, in contrast with Factory Studio Theatre's sparse technical setup and DIY approach to sound and lighting, the information package also explains that the Martha Cohen Theatre is "equipped with computerized lighting and sound, a fly gallery, wing space equal to the performing area, an under-stage area for trap doors, and five elevators on the stage which can change the size and shape of the stage itself."

This description of the Martha Cohen Theatre helps paint a more detailed picture of where *The Apology's* 2013 premiere production took place. By comparing this large, ornate, Georgian-style theatre against the much smaller black-box Factory Studio Theatre, we can begin to get a clearer sense of the distinct settings of *The Apology's* two premiere productions. Furthermore, when also considered alongside the corporate funding behind playRites, ATP's established history in Calgary as a professional theatre company, and Teitel's own assertion that "the biggest difference" between the two productions was the amount of financial support each provided, we can continue to perceive the differences between the production contexts for *The Apology* in 2011 and 2013. But while the financial resources, institutional supports, and theatres were certainly different for each production, how did this disparity influence the production process itself? And furthermore, how did a new creative team, a changed script, and the two

¹¹⁵ The Georgian era is most commonly considered to have spanned from the coronation of George I in 1714 until the death of George IV in 1830. Although the second-generation Romantics more accurately lived and wrote during the Regency period, when the future George IV acted as Prince Regent from 1811-1837, the Regency period is often critically considered as a sub-period of the greater Georgian era.

years since the play's first production affect the staging process? To begin answering these questions, we now move from this discussion of *The Apology*'s performance context and setting to meeting the creative team that brought the play to life for its 2013 premiere.

Assembling the Team (2013)

Having discussed the company that produced *The Apology* in 2013, as well as the festival in which it debuted and the theatre where it was staged, we now move to a discussion of the personnel who were involved with the production. When *The Apology* first premiered in 2011, it was produced by Teitel's own Rabiayshna Productions. Resultantly, Teitel maintained control over assembling the creative team, having notably selected the production's director and three of the four actors herself. However, once the play was selected for inclusion as part of playRites, the increase in funding and institutional backing also meant that a larger team would need to be brought in to bring the more ambitious project to life. Accordingly, it was largely up to ATP to select the members of the creative team in 2013, although the production's director, Kate Newby, did note that she "also offered to include [Teitel] when I was casting the production."

First, Kate Newby, a Calgary-based actor and director who had previously worked with ATP, was brought on to direct *The Apology* in 2013. In discussing which elements initially attracted her to the script, Newby noted that she was particularly interested in "Teitel's interpretation of historical characters through a contemporary feminist lens."¹¹⁶ Another member of the creative team was April Viczko, a Calgary-based designer and professor in the Department of Drama at the University of Calgary, who brought on as the production's costume designer.

¹¹⁶ Notably, Newby's interest in how *The Apology* employed "a contemporary feminist lens" directly aligns with her current work as the artistic producer of Handsome Alice Theatre in Calgary, a company that is described on their website as "theatre that empowers the female voice."

Viczko previously worked on the playRites festival in 2012 and she explained that she was “hired again the second year to work on two of the productions that were at playRites that year and one of them was *The Apology*.” Playing the role of Mary Shelley in *The Apology* was Calgary-based actor, Jamie Konchak. Speaking to what initial drew her to *The Apology*, Konchak recalled how she was “drawn to the challenge of the play.” Furthermore, she explained how she was “attracted by the youth and life and hunger of these young artists” and observed that “the artistic process and the desire to discover truth in the artistic journey of the Romantics was very familiar to me.” Additionally, she noted her personal interest in the genre of historical fiction as a reader, stating how *The Apology* “spoke to that much-loved mix of historical report and imagined heartbeat.” Rounding out the cast was David Patrick Flemming as Percy Shelley and Ava Jane Markus as Claire Clairmont, as well as David Beazely, who returned as Lord Byron after debuting the role in 2011. Furthermore, the addition of the second act brought a new romantic interest for Mary, the original character Tom, who was played by Graham Percy. In addition to these key members, an extensive creative team was involved in staging the production, including designer Scott Reid, as well as a stage management crew, fight director, and a full festival staff.

Finally, one of the key members of *The Apology*'s creative team in 2013 was the production's dramaturg, Vicki Stroich. As we discussed with the play's 2011 production, it had no dramaturg and, as Brendan McMurtry-Howlett recalled, the creative team was instead “constantly honing things on our feet.” Conversely, for *The Apology*'s 2013 production, Stroich's role as dramaturg led to her playing a key role in both the development and staging of the play. In addition to her dramaturgical work, Stroich was

also serving as ATP's Interim Artistic Director at the time, which uniquely positioned her as an important figure within both the play's creative team and the producing company itself.

Furthermore, Stroich's experience with Romantic Biodrama goes beyond *The Apology* and directly connects her to another play-in-performance that was discussed earlier in this research project: Rose Scollard's *Caves of Fancy*. To chronicle the process behind *The Apology*'s restaging, we will then begin with Stroich as a key figure in the story of the play-in-performance. Accordingly, in the next section, we start by exploring how the creative team worked to re-develop *The Apology* for its 2013 premiere performance by first looking at the initial, collaborative work between Teitel as playwright and Stroich as production dramaturg.

Staging *The Apology* (2013)

Dramaturgy and Development

Before Vicki Stroich became ATP's Interim Artistic Director and production dramaturg for *The Apology* in 2013, she performed as a student-actor in the 1997 premiere of Rose Scollard's *Caves of Fancy* at the University of Calgary. This experience marks a significant point of departure for our reading of *The Apology* staging, since Stroich herself attested to the fact that her work on this Romantic Biodrama earlier in her artistic career proved formative for her understanding of the subject and directly translated to her later work as a dramaturg for the 2013 production. Stroich began by noting that, although the character she played in *Caves of Fancy*, Fanny Imlay, was not directly featured in *The Apology*, her "understanding of the biography of the other characters, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley and Claire Clairmont and the connected biographies that we explored through references in *Caves of Fancy* (Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron) made for an easy shorthand when reading and later exploring *The Apology*." Beyond this background knowledge, Stroich pointed to the fact that acting in a Romantic

Biodrama further influenced her understanding of the material, elaborating how “the deeper, felt knowledge of the difficult family dynamic between sisters and step sisters that I gleaned from my work on *Caves of Fancy* helped me understand the tension and connection between Mary and Claire in *The Apology*.” Speaking further to the thematic connections shared between *Caves of Fancy* and *The Apology*, Stroich recalled that “exploring the weight of living up to a utopian ideal in an imperfect life was also familiar emotional territory.” Addressing how this experience then fueled her work as a dramaturg, Stroich explained that her earlier role allowed her to “tap into some of the motivations and justifications that Darrah’s characters had in the script and discuss them with more confidence, having experienced how Rose had explored them” through *Caves of Fancy*. Finally, she summarized the shared features of both plays and the common approach both playwrights took to the subject. Specifically, she observed that *Caves of Fancy* and *The Apology* both “took an unconventional approach to narrative,” which meant that she did not “hold anything as sacred when approaching *The Apology* because the exploration of the exploration of the characters in *Caves of Fancy* had been so bold.” As demonstrated through Stroich’s relational discussion of both plays, her application of the dramaturgical work done on *Caves of Fancy* to the later staging and development of *The Apology* creates a salient link between these two productions and speaks to the experiential knowledge that Stroich brought to the production as a participant in an earlier Romantic Biodrama.

Transitioning from her experience with *Caves of Fancy* to *The Apology*, Stroich began working with Teitel early in the production process to continue developing the script for production and consider how it could best be staged. In discussing the play’s

development process, Newby recalled that Stroich “worked with Darrah over a period of six months to a year prior to rehearsal” and it was during this time that Stroich and Teitel collaboratively decided on their research plan for the production. Speaking to *The Apology*’s initial development process at ATP, Stroich explained that they were “very much focused on new play development and not on providing historical context.” She elaborated that, after meeting with Teitel, whom she described as having “such a depth of biographical knowledge,” they decided together that Stroich “should not brush up on” her own understanding of the biographical or historical record of the Shelley circle. Stroich justified this cooperative decision by noting that they thought this would allow her, as dramaturg, to better “contemplate her script, rather than make biographical comparisons.”

This decision to limit additional research and instead rely on both Teitel and Stroich’s current understanding of the material marks a significant decision in the production process and speaks to *The Apology*’s relationship to its subject matter. Rather than ensure that the play accurately reflected the events of the Haunted Summer of 1816 or faithfully re-created some key aspects of the Shelley circle’s biographies, Teitel and Stroich determined that, at that point, it was best to rely on their shared, pre-existing knowledge of the subject and to “contemplate her script, rather than make biographical comparisons.” However, despite this decision to intentionally limit biographical comparisons by deciding not to “brush up on” their understanding of the source material or develop a shared understanding of the play’s historical basis, Stroich did recall that Teitel initially referenced “some source material for the play, including various diaries and books.” Specifically, Stroich echoed Teitel’s earlier statement in recalling the influence of Daisy Hay’s *Young Romantics* on Teitel’s writing and even noted that the playwright “recommended [it] to the cast and director to capture the spirit and basic facts.” In

her previous discussion of the play's composition, Teitel noted that Hay's *Young Romantics* became especially formative in her later conception of the play and her decision to "recommend" this secondary source to the cast and director is again notable, reflecting the text's continuing influence on *The Apology*'s later development. In addition to historical sources about the Romantics themselves, Stroich also noted that another source of inspiration for Teitel's re-conception of the play was "Whit Stillman's film *Metropolitan*."¹¹⁷ Taken together, this melange of sources from different periods or contexts, as well as the conscious decision to limit "biographical comparisons," reflects the play's complicated relationship with its sources or influences. Furthermore, this description of the script development and initial research processes further demonstrates how, as Stroich stated, she and Teitel were "very much focused on new play development and not on providing historical context."

Following Stroich and Teitel's initial work on the play's development, Teitel was again invited to attend the Banff Playwrights Colony in 2012. Stroich noted that the Banff Playwrights Colony were "still partners on the program" for playRites at that time, and so Teitel and the other playwrights featured in the festival were all invited to take part in the colony to finish developing their scripts for production. As previously discussed, Teitel had taken part in the Banff Playwrights Colony in 2011 and the

¹¹⁷ Like *The Apology*, the film *Metropolitan* (1990) tells the story of a group of young people from privilege and brings them together in different pairings and romantic relationships. In Mark J. Charney's "'It's a Cold World Out There:' Redefining the Family in Contemporary American Film," he describes *Metropolitan* as "a slice-of-life comedy, a three-week visit with a spoiled but well-intentioned group of prep school students. At the end of the Christmas holiday, no one is paired up, no one is better off, and very few of the students face permanent friendships, with the exception of Charlie, Audrey, and Tom. Although they have been fighting for most of the film, the three form a bond that might be permanent" (36).

experience had allowed her to develop and compose *The Apology*'s second act. Speaking to her experience with the Colony in 2012, Teitel explained that "the play was almost ready to go when I went to Banff with it in 2012, as it was already slated for production at ATP." Thus, she explained that her participation in the 2012 Colony "was all fine tweaks and edits."

Stroich explained that, following Teitel's residency as part of the Banff Playwrights Colony in 2012, they "hosted workshops of the play" at ATP to continue the editing process and to begin hearing how the script would sound in production. Again, Teitel's funded participation in the Banff Playwright's Colony in 2012 and the decision to host preparatory workshops of her script show how *The Apology*'s inclusion in playRites afforded Teitel more opportunities and resources for her play's development, even before the formal production process began. Considering Stroich's hands-on role as dramaturg, Teitel's participation in the 2012 Banff Playwright's Colony, and the subsequent workshopping of the play at ATP, it then becomes clear that the play's development process for its 2013 production was facilitated by far more time, creative supports, and financial resources than its first production in 2011. Taking all these resources and opportunities into account, Stroich similarly concluded that "there was a lot of support in the development, and staging, of the play" and, as we will explore through the remainder of this chapter, these supports continued throughout *The Apology*'s development, staging, and performance.

Once *The Apology* had been re-developed for production, the creative team was brought together to begin the staging process and Stroich remained on-hand to facilitate their research process as production dramaturg. After Stroich and Teitel completed their initial dramaturgical work and the play entered rehearsals, Newby joined them as the play's director "to finesse the piece to bring it to production." More specifically, she recalled "there being a few repetitive

moments in the script that I felt could be trimmed and those moments were discussed, leaving Darrah to make final decisions on edits and/or rewrites.” Newby explained that, in terms of the dramaturgical development of the script, most of her “dramaturgical notes went through Vicki Stroich (dramaturg) to Darrah.” She explained that she “chose to keep a clear protocol where notes went from director to dramaturg to playwright” throughout the process. However, she did note that as they festival neared and Stroich “took on more of the responsibility associated with producing the playRites Festival,” she and Teitel “worked one on one” more often.

Following the initial development of the script by Teitel and Stroich and the later involvement of Newby as the production’s director, the actors and the rest of the creative team were given a working version of the script, to begin working with the text itself. However, it is important to note that, much like *The Apology*’s 2011 production, the dramaturgical process for the 2013 production was also very informal and Teitel and Stroich’s decision to avoid “biographical comparisons” subsequently influenced how the subject was approached. Speaking to the collective research process for the creative team, Stroich further detailed how “the cast was offered a few pieces of material to go on (Daisy Hay’s book for instance),” but, beyond that, “they had the option of exploring the biography in depth or not.” The optional nature of the production’s research process and the fact that the cast “was offered a few pieces of material to go on” speaks to the production’s focal emphasis on new play development, as stated earlier by Stroich, and the diminished role of establishing a collectively-shared understanding of the play’s historical basis. While one might assume that this decision to render the research process “optional” for the production was the result of a shortened rehearsal process, due to its festival setting, the next section will show that special concessions were made to afford *The Apology* a

longer rehearsal period than the other shows in playRites, making the decision to have no formal dramaturgy even more pointed.

But although historical research was left up to the individual members of the creative team, both Newby and Konchak noted that they had undertaken their own research work to become better acquainted with the source material. Newby discussed which texts were of particular use or interest to her when she was researching the Shelleys' circle and their time. Of note, she recalled that she read "a long list of biographies, Byron's and Shelley's poetry, and *Frankenstein*," which she also "passed on to the cast for research." Reflecting on the experience of researching to play Mary Shelley, Konchak explained that the process of character development "can be surprising at times," and what you "would assume could be very useful" is often not as effective as "the simplest thing that awakens the images I need." In discussing if there were any secondary sources that help inform her character work, Konchak mentioned that she "found it inspiring to read about Mary Wollstonecraft." She explained that "*The Apology*'s Mary is very conflicted about her lack of a relationship with a living mother" and observed that she was instead raised by "a memory mother, a mother of text and paper, not the flesh and blood that could have held her and comforted her when she needed it." Konchak reiterated that this bond between Mary Shelley and her mother was then "a relationship of the mind, not the body." Furthermore, Konchak noted that she "also found reading about the Romantics and their time together useful." As well, she read *Frankenstein* in preparation for the role, although she conceded that she "found it less helpful than I imagined it would be." She attributed this disconnect with the novel as a source for her character development that perhaps she needed her "own monster, in a way." Newby and Konchak's descriptions here of the research work that they did in preparation for their roles in *The Apology* indicates that, despite the optional nature of the

production's dramaturgical process for the cast and crew, at least some members of the creative team decided to explore the historical source material to get a better understanding of the play's subject matter.

The preceding discussion of the play's development and dramaturgy has shown that *The Apology's* re-development from its first production in 2011 involved a lengthy process of writing, editing, and workshopping in preparation for its re-staging in 2013. And although Teitel and Stroich decided that their emphasis should be on developing the play itself and limiting "biographical comparisons," Teitel's own "depth of biographical knowledge" and Stroich's practical experience as an actor in an earlier Romantic Biodrama still brought a familiarity with the subject to the development process that informed their work on the play. Similarly, although there was no formal dramaturgy for the creative team as part of the staging process, both Newby and Konchak attested to the fact that they sought out source material to become better acquainted with *The Apology's* historical and biographical subject matter and it is certainly possible that others did as well. To continue exploring how the play was adapted from page to stage in 2013, the next section picks up from the play's development and dramaturgical work to describe the production's rehearsal process.

Rehearsal Process

As briefly alluded to in the preceding section, *The Apology's* rehearsal and production schedule in 2013 were affected by a special concession made by ATP. Although playRites is a repertory festival, in which actors are typically shared between plays, Stroich disclosed that ATP accommodated *The Apology's* specific casting requests and "went a bit further" by allowing them to cast a distinct group of actors and avoid putting it into "repertory rehearsals" with the other festival productions. Stroich elaborated on the reason behind this decision, explaining that

the ability to independently cast the show allowed them to “get a cast of the right age and skill for the show, rather than having to consider the casting in the other shows in the Festival.” In addition to the benefit of this allowance for casting considerations, this change also meant that *The Apology* was given a more open rehearsal schedule, since they did not have to share personnel with the other productions and were allotted their own block of time. Speaking to the benefit of this change, Newby recalled that “the length of rehearsal time we had during the playRites Festival was a luxury” and asserted that the additional time “provided the actors time to get to know each other and develop a strong bond as a company.” Furthermore, she also stated that this longer rehearsal process “greatly contributed to strong character relationships and enhanced the overall production.”

However, Stroich’s view of *The Apology*’s altered rehearsal schedule pointed to some of the possible disadvantages in having rehearsals held outside of the festival’s repertory rotation. She noted that, instead of having shorter rehearsals over a longer period, this change meant that the team instead “rehearsed daily for a shorter period.” Because of this more condensed schedule, Stroich recalled that there “was no time between days of rehearsal to respond to script changes.” She emphasized that “a script can really benefit from time to think, even a day” and that, because of *The Apology*’s condensed rehearsal period, “the pressure on Darrah when she was here and myself as the dramaturg was intense.” Further commenting on the effect of this “pressure” on the rehearsal process, Stroich asserted that it affected both her and Teitel’s ability to respond to issues that emerged and “may not have led to the strongest responses to questions coming out of rehearsal.” Ultimately then, she described the process as “an intense experience with a lot of pressure,” which he thought was especially taxing for Teitel “as an emerging playwright,” even though Stroich felt that she had “handled it well.”

In addition to the play's non-repertory staging and condensed rehearsal period, another distinctive feature of *The Apology's* 2013 rehearsals process was that Teitel was often present in rehearsal, just as she had been in 2011. Stroich explained that ATP ensures that playwrights are in residency during rehearsals for playRites and she explained that, for Teitel, because she "had her son in the middle of the development process," she then "had him in rehearsal." For Stroich and the rest of the creative team, this inevitably added a new personal obstacle to the play's development process, which continued into rehearsals: "most of our time was spent focused on how to make her story work as well as possible and trying to encourage the process of revisions with the pressure of production and new motherhood on Darrah." Newby similarly recalled that "Darrah was present in rehearsals during the early stages of the process" and she explained that this allowed the playwright "to work with the actors on enhancing the story, character relations, and to answer any questions we had about the characters and narrative." Konchak also spoke to Teitel's involvement in the rehearsal process, noting that Stroich, Newby, and Teitel "certainly spent a good portion of the first few weeks of rehearsal testing scenes and proposing changes." She further noted how Teitel "was present for these" sessions and that she "was still making changes" to the script during rehearsals. In comparing this description of *The Apology's* 2013 rehearsal process to its 2011 production, some surprising similarities the productions become apparent. While the 2013 production certainly enjoyed more reliable rehearsal spaces, more funding, a larger creative team, and included the need to accommodate Teitel's son throughout the process, the continuing process of revision and script editing that marked the 2011 rehearsal process similarly marked the production's rehearsals in 2013. Furthermore, although the play's move to a larger festival setting in 2013 implied a reduced role for Teitel, who played a major

organizational role in the 2011 production, she continued to attend rehearsals and again played an active role in the play's 2013 staging process.

Another key element to account for in discussing *The Apology's* 2013 rehearsal process was Newby's directorial vision for the production and how she approached the play-in-performance. Speaking further to her collaborative relationship with Teitel, Newby explained that Teitel "was very open to my conceptual interpretation of her script" and that she felt that they "had a very trusting partnership that valued each other's voice." Newby also explained her perception of her role as "a director of new work" and described her approach to *The Apology's* premiere production because of this, stating that "I believe it's my responsibility to enhance the visual and aural elements of narrative." Building on her perceived "responsibility" to "enhance" the narrative of a new work, Newby recalled that Teitel "seemed happy with the choices made and trusted the creative team to fully support her text." Furthermore, she added that, "if she was concerned about a moment or path we were taking creatively, her voice was respected and heard."

Beyond her intention to "enhance the visual and aural elements of narrative" through the production, Newby elaborated on her directorial vision for *The Apology* and indicated that her primary interest with the play was in exploring the "cultural similarities/differences between contemporary times and the Romantic era, in relation to gender dynamics, women studies, polyamory, motherhood, and experimentation (sexual and drugs)." But although this comparative exploration of the Romantic era and the production's twenty-first century context was Newby's guiding interest, she more specifically identified the centrality of three elements to her vision of the play-in-production: gender, youthfulness, and sexuality. She first acknowledged the importance of gender and gender politics to the play, identifying them as "the driving force in

the production.” Secondly, Newby explained that she intentionally used casting to emphasize the characters’ young ages and the play’s overall sense of youthfulness. She further elaborated that “all the actors were in their mid-twenties (except for the actor who portrayed the character of Tom, who is ten years older than the rest)” and she asserted that “the actors’ professional experience and artistic skill allowed for a balance of youthful playfulness and volatile energy.”

Finally, alongside this interest in gender as the production’s “driving force” and her efforts to highlight the characters’ youthfulness through casting, Newby also accounted for the importance of sexuality in *The Apology*. Speaking to the role of sexuality in the production, Newby explained that she wanted to consider “all avenues of sexual exploration through a male-dominated lens” in her staging of the play. As we have already explored through our discussion of the play itself, as well as the its first production in 2011, sexuality is a key component of *The Apology* that pervades both the language and action of the drama. In the play’s 2013 production, Newby had to contend with the play’s overt sexuality and find ways to depict it onstage that would strike a necessary balance and continue to tread the line between art and pornography that Teitel wanted to explore in writing the play. Looking back on how she negotiated the practical challenges associated with depicting sexuality onstage, Newby recalled one key instance where the performance’s playing space, The Martha Cohen Theatre, and the production context of playRites influenced her handling of the play’s sexual content. She recalled how “the intimacy of the performance space” led her to “decide not to have the male actors perform in the nude.” Further elaborating on the rationale behind this decision, she explained that it was made “so as not to detract the audience’s attention away from the story.” However, looking back on this creative choice to instead have the male actors wear underwear in this scene, she conceded that “in hindsight, I regret my decision as it was based more on audience/artist comfort and the

proximity of audience to actors rather than depicting the characters in the way life would have been in a given moment.”

Newby’s description here of how *The Apology*’s performance context influenced how she decided to depict nudity and sexuality onstage again highlights the significance of the play’s festival-setting to its staging and reiterates the practical considerations of staging explicit material onstage. In an interview with Ruth Myles for *The Calgary Herald*, Konchak similarly addressed some of the questions that came up around this decision and how the play’s production context influenced their depiction of nudity. Konchak explained that “it is really interesting to explore our relationship with an Alberta audience, or people of different generations in the room” and noted that they continued asking themselves the questions “is this far enough; is that too far?,” “are we able to listen to the words and ideas that are still being explored if someone is nude?” and finally, “what level of nudity is okay, and what gender?” All these questions that Konchak asks here, regarding the treatment of nudity in *The Apology*’s production context, came to bear on Newby’s ultimate decision to void full male nudity in her production, despite her initial instinct. That Newby expressed regret for having made the change, in consideration of the festival context and closeness between the playing and viewing spaces in the Martha Cohen Theatre, further draws attention to the tension that can exist between directorial vision and practical considerations, as well as the difficult realities associated with the treatment *The Apology*’s sexuality in both productions. And, as we will explore later through the production’s reviews, Newby’s initial idea to have her male actors perform in the nude continued to influence reception of the play-in-performance, even though the decision was ultimately scrapped.

This section has explored *The Apology*’s 2013 rehearsal process by considering both the play’s condensed rehearsal schedule and its implications, as well as Newby’s broader directorial

vision and how it was realized during the play's staging process. In considering both components, we can get a fuller sense of how *The Apology* continued to be developed for its second premiere performance based on the vision that the creative team had for its re-staging, as well as the material realities and contextual influences that continued to inform it. Although Teitel noted that there was "more money" available for *The Apology*'s 2013 production, which helped mitigate many of the issues that plagued the rehearsal process for the 2011 production, this section has helped show that these resources still came at a cost and often put additional pressures on the staging of the play.

Moving now from this discussion of the play's development and rehearsal processes, in the following section, we further explore how *The Apology* was re-worked for its 2013 premiere production by unpacking how the Shelleys and their relationship were dramatized through this production. Furthermore, we will consider how the play's reworking and extension into the twenty-first century influenced their characterization.

The Shelleys in *The Apology* (2013)

In the 2013 version of *The Apology*, although the Shelleys are still deeply involved in a romantic relationship, the time jump to the twenty-first century has seen their relationship evolve into a polyamorous, open relationship. A new challenger for Mary's affections is introduced, in the character Tom, and Percy is forced to share her attention with someone outside their intimate group. With the continuation of the relationship, and its relocation to a twenty-first-century setting, new obstacles and challenges emerge and more is ultimately revealed about the nature of the Shelleys' relationship in *The Apology*. Consequently, of all the relationships in *The Apology*, the Shelleys' is perhaps most affected by the continuation of the narrative and the move to the present, since their unconventional partnership is made the focal subject of the play's second act.

To get a better sense of how the Shelleys were characterized in *The Apology*, and insight into their portrayal in the 2013 production, I spoke with Konchak, Newby, and Teitel about the characters and their relationship in the play.

First, speaking to the development of the Shelleys' relationship between the two versions of the play, Teitel noted that both Mary and Percy "grow up a bit," elaborating that "they experience trauma together and Percy starts to listen a bit and stops mansplaining constantly." Furthermore, Teitel observed that, through the course of the play, Percy "becomes an adult and that, of course, enriches his relationship with Mary." In terms of Mary's extended character arc, Teitel explained that she "learns to follow her actual desires without fear of Percy's approval and so she is able to meet him as an equal" by the end of the play in its 2013 iteration. Teitel's description of the changed nature of the Shelleys' relationship in the 2013 version of the play accounts for the maturation of both characters in the drama, while also conceding that they only "grow up a bit." And although her perception that the characters have grown because Percy "starts to listen a bit" or "stops mansplaining constantly" and Mary "learns to follow her actual desires" might seem like only modest character development, it does mark a significant shift from her earlier description of their relationship as "perfectly teenage/ early twenties bullshit."

In addition to Teitel's description of the Shelleys' relationship in *The Apology*, Konchak also addressed how she approached the challenge of playing Mary Shelley, as well as how she conceived of both the character and her relationship with Percy. She began by discussing how playing a historical figure presented both unique challenges and opportunities for her as an actor, explaining her perception that "playing historical figures can begin as daunting because other people and audiences have assumptions already as to how this person should be portrayed." But in addition to the need to contend with audience expectations, Konchak asserted that "it is also

an honour” and that “it can feel like an invocation, of sorts.” Speaking to her experience playing Mary Shelley, Konchak described the process as “a delightful journey into a powerful, brave, intelligent, passionate woman I knew very little about.” She also pointed to the importance of re-embodiment of historical figures, such as Mary Shelley onstage for contemporary audience. She stated that “we can all benefit from the reminder that these women fought for feminism, to be heard, to be considered.” Interestingly here, just as Riordan did in her description of how she portrayed Mary Shelley, Konchak also keyed into the influence of Wollstonecraft on Shelley’s characterization and she identified Wollstonecraft’s “feminism” as an important influence. Furthermore, Konchak explained how the importance of Mary Shelley and her mother as socially-conscious women writers encouraged to create a nuanced, embodied, and deeply human character in *The Apology*: “I wanted to ensure that this historical portrayal included the flesh and blood and frustrations and deep burning desires of the woman, not just the textbook icon.”

From this discussion of the challenges she faced in portraying Mary Shelley and her desire to “invoke” her through her depiction, Konchak then discussed how she perceived Mary’s characterization in *The Apology*, although she was careful to note that “what the audience perceived could have been the same or very different.” She first described Mary as “a contradiction” who is at once “searching and strong,” “passionate and depressive,” and “traditional and modern.” She further described her as both “a restless lover with a deep yearning for family and for solidity” and “an incredibly talented artist who suffers from her own inadequacy.” Again, Konchak’s emphasis on Mary’s contradictory nature in *The Apology* recalls Riordan’s own description of her portrayal of the character as at once “savvy” and “suspicious,” both “eager to explore the world” and “delving into her imaginary world,” dealing with “boundaries and limits” while also falling “horribly in love with Percy.” Consequently, although

each actor's description offers a distinct vision of the character, both are united through their emphasis on the seemingly contradictory nature of Mary in *The Apology* and the real character complexities that mark her as the play's standout figure.

Beyond addressing the challenges associated with playing a character based on a historical figure, Konchak also had to contend with an additional challenge that Riordan did not face when she played Mary in 2011: playing that same character across two hundred years between acts one and two. Konchak addressed how she negotiated this shift between the nineteenth century and the present-day setting in her performance as Mary Shelley, asserting that "the person remained the same," even though "the rules and the clothes and the world around her shifted." While she did concede that "there were new obstacles and new rules of engagement," Konchak still emphasized that "the heartbeat of the woman was the same—and her loss and her need to be loved were as hot as ever."

Although we do not have Flemming's account of his process for developing Percy Shelley in *The Apology* or his perspective on the relationship between the Shelleys, both Konchak and Newby offered their point of view on this key relationship in *The Apology* and how it was realized through their production. First, Newby succinctly characterized the relationship between Mary and Percy in their production as "passionate, volatile, and codependent." This brief summation emphasizes the tumultuous nature of the Shelleys' relationship in *The Apology*, while also accounting for the "codependent" nature of their relationship. This codependence, which is suggested in *The Apology*'s 2011 script, becomes a major feature of the play's 2013 reworking, as Mary and Percy realize that they are fatefully and irrevocably linked to each other, despite their best efforts. Speaking at greater length on the subject, Konchak began by identifying the Shelleys' relationship as "limiting." She elaborated on this descriptor by

continuing to characterize their bond as “old and deeply rooted,” as well as “passionate and always just missing one another.” Furthermore, she observed that it was marked by “a shared need for one another” and “a deep rejection of what the other one was.” Ultimately though, Konchak candidly stated her own personal feelings toward the Shelleys’ relationship in the play: “I can say now, without fear of judging the character, that it was a deeply unhealthy love, but that does not negate the deep, deep need for that person.” She further elaborated on her basis for this reading, explaining that “it felt as though each had planted a very important piece of themselves inside the other and needed to keep returning in order to make another attempt at wholeness.” Building on this description, she ultimately characterized their bond as “childlike, in many ways” and asserted that “it did not feel like it was a grown-up relationship where passion can happen and bills can get paid, and wherein each partner can thrive and be supported with generosity and love.” Again here, Konchak’s description of the Shelleys’ relationship, and her emphasis on the same codependency that Newby identified in her description, encapsulates the direction that Mary and Percy’s character development, both individually and relationally, took in *The Apology*’s 2013 iteration. Resultantly then, although *The Apology*’s 2013 production still included the Shelleys from the play’s 2011 version, Teitel, Newby, and Konchak’s accounts help demonstrate how this key relationship changed between the two productions and how the addition of the second act ultimately reimagined this relationship.

Moving now from this focused discussion of how Mary Shelley and her relationship with Percy were realized onstage in 2013, we now move to the production’s design. In the next section, issues of design are discussed, with a key emphasis on how costuming was used to bring the play to life.

Designing *The Apology* (2013)

In comparatively treating *The Apology*'s 2011 and 2013 premieres, design stands out as a key distinguishing feature between the two productions. Although the 2011 version of the play was strictly set in the nineteenth century, modern dress was employed, due to the production's aesthetic, as well as financial considerations. For *The Apology*'s 2013 production, the design team was no longer forced to contend with the same financial restrictions and were subsequently given greater freedom to create a more cohesive vision. However, although the team benefitted from ATP's larger budget and the many resources available through the Martha Cohen Theatre, they still had to contend with the limitations of festival production. Furthermore, with the addition of a second act and a transition from the nineteenth to twenty-first centuries halfway through the play, the designers had to negotiate this new temporal shift and find a way to visually communicate this change to the audience, while also maintaining cohesion between the two acts. Speaking to how they negotiated the major change between acts one and two for their production, Newby explained the importance of design, noting that the transition "was supported through a mash of contemporary and classical set, sound composition, and costume designs that offered a feel of both eras colliding." This section explores how this sense of "both eras colliding" was visually communicated through design, especially through the production's costume design.

Although *The Apology*'s 2013 production had a much larger budget and more design resources than the 2011 staging, the play's inclusion as part of playRites meant that the set had to be limited enough to allow for easy changes between plays, often within the same day. Resultantly, Scott Reid's set design for *The Apology* was streamlined to only three main set pieces, although its size and scale still made full use of the Martha Cohen Theatre's large playing space. While smaller furnishings were brought on throughout the play to set the scene more

specifically, Reid limited his design to a balcony, which was connected to a stairwell, and a large bed that started out front and centre on the stage. These three, large pieces allowed for Reid to create levels and dimension onstage and make use of the Martha Cohen Theatre's spacious playing space, while still allowing for easy set changes between the festival's different plays. Furthermore, these visually striking set pieces not only added visual interest on their own, but also provided new areas of the stage for Newby and her actors to explore. In a review of the production for the *Calgary Sun*, Louis B. Hobson commented on the effect of the set in the production, noting that he "loved that Newby had her actors use all the levels of Scott Reid's set, including the balcony, staircase, and bed, and that the actors seemed in constant motion because oftentimes there was very little movement in the dialogue."



Lee, Trudie. "The Cast of *The Apology* (2013) on the Set at the Martha Cohen Theatre," 2013, Calgary.

In addition to the practicality of the set for accommodating the action of the play and providing visual dynamism through levels, the choice to streamline the set to include only three primary pieces further highlighted their symbolic significance. This is especially true in the decision to include a large bed in a focal position on stage, downstage-center, which served to visually centralize the role of sexuality in the production. Commenting on the effect of this decision in her review for *The Calgary Herald*, Ruth Myles similarly observed that “it’s only fitting that a bed is front and centre on stage, as the aftershocks of what takes place in it dominates the storyline.” Considered in this way, Reid’s set design not only responded to the need to keep the set limited to accommodate the play’s festival setting, but, through its simplicity and streamlining to three major pieces, it also symbolically underscored the play’s major thematic overtones, while also providing new levels and spaces for the actors to explore onstage.

Moving now from the production’s set design to costuming, the difference between *The Apology*’s 2011 and 2013 productions becomes even more pronounced. While limited budget meant that the actors needed to bring in their own clothes to wear in 2011, *The Apology*’s greater production budget and professional costume designer meant that costuming could be further developed in 2013. Additionally, because the production had to contend with the new challenge of the play’s second act and its associated time jump, these resources had to be put towards the creation of at least two distinct looks for each character. Furthermore, because the timeless set design remained largely unchanged between acts one and two, the production’s costuming was primarily responsible for visually indicating the changed setting to the audience. To begin addressing how the creative team contended with these challenge, the production’s costume designer, April Viczko, spoke about some of the initial conversations that she had with director Newby and the important role of costumes in *The Apology*.

Viczko first explained that, in terms of how she conceived the play and its characters, Newby “kept coming back to the notion that these are bold decisions that these people are making, but what comes to bear is ‘what are the responsibilities of making those choices?’” But while she noted that the implications of the Shelley circle’s “bold decisions” in *The Apology* is “the heavy part that grounds the piece,” Viczko also highlighted the importance of aesthetic and self-styling to the play and our evaluation of the characters. She further explained that “the part that makes us fall in love with the characters is that they are beautiful, and they are sometimes androgynous in ways that are unexpected, and they are also very fully sexual in their beauty.” Viczko’s description here of her early conversations with Newby and their discussion of the significance of beauty in *The Apology* offers important insight into their perspective on the play and its characters. Her characterization of the very real implications of the characters’ decisions as “the heavy part that grounds the piece” along with her assertion that beauty is “the part that makes us fall in love with the characters” offers a fascinating reading of the circle in *The Apology* and highlights the key role of visual beauty in this production. Viczko’s emphasis on the importance of the characters being “fully sexual in their beauty” further speaks to the important role that costuming and visual aesthetic played in this production of *The Apology*. Far from strictly utilitarian then, the clothes that the characters wore and the way they were styled was used to visually broadcast the importance of beauty to their lives and, according to Viczko, ultimately enabled the audience to “fall in love with the characters.” Considered in this way, the costuming became, for Newby and Viczko, an important tool for emphasizing and enhancing the beauty in their production by helping to define to these characters as “beautiful,” “sometimes androgynous,” and “fully sexual in their beauty.”

Having established the importance of costuming and visual beauty to this production and its treatment of these characters, Viczko then discussed how she began situating the play's costuming in the nineteenth-century and how the notion of "Romanticism" at large influenced her design work. She began by first noting how the play's transition from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century inspired her to consider how she could integrate modern and historical influences in her design. Knowing that they would have to create a design that could transition from the nineteenth century to the present, Viczko and Newby turned to the term "Romantic" as a grounding idea that they could re-interpret for both temporal moments. Viczko explained that "one of the things we talked about was the notion of 'Romantic,'" since the "revisiting of the Romantic period" through clothing design in later periods greatly interested her. From these early meetings and inspirations, Viczko then began researching different aspects of Romantic fashion that she saw being revisited through twentieth-century style. One decade that stood out to her as connected to the Romantic period was the 1970s, which she characterized as "a place where that kind of Bohemian and free-love, even the princess and empire-style dresses were revived somewhat and the exaggerated kind of limbs with bellbottoms." Looking at even more contemporary applications of this "Romantic" aesthetic in clothing, Viczko observed that "there was a bit of a revival of that in the early 2000s" as well. To account for the production's transition to the present and to demonstrate the continuing influence of Romanticism through visual design, Viczko then borrowed from each of these different periods, instead of limiting herself to what is considered "Romantic" in a strictly historical sense. Accordingly, using the play's time jump as a point of departure for the costume design, Viczko pulled from different periods and distinct aesthetics to evoke the sense of beauty that she and Newby wanted to create onstage, while also visually alluding to the continuation of the "Romantic" aesthetic from the

nineteenth century to the present. Ultimately, Viczko asserted that her approach to the play's historical basis was to “draw from any of those periods” during which she perceived the influence of Romantic-era style and that she was governed more by “what felt ‘Romantic’” than by the strict confines of that period.

In terms of which sources directly inspired the “Romantic” aesthetic she wanted to create, Viczko began by recalling that she “looked at a lot of paintings by the Pre-Raphaelites”¹¹⁸ as an initial point of inspiration. Beyond the dreamy and ethereal visual style of their paintings, the Pre-Raphaelites and their fascination with nature and beauty, as well as their pointed interest in the Romantics themselves, marks them as a significant cultural interlocutor between the Romantics and the twenty-first century. Viczko also noted that she considered “paintings of the Shelleys themselves and their particular style” to help inform the costumes, although she noted that she did not feel obliged to directly re-create their appearances.

Finally, she also referenced “a lot of contemporary fashion from a variety of different sources,” which included “online blogs,” as a way of finding examples of what she referred to as “contemporary Romantic fashions.” Specifically, Viczko acknowledged designer Vivienne Westwood¹¹⁹ as a key influence on *The Apology*'s costume design and noted that she is “a huge fan of Vivienne Westwood” and that “her ability to take a period silhouette and make it very contemporary” coincided with her own vision for how she would style the characters in the play. Westwood is a particularly fascinating choice of inspiration for this production design, since her

¹¹⁸ According to David Latham, “Pre-Raphaelitism began in Britain with the term first being associated in 1848 with a brotherhood centered on three painters: William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti” (13). A broader collection of artists soon followed to form the larger group known as the “Pre-Raphaelites,” similarly adopting the brotherhood's emphasis on “the pursuit of beauty” and “revolt against Academic convention” (23).

¹¹⁹ Vivienne Westwood is a British fashion designer who rose to prominence through her punk-inspired designs in the 1970s and has since become a major figure in haute couture culture.

designs gained further renown in the early 1980s as part of the popular culture movement known as “New Romanticism,” which was characterized by the explicit return to Romantic-era fashion. Speaking further to how Westwood influenced her design for *The Apology*, Viczko specifically acknowledged her ability to integrate styles from different periods as an inspiration for the



Waterhouse, John William. “The Lady of Shalot,” 1888, Tate Britain, London.
 Marsland, Mike. “Vivienne Westwood’s Spring 2015 Runway Show,” Getty Images,
 GettyImages.ca, 2014.

Lee, Trudie. “*The Apology* in Performance,” 2013, Calgary.

These images reflect some of the stylistic influences on Viczko’s design for the production, including the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites (left) and Vivienne Westwood’s fashion (center), and demonstrate how they helped inspire the costuming for *The Apology* (2013) (right).

production’s costume design, explaining that “she’s really a master at capturing period sensibilities, whether they are Victorian, or French-Neoclassical, or Rococo, and putting them into a contemporary spin, whether it’s her bustle skirt with Victorian or Edwardian bustle, and

turning it into a mini-dress.” This approach to mixing styles from different periods, seen in Vivienne Westwood’s design approach, would greatly influence Viczko’s costume design for *The Apology* by providing a model for how to integrate different stylistic influences, periods, and aesthetics in clothing. Considered together, Viczko’s references to the outside sources that inspired her design, from images of the Shelleys themselves, to paintings by the pre-Raphaelites, to the designs of Vivienne Westwood, further underscore her interest in integrating “Romantic” influences from distinct periods to ultimately create the “contemporary Romantic fashions” that she envisioned for the characters in *The Apology*.

Although Viczko integrated both nineteenth and twenty-first-century design elements into the costumes for both acts of *The Apology*, she still needed to find a way to transition the characters from one temporality to another and clearly broadcast the two-hundred-year leap to the audience. To explain how she approached this design challenge, Viczko first pointed to the examples of Mary and Claire to discuss how she reimagined the characters’ costuming between acts. One of her key tactics for preserving elements of the nineteenth-century aesthetic in the second act was to employ more masculine pieces for the female characters that marked a throwback to nineteenth-century male clothing. She further explained that “for the example of Claire, it was fun to then put her into high-waisted trousers and a feminine kind of riding coat, similar really to what the men were wearing in a previous scene, but they had a more contemporary lit.” Viczko also adopted a similar approach for her styling of Mary. Describing Mary in act two as, “the contemporary woman,” she noted that she wanted to use costuming to imbue her with “that sort of strength that we like to perceive ourselves having that is different than feminine characters from the nineteenth century.” When it came time to adapt Byron and Percy’s styling for the second act, Viczko did note a discernable difference in her approach to

how she styled the men and women across the two acts. She recalled how, when it came to adapting the female character's costumes from the nineteenth-century setting to the present, "it was easier to navigate because it was such a sharp difference." She elaborated that, "with the men, it was a bit more subtle because I wasn't about to go put them in skirts, although they did wear bedsheets and they did wear things like that." Viczko's description here of how she adapted the characters' costumes to represent the play's major time jump highlights the important communicative role that costuming played in the production, helping the audience to better understand the change in setting. Furthermore, because Viczko's design played with elements from different time periods, as a means of exploring different applications of the term "Romantic" and establish a continuity between the era and the production's own context, she was still able to integrate elements of both periods throughout the play and create a cohesive design that united *The Apology's* visual aesthetic.

Finally, in discussing if she thought there were any unique challenges¹²⁰ or opportunities that came with designing costumes for characters that already had an established history of well-known visual representations through painting and portraiture, Viczko first stated that she "felt that the audience would go with us if the characters were believable, without it having to reference the painting itself." She further explained her guiding belief throughout the project

¹²⁰ Speaking to another important challenge associated with the design process for *The Apology*, Viczko acknowledged that a bout of illness interfered with her ability to completely implement the design. She recalled that she contracted "pneumonia in the middle of the production process and so an assistant designer [Juli Elkiw] had to take it right to the end," while she was forced to "step away for the last few weeks." She explained that her absence during this crucial time meant that Newby "and the assistant were relying heavily on all the work that Kate and I did up front and put into those sketches and put into those ideas." But despite being forced to spend time away from the production, she remembered that when she saw the play on opening night, she was "so pleased because it meant that the work that we had done up front really mattered and it was really what guided that whole process and I think it bore good fruit."

that, “if the clothes reflected the period and enhanced the physical beauty of the characters themselves already, the actors themselves, then it didn’t matter that Mary Shelley looked like Mary Shelley in any painting.” Accordingly, instead of aiming for the accurate re-creation of Mary Shelley’s appearance through her design, Viczko asserted that “what mattered was that she looked like she belonged in that period and that we could believe her from that timeframe.” She then explained that this emphasis on creating a version of Mary Shelley that “belonged in that period,” rather than matched her image from her portraits, allowed her to create an image of the character that instead fit within the world-of-the-play. Viczko further emphasized that the goal of the costume design was to help audiences “to suspend their disbelief enough that they could believe her to be Mary Shelley.”

Viczko’s stated goal of creating a world where audiences could see Konchak and “believe her to be Mary Shelley” within the context of the play offers an important insight about the key role that costuming played in *The Apology*’s 2013 production. Viczko’s assertion that, “if the clothes reflected the period and enhanced the physical beauty of the characters themselves” then “it didn’t matter that Mary Shelley looked like Mary Shelley in any painting” underscores the key contribution that costuming played in *The Apology*’s 2013 production. Having already discussed the importance of, chiefly physical, beauty to the play’s characters and our ability to “fall in love with them,” Viczko here emphasizes how costuming helped to create these characters as dramatic figures, rather than true-to-life representations of the historical figures on which these characters are based. Consequently, rather than feeling obligated to visually approximate the iconic appearance of these famous figures, Viczko could instead adopt Teitel’s same approach in writing *The Apology* by creating an appealing version of these characters that could live within the world-of-the-play.



Lee, Trudie. “Ava Jane Markus as Claire Clairmont and David Beazely as Lord Byron in *The Apology*,” 2013, Calgary.

As the preceding section has helped demonstrate, design played a more central role in *The Apology*'s 2013 production, due in part to its larger budget and the added challenge of visually indicating the play's time jump from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century. Unlike the 2011 production, the play's 2013 staging took place in a large and well-equipped theatre, in which set designer Scott Reid created a multi-levelled set that visually grounded the play during its time jump. As we explored, the set design not only accommodated the play's festival context by being relatively easy to move, but it was also symbolically significant and contributed to the overall visual aesthetic of the production. Furthermore, our in-depth discussion of the production's costuming with designer April Viczko helped define the important role that costumes played in developing the “beauty” of the characters, establishing the change in period between acts one and two, and contributing to the overall “Romantic” aesthetic of the production

through Viczko's creation of "contemporary Romantic fashions." From this discussion of the production's design, we now move to the performance of *The Apology* by first looking at how the play was framed through its promotional materials and playbill.

***The Apology* (2013) in Performance**

Playbill and Promotional Materials

In our discussion of the promotional and other supporting materials for *The Apology*'s 2011 production, certain recurring features emerged, which subsequently informed critical reviews of the production. For example, in Teitel's playwright's note for the 2011 playbill, she began by identifying feminism and anarchism as the "twin pillars" of *The Apology*, which in turn led many reviewers to comment on how both concepts were treated through the play-in-production. Looking now at the play's 2013 production, the play's increased media attention as part of playRites meant that a lot of resources were put towards advertising and promoting *The Apology*'s staging. Accordingly, we can then look at how the production was advertised as a way of determining which elements of the play were considered most appealing and, ultimately, to learn how ATP wanted audiences to perceive the play. Furthermore, much like the play's 2011 staging, the production playbill in 2013 also offers valuable information regarding how the play was framed for audiences and allows us to better re-create the performance experience by considering the supplementary materials with which every audience member was provided.

On March 30, 2012, a year before *The Apology*'s March 2013 premiere, *The Calgary Herald* published a preview of ATP's upcoming season. In it, Bob Clark interviewed Vanessa Porteous, ATP's artistic director, as she first introduced the play to prospective audiences. In the interview, Porteous described *The Apology* as "more 'Spring Awakening' than 'Masterpiece Theatre'" and, in doing so, emphasized the important distinction between the play's irreverent

treatment of its subject and the historical realism that is perhaps expected from a play about nineteenth-century writers. In addition to Porteous' brief comment on the nature of the play, this season preview also included a synopsis of *The Apology* that, perhaps inadvertently, highlighted the loose relationship between Teitel's play and its historical subject matter: "The Apology by Darrah Teitel, about Frankenstein author Mary Shelley and the famous poets Percy Bysshe [sic] Shelley and Lord Byron along with aspiring writer Claire Clairemont [sic]— Mary's stepsister and mother of Lord Byron's daughter, Allegra — all holed up together in a castle in 1814 for a bout of sex, drugs and a somewhat anarchic¹²¹ run at creation." This plot synopsis, which was used to introduce the play to prospective audiences and promote ATP's upcoming season, is conspicuously marked by several important errors.¹²²

First, two of the main characters' names are spelt differently than their historical counterparts: Percy Bysshe Shelley and Claire Clairmont. Additionally, as is the case throughout the run of both plays and, indeed, within the play text itself, is the persisting issue of the year in which it takes place.¹²³ While *The Apology* itself is evasive and unclear with fixed dates, employing them only sporadically and often incorrectly, issuing a press release that is neither entirely consistent with the setting of the play itself, nor the established documentary record, inevitably conveys a lack of research into the subject. That *The Apology*'s announcement as part

¹²¹ While anarchism was touted in the 2011 production's playbill as one of the "twin pillars of the play along with feminism, this mention of the characters' "somewhat anarchic run at creation" is of the only remaining references to anarchism in the play's 2013 promotional material, including Teitel's new playwright's note.

¹²² Interestingly, this story was subsequently picked up by the Vancouver Sun and these spelling errors were left uncorrected.

¹²³ As referenced earlier in our discussion of the play text, it is often difficult to discern when the action in *The Apology* is taking place and latent evidence is frequently contradictory. However, there is no direct assertion in the play itself that the action takes place in 1814 and the events of the play most closely correlate to the summer of 1816, the only time that these individuals convened together at Lake Geneva and the year when Mary began composing *Frankenstein*.

of ATP's season contains both factual and typographical errors is significant for our consideration of the play-in-performance, as it necessarily hints at the tenuous relationship between the play, or at least the production's promotion, and the subject matter on which it is based. Additionally, the fact that many of these errors went unchecked and reappeared in later promotional materials underscores the uneasy connection between *The Apology* and its source material and questions the rationale of including a specific year and names of historical figures when such information was left unchecked.

In addition to this initial preview of the play, ATP also created a brief description of *The Apology* that ran on its website in anticipation of the production. The synopsis began with an epigram credited to Lord Byron: "Truth is always strange – stranger than fiction."¹²⁴ In addition to suggesting a salient link between the writing of Lord Byron and the play itself, the content of this quotation suggests that the play that tells a "true" story, one that is indeed "stranger than fiction." Having employed this quotation, the preview formally begins by succinctly indicating that "it is 1814." In addition to the problematic reference to this year, since it does not correlate with the events of *The Apology*, this bold assertion that "it is 1814" locates the play and its action firmly in the historical context of 1814. The synopsis then continues with a cataloguing of the play's main characters and, although the spelling of Percy's name was here corrected from the play's initial preview, Claire Clairmont's name remains unfixed: "young Mary Shelley (author of *Frankenstein*), Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron and Claire Clairemont [sic] retreat to a castle to write poetry, make love, do drugs, and try to invent a new way of being alive." Following this listing of the play's main characters, including a parenthetical reference to Mary as "author of *Frankenstein*," the description concludes by describing *The Apology* as a "funny,

¹²⁴ From Byron's satirical poem *Don Juan* (1819-24).



“Promotional Image for *The Apology* at Alberta Theatre Projects,” Alberta Theatre Projects Website, ATPLive.ca, 2012.

While *The Apology*'s 2011 production relied on photos of the cast that broadcasted the play's sexual overtones, ATP created their main promotional image well before the creative team, including the cast, was assembled. The image visually conveys *The Apology*'s modern and historical influences by setting four busts, which appear to resemble the members of the historical Shelley Circle, alongside anachronistic elements, such as sunglasses. The use of spilled wine and lipstick on the busts also symbolically suggests the sense of subversion, chaos, and general irreverence that pervades the play-in-production.

hot-blooded, live-wire portrayal” in which “Romantic tradition is ripped wide open to unleash a group of anarchic, love-crazed, foul-mouthed teens – who also happen to be geniuses.” Again here, this plot synopsis sells *The Apology*’s “hot-blooded, live-wire portrayal” and the fact that “Romantic tradition is ripped wide open.” Furthermore, the play’s subversive depiction of these historical writers is again emphasized here through their contrasting characterization as both “love-crazed, foul-mouthed teens” and “geniuses.”

Turning from the marketing materials used to attract audiences to *The Apology*, the playbill for the production also offers valuable insight into the play’s performance context and further distinguishes it from its initial staging in 2011. Unlike the NSTF, whose fringe-style festival included distinct and self-produced playbills for each play, playRites was both presented and packaged as a curated collection of works. The playbill, along with its framing materials from the festival’s corporate sponsorships and supporters in government, clearly works to convey the festival’s prestigious connections and sources of financial backing. Each of the festival’s productions is individually featured within the substantial playbill, but the booklet first begins with many notes and introductions from the festival’s producers and patrons, including one from ATP’s Interim Artistic Director at the time, Vicki Stroich (3).¹²⁵ But while Stroich’s key position within ATP, and her direct involvement within the festival itself, make her an obvious choice to be included in the playbill, some of the other voices that are featured speak to playRites many sponsorships and the festival’s dependence on both corporate and government

¹²⁵ In her note in the playbill, Vicki Stroich emphasizes the specificity of the festival’s setting while also gesturing to the broader significance of the work being done at playRites: “we have the opportunity here in the Martha Cohen Theatre in Calgary to enjoy each other’s company while we hear stories told to us by master playwrights like Joan Macleod and bold new voices like Darrah Teitel... There are many places in this world where the kinds of questions that we engage in through the work of our Canadian artists are not encouraged, much less discussed.” Stroich then gestures to playRites as “an opportunity to celebrate what makes us Canadian.”

involvement. Accordingly, following Stroich's note is a message from the festival's naming sponsor, Enbridge Inc (4).¹²⁶ Additionally, various voices from both local and national government are also accounted for in the playbill, including three "government messages" from Calgary mayor (Naheed Nenshi), Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages (The Honorable James Moore), and Minister of Culture (The Honorable Heather Klimchuk) (5).

While sponsorship is certainly a common feature of almost all professional theatre companies, it is necessary to account for the assertive role that this diverse group of outside figures played in *The Apology*'s 2013 production context. As Teitel noted early on, money was "the biggest difference" between the play's 2011 and 2013 productions and that financial support was due, in large part, to the involvement of these outside sponsorships. However, while it is important to acknowledge the key role that these sponsors played in producing both *The Apology* and playRites itself, their financial endorsement also brought with it their implicit endorsement of the festival itself, which is made explicit articulated through their playbill notes.

Consequently, this strong corporate and government endorsement, which audience members would have initially encountered when they viewed a performance of *The Apology*, not only had the potential to exert possible pressure on the company itself and the creative team staging the production, but also inevitably continued to influence audience perception of the production, as we will see in the upcoming review section.

Finally, in considering the supplementary materials that framed the performance experience for audiences, it is necessary to consider the "playwright's note" for the 2013

¹²⁶ Executive Vice President, People and Partners of Enbridge Inc., Karen Radford, begins her note with the assertion that "at Enbridge we understand the importance of energy," before pivoting to suggest that "the creative energy generated by the Enbridge playRites Festival of New Canadian Plays sets off a cultural chain reaction of new ideas, new relationships and new discussions that end through our city, our province, our nation, and even around the world."

Playbill subject to copyright approval and available by request.

“2013 playRites playbill for Alberta Theatre Projects,” 2013, Calgary.

Festival playbill for Enbridge playRites Festival of New Canadian Plays, including images for the four plays staged that year. Note the continued use of the same promotional image for *The Apology* from ATP’s initial season announcement and the sixteen festival sponsors listed.

production. Although the playbill did not include a “director’s note” for this production, it did offer a playwright’s note from Teitel that not only reflected *The Apology*’s restructuring as a two-act play, but also reframed the play and its initial production. Accordingly, instead of identifying feminism and anarchism as the play’s “twin pillars,” as she had in 2011, Teitel instead began by focalizing her interest in polyamory and sexual politics as the key interest of *The Apology* in 2013: “I became interested in the Romantics’ historical experiment with polyamory because I wanted to tell the story of how nothing really changes when it comes to sexual politics” (12). From here, Teitel disclosed a personal development that took place between the two productions, thus centralizing the impact of this experience as a key influence on the play’s re-conception: “I became pregnant for the first time while working on the final drafts of this play, which was a bit ominous—the problems for my characters begin when they become pregnant” (12). What followed from this personal statement was an articulation of Teitel’s frustration with conceptions of maternity in early and proto-feminism, juxtaposed with twenty-first-century statistics regarding poverty and equal payment for women: “It is a point of anger for me that the feminist politics of the 18th and 19th century could not support maternity, because that is where the women got stuck. 54% of single mothers with small children live below the poverty line in Canada. As a direct result, women still earn 70 cents on the dollar compared to men. That statistic hasn’t changed in 40 years” (12). As we discussed with *The Apology*’s 2011 playwright’s note, Teitel primarily discussed how feminism and anarchism were foundational to the play. However, for the 2013 production, the addition of the second act and the extension of the narrative into the twenty-first century allowed her to address these ideas more pointedly and explore their contemporary implications by recasting *The Apology* as a more direct social allegory about women’s rights surrounding maternity, custody, and equal pay. Teitel

then concluded her note with her intention in writing *The Apology* or, at least, this version of it: “there is something about the social reality of having babies that has not yet been resolved by feminists. I wrote this play to try and figure it out. Several years later, I still have no answers, but I do have a baby, and an even greater desire to resolve these issues” (12). By ending her 2013 playwright’s note by asserting that her purpose in writing *The Apology* was to identify what “about the social reality of having babies that has not yet been resolved by feminists,” Teitel re-framed the audience experience of the play-in-performance from 2011 to 2013, significantly replacing the “twin pillars” of feminism and anarchism with the issues surrounding maternity and motherhood as seemingly irreconcilable with her conception of modern feminism.

Having considered *The Apology*’s promotional materials and playbill for its 2013 production, we can better perceive how the production’s context as part of a well-funded festival continued to influence both how it was marketed and framed for potential audiences. Additionally, in comparing the playwright’s note for both productions, we can see how Teitel’s life events, addition of a second act to the play, and experience with the 2011 production led her to reposition and reframe the play for the 2013 audience. But how exactly, if at all, did these materials ultimately influence audience experience and contribute to reception of the play-in-performance? To begin answering this question, the following section brings together key insights from the collective critical responses to the production to determine how the play was received and to further consider any significant similarities or differences between *The Apology*’s two premiere productions.

Reviews and Reception

As was the case with the play’s first production, *The Apology*’s 2013 run benefitted from the play’s inclusion in a new works festival that attracted large audiences and encouraged multi-

show viewings in a single day. Furthermore, because *The Apology* was included as part of playRites, which was a major theatrical festival in Calgary that received both local and national attention, the play attracted a broad viewership and enjoyed well-attended performances throughout its run. Additionally, while *The Apology*'s 2011 production enjoyed many sold-out performances, Factory Studio Theatre's one-hundred-seat capacity limited the overall number of individuals who could take in the production. Conversely, when the play premiered as part of playRites in 2013, the Martha Cohen Theatre's four-hundred-and-eighteen-seat capacity meant that far more people could attend each performance and the amount of critical response to the production reflects this larger viewership.

In considering trends or recurring themes of *The Apology*'s 2013 production reviews, sexuality immediately emerges as a focal interest among critics. Accordingly, while the play's sexuality was only occasionally referenced in the reviews for *The Apology*'s first production, the press for its 2013 premiere was almost exclusively centered around its treatment of the subject. More specifically, a significant number of reviews focused on the play's accompanying warning of "nudity, sexuality, and strong language"¹²⁷ or the rumor of "alleged nudity" that was supposed experimented with during the preview performances. For example, the title of Louis Hobson's review in *The Calgary Sun*, "Sex & Lies before Videotape: Tale of Two Poets Heavy on the Carnality," encapsulates his argument that the play predominantly focuses on sexuality. Similarly, in her review for *The Calgary Herald*, Ruth Myles¹²⁸ explains that "the play comes with a warning of nudity, sexuality, and strong language, and delivers on all counts."

¹²⁷ To the best of my knowledge, no such warning accompanied the play's 2011 production.

¹²⁸ The eclipsing power of sexuality in *The Apology* is further highlighted by Myles' decision to simply identify Lord Byron as "Percy's lover" in her production review.

Furthermore, she explains that these warnings are indeed warranted, since “there are F-bombs galore, heroin, coke and opium are consumed and breasts bared as the various couplings unfold.” In addition to this notable account of the production’s “nudity, sexuality, and strong language,” Myles’ review is also significant, as it represents the possible genesis of an ongoing rumor that carried through critical responses to the production: that there was full-frontal, male nudity in the production’s preview performances.

The archived version of Myles’ review ends with a notable correction on an earlier, published version: “**An earlier version of this review incorrectly stated that there was full nudity in the previews.*” Published on March 18th, during the run of the show, Myles’ original statement that there had been full nudity during the previews greatly influenced subsequent reviews of the production, as demonstrated by later references to this supposed nudity. Coupled with Newby’s initial consideration of using full, male nudity at different points in the production and the ultimate decision to instead feature the actors in their underwear, the rumor was not only seemingly viable, but also enhanced audiences’ already-pointed interest in the production’s overt sexuality. Looking to examples of reviews that read the production through the lens of this rumored nudity, we can see that Jessica Goldman’s review for *Applause Meter* noted that she had “heard from people who attended preview evenings that the male actors performed together with full-frontal nudity, yet the version I saw had them in underwear.” Thinking further on the choice, she suggested that “either staging would have been fine in my opinion, yet I couldn’t help but wonder if the many corporate sponsors and VIP’s in the audience had anything to do with the less racy direction.” In addition to Goldman’s echoing of the play’s rumored full-nudity, her speculation that the festival’s well-known corporate sponsorship may have been the reason behind the alleged change again points to the important role that *The Apology*’s production

context had in influencing how it was ultimately received. In their review of *The Apology* for *Avenue Magazine*, Allison McNeely and Shelley Arnusch also discussed the rumored full-frontal nudity and how this rumor, along with the production's appended warning, affected their overall experience of the play. Arnusch began the review by remarking that "the 'risqué' factor of this show was not what it was built up to be. For a show that was said to flaunt its full frontal, there was a surprising amount of undergarments, speedos and strategically utilized filmy sheets." In response, McNeely again acknowledged the spectre of the production's rumored nudity: "I actually heard that during previews, the actors spent quite a bit of time in the nude." However, McNeely speculated that this choice "might have turned some audience members off (and it could have been a little distracting!) so they decided to keep things covered," although she noted that "it didn't make much of a difference" for her. Arnusch agreed with McNeely on this account, noting that "full-frontal nudity might have cheapened things somewhat and distracted from the larger themes at play" and "the sensuality and sexual proclivity displayed by the characters wasn't contingent on them being fully nude," although she did admit that her expectation of explicit content meant that "you're kind of expecting it to jump out at you at any moment" and that, "when it doesn't, it's almost just as distracting."

In addressing the play's adult content and alleged full-nudity, reviewers also discussed the 2013 production's acting and directing. Speaking about the production's direction, Nicholls noted that "director Newby sets them in high-speed motion, talking over each other, in a way that's consistently fun to watch." And while Goldman described Newby's direction of the play as "overly busy," Nestruck stated that Newby "directs the production with brio." In terms of acting, while the entire ensemble was distinguished in the 2011 production, reviews focused almost entirely on Jamie Konchak's performance as Mary Shelley, a change that further reflected

Mary's enhanced role through the addition of the play's second act. Speaking generally to the strengths of the cast as an ensemble, Myles noted that they committed to "playing this motley mix of Romantics, bringing passion and personality to their roles," while Nestruck stated that "the young cast are all...good, giving and game" and Liz Nicholls acknowledged the contributions of the "five game and engaging actors." However, Goldman represented the view of many critics through her stated belief that, "while this show was in many ways an ensemble piece, it's Mary's role that leads the cast and Jamie Konchak does a superb job vacillating between feminist confidence, youthful insecurity, jealous indignation and vulnerable love." She further elaborated on the effectiveness of Konchak in the role, even asserting that "any fondness I had for Mary was a complete outgrowth of Konchak's ability to break through the limits of the writing and bring a tender humanness to the role." Similarly speaking to Konchak's performance, Myles noted that the actor "lends that magical spark to Mary, letting us see why everyone so desires to be near her" and that she "infus[es] the character with relatable emotions." Finally, Arnusch noted that she "really believed the sexual chemistry" between Percy and Mary and stated that "Jamie Konchak was an inspired choice to play Mary Shelley, both the historical and modern versions." She elaborated that Konchak "brought the appropriate amount of strength to the role that really made you believe in her as a formidable intellect, but she was still able to convey vulnerability."

In discussing Teitel's play text itself, reviewers primarily praised *The Apology's* writing as its most exceptional feature, as was also the case in 2011. Myles asserted that "there is plenty to like in *The Apology*" and pointed to "the writing" as its greatest strength, while Goldman similarly noted that Teitel gave her characters "some deliciously smart and funny dialogue." However, despite praise for Teitel's writing, many critics took issue with the plot itself. For

example, Nestruck observed that the play's central interest in the question of whether these figures are monsters is answered "too quickly—in a prologue, in fact." He observed then that, "once the characters become monsters, there's little for them to do but be monstrous over and over to diminishing effect." Furthermore, Nicholls noted that much of the play's action, and indeed interest, stems solely from the group's "energetic coupling, recoupling and uncoupling." Finally, in his review of the production for *The Calgary Sun*, Louis B. Hobson was one of the only reviewers who addressed the play's more overt political aims and he took issue with *The Apology* as an "agenda play." Hobson first explained that *The Apology* is "a whimsical love romp" that is primarily comprised of "marvelous and mischievous invention on Teitel's part." However, in discussing the play's script, he asserted that "*The Apology* is actually an *agenda play*, in that Teitel is using it to wage a feminist argument about how women's perceptions of themselves and by society change as soon as they become mothers." It is certainly necessary to read Hobson's comments alongside Teitel's playwright's note for the production, as it is there that she most clearly articulates her overt sociopolitical interests, with which he took umbrage. Based on this reading of *The Apology* as an "agenda play," Hobson questioned the success of the play-in-production, asserting that "the soap box Mary is supposed to be preaching from is shattered by all the tearing off of clothes, groping, simulated sex, and raunchy dialogue."

Because *The Apology*'s 2013 production added a second act to the play, which also featured a major temporal leap, there was a tendency throughout the reviews to treat both acts separately, rather than as a cohesive performance. This trend perhaps speaks to a lack of cohesion or continuity between the two acts that was emphasized through the play-in-production. In looking at the reviews, more attention was paid to the newly-written second act and much was made of the decision to relocate the action to the present during the act break. Although the first



"The Apology in Performance," The Calgary Herald Website, CalgaryHerald.com, 2013.

act was left largely unaltered between the play's 2011 and 2013 productions, the addition of the second act resulted in a more critical comparative reading of the play's nineteenth-century-set beginning. Commenting on the dramatic effect of the first act, Myles observed that "for a piece about 'rock stars,' though, the First Act drags" She then summarized the action of the first act as "voices are raised, fingers are pointed and relationships sour" and emphasized that, because "the audience already knows that there are consequences for every action," they are already "ahead of the game when the fallout begins." Similarly, Goldman described the first act as "interminably long" as "we watch these four fall in and out of bed with each other, become jealous, fight, make up, take drugs, bed different partners, get territorial over mates, battle, reconcile and do it all over again. Wash, rinse, repeat."

Moving then to the discussion of the play's second act, critics primarily focused on the decision to include a time jump, specifically commenting on the perceived success or failure of this novel feature. Summarizing the differences between the two acts, McNeely argued that "the show had more nuance and restraint in the second half," and noted that, while the first act was "grandiose and fantastical (the actors are wearing sparkly booty shorts!)," the second act felt "more grounded, nuanced, and ultimately, more believable." In his review of *The Apology* for *The Globe and Mail*, J. Kelly Nestruck discussed the changed nature of the script and the effect of the addition of a new second act, having also reviewed the play's 2011 production. Nestruck argued that the addition of the second act meant that "*The Apology* has become too long" and the result is that it instead "feels like a play followed by an apology for it." Hobson described the play's second-act setting as "some kind of weird time machine era." Speaking to the effect of the post-intermission transition, he derisively summarized it as "presto, in the second act they're in contemporary London with cell phones and computers, but who really cares." Hobson suggested

that part of what made the transition so jarring for him was that the period used for the second act did not coincide with the Romantic ethos as well as other periods would have. He explained that he was “baffled why Teitel and Newby didn’t set act two in the free-love, hippie era of the early 1970s, which really was the mirror of the Romantic era.” Similarly, Goldman asserted that she was left “unmoved by Teitel’s decision to set the second half of the play in modern times” and she asserted that, “while I understand this was a metaphor examining the relentlessness of sexual politics regardless of era, I found the design decision twee.” Speaking positively to the changed setting, Myles argued that the second act “generates more sympathy” than the first act and that, “by setting the second half of the play squarely in the here and now (there are cell phones, a laptop, apartment buzzers, Byron’s Speedo), Teitel reinforces her point that women are still waging the eternal fight to be their own creatures, as well as mothers.” Regarding whether the decision to stage the second act in modern times was effective, Arnusch admitted that she was “unsure right off the bat about this,” but ultimately came to like the idea that the themes in this play were not confined to their times, that the “monster” of human nature will always stand in the way of utopian ideals.”

Addressing the overall quality of the play-in-production, it is necessary to begin by acknowledging that *The Apology*’s 2013 production was distinguished within the Calgary theatre community through its nomination at the Betty Mitchell Awards.¹²⁹ Adding to the play’s three Dora Award nominations for its 2011 production, *The Apology* received five Betty Award nominations in 2013.¹³⁰ In addition to these many nominations, the play also won the Calgary

¹²⁹ Since 1998, the Betty Mitchell Awards, or “The Bettys,” have been awarded to honour theatrical achievement in Calgary.

¹³⁰ These nominations included “Outstanding Performance by an Actor in a Drama” for David Patrick Flemming as Percy, “Outstanding Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role” for Ava Jane Markus as Claire, “Outstanding Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role” for

FFWD Magazine “Audience Choice Award” for 2013, which was presented as part of the Betty Mitchell Awards. This award and these nominations not only indicate the prominent role that *The Apology* played within the Calgary theatre scene, as part of playRites in 2013, but also demonstrates the appeal that the play-in-production held for many critics and broader audiences in general. However, despite the acclaim associated with these accolades, specific reviews of the production were largely mixed, just as they had been in 2011.

In her review, entitled “*The Apology* Delves into the Messy Lives of the Romantics,” Myles awarded the production three stars out of five and observed that “the opening-night audience laughed loudly and often.” Taking a different direction and offering a stylistic description of the play-in-production, Nestruck noted that, “at its best, the show is like a Bret Easton Ellis novel adapted for the stage by Bernard Shaw.” Still others had more negative critiques of the production, and while Goldman conceded that “it’s fun to see the wild private lives of such well-known authors and poets at first,” she also asserted that “a lack of connection to the characters and tedium with their situation may leave you wishing you could enjoy their art and know less about the artist.” In a similar vein, Jenna Shummoogum’s review of the production, entitled “*The Apology* Is an Exhausting Soap Opera,” she asserted that “*The Apology* is exhausting. Not only in length (especially the first half) but also in subject matter.” Additionally, although Nicholls remarked that “the production really rips,” she also noted that “the play never quite manages to coalesce into something that kicks all the way through.” Finally, although Hobson took issue with many aspects of the play-in-production, he ended his review by acknowledging the greater potential of *The Apology* as a, perhaps inadvertent, tool for

David Beazely as Byron, “Outstanding Direction” for Kate Newby,” and “Outstanding New Play” for Darrah Teitel.

getting audiences interested in learning more about the Shelley circle. Accordingly, he concluded by suggesting to the reader that “if *The Apology* has whetted your appetite as to the lives of Shelley, Mary Shelley, Byron, and Claire Clairmont and what really happened in Switzerland and afterwards, that’s one of its greatest virtues.” Finally, he acknowledged the disparity between *The Apology* and its historical source material, teasing that “the real story is far more tantalizing and tragic than what unfolds on the Martha Cohen stage.”

“The More Things Change:” After *The Apology*

While collecting interviews and critical responses regarding Darrah Teitel’s play, *The Apology*, a common refrain that emerged was the use of the popular maxim “the more things change, the more they stay the same.” Ruth Myles began her review of the play’s 2013 production with the phrase, while Newby used it to respond to how she envisioned *The Apology* as speaking to our contemporary moment. Although Dwyer did not directly use the maxim, her own answer that “young people, say folks in their twenties, may be struggling with these issues the same way that Mary Shelley was” conveyed a similar sentiment about the connection between the Shelleys and young people in the twenty-first century. In much the same way, Konchak captured this sentiment in her assertion that “the stuff of our lives changes; the world around us changes but I think the deep core of humanity is constant” and that “it is a joy and a horror to see how far we have advanced in technology and how in so many ways nothing has changed.” Finally, looking back to Teitel’s description of what brought her back to *The Apology* and led her to extend the play from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first century, she stated that “we think we get over these questions throughout the history of feminism, but it’s all the same today.” She then teasingly subverted the old maxim to suggest that “nothing changes...or maybe it does?”

In considering the story of *The Apology*'s composition and subsequent staging, it quickly becomes clear that Teitel's play is itself a testament to this sentiment. Although the play underwent many significant changes and received two distinct premiere productions, in entirely different contexts and with two separate creative teams, at its core, *The Apology* continued to tell the same story. As this chapter has worked to show, *The Apology*'s two versions and two productions represent two halves of a single story. In both versions of *The Apology*, Darrah Teitel's subversive Romantic Biodrama, she explores the modernity, progressiveness, and youthfulness of the Shelley circle and collectively employs the group as precursors for a specific approach to living and creating. When she initially wrote the play in 2011, Teitel worked to forge a salient link between these Romantic writers and her own contemporary moment. In 2013, she extended the one-act play about the Shelleys' progressiveness into a two-act play that re-located the characters to the twenty-first century, thus literalizing the connection between them and our present-day ethos, as again conceived by Teitel. And while the production contexts, personnel, funding, geographical locations, and even versions of the script significantly differed between the play's 2011 and 2013 productions, both used different means and methods to ultimately tell this same story. Consequently, while the overall success of Teitel's attempt to cast the Shelleys as historical antecedents for contemporary feminism, anti-capitalism, maternal rights activism, and polyamory is debatable, it can certainly be said that *The Apology* and its twinned performance history are themselves a testament to the maxim that "the more things change, the more they stay the same."

Since *The Apology*'s second premiere production in 2013, one thing that certainly has changed is the status of the production companies that staged *The Apology*. The Next Stage Theatre Festival remains a fixture in the Toronto fringe theatre season, having marked its tenth

year in 2017, and the Factory Theatre underwent a major renovation to improve accessibility, which was completed in 2014. Conversely, 2014 also saw the end of the playRites festival and, as of March 2017, Alberta Theatre Projects initiated an “urgent” fundraising campaign, citing a seventy-seven percent in corporate sponsorship following an economic downturn in Calgary.¹³¹ Consequently, while the play’s second premiere production was largely defined for Teitel by the fact that “there was way more money in Alberta,” the intervening four years have since seen a sea change of sorts in Calgary that brought with it the depletion of the resources that made *The Apology*’s 2013 production possible.

In February 2016, a staged reading of *The Apology* was performed as part of “Just Another Gala’s Equity in Theatre: Reading Series” held in Ottawa, indicating continuing interest in the play and the possibility of a future production. However, we do not currently know we do not know where the story of *The Apology* goes from here. Currently, the script of the play has not been published and it remains unclear both if and how *The Apology* will be preserved or perpetuated in the future. Furthermore, one cannot help but wonder, if an edition of the script were to be made published, which of the play’s two versions would be selected. Maybe it should be the 2011 version of the play, with its focused exploration of the exceptional dynamics of this distinctly exceptional group. And maybe it would be the 2013 version, since its modern setting continues the story, lending a sense of immediacy and currency to the drama. Or perhaps, maybe Teitel is still not finished with her play and another *Apology* has yet to be made.

¹³¹ An article published by *The Calgary Herald* on March 1st, 2017, entitled “Alberta Theatre Projects Asks for Community’s Help in the Midst of Financial Crisis,” also included a statement from Vicki Stroich that “looking beyond next season has become extremely difficult given our financial situation.” However, on May 2, 2017, *The Calgary Herald* reported that ATP had met, and indeed exceeded, this fundraising goal.

Justified Sinners

In 2017, a new Romantic Biodrama was staged in Edmonton, Alberta. Performed from August 30th to September 1st, the play premiered in the Second Playing Space at the Timms Centre for the Arts. Despite the popularity of Romantic Biodramas in contemporary theatre, this play-in-production can be distinguished as an exceptional case study in this growing collection of performances for several key reasons. First, it was produced and staged at the University of Alberta and involved both the Departments of Drama and of English and Film Studies, thus representing an interdisciplinary, cross-campus collaboration. Second, in addition to benefitting from University supports and student and faculty involvement, this production received sponsorship from members of my supervisory committee, which allowed for the student-artists involved to receive financial compensation. Third, and perhaps most exceptionally, this Canadian Romantic Biodrama was not written by a playwright, but by me: a Shelleyan student-researcher. The resulting play, entitled *Justified Sinners*, was therefore the unlikely culmination of what began as a research question: how could I better discuss Romantic Biodrama from a practitioner's perspective and use my doctoral project to actively contribute to the ongoing history of plays-in-performance? Consequently, what started as a thought experiment ultimately resulted in a one-act script and a full theatrical production that have together become the creative complement to my critical research project and an integral component of this broader dramaturgical study. Ultimately then, my aim with this experiment in playwriting was to use the theatrical medium to explore my topic in a creative, and distinctly Romantic, way by actively contributing to an existing artistic tradition.

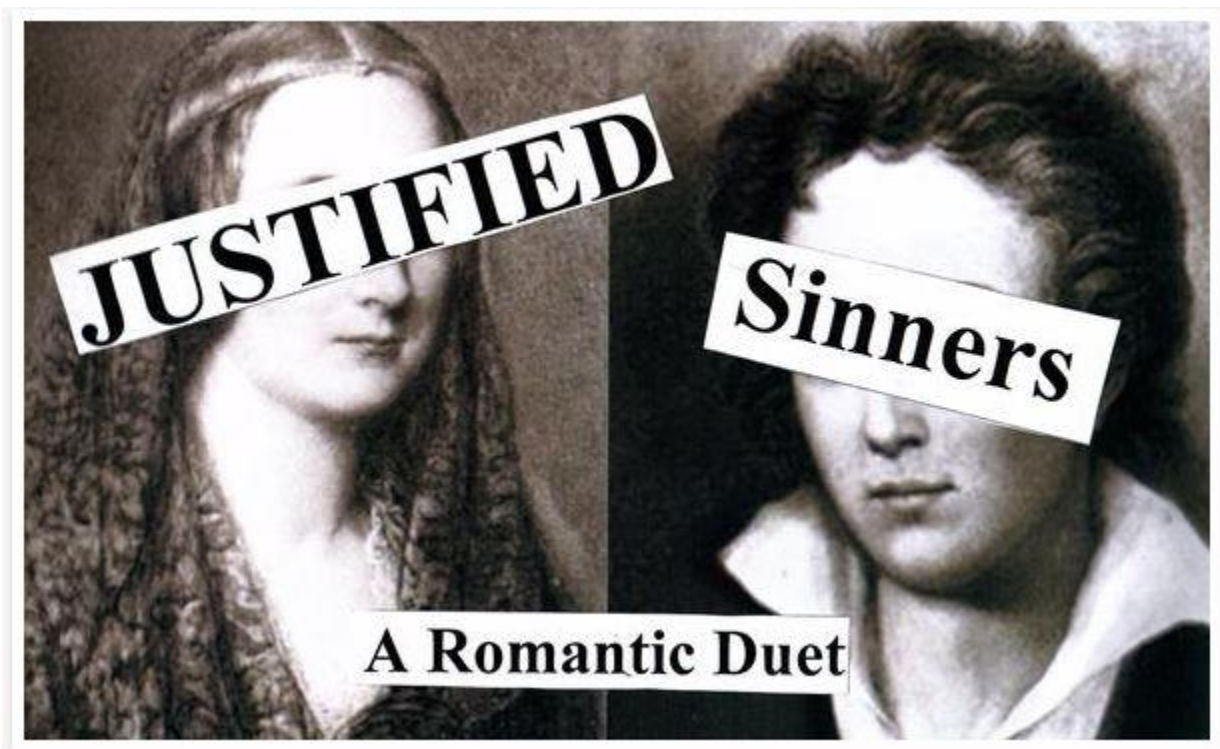
In addition to gaining practical insight through the composition and staging of this script, I also consciously wrote *Justified Sinners* to address what I perceived as a present gap in the

genre of Romantic Biodramas. Throughout my research of Romantic Biodramas across the transatlantic world, I had not encountered a play that strictly focused on the relationship between the Shelleys. Thus, this play features only Mary and Percy onstage and is set at an unconventional time in the Shelleys' fraught relationship: after Percy's death in 1822. Beginning two years after Percy's passing, *Justified Sinners* opens in 1824 as Mary Shelley is about to publish her edition of Percy's *Posthumous Poems*. By re-reading Percy's words, Mary resurrects his haunting presence in her mind and imagines what she would say to him, if given one last chance. As the play unfolds, it reveals the complex relationship between these two Romantic writers, lovers, and co-collaborators and shows how their distinctly modern marriage was not as perfect as all the poetry might suggest. *Justified Sinners* uses the lives and writing of the Shelleys as a jumping off point to explore themes of Romantic love, the often-difficult dynamics of artistic collaboration, the power of words, and the potential human costs of living a creative life. And although the resulting play takes the form of an imagined conversation between the Shelleys, I created a play text that was born out of both Mary and Percy's own writings: their poetry, prose, letters, or journals.

Resultantly, the story of *Justified Sinners* emerged from my own creative engagement with the Shelleys' words and employed both their lives and writing as its formal basis. Following the completion of the script, the play's subsequent staging further extended this Romantic collaboration by broadening the Shelleys' circle to include students, alumni, and faculty of the University of Alberta, who all worked together to translate the work from page to stage.

This chapter therefore documents the writing and staging of *Justified Sinners*: a new Canadian Romantic Biodrama. Through it, I therefore chronicle the processes of adapting and composing the script, developing it as a performance text, assembling the creative team,

participating in its staging, and, finally, performing the play for a public audience at the University of Alberta in 2017. To that end, this case study fittingly concludes my project by framing the process of composing and performing a Romantic Biodrama as a “performance as research” project and by discussing *Justified Sinners* in terms of theatrical praxis. Accordingly, this chapter chronicles, describes, critically engages with, and directly contends with the realities of writing and staging a contemporary biographical play about the Shelleys in a Canadian university context while, importantly, continuing to acknowledge and underscore my bifurcated roles as both this project’s student-researcher and *Justified Sinners*’ playwright and co-dramaturg. As such, my work in this case study presents both a candid depiction of the successes, as well as the trials and tribulations, associated with this specific creation process from a practitioner’s point-of-view, and an attempt to critically discuss this play-in-performance, as well as my perception of its place within this emerging theatrical subgenre.



Reid, Brittany “Cover Image for *Justified Sinners*.” 2015, Edmonton.

The Archive

As with my preceding case studies, the recoverable archive of production materials here informs my analysis, allowing me to draw from interviews with the creative team and to directly engage with the performance text. However, although this case study takes a similar form to those dedicated to *Caves of Fancy* and *The Apology*, my first-hand experience in the writing and staging of *Justified Sinners* and the relative recency of the production inevitably influence and, in many ways, augment and enhance my discussion of the play-in-production. For example, I maintained a website and digital process journal during the writing and staging processes, StagingTheShelleys.com, and this chapter both integrates and benefits from this active electronic resource. Furthermore, because the production was staged with an eye to posterity and for inclusion within this doctoral project, theatrical ephemera, such as rehearsal notes or nightly talkbacks, were preserved and subsequently used to bolster my discussion of the play-in-production.

As the playwright and a dramaturg for this play-in-production, I was deeply involved in both the composition and staging of *Justified Sinners*. Resultantly, my own subjective interpretations of both processes inevitably inform my documentation and discussion of the project in this chapter. While my participation in the writing and staging of a Romantic Biodrama is predicated on my immersive, practical involvement, I recognize the importance of addressing my personal investment in the project as a possible limitation on my ability to objectively critique the performance process. Furthermore, my role as researcher also required me to interview members of the creative team and I must acknowledge that my multiple roles as playwright, dramaturg, interviewer, and researcher could have exerted latent pressure on individuals to alter, refine, or otherwise censor their responses. However, while I recognize my

direct involvement as a possible limitation, since it inevitably precludes the possibility of an objective treatment of the play-in-performance, I also believe that my closeness and direct participation provide rare access and insights that have the potential to meaningfully enhance the study of Romantic Biodrama as a theatrical genre by treating it as both a subject of scholarly interest and a field of creative exploration.

Branching out from my own perspective, I have also accounted for the experiences of my collaborators by collecting interviews with members of the creative team following the production. A week after the production closed on September 1st, 2017, I contacted each member of the creative team with questions regarding the play-in-performance. I received written responses from the director, Alexander Donovan, actors Morgan Grau and Jessy Ardern, poster designer and photographer Kelsi Kalmer, and designer Sarah Karpyschin, which feature prominently in this case study. Supplementing these responses, talkbacks were also held nightly after each performance and the transcripts from those conversations between the creative team and audiences also provide insight into the staging process as well as helping to indicate audience response. Accordingly, the responses from Donovan, Grau, Ardern, Karpyschin, myself, and Professor Stefano Muneroni as the talkback moderator and production co-dramaturg offer additional material for discussion. Importantly, while I cite excerpts from the written, formal responses of the creative team alongside their more informal, candid conversations from the talkback, I acknowledge the source and context of each quotation, to draw attention to the distinct rhetorical modes and intended audiences in each case. In addition to citing the talkbacks as an indicator of audience response, I also received written feedback on the production from Dr. Mark Smith, a professor of Romanticism at MacEwan University in Edmonton. His critique is included in the “Responding to *Justified Sinners*” section and represents an outside, scholarly

response to *Justified Sinners* as a theatrical treatment of the Shelleys' lives and writing. Finally, the archive for *Justified Sinners* in production is rounded out by a variety of paratextual materials relating to the performance, including the poster, playbill, promotional materials, images, etc. that further contributed to audience perception. Together, these materials meaningfully enhance my ability to re-create the conditions surrounding this play's premiere production and their collection in this chapter represents a concerted effort to document and preserve the performance experience.

Plot Synopsis

Beginning two years after Percy's death, *Justified Sinners* opens as Mary Shelley is about to publish her edition of Percy's collected works. By re-reading Percy's words, Mary resurrects his haunting presence in her mind and imagines what she would say to him, if given one last chance. As the play unfolds, it reveals the complex relationship between these two Romantic writers, lovers, and co-collaborators and shows how their distinctly modern marriage was not as perfect as all the poetry might suggest. *Justified Sinners* uses the lives and writing of the Shelleys as a jumping off point to explore themes of Romantic love, the often-difficult dynamics of artistic collaboration, the power of words, and the potential human costs of living a creative life.

Justified Sinners is the story of a renowned husband and wife from literary history. But rather than realistically depict any event or period from their lives, this dramatization of the relationship between this famed nineteenth-century poet and the author of *Frankenstein* picks up after Percy's mysterious death and tells the story of a still-grieving widow imagining a confessional conversation with her late-husband. It begins with Mary addressing the audience about the power of words to bring their writer back to life. She opens her late-husband's collected works, which she has been editing since his death two years earlier, and imagines him

physically returning to her through his words. Percy enters, and, for a short time, we are given a window into the bond this couple shared early in their relationship as we watch them return to their first meeting, recall how they fell in love, and witness them luxuriating in their shared passion for language. However, amid their joyous reunion, old wounds are quickly opened, and those same words become weaponized as Percy starts criticizing Mary's writing, causing their warm feelings give way to familiar resentments.

As the play continues, the affection between the couple gives way to a war of words between husband and wife and former collaborators, during which Mary employs poetry and prose as evidence in her mounting case against her husband. Mary cites his letters and his poems to support her suspicions of possible affairs and discovers what she considers to be proof of his cruelty, for which she now seeks restitution. However, Percy launches his own counterattack on his wife, suggesting that her "coldness" drove him away and employing his own treatises as a defense of his actions. Through the course of their confrontation, and their continuing returns to the past through dreams and memory, both Mary and Percy ultimately concede that their shared grief caused them to pull apart when they should have come together. As their conversation ends, they reach a point of peace where each comes to understand the other's experience during the most difficult time in their relationship. They fondly return to the sense of love and friendship that initially brought them together and their rhetorical attacks give way to words of love and renewed commitments to each other. The play then concludes with Mary literally closing the book on her husband's story and willingly taking up the mantle of his biographer, stating "I shall write his life" (447). Reflecting with a sense of bitter-sweetness on their imperfect love story, Mary determines to honour her husband and their bond by publishing his writing and preserving his legacy for future readers.

“This Ancient Alchemy of Language:” Writing *Justified Sinners*

“Why would someone who has never written a play before decide to compose one as part of her dissertation?” This is a question I have asked myself many times since I started this process and it is necessary to begin by explaining why I thought an original composition would meaningfully contribute to my research project. From the earliest stages of my doctoral research, I have been interested in studying plays in performance, an approach that has involved both close reading of scripts and appraising the elements of staging. This desire to treat theatre as a performance-based medium, distinct from yet related to text-based studies, has always meant that my methodology must reflect this practical dimension. I therefore decided that, to epitomize my practical interest in the theatre and to enact my own ideas regarding the Shelleys through performance-as-research, I should try my hand at writing a Romantic Biodrama. Although it is somewhat unconventional for a critical dissertation, writing this script has provided me with an opportunity to address under-represented themes of the Shelleyan project, to make my own contribution to the catalogue of existing play texts, and to gain further insight into the processes of creative adaptation and practical staging that goes into these performances. But despite this resolution to try my hand at playwriting, many questions remained: what would my play be about? When would it take place? What sources would form the basis for it?

Before I started writing the script, I thought of a title that I wanted to use: *Justified Sinners*. In our August 31st talkback, I explained how I began with the play’s title and explained where that initial idea came from: “The title *Justified Sinners* was one of the first things that I came up with for the play...*Justified Sinners* is the shortened version of what I imagined to be the full title of the play, which is one that I took from the title of a Romantic-era novel written by James Hogg, entitled *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*” (491). *The*

Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner is a Romantic-era novel by Scottish writer James Hogg. In the novel, Robert Wringhim's account of his life is presented by an editor who attempts to explain and elucidate these "private memoirs and confessions." The story told by these two narrators details Wringhim's experience of encountering a stranger, Gil-Martin, and the tragic outcomes of their Doppelgänger relationship. Hogg's novel and its title were especially formative for me in my early development of *Justified Sinners* for several important reasons. First, the novel was published in 1824, the same year that my play was ultimately set and an important year in Mary's life that saw the death of Byron, her moving to Kentish Town in north London, and her publication of Percy's *Posthumous Poems*. Furthermore, in my early musings about the play, I was specifically interested in finding a way to represent the doubling between Mary and Percy and the possibility of framing their union as a kind of Doppelgänger relationship. Additionally, Hogg's use of two narrators for his novel was compelling for me and I initially thought that the play could take the form of two interconnected monologues delivered to the audience from the afterlife, not unlike Samuel Beckett's *Play* (1963). Finally, I was intrigued with the notion of a "justified sinner" and the stark dualities the idea could represent in my play. In our August 31st talkback, I further unpacked my interest in Hogg's novel as an initial source of inspiration and how I saw the idea connecting to my early vision of the play:

The title as a descriptor for what Mary encounters, these private memoirs and confessions of Percy as the potentially "justified sinner" in the play, although we play with the idea of "justification," depending on how you read his actions. I wanted to take this idea as a reference to the book, which is again all about Doppelgängers and Romantic doubles and all these things that would come into the play, and to play with this idea of them both potentially seeing themselves as sinners in some way. (491)

As this response helps show, my initial interest in *Justified Sinners* as the title for my play not only served to reference many of the ideas, events, and formal elements of Hogg's novel, but the inherent tension in describing someone as a "justified sinner" would continue to apply to Mary and Percy's belief in the play that they have been sinned against and their ultimate resolution that they were both justified in their actions. In this way, my early inspiration from Hogg's novel and decision to name the play *Justified Sinners* both highlighted themes and ideas in the script and served to guide and inspire my subsequent development and writing of the play.

Significantly, when I set out to write *Justified Sinners*, I had not yet determined my thesis for this project and so I was not consciously attempting to write a play that focalized Mary, although the resulting play inadvertently followed that trend. But instead of aiming to write a play that centralized Mary's life and writing, as so many contemporary dramatists have done, I was guided by five primary goals intended to aid my writing and distinguish the resulting script from the existing performance catalogue.

First, I wanted to write a play that intentionally focalized events from the Shelleys' lives besides the ones that are most frequently dramatized: namely, the "haunted summer" of 1816, the subsequent conception or composition of *Frankenstein*, or Mary's pregnancies and the ultimate passing of four of their five children. Necessarily, these events would still have significant bearing on the play I would create, but they would haunt the present action, rather than be directly re-enacted onstage. I decided from the beginning that if I was going to write my own Romantic Biodrama, I needed to use this opportunity to depict events or ideas that have not featured prominently in the catalogue of existing performances and are of significance to my own research questions. Although there is a lot of variety within contemporary theatrical representations of the Shelleys, some tropes frequently reoccur, including the depiction of the

“Haunted Summer” and, accordingly, the primacy of *Frankenstein*’s texts and themes. In the Talkback following our August 31st performance, I further discussed some popular trends and themes in contemporary Romantic Biodramas that I hoped to eschew through my play:

So many of them talked about *Frankenstein* and so many of them also talked about *Frankenstein*’s exceptional origin story, which if you are not familiar with it involved a ghost story competition at the Villa Diodati at Lake Geneva in 1816 that Lord Byron initiated. So many plays about the Shelleys lives focus on these key events. (492)

While the story of *Frankenstein*’s composition is the subject of literary legend and is relevant to a reading of the Shelleys’ lives and writing, the events of the “Haunted Summer” of 1816 have been so often dramatized that I wanted to explore other events from within, or even after Mary and Percy’s lives that have not received the same theatrical treatment.

In accordance with my efforts to focus on underrepresented events from the Shelleys’ lives, my second objective in writing this play was to set it in a time and place that is rarely depicted in Romantic Biodramas. I wanted to go outside the traditional chronology of the Shelleys’ relationship found in most Romantic Biodramas to instead focus on a crucial but under-represented moment in the development and continuation of the Shelleyan project. I therefore chose an event that was of great importance to my research focus on the Shelleys’ continuing cultural legacies, yet has received little to no dramatic treatment: Mary’s response to Percy’s death and her decision to preserve and propagate his literary legacy as a means of memorialization and, ultimately, resurrection.

Perhaps the most crucial moment in our continuing cultural interest in the Shelleys occurred after the death of Percy in 1822. In a journal entry from November 17th of that year, Mary’s fateful determination that “I shall write his life” signaled her decision to take up the

mantle of biographer and champion of her husband's life and legacy. Although she was hindered in her efforts by her father-in-law, Sir Timothy Shelley, Mary artfully circumvented the restrictions imposed on writing about Percy in her lengthy prefatory notes to *Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (1824) and *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (1839). In doing so, Mary not only successfully secured her husband's posthumous reputation for centuries to come, but she also found a way to continue her dialogue and collaboration with him beyond the end of his life.

As Charlotte Gordon describes in *Romantic Outlaws: The Extraordinary Lives of Mary Wollstonecraft and her Daughter Mary Shelley*, Mary's roles as her husband's posthumous biographer, editor, and curator allowed her to imagine a continued dialogue with him: "for Mary, daunting though the project was, sifting through Shelley's papers helped her resurrect her husband's presence, giving her the sense that they were still in communication, that he was still speaking to her" (472). This belief that literary resurrection allows for continued discourse with the dead is a significant theme in the Shelleyan project, as seen through texts such as "Adonais" and *Frankenstein*. Furthermore, the dramatic potential of an imagined resurrection seemed particularly promising, especially given Mary's direct addresses to Shelley in the "Journal of Sorrow"¹³² she kept after his death.

But while this period in Mary's life is essential to understanding the persistence of the Shelleys in our cultural consciousness and a key moment in Mary's continuing devotion to her

¹³² On October 22nd, 1822, Mary Shelley started writing what became her Journal Book IV. She began the journal with an explanatory note: "The Journal of Sorrow—Begun 1822. But for my Child it could not End too soon." My reference to her "Journal of Sorrow" in this chapter therefore refers to the content of Journal Book IV, which covers the period in her life from October 22nd, 1822 until May 14th, 1823 and documents both her response to Percy's death and her subsequent efforts to collect, curate, and edit his works.

husband's memory, these events have not been given a full dramatic treatment and are more often entirely omitted from Romantic Biodramas. To that end, *Justified Sinners* specifically dramatizes this imagined, posthumous conversation between Mary and Percy and focalizes Mary's resolution to "write his life" as her renewed commitment to their personal and artistic collaboration, despite her husband's passing. By setting the play in 1824, two years after Percy's death, and locating the action strictly in a Mary's writing room in her London home, I hoped to focus on the insular world of Mary and her memories at this moment in her life, rather than the vibrant dynamic of the Shelley circle epitomized through the "Haunted Summer" of 1816.

Third, although familiarity with the "Shelley circle," its members, and its dynamics is foundational to an understanding of how the Shelleys' lived and wrote, I endeavored to instead focus on the couple themselves by featuring only them onstage. As I noted in our August 31st talkback, "Part of my initial motivation in doing this play was that I wanted to carve out a place that I hadn't seen filled before by different Romantic Biodramas, which led me to focus specifically on the relationship between the two of them" (490). As I detailed in the introduction to this project, Romantic Biodramas tend towards large-scale, mimetic, period pieces that seek to capture the realities of nineteenth-century society and situate the Shelleys, as they existed both within and outside it. The ubiquity of this approach correlates to the popularity of events, such as the "Haunted Summer," as focal subjects of Romantic Biodramas, but it also reflects the very authentic realities of the Shelleys' relationship. Part of the couple's interest in adopting a vanguard approach to living and writing was that they partook in Romantic coterie culture, which often entailed living and writing with others. Consequently, their eight-year relationship, and especially the periods of their greatest production, were dominated by the presence of outside figures, from Claire on their 1814 and 1816 sojourns to the continent, to Byron and

Polidori in 1816, to the Pisan Circle that formed during the Shelleys' time in Italy beginning in 1818. Taken together, the majority of the Shelleys' relationship was spent in the company of others and this dynamic is subsequently reflected through most Romantic Biodramas.

However, in staging *Justified Sinners* after Percy's death, I was free to imagine the couple alone together to speculate about what that isolation would entail. In our August 31st talkback, I elaborated on my desire to imagine the Shelleys after their circles had disbanded and to displace them from their coteries to consider how they would far after they were gone:

I was really interested in what it would be like if you created a small, focused story that went back to the text and pulled out so many of the things that I love so much about this Romantic couple, their ideas, their writing, and their relationship. I wanted to see if you just focused on that, if you could create a play that worked. (492)

I further elaborated on my interest in taking some of the key characters featured in most Romantic Biodramas, such as Byron and Claire Clairmont out of the equation to depict the Shelleys without these important individuals: "I thought that, in taking Byron out of the equation, that sort of figural crutch for them, I could see what they were like if they actually had to be alone together" (490). By displacing the Shelleys from their circles and imagining how their relationship continued after Percy's death, I hoped to focus on the connection between them as husband and wife, collaborators, and, in 1824, as subject and biographer.

Fourth, I wanted to create a salient connection between the language of this play and the Shelleys' own writing by employing their poetry and prose as the textual basis for my script. When I initially set out to create *Justified Sinners*, I was curious to see if I could produce a script that was primarily adapted from the Shelleys writing, resulting in a found text that I uncovered and curated, rather than composed myself. I therefore turned to the Shelleys' fiction and non-

fiction as my primary sources and sought to employ excerpts and ideas from these works directly into the play. Using the language from their letters, journals, poetry, and prose, I hoped to mirror Mary's literary resurrection of Percy through the play's adapted dialogue and to employ their writing as the medium through which the audience encountered their posthumous images onstage. As I will detail in my description of the writing process, Mary's "Journal of Sorrows," which she kept after Percy's death was especially informative for *Justified Sinners*, both in terms of informing Mary's voice in the play and in depicting her emotional state at that specific moment in her life. In our September 1st talkback, I expanded on the importance of the "Journal of Sorrows" to Mary's characterization in the play and talked about how that text was employed, both for its language and as inspiration for the play's focus:

I read Mary Shelley's "Journal of Sorrows" that she kept after Percy Shelley's death and I know she had a lot of questions from reading his writing that she wanted answers to. As a would-be biofictional writer of the Shelleys, as a student of them, I too had a lot of questions that I wanted him to answer too...I used her "Journal of Sorrows" as a basis to ask those questions of him and I used this play as an opportunity to see what Mary would find out if she was able to actually reimagine her husband and to ask him those questions she had and to find answers and I used the Shelleys' texts to answer the questions that I had (496).

As this response helps convey, *Justified Sinners* was consciously created out of the Shelleys' words and intended to demonstrate the close interrelationship between their lives and writing. Accordingly, I wanted the play itself to not only depict events from, or after, Mary and Percy's lives, but to use their text to animate their characterization and to ground the play through their language. While my desire to strictly "find" the text and story of the play through the Shelleys'

writing evolved through the writing process and I began acknowledging my own creative contributions, the play's basis in their fictional and non-fictional works persisted in the final version of *Justified Sinners* and remained a key feature of the play.

Fifth and finally, I knew early in the process that I wanted to create a play that operated outside the limitations of strict theatrical realism. My decision to write a play that took place after Percy's death, yet featured his embodied presence onstage meant that I had to extend the limits of realism for the play. As my discussion of Romantic Biodrama earlier in this project has already demonstrated, a distinct feature of the genre is departures from realistic representation, usually taking the form of *Frankenstein's* creature intervening in Mary's life. This tendency to add supernatural elements to the Shelleys' lives or to integrate the imaginary worlds of their fiction into their biographies continued into my conception of the play. Accordingly, while I did not choose to trouble their life/writing binary by bringing on characters from their fiction, I did want to employ similar rules about the power of language to bring a subject to life.

In Mary's opening monologue to the audience, I wanted her to explain who she was and to establish the play's governing logic: namely, that writers and biographers have the power to bring their subjects to life. The premise was not only essential to the play itself, but the belief that Romantic Biodrama has the potential to reanimate these writers also underpins my own critical work throughout this project. Considered in this way, Mary monologue not only informs the audience of the means through which she can bring her husband back to life and how she herself has been theatrically reimagined, but also acknowledges the power of biography and biofictional representation:

You see, a strange thing happens when you immerse yourself in the ideas of someone who has passed. There is magic in the language. There is life within the words. For what

are we if not the physical embodiment of our words? And after we are gone, our words will remain to tell our tales to those we left behind. To keep our stories going. To address all the questions that have been left unanswered. We writers understand this ancient alchemy of language better than anyone. And so, I am not just Percy's biographer. Not just his editor. I am bringing him back to life. These were his words, his own remarkable creations, but I have the power to bring my Shelley forward through these sacred pages. Not through mean materials, not through bone nor blood nor brain. But like a posthumous poem. Like a living body of work. And as I arrange, collect, and curate his perfect words, I can hear what he would have said if, speaking thus to him, he could have answered me. (414).

In reading Mary's opening monologue, the play's literal treatment of "life within the words" is laid bare and the potential for her to "bring my Shelley forward through these sacred pages" takes on a supernatural dimension beyond strict realism. Beginning the play with this premise, that Mary could bring Percy "back to life" by "arrang[ing], collect[ing], and curat[ing] his perfect words," opened the door for me to play with time, through memories and dream sequences, and this same approach was later adopted through the production and its design. Resultantly, although I wanted my play to emerge from the Shelleys' lives and the play text to integrate the Shelleys' writing, *Justified Sinners* and its subsequent production both went beyond strict realism to help audiences encounter the Shelleys "like a living body of work."

Having established a clear understanding of the kind of Romantic Biodrama I wanted to create and the story I wanted to tell, I began work on writing the script in September 2015 by collecting material and creating the basic framework and dialogue. To start, I genuinely hoped when I made the move from critical to creative writing that somehow my methodological

approach to writing would have reoriented itself. Whenever I conduct critical research, I always begin by collecting a massive, unwieldy collection of information. Only after I have spent many hours scavenging for information and filling dozens of word documents with quotations and key words can I then begin writing. For the composition of *Justified Sinners*, this entailed combing through archives of the Shelleys' fiction and non-fiction, including everything from digitized letters and journals, to collections and re-editions of their writing, to scans of manuscripts, drafts, and fair copies of their texts. It also meant turning to sources from the Shelleys' cultural context, or even outside the Romantic moment altogether, for additional information and ideas. Once I had nearly fifty pages of primary and secondary sources smattered across my fleet of open documents, I knew the alchemy-like process of turning it all into something somewhat intelligible could finally begin.

Shelley to Mary

Well, my dearest Mary, are you very lonely? Tell me truth, my sweetest, do you ever cry?

I assure you, I am not of a disposition to be flattered by your sorrow, though I should be by your cheerfulness

The whole story wants moral discrimination and modesty

I can, of course, tell you nothing of the future

Dearest love, be well, be happy, come to me—confide in your own constant and affectionate

How are you, my best Mary? Write especially how is your health, and how your spirits are

How are you, my best love? How have you sustained the trials of the journey?

Reid, Brittany. "Screenshot of lines used as the basis for Percy's dialogue." 12 September 2015. Text from *Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Ed. Frederick L. Jones. Oxford: Clarendon, 1964.

I then appraised the information in front of me to determine what kind of narrative might naturally emerge from these texts. I knew my own creative voice and authorial influence would

ultimately shape the form of the script but, as much as possible, I wanted to follow any potential narrative threads that carried through the texts and allow the Shelleys to assert their voices through their writing. An early goal that I established for this adaptation was to capture the “spirit” of the Shelleys’ lives and writing, so I wanted to return to their written lives as my point of creative departure. For example, many of the exchanges in the play are based on Percy’s texts and Mary’s documented responses to reading them. These imagined dialogues formed a sort of call-and-response between husband and wife, the deceased writer and his living reader, the subject and his biographer-editor. For these interactions, I used Mary’s journals and letters to influence my early editorial choices as I attempted to hypothesize how Mary would have responded to Shelley’s writing and what she discovered through it. By basing these interactions between the Shelleys in the play on the texts themselves and then imaging the conversation that would develop from them, I hoped to forge a more salient link between the source material and the adaptation I was creating.

Once I had those sources collected, I still wondered how to integrate them into a cohesive script in such a way that the play’s intertextuality did not detract from telling a unified story. I needed to figure out my own strategy for adapting the Shelleys’ lives and writing into a play. In *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), Linda Hutcheon identifies adaptation as both a product and a process. She explains that adaptation represents “a creative *and* an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging” (8). This notion of adaptation always involving “both (re)interpretation and then (re)creation” directly informed my own process in creating *Justified Sinners* (8). Taking her lead, I knew that I wanted my adaptation to rely on both the Shelleys’ salvaged writing and my own creative contribution. Once I had settled on this approach, I came to imagine *Justified*

Sinners as a duet performed by the Shelleys (as reflected in the play’s subtitle, “A Romantic Duet”) and conducted by me as the biographer-adapter-playwright.

“To Jane: The Invitation”

Bending from Heaven, in azure mirth,
It kissed the forehead of the Earth,
And smiled upon the silent sea,

And what, *precisely*, were you inviting dear Jane to do? Tell me Shelley, why must you dream of kissing every woman you meet?

“Alas, I kiss you, Jane” –next to the last lines of **“Triumph of Life”**

“To a Lady, with a Guitar”

ARIEL to Miranda:—Take
This slave of music, for the sake
Of him, who is the slave of thee;

Poor Ariel sends this silent token
Of more than ever can be spoken;

“To a Lady” how very coy, dear heart, Alexander the Great himself could not untie such an elaborate knot of subtle deception! And how brilliant of you to employ *The Tempest* to covertly convey your affection for her! What great fortune for you that nobody has ever heard of Shakespeare, congratulations on your successful rouse.

“To Sophia”

And if it’s not Jane, it’s Sophia Stacy

Reid, Brittany. “Screencap of Notes for *Justified Sinners*,” 12 September 2015, Edmonton.

Text from “To Jane: The Invitation” and “With a Guitar. To Jane” from *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts, Criticism*. Ed. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers. New York: Norton, 1977. 443; 449.

The first step after collecting my various sources of information and settling on my approach was to begin creating a narrative through line out of what was available to me. To accomplish this task, I primarily relied on one key source as the basis for my adaptation: Mary Shelley’s “Journal of Sorrows” that she kept after Percy’s death. Of all the many sources that I

eventually brought into the script, no single source contributed more to the content or themes of the play than this journal. As I detailed earlier, I wanted this play to feature Mary as Percy's posthumous biographer and dramatize the couple's imagined conversations after his early death. This setup required me to draw heavily from Mary's own first-person account to better understand her reaction to her husband's death and her subsequent experience as editor of his manuscripts. As I quickly discovered through this, my first experience as a playwright-adapter, sometimes your subject can express how he or she is feeling so much better than you can. In my case, Mary Shelley articulated her widow's grief in such poignant and emotionally evocative terms that I decided to excise entire portions of her journal entries and implant them into the script intact.

how alone! The stars may behold my tears, & the winds drink my sighs -- but my thoughts are a sealed treasure which I can confide to none. White paper -- **wilt thou be my confident? I will trust thee fully, for none shall see what I write.** But can I express all I feel? Have I the talent to give words to thoughts & feelings that as a tempest hurry me along? -- Is this the sand ↑that↓ the ↑ever flowing↓ sea of thought would impress indelibly? -- Alas! I am alone -- no eye answers mine -- my voice can with none assume its natural modulation, to none all is shew -- & **I but a shadow** -- What a change! Oh my beloved Shelley -- It is not true that this heart

-- 430 --

was cold to thee. 2 Tell me, for now you know all things -- did I not in the deepest solitude of thought repeat to ↑to↓ myself my goodfortune in possessing you? How often during those happy days, happy though chequered, I thought how superiorly gifted I had been in being united to one to whom I could unveil myself, & who could understand me. Well then, I am now reduced to these white pages which I am to blot with dark imagery. As I write let me think what He would have said, if speaking thus to him, he could have answered me. Yes, my one ↑own↓ Heart, I would fain know what you think of my desolate state -- what you think I ought to do -- what to think. I think ↑guess↓ you would answer thus: -- "Seek to know your own heart & learning what it best loves -- try to enjoy that." -- Well, I cast my eye around, & looking forward to the bounded prospect in view. Lark myself what pleases me there. When I meditate or

BR **Brittany Reid**
Important, Mary says she has no confidant and looks to the paper to listen to her (How is writing represented onstage for her)

BR **Brittany Reid**
Have Shelley break in at this point?

BR **Brittany Reid**
Mary makes a direct appeal to Shelley here. Furthermore, she claims he now knows "all things." It might be nice to complicate this for him?

BR **Brittany Reid**
Ah!! Mary writes the journal in a way that sets up this discourse by imagining what he would have said to her

Reid, Brittany. "Screenshot of Notes Based on Mary Shelley's 'Journal of Sorrow,'" 8 September 2015, Edmonton.

Text from: Feldman, Paula R. and Diana Scott-Kilvert, eds. *The Journals of Mary Shelley (1814-1844): Electronic Edition*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1987. *Intelix Past Masters*. Web. 10 August 2015.

For example, in the section highlighted below, my liberal use of Mary's own writing is demonstrated through the large amount of bolded text, which indicate lines that were adapted from Mary's journal:¹³³

But no solace came—no reprieve from sorrow. Instead, all but one of my children fled from me, never to return. Am I so monstrous that they had to leave me? **After losing my first child, a tiny girl who passed before I could name her, I dreamt that my little baby came to life again; that she had only been cold, and that we rubbed her before the fire and she lived. But I awoke to find no baby.** She left no words, so how am I supposed to tell *her* story? (438)

As seen in the above passage, I endeavored to preserve Mary Shelley's voice in this play, while also adding my own voice to help animate and adapt her work for the stage. But while my dialogue for Mary was largely drawn from her letters and journals, Percy's dialogue was necessarily selected from his entire literary oeuvre. Because the play centers on Mary imagining her husband's resurrection through his continuing literary legacy, I thought it was important to represent this sense of recurrence or return by having his words come back to her in crashing waves:

Percy: (*Reading from each page, to the audience*) **'Life and the world, or whatever we call that which we are and feel, is an astonishing thing. The mist of familiarity obscures from us the wonder of our being'** (*Reading the next page*) **'I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar'** (*Reading the next page*) **'To defy Power, which seems omnipotent; / To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates.'** (427)

¹³³ From her journal entry on March 19, 1815, which was written after the death of her first daughter in February 1815.

By collecting Percy's words into heaps and congeries during key moments, his lines in the play have become something of a Frankenstein's Creature unto themselves: stitched together from distinct textual sources, both fictional and nonfictional, and marred by the surgical scars of their intertextuality. Extending this same metaphor, my work exhuming the Shelleys' collective literary corpus and splicing their various texts together with my own original composition has made me into something of a Dr. Frankenstein in this project. However, once I had created these collections of quotations from the Shelleys' writing, the time inevitably came where I would need to adapt these words into theatrical dialogue and, to do so, I would have to introduce my own authorial voice into the script.

As I discussed earlier in this section, I initially wanted the story and dialogue for *Justified Sinners* to strictly emerge from the Shelleys' language, instead of me composing one based only on my reading of their lives and work. I described this initial approach in our August 30th talkback and explained how I initially thought the playwriting process would progress:

When I was initially writing this play, part of my lack of fear and the reservations that I should have had in having no experience was that I imagined myself more as how Mary positions herself as Percy's biographer...I thought this would be a curatorial effort more than a creative one, which is a great defense mechanism, to tell yourself that you are not 'writing,' just 'collecting.' So that's how I imagined it at the start...an effort to preserve and keep intact that original text, be it from letters or poems or journals (489)

However, as I soon realized, my cross-medium adaptation of the Shelleys' lives and writing would require me to adjust, alter, and re-frame these source texts so that they could work in a theatrical context. Furthermore, these disparate and disjointed quotations I pulled required my authorial intervention to make sense outside their original contexts and to be meaningfully

employed as part of this story. Consequently, after pulling quotations from the Shelleys writing and other primary sources that they could have referenced, such as Shakespeare's plays, I had to transition from considering my work as adaptation and to start thinking about the script from the perspective of a playwright.

Admittedly, the transition was not easy for me at first, and it took many stages in the subsequent script development process before I was willing to accept that my voice was necessary for the play, rather than an intrusion in the Shelleys' story. I came to realize that I needed to create a story out of the Shelleys' writing and that the adaptation process entailed my creative involvement with the project. In short, I realized that my initial belief that writing a Romantic Biodrama could be "a curatorial effort more than a creative one" was proven false in practice and the lesson informed my subsequent reading of other scripts and how they chose to adapt the Shelleys' lives and writing. In our August 30th talkback, I spoke further on this realization and acknowledged the lesson that I learned in trying to write my own script:

Part of that effort was to then find my own place and to collaborate with the Shelleys. To not only be just their biofictional biographer in this context, but to assert myself and have some sense of the dramatic by finding the moments where we could have a sense of slippage that allowed us to concede that we are viewing this performance as a twenty-first-century audience (489).

While I started writing *Justified Sinners* believing then that the best Romantic Biodrama would preserve and present the Shelleys lives through their own writing, I came to realize that although this genre of plays shares some similarities with Romantic biography at large, the need to create a working performance text demands assertive authorial intervention on the part of the playwright. Resultantly, I took the piles of quotations and references that I collected as part of

my research, but I was no longer bound to them as I created the dialogue for the script. As such, in the final performance draft of *Justified Sinners*, my own original text constitutes more of the language than the Shelleys' quoted lines. However, the fact that I employed their text and other referenced works as the basis for the script meant that Mary, Percy, and their remained as the basis of the script, despite my necessary involvement as the playwright. Consequently, in writing *Justified Sinners*, I became more comfortable employing these primary sources as my point of departure as I composed dialogue, established a dramatic arc, developed characterization, and, ultimately, created a theatrically-viable performance text that was grounded through research, yet still accessible for contemporary audiences.

Having started to learn this important lesson, which I revisited and refined throughout the script development process, I created a first draft of the script for *Justified Sinners* in October 2015. After that, I began the process of editing, revising, and developing the script for performance: a process that continued well into rehearsals. While I felt as though the play was ready for staging at that early point, it still had a long way before it would become the version used for our performance. Furthermore, the play's production was still nearly two years away at that point and the script had to undergo many important changes in the meantime. In the period between the play's conception in 2015 and its staging in 2017, I continued to work on it constantly, periodically making changes and adding new lines or ideas as they came to me. However, in addition to the work I did on the script itself, an important component of the writing and staging processes for *Justified Sinners* was the creation and maintenance of a digital resource that complemented my work on the play: StagingtheShelleys.com.

StagingTheShelleys.com

While I was initially conceiving of the idea behind *Justified Sinners*, I decided to document my writing and, hopefully, subsequent staging process that would follow. To that end, I made a website, StagingTheShelley.com¹³⁴, that would record and encapsulate the experience of creating a Romantic Biodrama. STS.com became an important repository for materials and insights relating to my writing process as a first-time playwright. Ultimately, my goal for this website was to offer a candid depiction of the creation process, with a specific emphasis on the creation of my play script, to better organize my ideas and help share them with others. It therefore operated as a repository for information and a laboratory for experimentation, not unlike the theatre itself. My own research has greatly benefitted from the insights and experiences of others and I hoped this website could of use to fellow students, dramaturgs, or desperately devoted Shelleyans. And so, I wanted this digital resource to not only serve as a record of my own research practices, but also become a useful tool for other theorists and practitioners interested in Romanticism, biographical theatre, literary celebrity, or performance-as-research.

As the writing, and later staging, process progressed, so too did STS.com as it continued to grow as an online resource and repository. I started populating the website with information relating to *Justified Sinners*, as well as my larger doctoral project, thus creating an interactive digital archive for research with which visitors could engage. First, the foundation of the website and the reason for its creation was my blog about writing and staging *Justified Sinners*. Located under the website's "Blogging the Shelleys" section, the blog became a place for me to discuss developments or setbacks as I negotiated the playwriting and production processes. In the two years between the play's initial conception in 2015 to its performance in 2017, I created twenty

¹³⁴ Hereafter referred to as STS.com

long-form posts that covered such topics as my complex feelings towards Percy Shelley and how they informed the writing process, my disappointment in losing out through the Fringe festival lotteries and fear the play would never be staged, and the sometimes emotionally-fraught process of editing and developing the script for performance. At the time, the blog became a process journal that held me accountable to the work and my resolution that I offer a “candid depiction” of my experience as a first-time playwright encouraged me to be honest and open with myself and my imagined readers. Now that the play has been written and staged, the blog entries can be read together as the story of writing and staging a Romantic Biodrama, told from a first-time playwright as she worked through both processes. As such, it has not only informed my subsequent composition of this chapter, but it also stands on its own as a first-hand practitioner’s account of staging the Shelleys.

In addition to the blog, STS.com also included a variety of other resources relating to *Justified Sinners* and Romantic Biodrama as a genre. For example, I created a “Resources” and “Play List” section, both of which were intended to provide context and further information for the website’s potential visitors. The “Resources” section contained recommended readings for those interested in learning more about the Shelleys. In my introduction to the section, I explained my rationale for including the list and acknowledged the broad field of Shelleyan studies, of which these texts were only a few examples:

The Shelleys have captured the imagination of playwrights, artists, novelists, and critics for the nearly two hundred years since they lived and wrote. My research into Romantic Biodrama and the couple’s contemporary biographical representations has required my engagement with the various responses, critiques, commentaries, and creative adaptations that the Shelleys have inspired over the years.

BLOGGING THE SHELLEYS



Percy and Mary Shelley,
as re-imagined on *Arthur*

Welcome to the Blog!

In each of the narrative entries featured here, I document the process of composing (and hopefully staging) my play, *Justified Sinners*. Click below and read on to hear about my experiences as an attempted playwright, learn even more about the Shelleys and Romanticism, or discover just how much *Frankenstein*-related decor I have in my apartment (*See also: My apartment*).

Romantic Biodrama Archive

A selection of other contemporary biographical plays about the Shelleys.



The Apology By Darrah Teitel

Production Company: Rabiayshna Productions (2011); Alberta Theatre Projects (2013)

Premiere Location: Toronto; Calgary

Venue: Factory Studio Theatre for Next Stage Theatre Festival; playRITES Festival of New Canadian Plays

Premiere Date: January 5th, 2011 - January 16th, 2011;

March 8 - April 6, 2013

Plot premise: *The Apology* employs the Shelley circle as a historical antecedent for contemporary sexual politics and gender issues by re-situating the group in the twenty-first century.

<https://www.playwrightsguild.ca/playwright/darrah-teitel>

The Birth of Frankenstein

By Adriano Sobretudo Jr., Matthew Thomas Walker,
and Claire Wynven

Production Company: Litmus Theatre

Premiere Location: Toronto

Venue: Parlour Room, Saint Luke's United Church

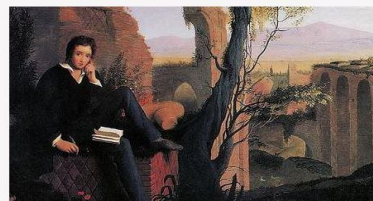
Premiere Date: October 23-November 3, 2013

Plot Premise: *The Birth of Frankenstein* calls forward the Shelleys' sniritis and subsequently recasts them as characters



Research Pack

As a production dramaturg for *Justified Sinners*, I created an information pack about the play and its historical subject matter for the creative team to consult. Check it out below to learn more about *Justified Sinners*, Romanticism, and the Shelleys!



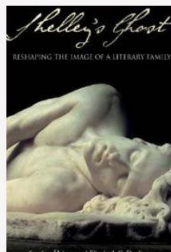
Joseph Severn's *Posthumous Portrait of Shelley Writing Prometheus Unbound* (1845)

Historical Context

Justified Sinners is a story about two renowned nineteenth-century writers and collaborators who were also husband and wife: Mary and Percy Bysshe Shelley.

A few key resources.

The Shelleys have captured the imagination of playwrights, artists, novelists, and critics for the nearly two hundred years since they lived and wrote. My research into Romantic Biodrama and the couple's contemporary biographical representation has required my engagement with the various responses, critiques, commentaries, and creative adaptations that the Shelleys have inspired over the years. Of those innumerable examples, here is a small sample of key resources that have informed my composition of *Justified Sinners* and might be of use or interest to anyone getting started on their own Romantic journey.

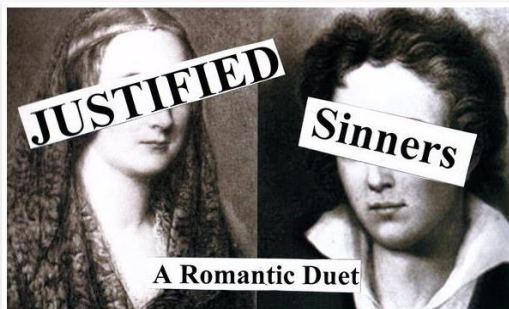


Shelley's Ghost: Reshaping the Image of a Literary Family Stephen Hebron and Elizabeth C. Denlinger

In *Shelley's Ghost*, the Bodleian Library's impressive "Shelley Manuscripts and Relic Collection" is showcased alongside illuminating narratives. Through stunning images of artifacts and accompanying critical commentaries, the history of the Shelley family is explored and their posthumous reputations are detailed. For my project research, I was fortunate enough to visit the Bodleian Library to consult their major holdings and this resource does an excellent job of both presenting the artifacts and creating a compelling narrative history of the family's members and their relationships. Ultimately, *Shelley's Ghost* emphasizes, and further contributes to, the process of visual mythmaking that has been associated with the Shelleyan legacy for nearly two centuries. This reliance on visual storytelling and the presentation of a family history through artifacts, images, and the words that were left behind all make *Shelley's Ghost* an indispensable resource for playwrights and researchers of Romantic Biodrama.

[Setting the Stage](#) | [The Blog](#) | [Dramaturgy](#) | [Performance](#) | [Inspiration Board](#) | [Resources](#) | [Play List](#)

STAGING THE SHELLEYS



A Romantic Proposal

Reid, Brittany. "Screenshots from StagingtheShelleys.com." StagingtheShelleys.com. 4 August 2015. Web. 25 September 2017.

As this explanatory excerpt here suggests, the resource section was designed to provide a stepping stone for readers interested in learning more about the Shelleys, their world, and their writing. Furthermore, while the list was by no means even representative of the texts available or the sources that informed my own understanding of the subject, I offered up these nine examples¹³⁵ and framed them through expository descriptions that highlighted why they were relevant to my project and could be of interest to others. For example, in discussing Charles E. Robinson's 2008 edition of *Frankenstein*, which included both Mary's earliest draft and Percy's revised draft, I explained how this edition influenced my conception and writing of *Justified Sinners*:

Since *Frankenstein's* anonymous publication in 1818, the identity of the novel's author has been the subject of much debate. However, despite continued interest in the text's authorship, the Bodleian manuscripts at Oxford and their digital iteration in The Shelley-Godwin Archive unequivocally demonstrate their distinct contributions, thus clarifying the authorial and editorial roles that Mary and Percy respectively played in the story's composition. Discussion of the Shelleys' shared contributions was recently reignited by Charles E. Robinson's 2008 edition of the novel, re-titled *The Original Frankenstein*, for which he granted Percy a co-writing credit based on his detailed revisions of the text.

Collaboration, editorial control, and the nature of the Shelleys' Romantic and literary

¹³⁵ The texts cited in the "Resources" section are: *Shelley's Ghost: Reshaping the Image of a Literary Family* (2011) by Stephen Hebron and Elizabeth C. Denlinger, *The Original Frankenstein* (2009) edited by Charles E. Robinson, *Young Romantics: The Shelleys, Byron, and Other Tangled Lives* (2010) by Daisy Hay, *The Romantics* (2006) written and directed by Peter Ackroyd, *Being Shelley: The Poet's Search for Himself* (2008) by Ann Wroe, *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer* (1996) by Richard Holmes, *Romantic Outlaws: The Extraordinary Lives of Mary Wollstonecraft & Mary Shelley* (2016), *Hideous Love: The Story of the Girl Who Wrote Frankenstein* (2013) by Stephanie Hemphill, and *The Godwins and the Shelleys: The Biography of a Family* (1989) by William St. Clair.

partnership emerge as dominant themes in *Justified Sinners* and Robinson's re-edition of the novel has helped to inform these exchanges in the play.

As this description of Robinson's edition of *Frankenstein* helps demonstrate, the "Resources" section on STS.com not only indicated possible texts and resources that could be of interest to potential readers, but also allowed me to articulate connections or influences between Shelleyan scholarship and my Romantic Biodrama.

This effort to provide background for the website's readers and to establish a creative context from which my play emerged also led to the creation of a "Play List" section. This section contained information about the title, author, company, production dates, theatre, geographical location, and plot premise of eleven contemporary Romantic Biodramas, as well as links to each company's website for more information. My intention in creating this "Play List" was to acknowledge the active tradition of Romantic Biodrama from which my own play emerged and to alert readers about the work that other dramatists had done to tell stories about the Shelleys' lives and writing. Again, although this list is not exhaustive and features eleven plays,¹³⁶ but I hoped that it would be useful point of entry and I indicated that I could be reached for more information or more exemplary performances. This section has already proven to be useful for readers, since I shared it with audience members, such as Professor Mark Smith from MacEwan University, he wanted to learn more about the genre and encounter other Romantic Biodramas.

¹³⁶ The plays cited in the "Play List" section are: Darrah Teitel's *The Apology* (2011;2013), Litmus Theatre's *Birth of Frankenstein* (2013), Rose Scollard's *Caves of Fancy* (1997), Pauline Carey's *Don't Talk to Me of Love* (2001), Ann Bertram's *Frankenstein Incarnate: The Passions of Mary Shelley* (2007), Helen Davis' *Frankenstein: The Year without a Summer* (2010), Emily Dendinger's *Hideous Progeny* (2010), Radiohole's *Inflatable Frankenstein* (2013), Helen Edmundson's *Mary Shelley* (2012), Jaffe, Atherton, and Hannock's *The Mary Shelley Opera* (2002), and Sally Beamish and Janice Galloway's *Monster: An Opera in Two Acts* (2002).

Beyond the Shelleys' obvious influence on both the form and content of *Justified Sinners*, my "Inspiration Board" on the website is an attempt to make explicit some of my many other sources of inspiration while writing this play. Although some links might seem self-explanatory, Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* gave me my play's title and is another story about doppelgänger relationships, my connections to Beckett's *Play*, Masters' *Spoon River Anthology*, or the final scene of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* might be less explicit. In composing my "Inspiration Board," I had considered glossing the images more thoroughly with descriptive entries that traced how these previous works have come to inform my own. But then again, that would be to assume that I was even entirely aware of how these various paintings, plays, films, stories, or other sources have influenced and inspired my writing. Instead then, I think it is best to pay homage to those many artists in the same way that I have attempted to pay tribute to the Shelleys: by counting myself among the many who have been influenced by their work. I therefore hope that, in addition to a love letter to the Shelleys and my own circle of collaborators, *Justified Sinners* became my own humble tribute to everything I have read, loved, and appreciated both before and throughout its composition.

Finally, STS.com also features resources relating to *Justified Sinners* performance, including production images, our poster, the production credits, and the resource pack I created through my work as a dramaturg on the production. Because the website was intended to document the process of writing and staging the play, these materials are crucially important to the story of the play-in-production. These sections of the website therefore represent the full realization of my vision for the play and these materials also offer important context and information about the production for future readers to consult.

Reflecting on the experience of creating and populating STS.com during the writing and staging processes, the website became an important component of my work on the play and allowed me to record my progress, acknowledge my sources of inspiration, and share my research findings with others. Most importantly, even though the play has been written and performed, I will continue to maintain and contribute to the website as a digital performance archive in the hope that it can help other students, dramatists, or researchers working with Romantic Biodrama.

Moving now from the process of initially writing *Justified Sinners* and how that was documented through my work on STS.com, I now open the circle to include other perspectives on the script itself and to account for how members of the creative team responded to the play as both its first readers and the individuals who first staged it.

Reading *Justified Sinners*

While in my previous case studies this section was devoted to my own critical engagement with each play text, my position as *Justified Sinners*' playwright necessitated a different approach in this chapter. Accordingly, I am here glossing responses to reading the script, which were provided by members of the creative team during the performance talkbacks. As the play's first readers, as well as the individuals responsibly for staging its premiere production, these individuals offer invaluable insight into the script at its current stage of development and their perspectives as practitioners help to frame *Justified Sinners* as a working performance text. In later sections I will expand on these responses to account for the creative team's various points-of-view regarding the production, but here I focus on their thoughts about the play itself and their impressions in reading it.

First, the production's director, Alexander Donovan discussed what first stood out to him when he read *Justified Sinners*. During our September 1st talkback, Donovan discussed what he took away from reading the play and what he imagined to be the central narrative of *Justified Sinners*. "It's very much, at the heart, a story of someone trying to come to terms with a person who they have lost, of death," he said, "and I think that is something that we all will unfortunately deal with at some point in our lives" (496). Building from this view of the play as the story of Mary working through Percy's death, he elaborated that "in reading it, I thought there was just an incredible story about 'what if you got the chance to get the answers from them?' and 'what that means?' and 'what kind of cathartic journey that requires?' and 'whether this is her just imagining that that happened or really happening to her?'" But although Donovan found these underlying questions in the play to be dramatically appealing, he conceded that the answers themselves were not as important, saying "it doesn't really matter, you can decide for yourselves." What was instead interesting to him was the specificity of Mary and Percy's characters, which he felt made the experience of watching Mary attempt to answer these questions compelling to read. Regarding the journey Mary takes to finding solace in *Justified Sinners*, Donovan explained that "there is something about that that is so human," and that, for him, there was something "so wonderfully specific with these two that I think is really incredible." Ultimately, he credited this sense of humanity, relatability, and specificity with grounding the characters and their struggles and making them more accessible for him as a reader. "I find stories become more powerful the more specific that they get because then you can start filling in the blanks," he explained. In the case of *Justified Sinners*, Donovan felt that these detailed depictions of Mary and Percy as dramatic characters and the attention to the particulars of their lives subsequently allowed him to "focus in on the story of these writers, and

their incredible lives, and the art that they made, and the real emotions that they faced, and the real hardships they went through,” which in turn made it so the play “really just resonated” for him (497). Donovan’s stated belief here that *Justified Sinners* told a relatable story, a person trying to work through the loss of a loved one, through specific and detailed characterization that brought the characters and their journeys to life suggests that although the historical subjects of the play lived and wrote nearly two hundred years ago, their story is still theatrically compelling and the attention to biographical detail in the play helped to enable this sense of relatability, rather than inhibit it.

Morgan Grau, who played Percy Shelley, also spoke to his perception of the play and similarly commented on how the detailed depictions of the Shelleys helped bring vitality and immediacy to their story. In the August 30th talkback, he said to the audience: “[Reid] has taken two real people that lived two hundred years ago. Taken their writing, all of their writing, years of writing, and tied their words not only to them and created three-dimensional people out of their poems, but also tied it to their relationship” (487). Here, Grau attributes the depiction of the Shelleys as “three-dimensional people” in *Justified Sinners* to the fact that their characterization in the play was “tied to their words.” For Grau, the fact that the Shelleys’ writing was both acknowledged and actively integrated into the script itself made him feel like the characters were more authentically reanimated through the play and its deep engagement with the text as a basis for characterization. He elaborated that “it’s easy to read a poem and to be done with it, but she added such a depth to all those words and what that meant to them, not only as people but to them as a couple and that’s insane. Think of another play that does that, it’s amazing.” Finally, Grau reiterated that the play, in a relatively short amount of time, successfully presented wholly-developed dramatic characters that were possible through the script’s investment in exploring the

Shelleys' lives through their writings. "This was an hour and fifteen minutes," he said, "just think about the amount of history that you learned about two people. I don't know that much about anyone" (487-88). Later elaborating on this idea in an interview, Grau asserted "I think this play paints the portraits of the Shelleys with a much finer brush than most interpretations I've ever read/seen" and suggested that "this play gives an in to many potential readers of the Shelleys' work in a way that not only modernizes their possibly daunting mastery of language, but does so in a way that could, in my opinion, stand the test of time."

Jessy Ardern, who played Mary Shelley in our production, also spoke about her impressions from reading the play. Ardern's discussion of the script accounted for the critical work and authorial interventions that she observed as both a reader and playwright herself. First, in the August 30th talkback, she explained how her research into the subject gave her insight into the curatorial and interpretive work that I had done as the playwright. "What I came to really love about it was that the more I read, the more I understood that Brittany has done an incredible amount of research," she said, "but she has also made some decisions about how she is going to interpret material" (487). Ardern's assessment here sheds light on my role as playwright and what it entailed for me in writing *Justified Sinners*. In creating this play, I not only had to research the Shelleys' lives and writing, but also make concrete decisions regarding what material to include or omit, possible authorial intention, or unresolved mysteries from the Shelleys' lives. As a result, although I tried to bring the Shelleys' own voices to the forefront, the play, its characters, and the events within it were inevitable informed by own interpretation, editorialization, or artistic interests. While I had, in the past, read Romantic Biodramas and held them to the same standards of historical fidelity as other documentary records, my own hands-on experience as a playwright revealed to me that choices, and even slight distortions or

obfuscations, could become necessary to facilitate the dramatic structure of the play. Accordingly, as Ardern rightly observed in the talkback, it became necessary for me to acknowledge my own agency in the play and to admit that strict re-creation was not only impossible, given the expected gaps in the historical record, but undesirable in a play that was already eschewing strict realism by reanimating Percy from the dead. Similarly, rather than view this interpretive role as a detraction on the overall quality of the play, Ardern asserted that her awareness that my own reading was one of “three or four different interpretations” that she had encountered through her own preliminary research was “exhilarating,” and indicated to her “that we were in the hands of a writer who had done all that research and made some really intelligent choices in interpreting it” (487).

In the August 30th talkback, Ardern also discussed the mix of contemporary and nineteenth-century language in the play and how it made sense to her as a reader. Commenting on the mix of contractions, colloquialisms, and verse that comprised the text, Ardern observed “I think it’s also an interesting reminder of how ahead of their time they were...I like the language because I think it’s a nice reminder that these were people who were living ahead of their time in a lot of ways” (490). Ardern observed that the language of *Justified Sinners*, and its blend of contemporary and historical speech, registered to her as a meaningful way of communicating the modernity of the Shelleys and the fact that they were “living ahead of their time in a lot of ways.” In adapting and writing the script, I intentionally set out to temper and contrast the formal rigidity of the verse lines from Percy’s poetry with speech patterns and structures that would feel natural and spontaneous for contemporary actors and audiences. I attempted to integrate these two styles so that the poetry and prose adapted from the Shelleys could be framed and punctuated in such a way that it would make sense for the characters to say the lines to each

other. Accordingly, I pulled in language from the Shelleys' less formal writing, such as their journals and letters, and brought it together with lines from both their fiction and my own composition to create a blended form that derived from their words, but was adapted for the purposes of performance and with an eye to contemporary actors and audiences.

Lastly, Ardern commented on the balance between critiquing and celebrating the Shelleys that she perceived in reading *Justified Sinners*. In the September 1st talkback, she explained “I think we live in a time where we are not allowed to have historical heroes, which in many ways I think is a healthy thing. We don't have Romantic heroes the same way that Percy Shelley was held up with his beautiful marble statues of him” (497). But while Ardern accounted for an apparent distaste for “historical heroes” and “Romantic heroes” at present, she observed a balanced approach between critical engagement and respectful acknowledgement of the historical subjects of *Justified Sinners*: “one of the things that I think is important about this play, that I really appreciate about it, is that it takes all that important stuff about trying to be clear-eyed about our heroes, and trying to be clear-eyed about their flaws, and trying to understand where they were coming from while also having a really beautiful respect for them as people and as artists” (497). This observation that *Justified Sinners* was an attempt to both problematize and laud different aspects of the Shelleys' lives and writing gets to the heart of the double-maneuver that I hoped to accomplish through this play. While the Shelleys are my favourite writers, they are far from flawless and I attempted to present a realistic depiction of them that emerged from their writing and laid bare both their strengths and weaknesses for the audience to consider. Ardern continued her assessment of the play's underlying celebratory impulse, observing that “that is something that I really think is missing in a lot of plays as we desperately try to bring them down to a very understandable level that we can break apart” (497). Describing how she

saw the balance between critiquing and honouring the Shelleys playing out in *Justified Sinners*, she concluded that “I think this is a great balance between understanding the need to do that, the need to see people as people and flawed, but also being so generous and respectful towards what made them beautiful people in the first place” (497).

The final reader from the creative team is Professor Stefano Muneroni: the production’s co-dramaturg, faculty researcher, and member of my supervisory committee. In the September 1st talkback, Muneroni said that “as dramaturgs, we always ask the question ‘why this play now?’ but I can find at least a dozen reasons why this play is relevant and essential today” (496). Later in that talkback, offered insight into his own reading of the play and how he perceived it to be a recovery effort that both memorialized and resurrected the Shelleys’ presences. “I found it really beautiful that we get to hear Mary’s point of view and sorrow and pain and we really get a clear picture of what she might have felt about her husband,” he said (497). Building on this observation that Mary’s story is clearly focalized in *Justified Sinners*, Muneroni further acknowledged that the play also brings Percy back from the dead, both literally and symbolically. Muneroni explained that “in a way, ironically, I think the play also re-places Shelley in the foreground because we know everything about Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, not so much Shelley... Besides ‘To a Skylark’ and ‘Ode to the West Wind’ I don’t know that many people casually know the body of Shelley’s work. But we all know *Frankenstein*” (497). Muneroni’s observation of Mary’s current primacy in the cultural consciousness is essential to *Justified Sinners*’ compositional context and key to understanding how it speaks to its own moment. As the introduction to this project chronicled, academic and popular interest in *Frankenstein* and Mary Shelley only emerged in the mid-twentieth century, but ever since Mary has eclipsed her husband as the more widely known, read, and dramatized of the two writers.

Consequently, audiences and readers are more broadly familiar with Mary than Percy and so her role in the play as her husband's resurrector and biographer has greater resonance in our time than it would have had in the nineteenth century when Percy was still more famous and culturally renowned. Resultantly, Muneroni's assertion that Mary not only tells her own story in *Justified Sinners*, but re-introduces her husband to the audience, thus reinvigorating his legacy, is an important double-maneuver in the play that is made possible through an understanding of our persisting cultural interest in Mary Shelley and her *Frankenstein*.

Muneroni reiterated the effect of Percy's resurrection, both figurally within the play and symbolically through reacquainting him with the audience through Mary: "so there is that interesting perspective to the whole play that kind of repositions and gives agency to Mary, who was of course the preserver of Shelley's legacy, but at the same time...he is not dead and buried." Accordingly, in *Justified Sinners*, Mary's role as her husband's editor, biographer, and "keeper of the Shelley flame" is doubly enacted through her preservation of his legacy in *The Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, which she completes in the course of the narrative, and her re-introduction of her husband's spirit to audience through her role as Percy's mediator and medium. Finally, in his discussion of the play in the August 31st talkback, Muneroni commented on the effect of this resurrection that allows Mary to tell her story while also bringing Percy back to life, both for her and the audience. Muneroni connected his reading of *Justified Sinners* and its efforts to bring the Shelleys back to life to Percy's epitaph, which was taken from *The Tempest* and quoted at the end of the play: "Nothing of him that doth fade, but doth suffer a sea-change into something rich and strange."¹³⁷ He observed that, "in a

¹³⁷ Percy's grave in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome was marked by a stone etched with two epitaphs: "Cor Cordium" or "Heart of hearts" in Latin and "Nothing of him that doth fade, but

way, your play is like a letter back to the Shelleys, giving them a chance to work out their traumas and transform them into something beautiful, as your play is” (493).

Considered together, these excerpts from the responses of the creative team during our performance talkbacks offer key insight into how the play was read by some of the first individuals who staged it. As such, this record offers meaningful insight into its reader-response and draws attention to emergent themes or shared commonalities that emerge, such as the play’s attention to detailed characterization, its emphasis on the Shelleys’ writing as a basis for character development and dialogue, and, overall, its attempt to critique, memorialize, or even resurrect its historical subjects. Consequently, these first readings of the script represent an important stage in the play’s development and as I continue documenting the play’s journey from page to stage, these themes will reoccur in the script’s development, the production design, and the subsequent response to the performance. But before I can discuss the specific elements of the production, I must first account for the crucial steps that initiated the staging process and started the play’s evolution from a closet drama to a working performance text.

Justified Sinners: From Page to Stage

“I like to define this project as a serendipitous occasion” (Muneroni 495).

This play began as a simple experiment in Romantic Biodrama, in which I was attempting to apply my research work to writing a play about the Shelleys. It therefore began as a modest proposal that did not have to amount to more than just a draft of an attempt. But as I came to love my little play, and my supervisory committee continued to kindly support my creative venture, I began to envision a brighter future for my one-act play: one where I could see

doth suffer a sea-change into something rich and strange.” The latter became a recurring theme in the play and is jointly spoken by both Shelleys prior to Percy’s exit at the end of the play.

it in action and participate in staging it. Accordingly, after I completed a working draft of *Justified Sinners*, I set out to try and find an opportunity to stage it. My supervisor, Professor Gary Kelly, had encouraged me early in the writing process that finding an opportunity to stage the play would be essential to its development and would allow me to discuss its composition and performance together as part of this doctoral project. Consequently, I began pursuing possible opportunities, such as entering my name, under the company name “Romantic Acts,” in the Calgary and Edmonton Fringe Festival lotteries in both 2015 and 2016. In all four cases, luck was not on my side and I was on the waitlist all four times. Looking back now that my play has been staged, this turned out to be a blessing, since my acceptance to the fringe festival would have entailed assembling my own production team and conscripting family and friends to stage the play with me. In addition to entering those Fringe lotteries, I also submitted my script for consideration to the 2017 Suncor Stage One Festival of New Work at Lunchbox Theatre in Calgary and the 2017 New Works Festival at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. Although neither opportunity worked out, I remained optimistic about the possibility of staging the play and continued searching new opportunities. At the same time, I was in contact with Professor Stefano Muneroni, an Associate Professor in the Department of Drama and a member of my supervisory committee, about possible venues for staging *Justified Sinners*. We discussed the possibility of performing the play as part of StageLab, a summer festival sponsored by the Department of Drama and aimed at featuring faculty research. But unfortunately, due to budgetary limitations, the festival moved to a biennial format beginning in 2016 and would not be held again until 2018. Confronting dwindling opportunities for performing the play without funding, and acknowledging that *Justified Sinners* was a new script and still in the early stages of development, Muneroni and I decided that a staged reading would likely be the best format.

However, although we had resolved that a staged reading could be a fair compromise, given the lack of financial backing and the fact that the script had not been workshopped, the play's journey from page to stage was radically altered during my annual meeting with my supervisory committee in March 2017. During our conversation about my progress on the dissertation, talk turned to my draft of *Justified Sinners* and our plans for it. While discussing the script and our intention to hold a staged reading, my supervisory, Professor Kelly, and my second reader, Professor Patricia Demers, suggested that a full production of the play would be highly beneficial to me and my discussion of Romantic Biodrama. Consequently, to enable its staging, they offered their cooperative financial support of the production. Reflecting in the August 30th talkback about how Professors Kelly and Demers financial contribution altered the course of *Justified Sinners*' development, Muneroni explained "we thought we could do a staged reading but then, talking about the serendipitous nature of the project, we started thinking that we have some money now and we can do something with it" (484). Having received a generous offer of financial assistance to put on a full production of the play, the staging process quickly began, and we started to adapt the play for performance, assemble the creative team, and secure the performance location, all tasks that Muneroni played a key role in executing. As a result, by June 1st, Muneroni had secured the performance space, our director, and the cast. After two years of working on *Justified Sinners* and imagining it being staged, the process of adapting the play from page to stage could now begin.

The following section illuminates the process of bringing together the student, alumni, and faculty from across the Departments of Drama and English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta. In it, I account for the many individuals who comprised the creative team

and made this production possible and describe the process of bringing them together for this project.

Assembling the Team

In the talkback after our opening performance on August 30th, I discussed some of the crucial elements that had made it possible to bring the play to life on stage and explained that the success of the production could be attributed to the collective efforts of our outstanding creative team:

If you are writing a Romantic Biodrama, have the best team in the world. Have whip-smart actors who are writers...who know the language, who can make your crazy, adapted text from the Shelleys' works makes sense for audiences, who are stunning on stage and have a beautiful chemistry between them. Have an amazing designer who creates a dream set for your actors to work in. Have the best stage manager that anyone could ever ask for. Have a dream team of people and life becomes very easy. (485)

What I knew then, but could have only guessed before the staging process began, was that the staging of *Justified Sinners* was only made possible through a confluence of circumstance, fortune, and exceptional individuals who came together to adapt the play from page to stage. The production would not have been possible without the creative team; each member was integral to the success of the project and helped transform this play into a collaborative creation.

First, as the preceding section discussed, this play and its staging depended entirely on the support of my supervisory committee. Their active support and generous involvement not only allowed me to initially write the script that would become *Justified Sinners*, but their direct intervention enabled the staging of the play. As I already noted in the previous section, Professors Gary Kelly and Patricia Demers generously provided financial support for the

production and I will further elucidate the significance and impact of their contributions in the next section. Additionally, Professor Stefano Muneroni from the Department of Drama was actively involved in the development and staging processes from the project's beginning and continued to be involved through the performance. Speaking to how he got involved with the project in the August 30th talkback, Muneroni explained "I had Brittany in my class in Drama 608, from Aristotle to Artaud, which covered a lot of ground. And then she asked me to join the supervisory committee" (484). In addition to his roles as a member of my supervisory committee, Muneroni was integral to *Justified Sinners*' staging by supporting and advising on script development, working with me as co-dramaturg, attending and assisting in rehearsals, facilitating our nightly talkbacks, and even volunteering to manage our box office. Furthermore, his involvement with the project was crucial to the securing of the theatre itself and other key resources through the Department of Drama, which I will further expand upon in the next section and my discussion of the production context. Finally, Muneroni also got the production's director involved with the project, who joined myself and my supervisory committee members to form the early basis of the production team.

The production's director was Alexander Donovan, who was entering his second year of the MFA in Directing program at the time of the production. In my interview with Donovan following the production, he began by discussing how he got involved with the project. He noted that he "got involved with the production through Dr. Stefano Muneroni" and that, "as I am in my MFA in Directing, I was working on a production of *Copenhagen* by Michael Frayn in the Winter Term and Stefano was asked to do a critique of my work on the production." Elaborating on the influence of his work with Muneroni, Donovan explained that, "through those discussions, and my time working with him for a Graduate Research Assistantship, we struck up a friendship

and found that we shared similar views on the theatre.” From these discussions and professional experiences, Donovan noted that Muneroni “asked if I’d be interested in the production and, being an eager, young director, I jumped at the opportunity. When asked whether he was familiar with the Shelleys, their circle, or their writing before becoming involved in *Justified Sinners*, Donovan began by noting that “my mother is a high school English teacher so I faintly knew of Lord Byron and Percy Shelley. He elaborated that he “knew Percy better than Byron thanks to his poem ‘Ozymandias,’” but conceded that “besides that poem, I only knew of the two of them faintly but had perhaps studied them in high school.” Donovan noted that he was most familiar with Mary Shelley, since he had “assistant directed a professional production of *Frankenstein* for Theatre New Brunswick.”

Mary Shelley was played by Jessy Ardern, a graduate of the BFA in Acting class of 2016 at the University of Alberta. Explaining how she got involved with *Justified Sinners* in our interview, Ardern disclosed that she had worked with Donovan on a previous project and that “he approached me and asked if I would be interested in performing in this production.” Addressing whether she was familiar with the Shelleys, their circle, and their writing before becoming involved with *Justified Sinners*, Ardern said that she was “only familiar with the basics of who the Shelleys were.” She elaborated that she knew Percy “was a Romantic poet,” that Mary “was the writer of *Frankenstein*,” and that the two “had a relationship with Byron,” but she conceded that the “intricacies of their relationship were entirely unknown to me.”

Morgan Grau, who also graduated from the BFA in Acting class of 2016, played Percy Shelley. In my later interview with Grau, he began by explaining how he got involved with *Justified Sinners*. Like many of the other individuals involved with the project, Grau was introduced to *Justified Sinners* through Donovan: “director Alexander Donovan approached me.”

He elaborated that he and Donovan “had worked together this past spring in one of his graduate student projects, which was also a bio-drama.” Speaking to his familiarity with the Shelleys, their circle, and their writing in advance of *Justified Sinners*, Grau explained in our interview that he was “was mildly familiar with the Shelleys.” He further noted that he had “seen a production of the bio-drama *Bloody Poetry* at the U of A[Alberta] a few years ago,” that he “read Percy Shelley’s ‘Ozymandias’ (and some analyses of it),” and that he also “read *Frankenstein* in my youth” while participating in “a week-long theatre summer camp that examined the Jonathan Christensen musical based on the story.”

Sarah Karpyshin, a design student in the Department of Drama, joined the project as the set, lighting, and costume designer. Karpyshin recalled that she initially had reservations about participating in the project: “from the beginning I was hesitant, since I was working a full-time retail job.” But although her schedule at the time “did not lend itself to theater hours,” she was convinced to join by Donovan’s suggestion that the show would depend more on pulling and collecting production elements, than requiring Karpyshin to create costumes, props, and a set from scratch. She explained that Donovan “mentioned how it was mostly a pull show with a few sculptural elements, potentially. So I was in.” Discussing her familiarity with the Shelleys coming into the project, Karpyshin disclosed that she “wasn’t familiar with their writing styles” and although she confessed that she has not read *Frankenstein*, she said “I do want to! Now more than ever.”

Kelsi Kalmer, another student in the Department of Drama, was brought on as the poster designer and production photographer. Kalmer also identified Donovan as the reason for her involvement with the production. “I was familiar with the Shelleys beforehand,” she said, “although not in detail.” Kalmer was familiar with *Frankenstein* before the project, “due to its

saturation in pop culture.” She recalled reading “a couple of Percy Shelley’s poems” and credited her knowledge of the poet’s name to “English classes.” Significantly, Kalmer previously worked for Alberta Theatre Projects during their 2012/2013 season, during which they staged *The Apology*. She acknowledged the influence of that play-in-performance on her understanding of the Shelley circle, noting that “by working on that season, and seeing the show, some basics about the Shelley’s lives became familiar to me, and cemented their relevance in my memory.” Finally, Kalmer had also seen an earlier draft of the script for *Justified Sinners* last year, which she felt was “which was a very informative for when I needed to approach the work on the current version” that further contributed to her impression of the Shelleys” going into the production.

Rounding out the creative team was BFA in Stage Management student Roxanne Côté, who came on as the production’s stage manager. Finally, Department of Drama student Chris Pereira provided sound and music for Donovan to select from and edit for the production’s sound design. Once the team was assembled, the production process could begin in earnest and I could return to the script, with an eye to staging. However, before the play could open at the end of August, a lot of work would need to be done to ensure that the script was a working performance text, the creative team was acquainted with the subject matter, and we would have a space, set, costumes, light, and sound. There were also the tasks of blocking and rehearsing the play, getting the actor’s comfortable with the language and off-book, and securing an audience before the beginning of the school year. The following sections therefore elucidate the staging process for *Justified Sinners* by unpacking the production context, script development and dramaturgical processes, rehearsals, design, and promotion that led to the play’s performance.

Setting the Stage: Production Context

As with my preceding case studies of Romantic Biodramas, it is necessary to account for *Justified Sinners*' production context¹³⁸ and the material conditions associated with its staging. By outlining the budget, performance spaces, and other key features, we can better understand how the production came about and consider it through the practical realities associated with its staging. Muneroni asserted in the August 31st talkback that this project was “truly a collaboration between Drama and English and Film Studies” and this section unpacks how that collaboration came together to make this production possible (491).

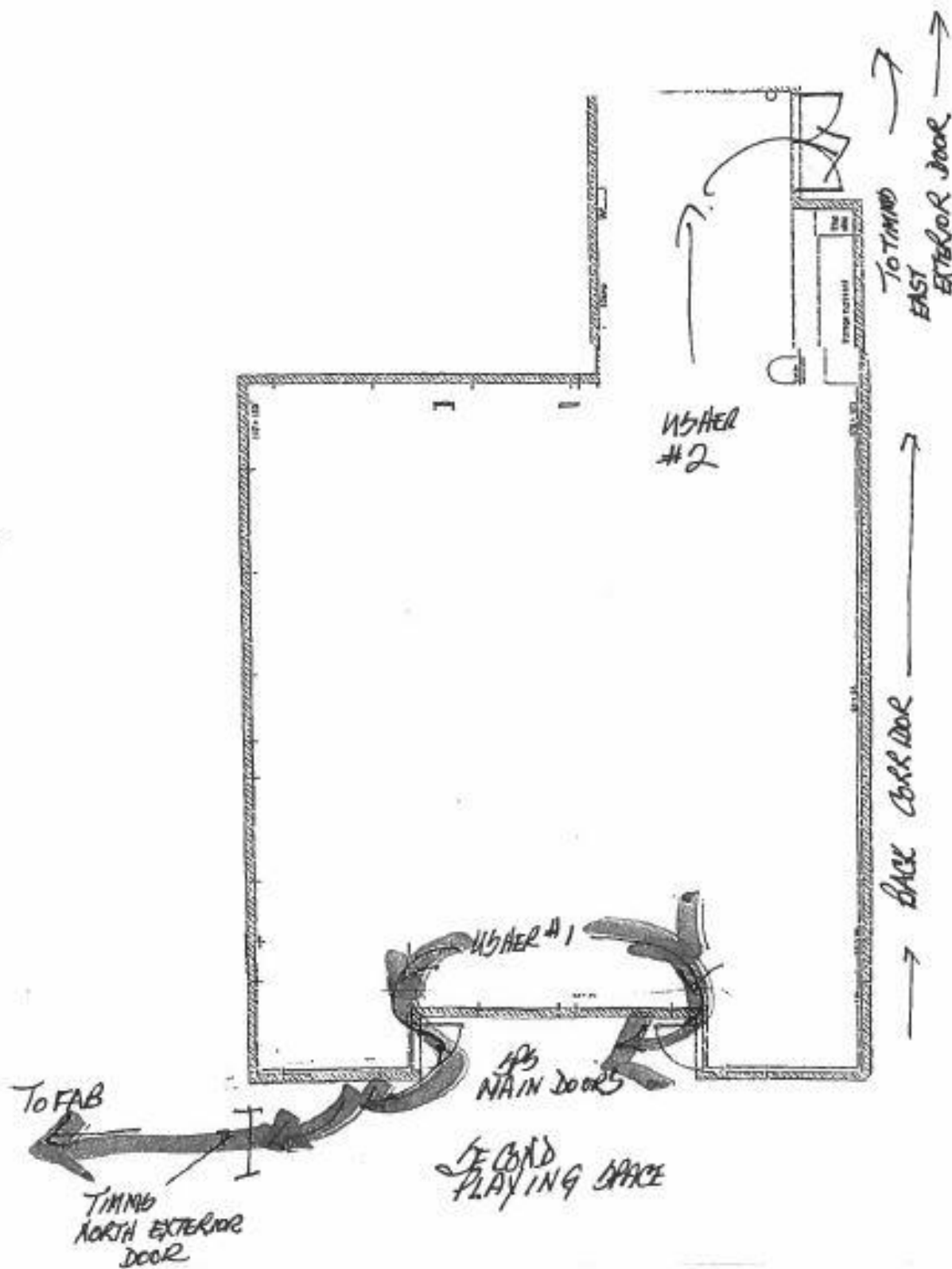
To begin, the funding from Professors Kelly and Demers played an essential role in making the performance possible. Their shared contribution of seven thousand dollars for the production budget jumpstarted the staging process and gave us the money needed to cover essential expenses. As a note of thanks in the playbill read, “this production was made possible thanks to the generous patronage of Dr. Gary Kelly and Dr. Patricia Demers of the English and Film Studies Department” and the money they provided went towards compensating the creative team and covering a variety of costs associated with the production. For example, later speaking on the impact of production budget on facilitating design elements, Donovan similarly observed that it “proved very useful in transforming the space.”

In addition to covering additional production costs, such as set piece construction and posters, most of the production budget was allocated to financially compensating the director, actors, stage manager, designer, and poster artist/ production photographer. Although providing

¹³⁸ The play was produced in association with Donovan's production company: Imaginary Circumstances Theatre, which he co-founded in 2013. The company went on hiatus in 2015 and returned in its latest incarnation with this production of *Justified Sinners* in 2017. Although the production's association with Imaginary Circumstances did not affect its material realities, it is important to acknowledge this relationship as part of its staging history.

payment to the creative team might seem like a nonnegotiable expense rather than a luxury, our ability to pay the student- and alumni-artists was a major boon and a marked departure from many university productions that must rely on volunteer participation. Furthermore, beyond receiving nominal honorariums for their work, the team members received payment commensurate with their workload over the two-week rehearsal period, which further distinguishes our staging process from production's like *The Apology*'s 2011 fringe run. In the talkback after the August 30th performance, Donovan candidly elaborated on how he got involved with the project, describing it as a "whirlwind of fortune" (485). He further discussed how the production's budget and the money allocated to paying the creative team piqued his initial interest in the project: "well, I will be frankly honest. The first thing that got me interested was when you said, 'do you want to direct a play it has a budget' and I said, 'I'm going to get paid, let's do it'" (485). As Donovan's response here suggests, the material realities of the production, and the relative freedom that the budget and institutional supports offered us, made it possible to both attract and reward student-artists for their labour. Having the ability to pay the team meant that the production could benefit from the best individuals available, while also supporting students and recent alumni from the Department of Drama.

Second, in addition to the immense help provided by Professors Kelly and Demers, Professor Muneroni and the Department of Drama were instrumental in providing key production elements, including the performance space. As the production playbill explains, "rehearsal space, venue, costuming props and technical support graciously provided by the Department of Drama and with the help of Dr. Stefano Muneroni." Professor Muneroni's involvement with, and advocacy for, the project meant that we benefitted from many of the department's resources, spaces, and personnel without having to expend our production budget.



“Floor Plan for the Second Playing Space in the Timms Centre for Performing Arts at the University of Alberta,” 2017, Edmonton. Used with Permission from David Prestley.

As Muneroni explained in the August 30th, “Drama offered all of the resources, I offered myself as a dramaturg, and so we put it all together and we produced this play” (484). The ability to utilize the department’s many resources profoundly affected the staging process. From allowing us to rehearse in the performance space, to giving us the ability to pull props and costumes from their collection, to offering the services and expertise of department personnel, the production was meaningfully enhanced through these supports. “We never would have been able to do the show without the help of the university to the extent that we did it,” Donovan asserted. He elaborated that “having access to a rehearsal space, costuming, props and lighting really helped to elevate the piece.” Designer Sarah Karpyshin spoke to the importance of the department’s support to her work on the show. Working from Donovan’s initial promise that the production would be a “pull show” that would not require her to create the design from scratch, Karpyshin “went in with a plan for indie theater” that relied heavily on the ability to borrow elements from the department. “I was hoping I was going to be able to rent from the University,” Karpyshin said. “Luckily, I was allowed, and they charged the renting costs to the department, since it was a research project. So that saved a lot of money.” As Karpyshin’s description helps demonstrate, the design for *Justified Sinners* hinged on these foundational departmental supports, which were arranged and facilitated by Professor Muneroni.

Perhaps most importantly, the Department of Drama provided the production with a theatre for the performance, which doubled as our rehearsal space.¹³⁹ *Justified Sinners* was

¹³⁹ Further to the discussion of the play’s production context, it is also necessary to account for the location of the play’s staging and the impact of performing *Justified Sinners* in a Canadian university setting, which I further elucidate on in the dissertation’s introduction. In writing *Justified Sinners*, I was cognizant of the fact that the play was being written, and potentially staged, in a Canadian context.

staged in the Second Playing Space in the Timms Centre for the Arts at the University of Alberta.¹⁴⁰ It is important to stress here how beneficial it was for us to stage the production in the Second Playing Space and how our use of the theatre enhanced and informed the resulting play-in-performance. Staging the play at the University of Alberta, in the Timms Centre for the Arts where the Department of Drama's mainstage and Studio Theatre seasons are also produced, meant that we benefitted from having our production centrally-located on campus and situated within the primary performing arts centre on campus. The Second Playing Space¹⁴¹ is a versatile black-box theatre that provided an array of staging opportunities for our production. Importantly, the theatre is fully equipped with a comprehensive theatrical lighting and sound system, both of which we were permitted to use for our production. The theatre's advanced technical capabilities meaningfully enhanced our production by allowing Karpyshev's lighting design and Donovan and Pereira's sound design to be fully realized in the space.

The spacious theatre is fifty feet by forty-five feet wide and features twenty-foot-high ceilings and a full grid that we used to hang currents and establish our playing space. Furthermore, because the SPS allows for a variety of staging configurations, we could adapt the space to our needs by creating performance and viewing areas that worked best for our production. Our director decided to use the theatre's flexibility to create a corner stage arrangement,¹⁴² with the audience in an L-shaped configuration around the playing space. This

¹⁴⁰ The play's staging at the University of Alberta, even though it was outside the school year or the main performance season, again had bearing on both the conditions of production and the lens through which it was subsequently perceived. Like *Caves of Fancy*, which was similarly staged at a university outside the school year, the audience and expectations associated with the performance were similarly influenced by this specific production context.

¹⁴¹ Hereafter referred to as "the SPS."

¹⁴² Early in the process, Donovan considered staging the play in the round. However, he altered his plan to accommodate the set design, which featured a sculptural collection of books that he

configuration was an important decision in the staging process that reflected Donovan's desire to create an intimate playing space, despite the large size of the SPS. By employing a corner stage arrangement and wrapping the five rows of audience members around the stage, Donovan used the black-box theatre's flexibility to create an intimate performance experience. Furthermore, by including only five rows of seating in the viewing space and employing an L-shaped arrangement around the stage, Donovan further enhanced the sense of physical closeness between the actors and audience. In my later discussion of the production design, the impact of staging the play in the SPS will be further emphasized and explored, but it is necessary to acknowledge the theatre as a crucial element of the play's production context and to again reiterate that our use of this facility was only made possible through Muneroni's involvement and department's support of the project.

As this section has explored, *Justified Sinners* was made possible through supports provided by my supervisory committee, in association with the Department of Drama. Their financial and personal advocacy enabled the production to happen and their involvement is therefore essential to the story of this play-in-performance. Furthermore, the play's staging at the Second Playing Space at the Timms Centre for the Arts made us accessible to a larger audience and our ability to rehearse in the space was immensely helpful during our abbreviated rehearsal process. Having now established the production context for *Justified Sinners*, I now delve into the staging process itself, beginning with the script development process.

Staging *Justified Sinners*

Script Development

and Karpyschin wanted to place upstage behind Mary's desk that would also serve as Percy's entry point. The production's design is later discussed in the "Designing *Justified Sinners*" section

The formal staging process for *Justified Sinners* began the day after my Spring 2017 supervisory committee meeting when I met with Professor Muneroni to discuss the script, during which we talked about how I could think about adapting my current play draft into a working performance text. that we could use for performance. Professor Muneroni's insights were invaluable at this point in the process and he provided the first feedback on the script. In our August 30th talkback, I talked about the important role that he played in the script's development, saying "Stefano has been so phenomenal in giving me script support and bringing the dramaturgical basis and helping me develop this idea" (485). Working from the feedback I received in this meeting, I began been revising the script and reframing it with a renewed focus on how it could work onstage and on showing, rather than telling. This entailed re-working some components of the play to bring a greater sense of immediacy and to flesh out the relationship between the Shelleys. More specifically, this has entailed adapting some of the script's descriptive passages into acted-out memory scenes, as well as paying attention to what the characters are physically doing onstage at a given moment. Speaking again about the process in our August 30th talkback, I explained how the memory scenes emerged out of my first conversation with Professor Muneroni and how they became an integral to depicting the idealized Romantic love the Shelleys' shared:

That's something Stefano and I talked about very early, to have this perfect image of their love, this rose-coloured version that we talked about. For those memories, I wanted to have more colloquial language and some more relaxed or contemporary phrasing or moments so that there could be that kind of disjuncture consciously kept in there. (489)

Based on these formative discussions, I created a new draft of the play that added two memory scenes between the Shelleys: one that showed them meeting for the first time and one that

showed them confessing their love to each other. Overall, I worked to revise the script with the intention of making it more kinetic, the action more immediate, and removing textual description wherever stage direction could more effectively communicate meaning. I completed this draft of the play at the start of May and this was the version that Donovan first read.

In late June, I met with some members of the creative team for a preliminary production meeting in Edmonton that included the director, stage manager, and actors. Getting the chance to talk to the people who would be involved in staging the play was a real thrill for me.

Additionally, through my conversations with him and meeting the cast, I was given ideas and inspiration for how I could continue developing the script with an eye to its staging. As a result, I returned to the play to make some edits and revisions. In our August 30th talkback, I discussed how this meeting marked another important step in the script's continuing development process: "I was able to meet up with this stellar creative team and Alexander really became my partner in crime in terms of developing this text into something that we were both proud of. I hope I can speak for him, but it became a labor of love, I think for both of us" (485). During this meeting, Donovan offered his suggestions on the script and gave me advice on what he thought would make it a more dynamic performance text. Reflecting on the script's development, Donovan described the process as "very rigorous" and he explained that "it began with Stefano offering feedback, then after the revisions were made I met with Brittany and we discussed the broad points of the story." While my lack of experience in playwriting made me initially uneasy about the suggestions, mistaking his advice as an acknowledgement of my shortcomings, I soon realized that they were given in the spirit of collaboration, rather than critique. I became open and excited about returning to the script with his feedback in mind.

In looking over the script again, the points he made became exceedingly clear to me too. For example, at that point in the script's development, Mary's overall character arc was still left unclear and my initial decision to bold the text adapted from the Shelleys' journals impeded the fluidity of the language. Furthermore, because I had initially written the play without a concrete production, audience, or actors in mind, I had lost a sense of how certain moments could be performed, the beats of each scene, and which passages were repetitive. I could see for myself now that all that was true and that there were many other things I wanted to reimagine now that I knew it would be a performance text and not a closet drama. I started to implement the changes Donovan suggested and worked to make the script much stronger in the process. More importantly, as I worked through these questions and flagged passages, I made even more qualitative changes that refined the story and I continued to explore the poetry of the Shelleys' words. In time, I really did come to love the script more and I became prouder of it with each new draft. After I worked through these changes, I submitted the next draft to Donovan in the middle of July and that version was distributed to the team, along with the research pack, shortly thereafter. That version of the play from early July was not the last iteration of the script, but I am glad the team first read it at that later stage in its development.

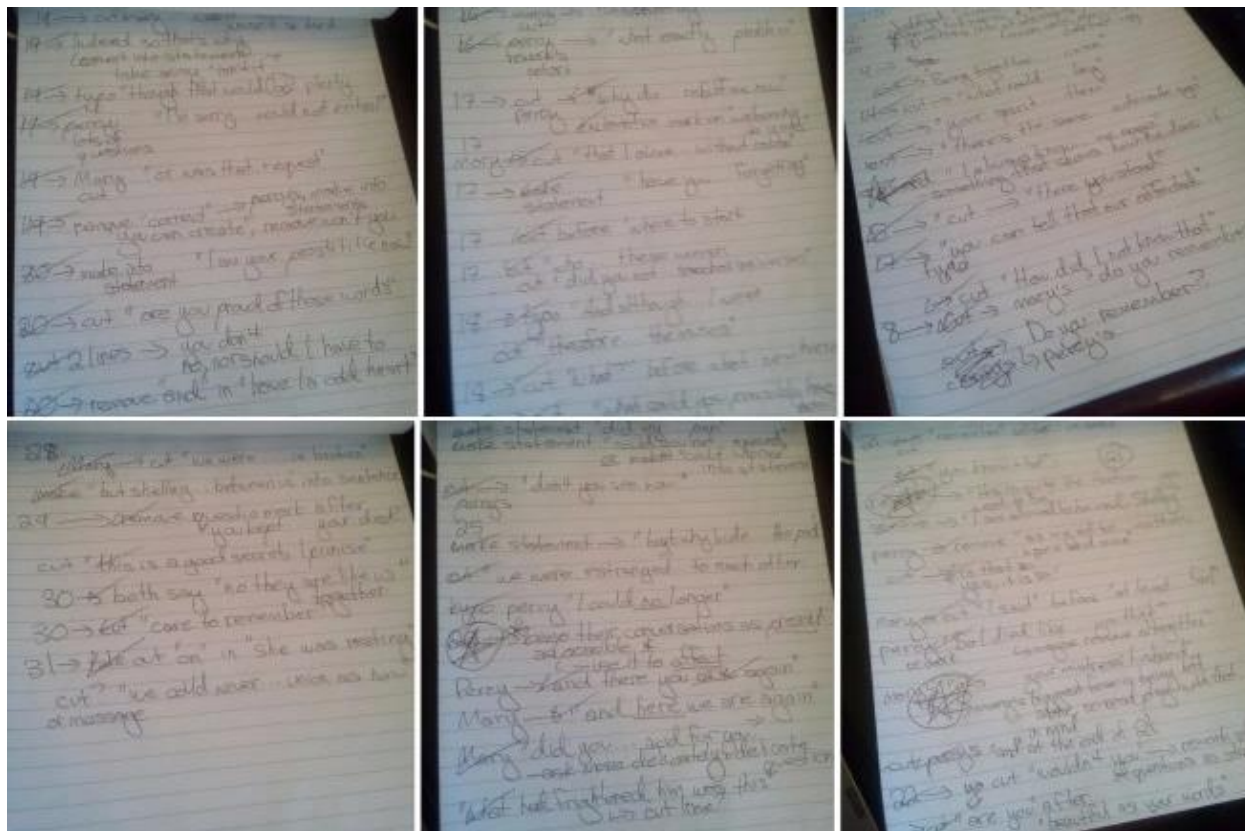
After those revisions, which really changed a lot about the structure and tone of the play itself, the suggestions that came later from Donovan were primarily about individual lines, rather than the structure or narrative arc. In a phone call that he and I had only three weeks before rehearsals began while he was in Cape Breton and I was in Ontario, we spoke for over an hour and he continued to generously offer feedback on the latest draft of the text. Donovan recalled that we "spoke over the phone about some of the finer details of the lines and made a last pass of sweeping cuts." From that discussion, I specifically remember his note there were too many

questions in the play and how, for the height of the conflict, it should maybe be Mary who brings the action to a head, rather than Percy: two major changes that enhanced the dramatic potential of the script. In our August 30th talkback, I discussed how helpful this conversation was and how formative it was in that later stage of the script's development:

We would talk and go through the play together. We would discuss everything and, at first, my little, fragile heart was terrified that collaboration meant criticism because I am not used to sharing these words with anyone from my locked, English hermit-space. So again, that is the advice that I would give: to find great collaborators. And with Alexander, I was so lucky to work with a director who had such great historical experience and playwriting experience. (485).

While I was initially reluctant, and even saddened, by any suggestions Donovan made earlier at the start of the development process and misread each comment as a critique, by the time we spoke on the phone, I was invigorated, eager, and ready to apply those changes. In trusted in him as a co-collaborator and had reconciled with my own insecurities as playwright. For me, this moment in the script's development marked the change from thinking of *Justified Sinners* as *my* play, my fledgling creation that I needed to defend and protect, to realizing that, now that it was being staged, it would be *our* project. Thankfully, the initial sense of fear and hesitancy this realization brought out in me soon gave way to joy and excitement, which persisted throughout the staging process. That is yet another realization I have had from being involved in *Justified Sinners'* journey from page to stage. Because theatre is an inherently collaborative medium and the production process is at its best when it is kept flexible, responding to the needs, ideas, and interests of the individuals working together to bring the play

to life. I have found, in my own small, single experience as a playwright, that this also extends to the script itself and that rigidity and sensitivity are death to creativity.



Reid, Brittany. "Sample of Editorial Revisions for *Justified Sinners*," 24 July 2017, Edmonton.

Following that phone call with Donovan, I completed the necessary edits of the script and the actors received the revised version at the end of July, which they were asked to begin memorizing in anticipation of rehearsals starting in mid-August. As Donovan mentioned in his subsequent interview, I continued to make "small adjustments as we rehearsed," which I will expand upon in the "Rehearsing *Justified Sinners*" section, but the draft from July 25th only slightly differed from the final performance text we used. After three rounds of sweeping changes to the script, based on Professor Muneroni and Donovan's feedback, we finally had a version of the script that was ready to be unpacked, discussed, read, and critically engaged with

as the basis of our performance. To facilitate the creative team's research into, and reading of the script, I then transitioned from being the playwright to the production's co-dramaturg and began imagining ways that I could help them understand and access the material and its historical subject.

Dramaturgy

After completing the latest draft of the script at the end of July, the draft that we would be taking into rehearsals as our working performance text, I shifted my focus towards providing dramaturgical support for *Justified Sinners*. Because I was staying on as co-dramaturg, along with Professor Muneroni, my involvement with the project extended beyond writing the script and also entailed assisting the director, actors, and designer in their reading and interpretation of the script for the purposes of staging. This dual role required me to critically read the script, question my own intentions and construction of the play, analyze what the Shelleys meant through their writing, and arm the team with a working knowledge of the Shelleys, their cultural context, their relationships, and their writing that could further nuance and inform their understanding of the play.

Our abbreviated rehearsal period necessitated that the creative team be given materials to work with before the production process began, which meant that I needed to get information to them right away. Consequently, once the director sent the script to the actors, designer, and stage manager, I sent an accompanying research pack for them to have on-hand as they became acquainted with the play and its characters. To that end, I compiled an information and resource pack to accompany the play, which included information regarding historical context, the setting of *Justified Sinners*, and a list of key figures that are referenced in, or important to, the play. It also included explanatory suggestions for further reading, including primary sources written by the Shelleys themselves, and key secondary sources that they may want to consult. As I noted in

the email to the creative team accompanying the research pack, the characters and world that they created would take on a life of their own far beyond the established documentary record, and the historical Mary and Percy Shelley would serve as a point of inspiration for their wholly lived-in dramatic portrayals, which were unique to them. But I hoped that reading the play with that context and information, however much they chose to engage with it, could perhaps serve as a useful point of departure. The resulting research pack was therefore a curated guide that the team could consult before and during the staging process, a supplementary resource that decoded the many references and allusions in the play, and a critical counterpart to the script itself that revealed how the play interacted with the Shelleys' lives and writing, as well as the continuing critical tradition surrounding both writers.

The research pack began with an introduction to the play's historical context, which briefly outlined the major writers, years, and some of the salient characteristics associated with Romanticism. Not knowing how familiar each member of the creative team would be with the Romantics, I wanted to ensure that they had at least a cursory introduction to the period, which they could build on through the other research materials provided. The next section offered a summary of the setting, premise, and plot of *Justified Sinners*, intended to give the team a basic introduction to the world-of-the-play:

Justified Sinners is set in 1824: two years after the death of Percy Shelley. Mary has started working on her new, apocalyptic novel, *The Last Man*. Earlier in the year, her dear friend Lord Byron died from a fever he acquired while travelling to fight in the Greek War of Independence. Mary has moved to Kentish Town in England with her five-year-old son and, as the play begins, she is making final preparations for the publication of *The Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (1824), a collection of her husband's

poems that she has curated and edited. That initial collection later formed the basis for *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, which was subsequently published in 1839.

(466)

This description was intended to provide the team with necessary background on the events leading up to *Justified Sinners*, such as Lord Byron's death earlier that year, Mary's writing of *The Last Man* at the time of the play, and the upcoming publication of *Posthumous Poems*. As a dramaturg for the play, I wanted to ensure that they knew the events immediately leading up to the story we were telling and what was going on in Mary's life during that period. Following this description, I included a "Key Figures" section that introduced some of the key names referenced in the play or who might prove useful to their reading. This glossary began with a note that, although *Justified Sinners* only depicts Mary and Percy onstage, "their many friends, associates, and family members continue to influence the events of the play." I further explained that, to help account for the importance of these figures, individual character entries for fourteen key figures¹⁴³ each "briefly noted how they are significant to our play" and also "included links for further reading in case you are interested in learning more about these key individuals" (466).

The research pack was primarily comprised of a "further reading" list, which I offered to the creative team to consult as they saw fit. The list was made up of primary sources, divided

¹⁴³ The expository character sketches included Mary and Percy, William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, Lord Byron, Leigh Hunt, Maria and John Gisborne, Jane and Edward Williams, Claire Clairmont, Timothy Shelley, Harriet (Westbrook) Shelley, Percy Florence Shelley. The links I included were for the individual "Biographies" found in the Pennsylvania Electronic Edition of *Frankenstein*, edited by Stuart Curran. In addition to the individual biographical entries and links included, I also provided a link to the "Interactive Shelley Family Tree" available through the Bodleian Library's website for their "Shelley's Ghost" exhibition.

between Mary and Percy's writings,¹⁴⁴ and secondary sources,¹⁴⁵ including relevant biographies about the Shelleys.¹⁴⁶ Importantly, I did not want to simply list available resources for them without context or explanation so, just as I created an annotated e-script for my first dramaturgical outing, I here decided to annotate my recommended reading, so they knew what was available and how I felt it could inform their reading of the play. For example, in addition to providing a link to a critical electronic edition of *Frankenstein*, as well as its 1818 and 1831 introductions,¹⁴⁷ I also explained how these texts worked in conversation, the contexts from which they emerged, and how they could illuminate key details about the Shelleys' characterization in *Justified Sinners*. In my framing of *Frankenstein*'s 1818 introduction, I

¹⁴⁴ For Mary's writing, I recommended *Frankenstein* (1818) and her 1831 introduction to the novel, her 1839 introductions to Percy's "Alastor" (1816) and "Queen Mab" (1813), and the co-authored *History of a Six Weeks Tour*, although I also recommended reading her other fiction. For Percy's writing, I included "Mutability" (1816), "Ozymandias" (1818), "England in 1819" (1819), "Ode to the West Wind" (1820), "A Defence of Poetry" (1821/1840), and his 1818 introduction to *Frankenstein*.

¹⁴⁵ For secondary sources, I specifically mentioned two websites: *Romantic Circles* and *Shelley's Ghost* through the University of Maryland and Bodleian Library, respectively. For texts, I recommended Daisy Hay's *Young Romantics* (2010), Gary Kelly's *English Fiction of the Romantic Period (1789-1830)* (1989), Trelawny's description of Percy's corpse, included in his *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron* (1858) and an article by Richard Holmes about the thanatography of Percy Shelley's death, entitled "Death and Destiny" (2004). For key visual representations, I included links to Fournier's painting "The Funeral of Shelley" (1889) and two memorial sculptures: Ford's "Shelley Memorial" (1859) and Weekes' "Memorial to the Shelleys" (1853/4).

¹⁴⁶ The biographies referenced were Anne K. Mellor's *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (1988), Stephanie Hemphill's poetic biofiction *Hideous Love: The Story of the Girl Who Wrote Frankenstein* (2013), Ann Wroe's *Being Shelley: The Poet's Search for Himself* (2007), and Richard Holmes' *Shelley: The Pursuit* (1974).

¹⁴⁷ The e-text version of *Frankenstein* referenced is available through *Romantic Circles* and is the 1818 version of the text, as edited by Stuart Curran in 2009. For those who chose to reference a print version of the novel, I also noted that "both the 1818 and 1831 editions are useful, since the former was written before Shelley's death and the latter reflects Mary's evolving relationship with the novel over time."

offered insight into the book's publication history, early reception, and, most importantly, why the 1818 introduction is relevant to our reading of Mary and Percy's dynamic in the play:

Frankenstein was anonymously published in 1818 and began with an introduction written by Percy. Because of the introduction's writing style and the novel's controversial content, many initially suspected that Percy was the author, not Mary. His introduction not only offers context for reading the novel and insight into how it was initially framed, but it also reflects Percy's own attitudes toward *Frankenstein* and emphasizes the stylistic differences between the two writers (which could be interesting, given their competitive tendencies in *Justified Sinners*). (470)

This description is indicative of the annotations I gave for each link or book title in the research pack and help show how I framed these outside resources. My intention in providing such through descriptors was so that if they would know why I had recommended each text as a possible source for them to consider. But furthermore, knowing that the team was producing the play within a relatively tight period, I hoped that my expository annotations for each text could function as a helpful resource in and of themselves. Considered in this way, I wanted the research pack to offer multitudinous sources, links, and new opportunities for further research, while simultaneously offering key information and critical insight on the Shelleys that could nuance and inform their reading of *Justified Sinners*.

Some members of the creative team spoke to their use of the research pack in their research of the play and its subject. Donovan first noted that "Brittany graciously provided the team with a series of links and information about the Shelley's." Further referencing the dramaturgical resource pack, Ardern noted that she "read through the materials that [Reid] provided us" and recalled that she found the links to online resources, such as the *Romantic*

Chronology of Mary Shelley's Life:

<http://www.rc.umd.edu/reference/chronologies/machronology/chrono.html>

William Godwin

<http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Godwin/godwin.html>

- Father of Mary Shelley
- Godwin was a political writer and key proponent of anarchism
- Percy Shelley was an admirer of Godwin's writing and sought him out, leading to his initial meeting with Mary
- Godwin did not approve of Mary and Percy's relationship (as Percy was still married at the time) but came around once the couple got legally married in 1816
- Complicating matters, Godwin was financially dependent on Percy, even while he was estranged from his daughter

Mary Wollstonecraft

<http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Wollston/bio.html>

- Mother and namesake of Mary Shelley
- She is often acknowledged as a key figure in the development of modern feminism
- Wollstonecraft died days after giving birth to Mary Shelley
- Percy and Mary were both admirers of Wollstonecraft's work and proclaimed their love to each other at her grave

George Gordon, Lord Byron

<http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Byron/bio.html>

- Fellow Romantic writer
- The Shelleys met Byron when they travelled to Geneva in 1816 and were introduced to him by Claire, who was romantically involved with him (it is during this summer together that Byron proposed the ghost story competition that led to the writing of *Frankenstein*)
- The Shelleys maintained a close friendship with Byron until Percy's death in 1822 and Byron's death in 1824

Leigh Hunt

<http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Hunt/bio.html> -Close

- friend and supporter of Percy Shelley
- Hunt was primarily an editor, but also worked as a writer
- Hunt and his family travelled to Italy to start a periodical with Byron and Shelley, entitled *The Liberal*, but Shelley drowned only a few weeks after their arrival

Reid, Brittany. "Screenshot from 'Research Pack' for *Justified Sinners*. 22 July 2017.

The complete "Research Pack" is included as Appendix: B.

Circles website, to be "very helpful." Grau similarly observed that "the research materials given to us by the playwright were certainly useful, and gave all the necessary biographical details" he needed. Again, my intention in creating such a thorough research pack that could accommodate someone at any level of familiarity with the Shelleys and their context and would offer nearly limitless opportunities for secondary research was not to consign the creative team to reading everything I referenced. Instead, I wanted them to feel like they had a guide that could answer

any questions they had and give them places to turn until rehearsals began and I was there in person to answer them myself.

Further reflecting on their individual research processes for *Justified Sinners*, Donovan, Grau, and Ardern discussed how they each prepared for their role in staging the play and which texts or resources were especially formative for them before rehearsals began. First, Grau said that he watched “the ‘School of Life’ Youtube channel to research some other Romantic thinkers to get a feel for the era.” He further noted that, although he did “look at other resources regarding Percy individually,” he felt that “nothing gave me anything useful that I didn’t already find through the research materials given.”

Contextualizing the experience in his own ethos as a director, he explained that, “when directing a historical play, I tend to actually avoid learning too much about the characters involved because I’m more concerned with performing what exists on the page.” His rationale for this decision was that “Brittany and the actors tend to provide the better insights into who these people really are than I ever could.” Instead of this emphasis on the established documentary record, Donovan explained that he instead focuses on “artistic sources as reference and inspiration for the piece.” To that end, he recalled that he “spent time in countless museums during my summer travels and looked at a variety of paintings from across the years.” He also watched films that helped inform his directorial vision and listened to “a variety of music that inspires me or reminds me of the play in some way.”

In the August 30th talkback, Ardern discussed how the production’s condensed timeframe required her to alter her typical approach to historical research: “What was interesting for me was, on the one hand, having this love of research and wanting to figure it out and solve the mysteries, but, at the same time, in Mary Shelley’s life there is thirty-five years of writing

there. So that was an interesting thing for me about this project, learning to balance that” (487). However, although she acknowledged that both time and the scope of the documentary record limited her ability to research Mary Shelley further, she did note that the play’s accessibility and focused treatment of the Shelleys helped her to feel prepared and acquainted with the subject: “As much as I wish that I could have spent more time with the text, because it is so rich, I think that our playwright has done a really beautiful job of making it work as a play and there is such a strong dynamic between the two characters...I think that, in spite of the amount of actual literature that is in the play, it was easy to understand, which was great.” Reflecting on the process and the books that informed her understanding of the character, Ardern stated that she “only had time for three books.” First, she read Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* although, significantly, she noted that, “in hindsight, I wish I had dedicated this time to *The Last Man* instead.” Second, she read *Mary Shelley* by Martin Garrett, which she described as “a very simple and straightforward walk through her life and work.” Finally, she read Ann K. Mellor’s *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* and, while she noted that “this one had almost more literary analysis than biography,” she also recalled that it features “lots of interesting tidbits.”

These three distinct approaches to researching the Shelleys’ lives and writing in anticipation of staging the play indicates the variety of needs, interests, and preferences when it comes to outside research. Hearing how different each person’s strategy was, from Donovan’s preference for consulting “artistic sources as reference and inspiration” to Ardern’s “love of research,” reaffirmed my decision to provide a detailed yet accessible critical resource that everyone could engage with in whatever way they felt best. However, it is important to note that the dramaturgical process for *Justified Sinners* was not limited to individual research before

rehearsals began and so it did not end here. Although each member of the team became acquainted with the script independently in the three weeks leading up to rehearsals, a defining feature of our rehearsal process was that my presence in the room as both dramaturg and playwright meant that the dramaturgical process could continue throughout the staging process.

Rehearsing *Justified Sinners*

Discussing the rehearsal process in our August 31st talkback, Professor Muneroni informed the audience that “what you saw was rehearsed during the course of eight rehearsals,” a revelation that elicited surprise from the crowd (491). However, as Donovan had acknowledged during the previous night’s talkback, although the rehearsal period started on August 16th and the play opened on August 30th, “They were pretty long days. Eight hours, they were pretty long days. We did not waste time” (488). Nonetheless, despite our “long days,” the fact that the play was rehearsed during a fourteen-day period was a remarkably quick turnaround that was only made possible through our director and stage manager’s vigilant attention to time and efficiency. Although we initially set out to begin rehearsals earlier in August, conflicting schedules and several individuals’ participation in the Edmonton Fringe Festival’s from August 17th to 27th meant that we our stage manager had to get creative to accommodate everyone involved. The result was a theatrical intensive that required the creative team to work quickly to unpack the text, develop and implement a design, learn block, develop characterization, memorize lines, set the theatre for performance, complete the technical and dress rehearsals, promote the show, and have the play ready for an audience in only two weeks.

The actors commented on the play’s abbreviated rehearsal period and observed how it affected their experience of the production. Grau also discussed the rehearsal process for *Justified Sinners* and what distinguished it from other production processes with which he has

been involved. First, he noted that “the rehearsal process was truncated, meaning that we did about two to three weeks of work in eight days.” Regarding how this affected their work, he commented that a side-effect of this compressed schedule was that it “certainly allowed for an immersion in the text that one wouldn’t normally get.” Specifically, Grau observed that “we dove right into physicalizing the piece before sitting down and going through the script in detail.” He characterized “this jump to physical space” as “certainly unusual,” especially “when dealing with a script that puts such a heavy emphasis on language, and poetic language at that.” Speaking to the nature of the rehearsal process in the August 31st talkback, Ardern explained that “this process was different than my usual process, just because it was so short. I tend to like to start slowly and sitting at a table and doing lots of reading and getting my feet a little bit wet. With this particular process, we had to sort of just jump into the pool, which was actually great” (493).

Reflecting on the rehearsal process, both Grau and Ardern acknowledged its “truncated” nature and the fact that it “allowed for an immersion in text,” which required them to “just jump into the pool” and begin physicalizing right away. As their descriptions of the rehearsal process both suggest, our limited timeframe necessitated quick work, efficiency, organization, and complete engagement from each member of the creative team to complete our full-day rehearsals. So how was this mammoth task accomplished and what did these intensive rehearsals entail? To begin describing how this production was completed and staged in only two weeks, I will here unpack our rehearsal process and discuss how our approach, production context, and team dynamic all contributed to our efficiency and effectiveness. First, I will discuss how the dramaturgical process continued into the rehearsal period and how my dual roles as playwright and co-dramaturg were affected by this abbreviated schedule and helped contribute to our

collective understanding of the play, the script's final stages of development, and the overall efficiency of the production process.

After spending three weeks with the script and research pack and preparing however they preferred, the creative team reconvened for the start of rehearsals on August 16th. However, because I was there for every rehearsal, the dramaturgical process for *Justified Sinners* continued into the rehearsal process and so I begin my discussion of rehearsals by accounting for my responsibilities as playwright and co-dramaturg. As I characterized my role during our August 31st talkbacks, “for the past few weeks I have been haunting your rehearsals” and my presence in the room meant that I could address any questions that came up about the script or clarify meaning wherever necessary (494). Usually, this meant that Grau, Ardern or Donovan would ask me what I meant or, more often, what one of the Shelleys meant in the case of adapted text. Sometimes an explanation would clarify things for everyone, but wherever it did not, I would suggest a change to the script and implement it in that moment. No time to think, query, or reflect on what a bad “playwright” I was for having missed a mistake or waiting until now to make the change. No time to linger on the fact that the actors and director were all also playwrights. As I explained in our August 31st talkback, I was initial hesitant about overstepping my role in the rehearsals and fearful that my supposed “authority” as playwright and co-dramaturg would come across as prescriptive, rather than supportive. “I didn’t want to assert myself too much either,” I said (494). “I never wanted to say ‘well, in real life it was like this, so you are incorrect.’” Instead of limiting the team to the constraints of the historical record, I wanted to give them enough information and clarification for them to create their own fully-realized versions of the Shelleys and their world. “I wanted it to be Jessy and Morgan’s Shelleys,” I explained, “and I think that’s what’s so lovely about this play is that the vision that

Alexander had, that Morgan had, that Jessy had, that Sarah had is what made the Shelleys that you see. The Shelleys you will take away are the ones that they created” (494).

During our August 31st talkback, Ardern, Grau, Donovan all spoke about the impact of having the playwright/co-dramaturg in the room. “It’s a unique advantage to have the playwright in the room because every rehearsal we would have a question about what actually happened in real life, where does this piece of work come from,” Ardern explained (494). She elaborated that she “had questions every once in awhile” and that “[Reid is] obviously so incredibly well-versed in their lives and their literature, so it was fabulous for us” (494). Grau contrasted the experience of working through the script for *Justified Sinner* to working on a Shakespearean play and noted that having the playwright in the room helped clarify the script’s poetic language for him: “If you have ever done a Shakespeare before, you’ll know that you sit down and you look up every word. You look up five different ways the line could be interpreted and then you pick some of them” (494). However, in working through *Justified Sinners*, he recalled that “we didn’t have to do that because we could be like ‘hey, what the hell does this mean?’ and she would say ‘that’s directly from this journal and it means this’ and it was like ‘oh great, I don’t have to spend hours on that kind of thing’” (494). Donovan agreed that having me in rehearsals allowed him to focus on staging the play: “It was a relief for me, frankly, because they would ask me questions where I would usually have to think hard, but then I would be like ‘oh right, Brittany, you wrote this’” (494). He elaborated that my presence in the room and attention to dramaturgy also informed his decision to limit out formal tablework and start working on the play right away: “I very strategically spent little time at the table...That is a problem and a thing that I am still navigating in every rehearsal phase, especially when they are real people. How much do we look into them, because you can get stuck in the details with anything historical”

(494). Accordingly, our formal tablework for the production was limited to the first day of rehearsals, during which we completed a readthrough of the play and I addressed questions or concerns from the creative team.

Justified Sinners
Playwright: Brittany Reid

SPS
Director: Alexander Donovan

Daily Schedule
August 16th, 2017

Time	Activity	Company Called	Location
9AM	- First read - Design presentation	Mx. Grau Mx. Ardern	SPS
11AM	- Character work - Character improv		SPS
12PM	Lunch Break		
1PM	- Work on pg.3 to 13	Mx. Grau Mx. Ardern	SPS
5PM	End of day		

*Break(s) will be taken as required
*This schedule is subject to change

Thank you,
- Roxanne

Côté, Roxanne. "Daily Schedule for August 16th," 15 August 2017, Edmonton.

We began rehearsals on August 16th, just two weeks before our August 30th opening. Thanks to Professor Muneroni and the Department of Drama, we were fortunate to hold our rehearsals in the SPS. The ability to rehearse in the same space that we would be performing the show was a true luxury, since rehearsal space can be incredibly difficult to secure, especially during the Edmonton Fringe Festival. In comparison to productions, such as *The Apology*'s 2011 Fringe production where the director's family home had to be used as a rehearsal space, our

ability to rehearse in the SPS was a remarkable advantage that meaningfully facilitated and improved the rehearsal experience. By working in the SPS from the beginning, we not only became more familiar with our performance space, but we were able to skip the awkward step of transiting from one space to another during rehearsals and adapting blocking for the theatre. Additionally, because we were the only team using the space during that period, we were able to leave our set pieces and other materials intact during the rehearsal process, which was another major convenience that saved time and work for the team.

To accomplish the necessary work during this limited period, we primarily held full-day rehearsals, usually from nine until five. Our first rehearsal, an eight-hour day for the team, began with a read-through of the script. This was the first time for me to hear the script read aloud by anyone and it was genuinely thrilling and extremely beneficial to hear the actors read it. Additionally, it allowed me to get a bit of distance from the text and really *hear* all of it for the first time: the good, the bad, and the wordy. After the reading, Donovan noted a section where the energy of the piece began to lag and things started to get a little repetitive. He asked me to look at it again and this time, I felt only a momentary twinge of embarrassment that the team had heard my play and its flaws. Once that moment of fear passed, I immediately set to work in that very same rehearsal and tried to clean that section up, implementing changes to the script that same day. Following our first read-through, we discussed the background of the play and I gave a brief overview of some of the materials I prepared for the group's research pack. Our dramaturgical discussion at this point primarily focused on addressing any specific questions that emerged from their first encounters with the play and its supporting materials. I also glossed some key aspects of the Romantic period, especially the perception of the "artist" and "poet genius" at the time, and the Shelleys' own context. Chiefly, I broached the notion of "Romantic

sociability” and the important fact that the Shelleys’ lifestyle meant that they were only ever infrequently alone in their relationship.

Script Changes Pages 24-27

(Cuts indicated by highlighted text, Additions in red text)

p. 24

Mary: **Please**, tell me how to move on then. Seriously, I’m begging you. First my children went away. Then my husband left me to grieve by myself. You know that it was just me there. You had your friends and your women, but it was just me **then**. And now it will always be just me.

Percy: I said I was sorry, but I could not spend the rest of our lives in the throes of depression. I became tired of having to comfort and console you—tired of your tears and your messiness. I could not be expected to write from a place of such despair.

Mary: Excuse me? Your verses *benefitted* from my sorrows! My coldness played muse to your pen. You used the image of my grief to emphasize the passion you felt for another woman. I was your exercise in contrast—you made me your moon to cast her as your sun! You play the victim, but your pretty words still cut through me like shards of ice.

Mary: Well, now I am truly cold moonshine. Yes, Percy, your poetry speaks some truth. I will admit that I was sometimes cold towards you during those painful years. For that I am truly sorry. But you must admit that you were intolerably cruel for leaving me to suffer in solitude.

Mary: **But** It doesn’t have to be that way. You didn’t give a care for your tormented wife as I grieved. You **could have waited for me**.

p. 25

Mary: Have some compassion on me! You are right that I became austere in order to survive the ~~days that followed our losses, but what about you? Where did you even see?~~

Reid, Brittany. “Screenshot of Script Changes after First Reading,” 16 August 2017, Edmonton.

Once we developed a collective understanding of the play and its historical subject matter, we discussed the production design and some specifics regarding how the play would be staged, such as the important role that water and paper would play. After the initial groundwork of reading the play, engaging with the subject through my dramaturgical work, and discussing the production design, we immediately began the process of getting the play on its feet and started the blocking process on the first day (again, this rehearsal process has been at warp-speed

from the first day). Finally, our first day of rehearsals concluded with us working through and beginning to block the first fifteen pages of the script on day.

In addition to the professionalism and skill of our team, another thing that aided the rehearsal process was that many members of the creative team had worked together before at the University of Alberta. Côté and Donovan had just completed a production at Calgary's Ignite! Festival, where they worked together as stage manager and director, respectively. Furthermore, Ardern, Grau, and Donovan were involved in the staging of Michael Frayn's *Copenhagen* (1998) in April 2017 in the Bleviss Laboratory Theatre, for which Kalmer also designed the poster and Karpyschin designed the costumes. The sense of trust and understanding between them greatly expedited the process, allowing them to make connections quickly, respond to each other's needs in the moment, and to establish a network of positive communication. In our August 31st talkback, Donovan discussed how his experience working with the creative team, and especially the actors, facilitated quicker rehearsals by allowing them to build from their working relationship: "The fact that we had just worked with each other and I know how you guys work, you know how I work, it removes a lot of that time" (493). He further explained that "with a truncated rehearsal period, it was one of those things where it was short, but I never felt like I didn't have the time that I needed, and that's the difference" (493). Another important aspect of that sense of comfort was that, in addition to working together before, Grau and Ardern were also a couple.

During our August 31st talkback, they discussed how their relationship and their previous experience acting together contributed to their overall comfort in rehearsals and allowed them to expediate the process of establishing intimacy between the Shelleys. Ardern observed that "there is usually, when you are acting, a period where you are trying to adjust to your fellow

- Mary's reservation around her children (the kids as her own grief, kept private)
- Why is Percy so adamant on sharing the children (lying if omitted, if publishing entire life, how can you leave out, legacy, if they omit them they are gone forever)
- The difficulty of Mary for remembering
- Difficulty in memorializing children who never spoke
- Question of "moving on" as about the kids and Percy
- Tone deafness of Percy
- Does Mary think this exchange is the "real" Percy here? Is she fooled here?
- The kids as one more thing to talk through, final hurdle
- Coming to terms with lack of connection they have here
- p. 25-26, little moment of healing, ritualistic, seeing each other's side of it
- never told each other
- grief put them apart, but they felt the same (although they expressed differently)
- Last ten pages, trying to find each other again
- Part 1: Rose-colored glasses, Part 2: conflict, Part 3: trying to find a balance
- the function of the dreams
- What makes Mary accept his death? Understanding where he was at when he died (recognizing herself in it, seeing that it wasn't an action against her)
- the final moment where death isn't the end
- end of p.28, realization of chaos and possible finality
- both come back to the beginning (elopement journal) to realize that death isn't the end
- moment of seeing how happy they were and that their separation is circumstantial, childishly ran away from each other
- p. 32 as when we really see Percy, is there a change? (performance to "being")
- His acting as a "public" identity, at the end he is more that kid who was pitchy and bullied
- both have a sense of performance

Reid, Brittany. "Screenshot from Rehearsal Notes," 17 August 2017, Edmonton.
My complete rehearsal notes for *Justified Sinners* are included in this project as "Appendix C."

actors, especially with a play with intimacy,” which involves “trying to make sure that you are respectful of your fellow actors and making sure that everyone is comfortable on stage” (493). For this production, she explained that “partly because we’re dating and partly because we have spent a lot of time on stage together, we got to skip that step, which was great because we managed to just get into it” (493). She acknowledged that, typically this process of establishing a romantic dynamic is not only “such an awkward stage of rehearsal” but that it also “eats up a lot of time,” a sentiment that Grau mirrored through his belief that they “skipped like two weeks of rehearsal” because of their familiarity (493). Donovan agreed that Ardern and Grau’s familiarity and relationship with each other helped expediate the rehearsal process, explaining that “had it been two actors who I had never worked with before, two actors who were not intimate with each other, it would be a whole other story, so that was really fortunate” (“August 31st Talkback,” 493). As Grau, Ardern, and Donovan’s accounts all suggest, a foundational component of our rehearsal process was the sense of familiarity and comfort between the creative team, especially in the case of Grau and Ardern who were tasked with playing the Shelleys and bringing their relationship to life onstage. Since the team members had worked together in the past, they were able to establish a professional, productive and supportive atmosphere, despite having only two weeks to stage the play. Resultantly, due in part to this positive and productive dynamic in the room, we completed initial blocking of the play and held our first full run on August 20th. Even more importantly, the team’s incredible speed importantly did not come at the cost of depth, nuance, and character development.

Because we blocked the play so quickly and were already holding full runs of the show less than a week into the process, we were also able to take time for Ardern and Grau to nuance their understandings of their characters and to specifically understand the Shelleys’ relationship,

as it progresses in the play. *Justified Sinners* strips away the Shelleys' circle of friends and family and confines them to a single room to see them alone together. As a result, it is even more important to clarify the narrative arc in the play and to refine the precise nature of their relationship, since the play strictly focuses on Mary and Percy. To help Ardern and Grau to learn more about their characters' journeys throughout the play, both as a couple and individually, Donovan devoted an afternoon to an exercise in character development, specifying intentions, and clarifying the play's narrative arc. Accordingly, on August 18th we took a break from blocking the play and charting the actors' physical movements on stage to complete a fruitful exercise that helped establish the relationship between the characters and their journey through the play. Donovan noted that, in the process of blocking the play and memorizing where you are supposed to be and what you are supposed to be doing in every moment onstage, characterization can often get lost.

To help mediate this, we took a break in the formal blocking process after working through the play's first twenty-four pages for a relationship-building exercise. We set up a room on the other side of the theatre, complete with walls, a door, a couch, and a window. The actors could get coffee, get comfortable, and explore the emotional arc of the play without the pressure of sticking to where they had to stand, sit, or walk in any given moment. Working in this new space, which was intentionally created to make them feel at ease and to forget about theatricality and the presence of an audience, the actors ran through the whole script and followed their characters' emotional journeys and their own impulses. The director, stage manager, and I were there, although we were tucked to the sides and behind furniture to make them feel even more at ease. Periodically, Grau, Ardern or Donovan would pause what they were doing and take a break to reflect on what had occurred in the preceding section. Donovan would ask questions about

their intentions or emotions and they could pose questions to him, or to me as the playwright and dramaturg, whenever necessary. During that time, we discussed specific information about the Shelleys' lives, such as what years their children passed away, but that biographical information became fuel for their own specific, lived-in characterization of Mary and Percy. It gave them a chance to temporarily forget about the performative element of the play and focus on the emotional beats and relationship that are key to any production, but especially important for this two-hander about two writers and the relationship between them. Furthermore, it allowed them to conceive of the Shelleys in *Justified Sinners* as characters that they would embody, rather than historical figures whose words and actions they would imitate.

After the exercise, Donovan advised them to think about the journeys they had gone on during this exercise and to bring the character arcs they had discovered to their performance. In discussing the exercise with me afterwards, he noted that this method of combining the blocking of the play, which is inherently regimented and orderly, with a purely emotional and intuitive exploration of the material was akin to a process of thesis and antithesis coming together to produce a creative synthesis. In the rehearsals that followed, this sense of creative synthesis certainly pervaded the actors' work and enriched their understanding of their characters' journeys in the play. Furthermore, Donovan's willingness to devote an afternoon of rehearsals to this exercise not only underscores the efficiency of the rehearsal process in general, but also shows his continued privileging of nuance and character development, despite the time constraints.

Following the first week of rehearsals, the second and final week remained shifted focus towards setting the design elements, further refining blocking, and helping the actors get off-book. Perhaps the most challenging aspect of the two-week rehearsal period is that it required the

actors to memorize the play in such a limited amount of time, especially when they were both involved with Fringe productions at the same time. The process for memorizing lines was similarly condensed and the director asked that they have the first half memorized for Tuesday, August 22nd and the second half for Wednesday, August 23rd, meaning they had only one week to memorize the entire script. Once they had the play memorized, we delved even deeper in the material and continued to develop the characters they already started to create in that first week, all while production elements such as the set, costume, and sound were gradually introduced. Our final week of rehearsals built off the momentum from our first week and proved to be a fantastic whirlwind of excitement and new discoveries. The creative team's flexibility and openness was demonstrated through their continued willingness to explore, unpack, and adapt, up until the show's opening. For example, our director attuned that the Shelleys' first meeting at the beginning of the show needed to be re-worked and he wisely advised Mary to resist Percy's initial advances and to start out by being incredulous that her husband had returned to her. Additionally, the script includes several returns to the Shelleys' memories and, in our final rehearsals, two of these scenes were still presenting some issues for the actors. Specifically, Percy's nightmares were proving to be challenging and we were still working out the best way for the actors to conceive of these dream sequences, how they could be portrayed most clearly and effectively, and how to depict Percy strangling Mary. In our last rehearsal before our tech rehearsal, Ardern proposed that we re-visit and clarify the blocking of these scenes and I was so happy that she expressed her desire to fix this section and that our director was open and willing to find a new solution to the staging of these dreams. In the end, a new approach was found that brought the scene closer to the initial stage directions in the script by showing Percy literally strangling Mary, rather than twisting sheets of paper, as we had initially set. During these final

rehearsals, I was reminded of the open and supportive dynamic that defined our creative team and how it allowed for them to keep making discoveries and working through the text, even into our last rehearsal.

After this last rehearsal on August 26th, we moved forward into our tech and dress rehearsals. In anticipation of our tech rehearsal, Côté and the Department of Drama's production team worked together on August 27th to install risers, bring in the seats, set the lights and curtains, and ensure that the theatre was ready for the performance. This crucial step made it so that, when the team congregated again that night for our technical run of the show, that everything was in place and show-ready. This rehearsal introduced new challenges and new opportunities for innovation. For example, as I will elaborate in the upcoming design section, the initial plan to float books inside the aquariums did not work as hoped and a new approach needed to be adopted. Our dress rehearsal on August 29th was our last opportunity to run the play in show conditions, now that all the technical elements were in place. Although Donovan had some performance notes for the actors and some technical notes for Karpyshin and Côté, who took on the additional roles of lighting and sound board operators, the run was polished and professional. Watching the dress rehearsal that night and seeing the team's work having come together, it became apparent that the production was finally ready for an audience.

However, before fully transitioning to my discussion of the play-in-performance, I want to briefly remain with the rehearsal process by unpacking the depiction of the Shelleys in *Justified Sinners*. By disclosing how I conceived of Mary and Percy in the play and accounting for Ardern, Grau, and Donovan's vision for the characters and their relationship, I hope to offer insight into how I conceived of the characters and how the production's actors and director helped realize them onstage.

Fire and Ice: The Shelleys in *Justified Sinners*

In choosing to write a Romantic Biodrama that only featured Mary and Percy onstage, I made a conscious effort to focalize the Shelleys' relationship. Furthermore, by confining the play to a single location, Mary's study at her home in Kentish Town, and limiting the action to a posthumous conversation between a wife and her deceased husband, *Justified Sinners* became two interrelated character studies of Mary and Percy Shelley. As such, it worked to lay bare the Shelleys' similarities and differences as writers, parents, spouses, and individuals. However, just as I came to learn through my adaptation of the Shelleys' writing for the script's text, I soon realized that my dramatization could only employ the historical Mary and Percy as its basis and would require me to create fully-formed characters that made sense within the world-of-the-play.

Throughout this chapter, I have documented my initial interest in creating a Romantic Biodrama that emerged from the historical record surrounding the Shelleys' lives and writing and this similarly extended to their characterization in the play. In writing *Justified Sinners*, I was cognizant of the fact that this play might be some audience members first introduction to the Shelleys. Consequently, I wanted the portrayal of both characters to be as faithful a depiction as possible. To that end, I employed my critical understanding of the Shelleys and consulted various biographies to try and create dramatic renderings that felt faithful to my understanding of both Mary and Percy. In previously reading or viewing other plays about the Shelleys, I recalled feeling frustrated whenever an event or an action deviated too broadly from the historical record or defied my conception of Mary and Percy. While biographical fidelity is not an objective to which all Romantic Biodrama's aspire and true mimesis is an impossible goal, it was important to me that my play created a dramatic portrait of both writers that felt at least consistent with our received biographical image of them. Perhaps more honestly, I wanted the Mary and Percy of

Justified Sinners to sound and act like the Shelleys as I chose to imagine them based on reading their works and biographies about them. For me, this meant capturing Mary's intellect and rich interior life, Percy's quixotic nature and belief in the power of language to enact social change, and both writers' passionate interest in words and ideas.

However, while these felt like salient characteristics with which I could imbue these dramatic characters, I realized that I could only tell a story and plot the action of the play, since it would be up to the actors to give life to the Shelleys. This realization brought with it a sense of freedom and fear, knowing that the depiction of Mary and Percy in *Justified Sinners* would soon be out of my hands and the responsibility would fall to the actors who portrayed. But in taking part in the staging process and watching the Shelleys be reanimated onstage through Ardern and Grau's exemplary performances, I came to learn more about the theatrical process, Romantic Biodrama as a genre, and, indeed, the Shelleys themselves than I could have hoped. Through their conscientious work and empathetic portrayals, they invigorated my language and brought new life and vitality to these Romantic writers. Speaking in our September 1st talkback, I shared my own impressions of Grau and Ardern's respective portrayals of Percy and Mary Shelley and explained how much I appreciated their work in bringing these characters to life:

When you see writers that you love portrayed on stage, oftentimes there is a fear that they will be ruined...But to have two actors here who not only live up to your expectations of characters, but transcend everything you have loved and take something that is so beautiful and perfect to you and make it so beyond your wildest expectations. To bring joy, and light, and brightness, and vitality to people who have not lived for hundreds of years and to bring so much dedication, and intellect, and passion. I am so unspeakably grateful to the two of you for the work you have done on these characters. (498)

As this response helps demonstrate, seeing Mary and Percy Shelley come to life through Ardern and Grau's dramatic portrayal not only reminded me about what I appreciate most about them and their writing, but also served as an important lesson in how Romantic Biodramas and the physicality of performance lend greater immediacy and vitality to their historical subjects. To begin unpacking Mary and Percy's characterization within the script and how they were ultimately realized through our production, this section brings together different points of view and excerpts from the script to determine how the Shelleys are reimagined through this play. Although I will account for my intentions in creating both characters, this section emphasizes Mary and Percy Shelley's depiction in our play-in-production by bringing together quotations from the script and insights from Ardern, Grau, and Donovan.

Despite my desire to create dramatic portraits of the Shelleys that emerged from their writing and adhered to their established biographical image wherever possible, the premise of *Justified Sinners* as an imagined resurrection of Percy through his writing framed the character in distinctly supernatural terms. As such, although I still endeavored to maintain a salient link between the Percy in our play and the historical Percy who lived, I had to concede that this character was reanimated onstage by his grieving widow and, as such, could be my own imaginative rendering of him, rather than an attempt at mimetic re-creation. Rather than view this condition as a limitation, I instead started to acknowledge how freeing it was to create a dramatic portrait of Percy that was an impressionistic rendering of the historical figure, based on my research and reading of his life and writing. Considered in this way, the Percy of *Justified Sinners* was born out of biographical details and an established body of writing and subsequent criticism, but he ultimately came to represent the totality of his received biographical image, as I have come to view it through this project. As such, by using the historical Percy as an initial

point of departure, I was able to produce a vision of the character that came to symbolize and prioritize the portable, mutable, and highly-contingent image of Percy that has emerged and evolved over the last two hundred years. Resultantly, the play's premise of Mary reimagining her husband therefore permitted the Percy of *Justified Sinners* to emerge as a dramatic character as well as an aggregate of select biographical details,¹⁴⁸ examples from his literary oeuvre and nonfictional writings, secondary criticism,¹⁴⁹ key biographical treatments,¹⁵⁰ other biofictional representations,¹⁵¹ and my own interpretation of the historical record.

¹⁴⁸ While my posthumous portrayal of Percy allowed him to be divorced from many of the physical realities of his existence, I wanted to ground his portrayal through specific biographical details that I imagined would be key to Mary's conception of her husband's character. For example, during the Shelleys' first meeting, Percy recalls experiences with "Shelley baiting" from his youth. These instances of bullying were first recounted by his schoolmate, Edward C. Hawktreay, in *A History of Eton College, 1440-1844* (1889) and are retold through many modern biographies of Percy Shelley.

¹⁴⁹ Most foundationally, my critical conception of Percy's character in *Justified Sinners* is indebted to Andrew Bennett's work in *Romantic Poets and The Culture of Posterity* (1999). Bennett's discussion of "Shelley's ghosts," which he defines as "his sense of being haunted and his poetics and politics of haunting" greatly influenced my work, both in terms of this play and my larger project (159). Additionally, Ian Hamilton's *Keepers of the Flame: Literary Estates and the Rise of Biography* (1992) offered further insight into the early development of Percy's biographical image, which also informed both Shelleys' characterization.

¹⁵⁰ Although Richard Holmes' treatment of Percy Shelley in *Shelley: The Pursuit* (1974) was intentionally demystifying, my depiction of Percy as an ethereal, re-embodied spectre in *Justified Sinners* is partially indebted to Holmes' assessment that "Shelley's life seems more a haunting than a history" (xvii). But even more so, my treatment of Percy as an Ariel-like spirit is specifically indebted to Ann Wroe's experimental biography *Being Shelley: The Poet's Search for Himself* (2007). Rather than creating a strictly chronological, traditional biography, Wroe arranged her discussion of Percy's poetic life into four exploratory movements, each associated with one of the four earthly elements as it related to Percy. In her introduction, she outlines her intention to tell the story of Percy Shelley's artistic life: "The man who was Shelley is not neglected. He was the dragging shadow with which the soul had to live. But the usual priorities of biography are reversed. Rather than writing the life of a man into which poetry erupts occasionally, my hope is to reconstruct the world of a poet into which earthly life keeps intruding. This, I believe, is how things were for Shelley" (ix).

¹⁵¹ In Anne Bertram's 2007 play *Frankenstein Incarnate: The Passions of Mary Shelley*, she underscored the biographical associations between Mary Shelley's life and writing by double-casting members of the Shelley circle as characters from Mary's most famous novel. In a scene towards the end of the play that takes place after Percy's death, he briefly returns to Mary in

But although Percy's re-embodiment in the play through Mary's memories allowed me to introduce an imaginative element to his characterization, I was primarily invested in creating a version of Percy that reflected Mary's vision of him and with whom she could interact, reminisce, or even interrogate. This meant that, although he was ostensibly a figment of Mary's imagination created through her reading of his words, he still had to be a fully-formed character that embodied her view of her husband. In Mary's closing monologue to the audience, she concedes that the character we have seen is not a perfect re-creation of the historical Percy as he lived, but instead, the image of her "Shelley" as she chose to remember him: "Believe me, I know that he isn't perfect. Far from it. Truthfully, he might not have been as lovely as the version of him that I have created through my memories. But he is my Shelley. My own perfectly, imperfect Shelley. And, in the end, that is enough to justify everything. Don't you think?" (447). Mary's disclosure that the version of Percy seen in *Justified Sinners* is "created through my memories" and that "he might not have been as lovely" as the character she recalled is an explicit acknowledgement of the slippage between the lived realities of the Shelleys as historical figures and their biofictional depiction in this and other works. In this case though, the slippage is an intentional discord that is deeply imbricated within Mary's textual resurrection of her husband and we are explicitly reminded that this Percy is only a simulacrum of the "real" Percy, both within intra-theatricality of the play itself and outside in terms of the extra-theatrical world. Bearing in mind the many layers of creation, interpretation, and reimagining that necessarily underpin this version of Percy in *Justified Sinners*, we can unpack the constituent

place of *Frankenstein's* Creature and strangles her to death. Although it is only a brief scene to close the play, this was the only example I came across that dramatized the Shelleys' posthumous relationship. Furthermore, in reading this script, I was particularly interested in how this short scene highlighted the Doppelgänger relationship by doubling Mary as Victor Frankenstein and Percy as his Creature.

features of this character as a “vision in a dream”¹⁵² to determine how Percy is collaboratively rendered, both within the play by Mary, and outside the play by myself as playwright and Grau and Donovan as actor and director, respectively.

In *Justified Sinners*, Percy is variously envisioned as Mary’s biographical subject, friend, confidante, paramour, editor, adversary, Doppelgänger, and soulmate. Correspondingly, he demonstrates a variety of character traits associated with the many roles he plays in Mary’s life and these attributes are primarily derived from his own words. Early in the play, Percy reassures Mary that he can never be gone so long as his ideas endure through words adapted from his treatise “A Defence of Poetry” (1821/1840): “I always told you that, for a poet, there is no such thing as death. A poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one.¹⁵³ I can’t be gone when my words were written to transcend, to reflect the universal truth, to inspire every individual in every epoch to action” (4). In another instance, Mary recalls her earlier courtship with Percy and their dialogue directly quotes his poem “Alastor” (1816):

Mary: “Her voice was like the voice of his own soul / Heard in the calm of thought;”

Percy: “its music long, / Like woven sounds of streams and breezes, held...”

Mary: “...His inmost sense suspended in its web” (420).

Percy Shelley’s deeply-personal lyrical poetry, impassioned prose, and revealing journals and letters offer invaluable insight into his character and offer evocative language that I referenced in the play to help nuance and specify his characterization in *Justified Sinners*. By using Percy Shelley’s own words as the basis for his characterization, I hoped to create a dramatic version of

¹⁵² Subtitle of Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s lyrical fragment “Kubla Khan” (1797/1816).

¹⁵³ From Percy’s “A Defence of Poetry” (1821/1840): “A Poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one; as far as relates to his conceptions, time and place and number are not” (483).

him that authentically emerged from his text. But more than that, by using Percy's writing and ideas as the foundation for his dialogue, I endeavored to show how Mary's often-idealized version of him in *Justified Sinners* was informed by both her memories and his words, which she was poring through in 1824 as his posthumous editor. Through these quoted lines, I wanted the audience to learn about Percy and his dramatic counterpart through his own words and to show how Mary was similarly connected to his literary identity. The adaptation or direct quotation of Percy's words in these instances thus created a salient link between his portrayal in *Justified Sinners* and the historical Percy's writing and practically demonstrated how Mary's re-reading of his words informed her continuing conception of her husband after his death in 1822. However, while I employed Percy's words as a balm for Mary that directly evoked her husband's poetic spirit, I also used his language to nuance his characterization in negative ways as well.

The major source of conflict in the play emerges from the discoveries Mary made through reading and editing Percy's works. The inspiration for this idea came from Mary's "Journal of Sorrow," in which she directly addressed Percy, articulating her ensuing frustrations and depression. I wanted Mary to be able to confront Percy about some of the discoveries she made in reading his words: namely, his growing resentment of her and her "coldness" and his growing interest in other women. Again, this view of Percy was not only derived through Mary's descriptions of him to the audience, but was developed through his own words, which Mary had him confront by read them aloud:

(Reading from each page, to the audience) "Mary considers me as a portion of herself, and feels no more remorse in torturing me than in torturing her own mind" *(Reading the next page)* "I like Jane more and more" *(Reading the next page)* "I only feel the want of those who can feel, and understand me...Mary does not." (427-28)

In another example, I showed Percy reversing this dynamic and defending his actions by forcing Mary to read from his notes to his first major poem, “Queen Mab” (1813), and Godwin’s *Political Justice* (1793). Using his words as a defense of his actions, Percy says to her in the play: “Were the tenets of my philosophy not made clear to you through the same words that first ensnared your heart? You read the notes that accompanied my “Queen Mab”—you wrote of your love for me on those same pages. I confess that I was filled with an all-consuming fire then, but don’t pretend I was ever vague” (19). Elsewhere in the play, Percy’s critiques of Mary’s writing are informed by his actual editorial marginalia for *Frankenstein* (1818) and, more specifically, his indication that she had misspelled “enigmatic” in her manuscript:

Percy: For God’s sake, Mary, you misspelled “enigmatic!” Imagine sending that mess to a publisher without my editorial overview—you would have disgraced your parents’ legacies.

Mary: Well then, my family is forever indebted to you and your benevolence. (424)

Each use of Percy’s writing in *Justified Sinners* is employed to shed new light on the different, sometimes-contradictory aspects of the historical Percy’s writerly voice. Accordingly, whether Mary is recalling his Romantic lyrics, his youthful treatises, his editorial assertions, or his revealing letters, each text contributes to the patchwork that comprises the quixotic and mercurial vision of Percy that we encounter through *Justified Sinners*. By directly employing Percy’s words into the script as both the basis for the character’s dialogue and evidence employed by Mary and Percy, I was therefore able to highlight the direct link between the historical Percy’s life and writing, a connection that was further strengthened through his posthumous memorialization. Importantly then, in *Justified Sinners*, Percy’s character traits emerged through Mary’s view of him and are subsequently broadcast to the audience through his own words.

Accordingly, his positive traits, including his idealism, adoration, and utopian aims, are realized through his recollected words, but similarly, his callousness, critical tendencies, and incendiary nature also emerge as Mary re-reads her husband through his words.

Although Percy is re-animated as a “living body of work” in *Justified Sinners*, he is also necessarily an embodied character that was physicalized realized onstage. Contending with the challenges of bringing such a character to life onstage, Grau discovered deeply-human and accessible features of Percy’s characterization that allowed him to understand and embody the character in our production. In our September 1st talkback, Grau described the character as “a ball of fire,” keying into the symbolic contrast established in the play between Percy as “a real creature of fire” and Mary as “cold moonshine” (500; 423; 438).¹⁵⁴ Later reflecting on Percy’s characterization in *Justified Sinners*, as he portrayed him, Grau first asserted that “I found Percy to be a deeply thoughtful individual, who would take a criticism of his philosophy as a personal attack on his way of life.” Furthermore, Grau suggested that although Percy “was aware that his ideas could appear self-indulgent, even hedonistic, I believe they came from a profoundly empathetic place.” He elaborated on this contradictory characterization of Percy, explaining that “he loved love, he loved existence itself, and he believed in not only human potential, but in the aesthetic capacities of the universe itself...he believed that overcoming the ugliness of the world was absolutely worth the beauty on the other side.” However, in accounting for Percy’s negative character traits, Grau also conceded that Percy’s love and steadfast belief was undercut by the

¹⁵⁴ In his brief “sentiment” about Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, entitled “The Feminist and the Philosopher: A Love Story,” Romantic biographer Richard Holmes used fire and ice to describe the relationship between the first-generation Romantic couple. This partially inspired my characterization of Percy and Mary in *Justified Sinners* as like fire and ice, respectively.

fact that “he was also an insecure and fearful man.” Furthermore, he took stock of some of Percy’s flaws, which he perceived to be linked to his idealistic nature. Namely, Grau observed that “his affinity for beauty often led to an inability to deal with reality when it became raw and harsh.” Additionally, he felt that Percy “preferred to ignore problems” rather “than to face them” and that “he distanced himself from that which did not represent his ideals, even if those objects were of his own creation.” Finally, Grau suggested that “he seldom dwelled on matters,” instead “preferring a sense of momentum towards what he saw as a glorious future.”

Grau’s description of how he read, and subsequently portrayed Percy in our production, provides insight into how he brought vitality to a character that was comprised strictly of words and memories. His observations that Percy was at once a “deeply thoughtful individual,” “profoundly empathetic,” “insecure and fearful,” and someone who “preferred to ignore problems” and was unable to “deal with reality” captures the complexities and contradictions inherent to his characterization in *Justified Sinners*. But more than that, these traits speak to the humanity and flawed nature of the character, which can be directly attributed to the play’s textual basis and the intention to capture Percy Shelley’s prismatic writerly-identity through the integration of his writing into the script itself. In our talkbacks following the performances, both Grau and Donovan observed that Percy’s treatment in *Justified Sinners* allowed for his words, ideas, and attributes to be viewed and appraised by the audience, which made it possible to see his negative and positive traits. During our August 30th talkback, Grau observed that Percy’s characterization in *Justified Sinners* takes the facts of Percy’s life and “adds such a three-dimensional view to it.” As a result, “you understand why, and you understand how that affected Mary and how Mary’s attitude towards him affected him” (487). Speaking to the character’s depiction in the play, Donovan similarly noted during our September 1st talkback that



Kalmer, Kelsi. "Production Photo from *Justified Sinners* in Performance, Featuring Morgan Grau as Percy Shelley," 29 August. 2017, Edmonton. Design by Sarah Karpyskin.

“it is so much more interesting to watch him and to put no judgment on him and to allow everyone else to decide” (497). Here, both Grau and Donovan suggest that the play’s depiction of both Percy’s strengths and flaws allowed for audience members to each determine how they felt about the character. This observation supports my decision to create a dramatic portrait of Percy that represented the totality and inherent complexities of his writerly-identity, as reflected through his various fictional and nonfictional writings. Accordingly, although the Percy of *Justified Sinners* appears to us and to Mary as an re-embodiment of his words, his legacy, and her memories, his nuanced depiction by Grau in our production, and under Donovan’s direction, maintained the character’s humanity and all that entailed. Resultantly, by creating a version of Percy that emerged from his words and maintained their deeply-personal, lyrical sentiments, our play-in-performance presented a fully-realized dramatic character and gave audiences the freedom to determine whether this Percy could be considered a “justified sinner” in our play.

Having discussed Percy’s textual origins and development into a dramatic character in our production of *Justified Sinners*, I now transition to Mary’s depiction and her journey in the play. To begin, in writing *Justified Sinners*, I did not intentionally set out to re-centralize Mary Shelley or her story. In fact, if anything, I assumed my play would focus on Percy, because so many plays have emphasized Mary and *Frankenstein* in recent years. In the talkback on August 31st, I articulated this initial interest to the audience, noting how an increased attention towards Mary in contemporary Romantic Biodramas and my own interest in Percy made him the initial subject of interest for me: “when I set out to write this play, I wanted to do one about Percy because, as the twenty-first century has progressed, we have moved towards telling the story of Mary more often...I wanted to focus on him, as he is my favourite writer, and so I hoped I could centralize him” (490). But as I also noted in the talkback, in writing the play, “the

balance skewed” as “I came to side with Mary so much that it came to be more about her” (490). Accordingly, when it came time to write, Mary clearly asserted herself as the play’s primary figure and the intermediary who directly spoke to the audience. Perhaps, my decision to stage a conversation between Mary and Percy after the latter’s death already focused the narrative on Mary’s experience as the living and resurrecting memoirist, instead of Percy as the remembered and recalled spirit. Whatever the reason for the focal shift, there can be no doubt that Mary’s experience is centralized in *Justified Sinners*, even as she works to preserve and propagate her husband’s legacy. She is the one who maintains editorial control over Percy’s writing after his death, she is the one who evokes the posthumous presence of Percy, and she is the one who initiates the drama’s central conflict.

In our September 1st talkback, Ardern discussed her perception of Mary Shelley in *Justified Sinners* and identified the many contradictions that defined the historical figure and subsequently informed her dramatic portrayal:

I started reading about Mary Shelley and what really drew me to her and what interested me is that everyone described her differently. Her father described her as very spirited and fiery, but too much so, so she got sent to Scotland because she was always fighting with her stepmother. And Shelley described her actually as quite soft and lovely and girlish, until she got enraged by something. This person who was very spirited, but also very kind, and also soft, and wrote *Frankenstein*, which horrified everybody...So I was very interested in what looks like contradictory aspects of the character, because she’s all of those things. (499)

Ardern’s identification of the fact that “everyone described her differently,” and that this multiplicity of perspectives indicated “contradictory aspects of the character,” gets to the heart of

Mary's characterization in *Justified Sinners*. In developing her dramatic portrait in the play, I similarly worked to capture the seemingly "contradictory" nature of Mary Shelley by accounting for her apparent temper and austerity, her sensitivity and aloofness, her intellectualism and her emotional drive, her youthful sense of rebellion and her world-weary recalcitrance. *Justified Sinners* encounters Mary when she is twenty-seven-years-old, widowed, nearly impoverished, and having lived through the death of four children. Her most successful novel, *Frankenstein*, was published six years earlier, although she continued writing for the rest of her life. As a survivor of Romanticism and the Shelleyan project, Mary had already lived a long life by 1824, and I wanted to imbue her dramatic character in the play with a sense of her perilous emotional and physical journeys from youth to adulthood, married life to widowhood, mother of many children to single parent to one young son, member of a vibrant artistic coterie to isolated individual. To that end, I wanted her to re-live and vividly recall her hard-worn maturation and growth through her imagined dialogue with Percy in the play.

For *Justified Sinners*, the character of Mary actively engages with the audience and guides us through her experience of resurrecting her husband through his words. As the play begins, she introduces herself in declarative statements that establish her identity, while acknowledging her many roles, relationships, and cultural associations that persist in the twenty-first century:

I am Mary Shelley, author of *Frankenstein*. I am Mary Shelley, wife of the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. I am Mary Shelley, daughter of revolutionaries and supposed heir apparent to their creative genius. I am Mary Shelley, mother of monsters, sole survivor of collapsed literary empires, and last keeper of a dying flame. (414)

This initial introduction to the character indicates her knowledge of her various identifiers and the fact that she is many things to many people. Importantly, it also introduces the idea that, during her life, she was both known and defined in relation to others: to her more famous novel, to her more famous husband, to her more famous family. By beginning the play with this series of declarative identifiers that emphasize Mary's subservience, I hoped to later undercut her willingness to be defined in relation to others throughout the play by showing Mary resisting and revolting against the weight of these expectations.



Kalmer, Kelsi. "Production Photo from *Justified Sinners* in Performance, Featuring Jessy Ardern as Mary Shelley," 29 August. 2017, Edmonton. Design by Sarah Karpyschin.

In conceiving of Mary's character arc in *Justified Sinners*, I wanted to show her rejuvenated by Percy's return and for their reunion to bring her back to the version of herself that first met him and fell in love when she was seventeen-years-old. Speaking to her portrayal of Mary Shelley in the play, Ardern similarly acknowledged a shift in her depiction that coincided with the character's narrative arc. She said that she "wound up playing her rather young and light, particularly in the half," explaining that her "intention was to have her turn young again as soon as Percy reappeared in her life, and then to watch her age and mature as the play went on." To help show this sense of youthful infatuation, extended to near-idolatry of Percy and his writing, I employed Percy's language in the script and showed Mary becoming enthralled by his words:

Percy: I always told you that, for a poet, there is no such thing as death. A poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one.¹⁵⁵ I can't be gone when my words were written to transcend, to reflect the universal truth, to inspire every individual in every epoch to action.

Mary: (*Laughing*) There you go, making me fall in love with you all over again.

Percy: And there you go, making my heart sink and sicken with excess of love.¹⁵⁶ (416)

In showing Mary becoming captivated by Percy's language, quoted directly from his works, I wanted the audience to see the birth of their relationship and to imagine how the teenaged Mary first became enchanted with the poet. To accomplish this, the first movement of the play, where Mary and Percy are reunited, shows Mary who as a Romantic ingenue, rather than the world-weary woman we meet as the play begins. Primarily invested in her husband and finding

¹⁵⁵ Percy's "A Defence of Poetry" (1821/1840).

¹⁵⁶ Percy's "Alastor" (1816).

pleasure in supporting his writing, this Mary willfully plays a supporting role to Percy at the cost of her own literary talents. Accordingly, these early scenes portray an idealized version of the Shelleys' young courtship, but one that also relies on Mary's submission and therefore hints at the possibility of her later discontentment with their dynamic. For example, almost immediately after Percy appears in the play, he responds to Mary's confession that editing his poems has given her "some sense of purpose" by responding, "come on, Mary! You really haven't finished it yet?" (415). Mary's answer of "I'm trying the best I can. I want to get it right" is intended to show the sense of duty she continued to feel and Percy's continuing power in their relationship,



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even in her mind after his death (415). In another instance, returning to a memory of the first time they declared their love to each other, Mary initially offers criticism on Percy's writing before relenting, saying:

Then it doesn't matter how I feel about them or what I would want to write. What's important is that I think you are wonderful and brilliant and even incendiary. A real creature of fire (*They smile together*). But most of all, nothing matters as much to me as your happiness. And these words seem to make you incredibly excited, so those are the right words for you. (423)

For that scene, which showed the Shelleys' early relationship, I wanted to depict a younger Mary who was enamored with Percy's poetic spirit and willing to put his artistic vision ahead of her own. Like the declarations of her relational identity at the start of the play, Mary's willingness to silence her own critical voice for the sake of her husband's artistic vision here worked to undercut the idyllic nature of the Shelleys' reunion by hinting at an imbalance in their relationship that was soon addressed.

Having shown a younger version of Mary, who was perhaps more willing to sacrifice her own interests for Percy's, the play then explores how Mary has become disenchanted with her subservient role and less willing to continue ignoring her husband's behavior. For example, in response to Percy's critique of her early work on *The Last Man* (1826), Mary refuses to accept his "exercise in contrast and comparison" (425):

Mary: Yes, I said I get it. I am a writer too, as you well know.

Percy: Of course, but sometimes the coarseness of the prose form that you insist on working in simply cannot capture the prismatic and highly nuanced...

Mary: I said I've got it, Shelley. I have been doing a fine job of writing without you here.
(426)

This same resistance against Percy is seen in Mary's unwillingness to overlook Percy's perceived cruelty towards her in how his poems, letters, and journals negatively compared her to other women: "any attempt to assert myself, whether creatively or otherwise, would be read as a tyrannical act. Meanwhile, your opinions and views are merely altruistic assertions. Simply a prodigious talent deigning to assist his inferior wife at every turn" (429). Resultantly, although Mary promises Percy "I will protect and preserve your legacy in print, like a good little Mary," this assurance is tempered by her conditions that she will not let him "cower from your words" and that "with you and I at least, there must be a reckoning" (430). This iteration of Mary in the play again reflects the character's contradictory nature, which Arden identified in her description. Furthermore, in this movement of the play, Mary primarily contends with Percy's characterization of her as "cold," which she learned of through his verse and letters. Building on the contradictory nature of Mary's characterization, both historically and in *Justified Sinners*, I wanted her most fiery, volatile behavior in the play to emerge in response to these accusations of coldness, thus further reiterating her own mercurial characterization. Correspondingly, building from these initial signs of tension between the couple, the conflict of *Justified Sinners* comes to a crisis point as Mary's frustrations, which she suppressed in life, are finally given voice. Confronting Percy, she holds him accountable for his own avoidable death:

At least I didn't die like a fool! You took your pathetic boat out sailing. You went out even though you knew a storm was blowing in. You left your wife and child alone so that you could play sea captain with your mistress' husband. And you can't even swim! Who is that stupid? You are supposed to be a great poetic genius and you don't even

understand how water works! You don't understand anything about what people need to live. (434)

These accusations against, Percy and the suggestion that his recklessness made him culpable in his accidental death, gave Mary the chance to share her private anger and to assign blame to someone else for her situation, even if it is Percy himself. In addition to finally airing her grievances with her husband, Mary also expresses her own insecurities as a writer and her husband's editor. Showing Mary's response to the well-documented objections to her editing Percy's works was important for me to present in the play. In addition to losing her husband, Mary also lost many of the couple's friends after Percy's passing, with many similarly believing she was too cold in her response after his death¹⁵⁷ and others feeling she was an incapable editor after her editions were published. I wanted to show the toll that these accusations took on Mary during this period by having her reveal that she was intimately familiar with these charges of coldness and unworthiness:

I was an unworthy wife to you and now I am your unworthy editor. After all, that's what your friends have been saying about me since you died...And none of you are wrong either. I didn't deserve to be the wife of a brilliant poet and I am unfit to read your poems, let alone edit them. I should have died instead of you—everyone would be so much happier! (435)

¹⁵⁷ In her biography *Mary Shelley* (1987), Muriel Spark describes Hunt's reaction to Mary after Percy's death and how deeply it affected her:

She was surprised at first that Hunt's manner towards her was cool. As she recalled her past life with Shelley, she thought of the sum total of eight years, a companionship of the rarest order. But Hunt focused his attention only on the last weeks of Shelley's life, sadly embittered, as Shelley had confided to Hunt in those last tragic days, by Mary's low spirits and withdrawal. When Mary discovered the reason for Hunt's coldness, she too began to accuse herself and to repent her latter moodiness. (101)

In the latter movement of the play, Mary's anger subsides as she gains a greater understanding of her husband's final days. Furthermore, Mary develops the courage to share her full story with the audience and, through Percy's insistence, talks about her lost children for the first time in the play. Her confessional narrative directly recalls Mary's use of relational identifiers in her opening monologue, adding to the roles and relationships with which she is so often associated. Resultantly, she adds to her roles as author, wife, daughter, editor, and survivor by finally adopting her final mantle in the play: a mother, who outlived many of her children:

I am Mary Shelley, mother of William pre-deceased, Clara pre-deceased, an unnamed infant daughter pre-deceased, a miscarried child, and my little Percy Florence—so named after his late-father. I was the Mother of beautiful children. But they did not stay with me. Every time I lost another child to the cold grip of Death, Shelley sought to rectify the hurt with another one. Replacement parts for a broken heart. (437)

In finally sharing this important part of the Shelleys' story, Mary acknowledges an essential component of the couple's relationship and gives a name to the shared trauma that drove them apart. Building on this initial identification and the deeply-personal nature of this intimate disclosure, I wanted to use the historical Mary's own words in this section to give voice to her experience. Accordingly, I directly quoted from her journal entry on March 19, 1815, which was written after the death of her first daughter in February 1815:

After losing my first child, a tiny girl who passed before I could name her, I dreamt that my little baby came to life again; that she had only been cold, and that we rubbed her before the fire and she lived. But I awoke to find no baby. She left no words, so how am I supposed to tell *her* story? (438)

By adapting Mary Shelley's own journal entry into the character's confessional monologue, I hoped to imbue this moment in the play with a sense of realism through personalization, which would help to capture Mary's specific experience as a grieving mother. The revelation of this remarkable loss to the audience not only informs our understanding of the character, but also leads the Shelleys' to acknowledge each other's individual, distinct responses to this shared grief. Reflecting on their distance after the loss of their children, Mary suggests "we could have faced it all together, as we always had in the past" but Percy's contention that he "could not look in your eyes, and you could not look in mine" speaks to the emotional barriers that separated them during their final years together (439). Considered in this way, Mary's decision to share the story of her children with the audience both reveals a key aspect of the character and allows the couple to communicate and work through their shared grief for the first time in *Justified Sinners*. Although the beginning of the play recalled a version of Mary that was unburdened by the many losses that she was forced to contend with from her daughter's passing in 1815 to Percy's death in 1822, the Shelleys' relationship towards the end of the play is characterized by a greater sense of empathy and understanding, which is enabled through the difficult conversations that Mary initiated. Consequently, although the Mary we see at the end of *Justified Sinners* has endured much, but within and outside the events of the play, she is both sadder and wiser than the version of her we see through her remembered courtship with Percy. And, importantly, it is this iteration of Mary who, having gained a greater understanding of their bond, willingly lets Percy leave as the play ends. Resolving to follow his advice to let his *Posthumous Poems* "take flight," Mary resolves to finally lay her project "to rest" (447).

Accordingly, the play concludes with Mary returning to the audience and delivering a final monologue that demonstrates her character growth throughout the play and her hard-earned



Kalmer, Kelsi. "Production Photo from *Justified Sinners* in Performance, Featuring Jessy Arden as Mary and Morgan Grau as Percy," 29 August. 2017, Edmonton. Design by Sarah Karpyschin.

sense of peace and contentment with herself, her literary work, and her relationship. Having found a sense of peace through her conversation with Percy, Mary re-dedicating herself to the afterlife Shelleyan project, beginning with completing *Posthumous Poems* for publication. While the Mary we saw with Percy earlier in that play expressed her love by supporting his poetic spirit, here she fully realizes her dedication to their collective work by determining, as she does in her “Journal of Sorrow,” that “I shall write his life:”

In the private hours of my widow’s grief, I have been working to curate and create this: *The Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Through this book, I shall write his life and try my best to galvanize the spirits of future admirers for many ages to come. Its pages speak of many a walk and many a conversation when I was not alone. My companion was one who, in this world, I shall never see more.¹⁵⁸ Yet perhaps, he is not entirely lost after all. (*Thinking back*) “Nothing of him that doth fade...” (447)

As *Justified Sinners* closes, Mary returns to the audience and her renewed resolution to preserve Percy’s legacy through print reflects the journey she has gone through over the course of the play. After Percy’s return, we see a glimpse of Mary’s younger self, captivated by the poet and willing to place his artistic vision ahead of her own. However, the Mary of 1824, when the play is set, is ten years older than she was when she met and fell in love with Percy and the effects of this temporal shift can be seen in her maturation as a writer and an individual. Furthermore, in addition to having lived through many hardships and tragedies in the interim, Mary in *Justified Sinners* occupies a new position of power in her relationship as Percy’s editor, biographer, and the one responsible for preserving and propagating his literary legacy. How Mary ultimately decided to use this power over Percy, to “write his life” and “galvanize the spirits of future

¹⁵⁸ Mary’s 1831 Introduction to *Frankenstein*.

admirers,” speaks to her deep-rooted love for Percy and the nobility of her efforts to continue the Shelleyan project after his death. Considered in this way, much like the historical Mary Shelley, Mary in *Justified Sinners* is shown to be an evolving and nuanced individual whose apparent austerity belies her unconditional love and persisting devotion to Percy, even after his death.

Bringing together the individual characterizations of Mary and Percy in *Justified Sinners*, this section concludes with a consideration of how the Shelleys and their relationship are collectively treated through the play-in-production. As I have already made clear through this section and elsewhere, one of my primary goals in writing this play was to create a story that focused on the dynamic between Mary and Percy Shelley as a Romantic couple. Consequently, *Justified Sinners* offers an intimate portrayal of the couple and examines their shared joys as well as the many trials and tribulations that plagued their relationship. By focalizing their relationship and peeling back the almost mythological associations of their relationship to see how the Shelleys lived and wrote together, I hoped to create an accessible, affecting portrait of their Romantic love that acknowledged both individual’s strengths, aspirations, and inherent contradictions.

To gain further insight into how the Shelleys’ bond was portrayed in our production, Grau, Ardern, and Donovan again spoke to how they conceived of Mary and Percy’s relationship in *Justified Sinners*. Grau began by suggesting that, “much like Percy as an individual, they don’t dwell on, or at times even acknowledge, the problems in their relationship, which in turn *is* one of their greatest problems.” Furthermore, he described the Shelleys’ dynamic as “playful” and “caring,” although he felt that “there seems to be a dynamic wherein Percy tries to control the relationship.” He also observed that “when they come into conflict, they don’t communicate, yet when they’re in good spirits they seem to be able to speak volumes about each other.” Ardern

similarly spoke to the breakdown in communication between the couple that led to the play's conflict and described their relationship in *Justified Sinners* as "fraught with misunderstandings." She elaborated that she felt "they had a deep love that was interrupted by an inability to communicate through their pain and sorrow." As a result, she felt that their relationship was "quite tragic in the end." Donovan spoke about the relationship between Mary and Percy, as developed through our production. He began by characterizing it as "flawed, but deeply human." He further asserted that "we seem so quick to forget that both Percy and Mary lost four children in a horrifically short period of time." He elaborated further on the character of both Shelleys, claiming that "these were young people doing their best to change the world for the better" and that "their relationship wasn't perfect." However, he observed that "if they could stay together after losing four children in a row, then by god they must have loved each other some fiercely." As Grau, Ardern, and Donovan's characterization of the Shelleys' relationship in our play-in-production suggest, the couple's bond was both deeply-felt and fraught with hardships borne out of their shared loss and inability to communicate through it. Through the play's memory scenes, we catch glimpses into the beginning of their love affair, but the Mary and Percy that we join in 1824 have been estranged through trauma and ultimately separated through death. Although they are physically reunited in the play, at least in Mary's mind, the distance between them in life from the loss of their children still plagues them and it only towards the end of the play that they start to come back together, gaining a new understanding of each other's private grief:

Percy: Hello, Pecksie.

Mary: Hello, my Elf. It's good to see you again.

Percy: I didn't really go anywhere, did I?

Mary: No, I guess not. But I don't think I've really seen you in a long time. (446)

In this exchange, the Shelleys return to the initial sense of love that pervaded the play's earlier scenes, which is reflected through their use of the historical Mary and Percy's pet names for each other. Having learned of each other's plight, they returned to the initial warmth and conviviality of their memories, although that love is rendered bittersweet through their continuing separation.

Furthermore, just as I had employed the Shelleys' writing for their individual dramatic portraits, I continued to integrate their collaborative writing to help demonstrate the closeness of their relationship. For example, in a key moment later in the play, Mary and Percy return to the memory of their elopement and journey to Calais in 1814. The couple kept an elopement journal during their travels, which would later be published as *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* in 1817, in which they collaboratively described their shared experiences abroad. For the scene in the play, I adapted lines directly from this journal, which Percy spoke to the audience, as he and Mary gathered around an aquarium onstage and imagined a teacup as their imperiled ship. The sense of intimacy and closeness between the couple was not only reinforced through the reference to their co-authored elopement journal, but Percy's words here also highlighted the permanence of their relationship, even in death:

She was resting on the boards between my knees. She did not speak or look, but I felt that she was there. I had time in that moment to reflect and even to reason upon the possibility of death. She and I could never be separated, but in death we might not know and feel our union as we did then. I could not stand the thought of losing her..." (445)

Through these words, directly adapted from the Shelleys' elopement journal, Percy expresses his certainty that he and Mary "could never be separated," but that "in death we might now know and feel our union as we did then." This statement regarding the persistence of the Shelleys' bond and its mutability in the face of death encapsulates their relationship in *Justified Sinners*

and highlights the mutability of their irrevocable bond, which allows it to persevere after Percy's passing. The sense of closeness, intimacy, and the intrinsic connection between the Shelleys is further reiterated at the end of the scene through words that are again adapted from their elopement journal. At one point in the journal, Percy started a sentence by noting that "Mary was there" and Mary ended that same line by adding "Shelley was also with me." Correspondingly, the Shelleys' memory in *Justified Sinners* ends with a similar sense of complement and completion as Percy says, "Mary was there," to which Mary responds, "and Shelley was with me" (446). This sense of personal intimacy and close collaboration, captured through these complementary sentiments, pervaded their lives and writing for the eight years they were together and continued until Percy's death in 1822. But as *Justified Sinners* works to show, their relationship did not end and instead continued after Percy's passing when Mary took up the mantle of his biographer and editor, allowing their conversation to continue.

As this section on the Shelleys in *Justified Sinners* has helped to show, my decision to employ the Shelleys' writing as the basis for the script created a salient connection between the characters and the words and ideas of their historical subjects. Consequently, although Percy appears to us in the play as an imagined re-creation based on Mary's memories, his characterization is informed by the lyrics, the philosophies, and the flaws that are directly associated with Percy Shelley. Similarly, in turning to Mary's "Journal of Sorrow" that she kept after Percy's text to develop her dramatic portrayal, her depiction in the play specifically emerged from her language and emotional state following her husband's death in 1822. Finally, our production and the physical realization of Percy by Grau and Mary by Ardern, under Donovan's direction, helped to capture the inherent contradictions of both characters, as well as the joys and tragedies of this relationship. To continue discussing how production elements came

together to enhance and further nuance *Justified Sinners* in performance, this next explores how design was used to practically enable the production, underscore themes from the play, and continue developing audience understanding of the Shelleys in this Romantic Biodrama.



Kalmer, Kelsi. "Production Photo from *Justified Sinners* in Performance, Featuring Jessy Ardern as Mary and Morgan Grau as Percy," 29 August. 2017, Edmonton. Design by Sarah Karpyskin.

Designing *Justified Sinners*

While writing *Justified Sinners*, I found that my imagination was limited in terms of possible design elements that could help bring the story to life in production. My initial hope that the play would debut as part of a Fringe festival partly attributed to my limited consideration of design elements. Additionally, I did not want to be too prescriptive in my directions and wanted

to leave the staging decisions to potential production teams. But admittedly, the real reason for my oversight in this regard is my lack of experience in stage design and my own inability to conceive of how sets, props, costumes, lighting, and sound could be effectively employed to meaningfully enhance the play-in-production. Thus, the stage directions include no mention of costumes and stipulations regarding props, lighting, and sound are limited to minor suggestions. In terms of imaging a possible set, my own lack of imagination in this regard and desire to make the script as easy to stage as possible led me to include very limited instructions in the stage directions:

1824; Kentish Town in north London. Percy Shelley's desk sits center stage. Inside the desk and unseen by the audience is the burned remnant of Percy's heart, wrapped in the pages of his poem "Adonais." Two small books are inside (Percy's "Queen Mab" and the Shelleys' elopement journal). The desk is strewn with a large pile of Percy's loose papers and journals, many of which are water-logged or damaged through heavy use. The pages themselves are filled with scribbled notes, frequent edits or scratched out phrases, and liberal doodles (especially of boats). Among these pages, a large book sits closed. This book represents what will become The Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley, which was edited by Mary and published later that year. (414)

As these limited stage directions at the start of the play demonstrate, my initial vision of *Justified Sinners* in performance involved a single set piece place center stage: "Percy Shelley's desk." My rationale was that, because the events of the play emerged from Mary's reading of Percy's words, that having his desk as the only set piece and placing it at center stage would visually focalize and centralize his words and her editorial efforts. As my directions indicate then, I was more concerned with providing specific clues to the characters through this set piece, instead of

considering the utility of the desk or the limitation of having only a single item of furniture onstage. Accordingly, the fact that “*inside the desk and unseen by the audience is the burned remnant of Percy’s heart, wrapped in the pages of his poem ‘Adonais’*” took precedent over detailing more practical concerns or considering how this proposed set would influence the play’s staging.

Reflecting now on these opening stage directions and the final design for *Justified Sinners* in production, I am again reminded about a discovery I repeatedly made throughout the staging process: that collaborating with others made the play better than I could have ever imagined. Although my directions served as a jumping off point for Karpyshin and Donovan, their design work far transcended what I thought was possible and their creativity, resourceful, and ingenuity resulted in a spectacular production design. Even more, their design not only practically facilitated the production and enabled the performance to take place, but their ideas and inspirations meaningfully enhanced the play-in-production by inflecting themes and ideas from the Shelleys’ story.

The first element of the production design that I want to consider is the set design by Sarah Karpyshin. The production’s set design maintained the large desk from my stage directions, but also filled the space with additional set pieces that enhanced the utility and contributed to the overall aesthetic of the piece. In addition to the desk, which was placed upstage towards the back corner, seven additional pieces, or rather collections of objects and furniture, artfully littered the set. These included a sculptural stack of books and pages upstage in the back corner of the stage, three stacks of books for the actors to stand or sit on in the center stage area, an array of books and pages at the most downstage point of the stage towards the

audience, and finally, at both center-left and center-right, stacks of books were topped with asymmetrical aquariums that were filled with papers.



Reid, Brittany. "Set at the Top of the Show for *Justified Sinners*," 29 August 2017, Edmonton. Set design by Sarah Karpyschin.

The resulting effect was a stage design that was at once practical for the performance and allowed for dynamic blocking, but also a space that was distinctly lived-in and possible to imagine as the writerly, creative place where the play is set. Later discussing the overall feeling, mood, or aesthetic that she worked to evoke through her set design for *Justified Sinners*, Karpyschin explained "I wanted the overall feel to be warm and cozy, like a small bookshop. When you cozy up to read a good book." She also discussed how she was able to use lighting to enhance this sense of comfort: "with lighting, I wanted there to be a sense of warmth," since the Shelleys "are remembering the good memories going through a walk of their life together." Furthermore, Karpyschin commented on how the color palette of the set and costumes influenced

her lighting choices: “since the set was beige mostly and Percy and Mary were in white and black respectively, I was able to throw a warmer than usual color at them. Punchier colors.” She elaborated that she “wanted it to be an intimate setting, heavy and grounded but not because of sadness, but grounded because of knowledge.” Karpyshin also talked about how the Second Playing Space’s versatility and the decision to create a sense of physical closeness between the playing and viewing spaces through the corner stage and limited, L-shaped seating helped to foster this “warm and cozy” atmosphere. “I wanted there to be a sense of intimacy between both the actors and the actors and audience alike,” she noted, explaining that she and Donovan agreed to “a corner stage setting early on” to help establish this “intimate” setting.

To practically create this “sense of intimacy” and evoke the feeling of “a small bookshop,” Karpyshin had to first make, collect, and adapt materials for the set design. In addition to saving money by renting many pieces from the Department of Drama, Karpyshin also got creative when it came to acquiring set pieces from a variety of places: “my friend works with antiques, so I contacted him and he let us borrow the desk for free, the chair was my grandmother’s, the stool my other grandmother’s, the books were free, I found one tank at Value Village and bought one new.” Karpyshin’s description here of the various places where she borrowed or bought the set pieces for the production is consistent with Donovan’s initial promise to her that *Justified Sinners* would be a “pull show” and she would not have to create entirely new set pieces, costumes, and props for it. As I mentioned earlier in my discussion of the production context, the play’s staging at the University of Alberta and the supports provided by the Department of Drama and my supervisory committee meant that we had greater flexibility, due to our budget and access to department resources. But although these resources offered greater freedom for our production, Karpyshin’s creativity and resourcefulness in acquiring set

pieces from family, friends, and thrift stores demonstrates how her initial “plan for indie theater” allowed that budget to stretch further and resulted in a professional-calibre set design for our small production. Reflecting further on how the production’s context influenced her set design, Karpyshin reflected that although “we did have a budget for things,” much of the set was brought together as a result of “a weird ‘perfect timing’ or ‘finding the perfect item for not a lot of money’ type of situation.” Consequently, Karpyshin was able to acquire set pieces through her own resourcefulness and the generosity of others, which not only allowed our production budget to stretch further. Furthermore, the assemblage of materials from different sources and styles further contributed to the sense of intimacy, warmth, and coziness that she hoped to evoke through the set design.

In addition to creating a practical set with which the actors could work and fostering an intimacy that reflected the play’s small-scale and domestic setting, Karpyshin and Donovan also determined early in the process that they wanted to integrate key themes in the play into the production’s set design. Accordingly, the set design was used to highlight ideas that the director and designer wanted to emphasize in our production: paper and water. In considering the *mise-en-scène* of our production, paper and aquatic elements emerge as key, interrelated components. There are the sculptural stacks of books that furnish the set and, as the performance progresses, pages continue to litter the set. There are the two large aquariums, anchoring both stage-right and stage-left, that are filled with water and book pages and placed on top of stacks of books. The set design is filled with pages and books, for both furnishing and ornamentation, and placing the large aquariums alongside perilously-stacked books creates a sense of danger that undercuts the warmth and coziness of the space. In our August 31st talkback, Donovan discussed the initial

inspiration for integrating paper and water for the set design and recalled what about the two motifs initially stuck out to him:

Paper is how everything was translated between the two of them, it was the one thing that kept everything they had, and water seemed to be the one thing that destroyed everything in their life. To me, water was fascinating because water is the number one killer of paper, the end of history...unlike something like fire that just burns through everything, water gives you the slight hope that it's going to be okay because when you look at the pages you can still pull them out and it seems like it's fine. But it's when they meet the air and they just get ruined and they are wrinkled, or they run and it's terrible. There is that slight moment where it's okay and it's fine. (492)

Donovan's observation of the importance of paper to the Shelleys' relationship captures the play's interest in literary legacies and an author's textual afterlife. Because *Justified Sinners* is set two years after Percy's death, he lives on through his words and Mary's reanimation of him is made possible through his enduring textual corpus. As Mary tells the audience in her opening monologue, by reading and editing Percy's words, "I have the power to bring my Shelley forward through these sacred pages." She explains his reanimation is not through "not through mean materials, not through bone nor blood nor brain," but instead "like a posthumous poem. Like a living body of work" (414). In the play, Percy is resurrected through his words and his paper afterlife comes to subsume his abbreviated physical existence. However, in introducing water to the production's, Donovan not only visualized the transformation of the Shelleys' relationship to a purely textual one after Percy's death, but also alluded to both the impermanence of literary legacy and Percy's literal death by drowning. By juxtaposing paper and aquatic elements for the set design, Donovan and Karpyskin imbued the *mise-en-scène* with a

sense of danger and highlighted the ephemerality of both physical life, in terms of Percy's drowning, and literary legacies, since water is "the number one killer of paper, the end of history."

In the August 31st talkback, Karpyschin elaborated on how the idea to integrate paper and water in the set design was first conceived and explained her and Donovan's individual contributions to the concept. Speaking to her initial ideas when Donovan told her about the play's premise, she said:

As soon as he said that it was about Mary Shelley and Percy and all their writing I knew they were going to be throwing papers around. So then this was the main idea, but I figured that everyone has seen a paper set before. And then Alexander came up with the idea of having water on stage and I was like 'yes, that is so good,' so the fish tanks are really his baby. He made them as beautiful as they are, but the paper aspect is really what you need." (495)

As Karpyschin's response here suggests, her first idea for the production's set design was to ensure that Mary and Percy were "throwing papers around" onstage, which would produce an increasingly-chaotic stage picture as the performance progressed. But while she was primarily invested in how paper elements were used in the design, Donovan was interested in employing water to create the visual tension between paper and aquatic elements that defines this production's *mise-en-scène*. To show how these two distinct elements were individually developed and eventually brought together in the set design, I will first discuss the set's paper features and then consider conception and realization of the fish tanks, which introduced water into the set design.



Kalmer, Kelsi. "Production Photo from *Justified Sinners* in Performance, Featuring Jessy Ardern as Mary," 29 August. 2017, Edmonton. Design by Sarah Karpyshin.

Karpyshin discussed how her research for *Justified Sinners* led to the idea that books and papers would be focal elements of the set design. "I wanted there to be overwhelming amounts of writing and reading because that simply was their life," she reasoned. To create this sense of

“overwhelming amounts of writing” in the set design, Karpyshin realized that she would need to acquire many books to adorn the set. Karpyshin explained that she and Donovan initially discussed creating “a structure of paper behind the desk, almost a tower or something” which would provide a visual backdrop for Mary’s desk and from which Percy could emerge early in the play. “I was planning on creating that with paint and faking stacks of paper,” Karpyshin recalled, but her initial plan to create an ersatz tower of books was abandoned when Donovan came across a vast collection of books that they could use for the set. While walking past the sculpting studio on campus, Donovan noticed many shelves of books and inquired if I could borrow them for our production. Discussing the discovery in our August 31st talkback, Donovan recalled that “we got lucky because the sculpting studio was throwing out hundreds of books” (495). Fortunately, we were given access to all the books and Donovan explained that “we proceeded to like wheelbarrow these into here” (495). Commenting on the impact of his discovery, Donovan observed that “it came out really organically and I’m still rather amazed at how it all came together. It’s quite beautiful” (495). Furthermore, this stroke of good luck not only aided the production budget, but also freed Karpyshin up from creating prop books from scratch. “The books were totally lucky,” she said. “We were able to access all the books for free” and she also pointed out that the donated books also provided “some color for the set.”

The acquisition of the books and integration them into the set design as a focal element allowed Karpyshin to begin realizing her vision of a paper-based set that highlighted the importance of writing to the Shelleys’ lives and relationship. After gaining access to hundreds of books as the basis for her set design, Karpyshin was able to integrate these books into her design and complement them with other paper elements that she created for the set. For example, Karpyshin and her father constructed “paper stools” and “paper stacks were borrowed from the U

of A.” These structural uses of paper allowed her to integrate the book motif that she wanted to highlight through her design, while also providing functional set pieces with which the actors could interact. Additionally, Karpyshin’s favourite set piece was “the little sculpture most downstage” that comprised different books from the design studio and pages that she had treated to look aged. She reasoned that this paper sculpture “provided a frame while also almost inviting the audience in” and that “the avalanche effect” integrated the book theme and created a “cool and whimsical” effect. Perhaps most importantly, the pages Karpyshin used for this downstage sculpture were not just loose sheets of paper, but facsimile reproductions of pages from Percy Shelley’s journal that she integrated throughout the set. Resultantly, these pages not only became sculptural elements of the set, but they also became an active component of the performance and a subtle nod to the historical Percy’s writerly life.

To further evoke the feeling of “overwhelming amounts of writing,” Karpyshin decided that loose pages could gradually cover the set as the performance progressed. In the script for *Justified Sinners*, I included several moments where Mary hands pieces of paper to Percy that always followed the same form: “*Mary takes a stack of papers from the desk and hands them to Percy. As he reads each in turn, he lets them fall to the floor*” (427). In reading the script, Karpyshin saw potential for those moments to contribute to a growing sense of visual chaos that she wanted to evoke through the scattering of pages across the set. “I knew that I wanted there to be a change in the set,” she recalled. She further explained that “we go through this tremendous arc with the couple throughout the piece and I wanted that reflected in the space.” Accordingly, she wanted the set to capture “some sense of chaos,” but also worked to create a slow build of that feeling so that, as an audience member, “you don’t really notice it until Mary tells you to ‘Look around’ and you are jolted out of the argument for a moment and truly see the space that

these two characters have created.” Karpyschin’s idea that the design would evolve throughout the performance, becoming more chaotic disorderly to visually reflect the Shelleys’ interpersonal turmoil, allowed the paper element to overwhelm the set and, accordingly, the characters themselves. Furthermore, instead of using any pieces of paper, Karpyschin built on my description in the play’s opening stage direction to create pages that specifically underscored Percy’s textual life.



Kalmer, Kelsi. “Production Photo from *Justified Sinners* in Performance, Featuring Jessy Ardern as Mary,” 29 August. 2017, Edmonton. Design by Sarah Karpyschin.

As I outlined above, the opening stage directions did not stipulate very much about possible set pieces, but my description of the focal desk did offer information about the pages on the desk: “*The pages themselves are filled with scribbled notes, frequent edits or scratched out phrases, and liberal doodles (especially of boats). Among these pages, a large book sits closed*” (414). Taking a cue from these stage directions, Karpyshin re-created pages from Percy’s journal, which were then used as a fixed component set design as well as for hand props that the actors could scatter as the performance progressed. Discussing her decision to re-create pages from Percy’s journal for the production, Karpyshin recalled that, as she was looking at the Shelleys’ writing and becoming familiar with their work, she realized she could integrate some textual examples into the set design itself. She explained “this is when it dawned on me that...I could use actual pieces of Percy’s journal for the loose pages they would read and throw around.” Karpyshin explained that, from there, she “started searching images of Percy’s actual journal.” Speaking to the importance of those journal page facsimiles, Karpyshin stated “I wanted those to be pieces that would be thrown and used around the set” and that she “also dyed them with coffee and tea to give them some color against the tones of the books and other papers.” Later reflecting on her use of Percy’s journal pages in the set design, she suggested that “in retrospect, I would have included Mary’s too” and that she would “have them printed back and front,” but these pages and their evocation of Percy’s writerly process became an essential component of our production’s design.

In considering the many ways that Karpyshin introduced paper elements into the set design for *Justified Sinners*, it becomes clear that paper, pages, and pages of all varieties played an ornamental and utilitarian role in this production. Whether stacked together as functional set pieces, arranged into sculptures, or scattered across the stage, paper was both a favored material

and a recurring motif in our production's set design. Furthermore, through details such as the re-creation of Percy's journal pages, the paper of the production design specifically related to the world-of-the-play and explicitly referenced the lives and writing of the historical Shelleys. This specificity not only applied to the use of paper in the set design, but it also became more pronounced through the aquatic elements that were introduced and the interactions between these key motifs.

Just like paper, water is a recurring motif in *Justified Sinners* that was inflected through the production design and introduced as a key component in the set. As Mary tells the audience in the play, "water is the vengeful god of our story" and water and drowning are referenced throughout (445).¹⁵⁹ Correspondingly, along with paper, water emerged as a primary visual motif in the production design, especially through Karpyshev and Donovan's work on the set. Commenting on how the use of water in the production mirrored the themes of *Justified Sinners*, Professor Muneroni observed that "there's something about the permanence and impermanence of water that does speak to this idea of a love story that keeps on changing, but it does transform" ("August 31st Talkback," 492). This dichotomy between "the permanence and impermanence of water" and its connections with memory, relationships, and legacies was an important component of *Justified Sinners*, and this project at large, and the use of water as a production motif helped underscore these symbolic associations.

¹⁵⁹ For example, a scene in the play is based on Percy's vision of the sea rushing into the couple's Italian home, which Mary recollected in her August 15th, 1822 letter to Mrs. Gisborne. Mary says "death by drowning. You saw it coming," to which Percy says "I think I always knew it would end that way. I was compelled towards the water, but I never learned to swim. A perfectly poetic end" (27).

During our August 30th talkback, Donovan recalled that, although the centrality of water to the play had been apparent to him early on, it was when he was home and reflecting on the script that the idea came to life for him: “I was back home in the Maritimes in Cape Breton and we were talking about all this and I was staring at the ocean and getting the idea of water and death. But it had come almost immediately in reading it” (486). From this initial inspiration, Donovan considered the broader significance of water to the play and what it could mean for the production: “You can shape and mold within water. You can also destroy with water, or water can give you life... the more I thought of it the more it just seemed perfect. It kept fitting the play very well and it seemed like it would add a little element of danger within it because if one of these gets destroyed the whole set is ruined” (486). Karpyshin also spoke to the importance of water to the production design, recalling that “Alexander had mentioned he wanted water to be a dangerous element on the set, like a sense of foreboding.” This sense of “danger” and “foreboding” that Donovan wanted to emphasize by introducing water to the set design consciously undercut the sense of “warmth” and “comfort” that Karpyshin worked to establish through her lighting and the paper components of the set. Accordingly, by bringing the two motifs of water and paper together into the overall production design, Donovan and Karpyshin played up the disjuncture between comfort and danger and visually hinted at a sense of discord and possible chaos in *Justified Sinners*.

When it came to practically implement the idea of water into the production design, Donovan had to compromise his initial vision and find an alternative that would work, given our time and budgetary constraints. And so, while his first idea was to have the actors “in two inches of water the whole time,” he later “decided to be realistic with two fish tanks.” (Donovan, “August 30th Talkback,” 487). Karpyshin recollected that the fish tanks emerged as a solution

“out of lack of time, truly,” but she did feel that “they came out really great.” Karpyshin found two fish tanks that would help complete Donovan’s vision, but she intentionally chose ones of different size. Reflecting on the choice, she said “I wanted them to be different ratios because I believe asymmetry on stage is beautiful and more interesting as an audience member.” Once the fish tanks were procured and filled with water, it was time for the final step in integrating the water and paper motifs: filling the tanks with books and pages.

During the tech rehearsal on August 27th, Donovan began experimenting with how he could bring the two elements together. Reflecting on the process in our August 30th talkback, Donovan recalled “my original thought was that we were going to have these two tanks and put books in that tank and it was going to be great but what I learned was that it’s a lot of water, like ten gallons of water, and nothing was sinking. It was all floating” (488). What he noticed through his experimentation was that the disparity in size between the two tanks meant that, although the books in the large tank floated unless they were weighted down, the size of the smaller tank allowed pages to be placed and held them suspended:

I noticed that, with the small tank of water, you could put a page into it and you could literally position it in water and it would stay, which was really neat. I could put it into the middle and let go and it would just stay there because there is not as much force pushing it up. (488)

Through experimentation and a willingness to adapt the design as late as the play’s technical rehearsal, Donovan discovered new ways to integrate the production’s dual motifs of paper and water. The result was that the bottom of the larger tank was lined with pages, since we came to learn that the colouring from the book covers dyed the water. For the smaller tank, the result of Donovan’s experimentation was that book pages were held floating and suspended within the



Kalmer, Kelsi. "Production Photo from *Justified Sinners* in Performance, Featuring Jessy Ardern as Mary," 29 August. 2017, Edmonton. Design by Sarah Karpyschin.

water in a such a way that visually evoked the sense of preservation and hope for recovery that Donovan discussed. Commenting on this mutability possible through the water's suspension, Professor Muneroni observed that the effect was reminiscent of "memories and the creation of literary legacies and how they can be shaped and molded" ("August 30th Talkback," 486). This observation speaks to how the use of water in the production, and the interrelated use of paper, visually conveyed a sense of ephemerality, mutability, and impermanence that pervaded both the production concept and the play itself.

In considering other elements of the production's overall design, this persisting interest in combining water and paper continued to colour Karpyshin and Donovan's work. For example, to re-create the feeling of a thunderstorm during the Shelleys' remembered journey to Calais in 1814, Karpyshin used lighting effects that evoked the feeling of a storm at sea: "the thunder storm I wanted to look sickly and deep in the ocean and I used the same gel for the trance as well, so the deep gel would be in the show more than once." Additionally, in terms of the production's props, the same imaginative logic that dictated the creative uses of paper and water applied to how objects were employed. Speaking in our August 30th talkback about how objects were used in our production, Donovan commented on how the play's almost supernatural elements and the basic premise that Percy has returned from the dead informed the use of props. He explained that his approach to the use of objects, such as teacups, books, or pages, in the production was "much freer" than strict realism and that this choice underscored the fact that the performance is "a theatrical event instead of a perfect re-creation of life" (489).

Elaborating on how this ethos translated to the use of props in the production, Donovan reasoned that "if we were going to have these things, I needed them to be interactive. If I want something to be symbolic, it also has to fit. I can't just be illustrating for the sake of illustrating"

(488). Speaking to one instance where Percy uses his teacup from a previous scene to represent their boat sailing to Calais, Donovan described the process of determining how objects would be used to visually convey the action: “We thought he would play with pieces of paper or make a paper boat, but then we realized that the teacup floats and that it was perfect. So it’s a lot of playing around” (488). He explained that “if he pulls this little teacup and he starts talking about a boat, you think ‘sure, that’s what it is’” (488). Building on this idea during that talkback, Professor Muneroni attributed this willing suspension of disbelief to the fact that, in theatre “objects are magical” and “you can project so much on to the life of an object,” which allows them to “become almost a character in and of themselves” (488).



Kalmer, Kelsi. “Production Photo from *Justified Sinners* in Performance, Featuring Jessy Ardern as Mary and Morgan Grau as Percy,” 29 August. 2017, Edmonton. Design by Sarah Karpyschin.

For our production's costumes, Karpyshin carried forward that same mixture of realistic, historically-informed representation and symbolism that visually echoed our paper motif. She outlined how, when designing a production based on the lives of real people, "first I always start with viewing the people, typing in their names into google and looking at as many references of them as I can." Karpyshin elaborated that she always likes to begin by seeing "how they were memorialized, what are the most popular images of them" and to "to see what my gut reaction is to them. Before I know anything, what sticks out to me, appearance wise, the feel I get from them." Once she was familiar with the Shelleys' appearances and how they were most often depicted, she set to work collecting costume pieces. Karpyshin acknowledged that her previous experience working with Ardern and Grau helped expediate her work on the production's costumes, since she "had just worked with Jessy and Morgan in the spring on a play, so I had their measurements so that helped with the tight deadline." Armed with the actors' measurements and an understanding of how the historical Shelleys were most frequently depicted, Karpyshin returned to the Department of Drama's wardrobe department to locate possible costume pieces. There, she found Mary's entire costume: "I was lucky to be able to borrow from the U of A wardrobe and found an eighteenth-century gown that worked." Regarding how she approached Mary's costume design, Karpyshin explained that "tried to honour her," describing her as "a practical woman" who "still dressed nice and cared how she looked." Additionally, she knew that wanted "a dark color" for Mary's costume in order "to contrast with the set and Percy, but also because that's what she wore in most" images she had encountered of her. Reflecting on the dress she found in the wardrobe department, she conceded that "ideally, I would like one that had an open neckline and barely there on the shoulders with a corset, if I were to try to be period accurate." The discrepancy between Karpyshin's vision for what she wanted Mary's costume to



Kalmer, Kelsi. "Production Photo from *Justified Sinners* in Performance, Featuring Jessy Ardern as Mary," 29 August. 2017, Edmonton. Design by Sarah Karpyskin.

look like and the dress she was able to pull from the wardrobe department is indicative of one of the possible problems with a “pull show,” as she described it. The ability to borrow costume pieces from the Department of Drama was an exceptional help, both in terms of time and budget, and made Karpyshin’s participation in the production possible, given her busy schedule.

However, one of the setbacks that comes with borrowing from an archived collection of pieces is that you are limited by what is available, which was the case for Mary’s costume. But despite Karpyshin’s inability to get exactly what she wanted for Mary’s costume, the dress she was able to use closely emulated her version of the character and integrated the dark colour palette and practicality that she hoped to capture.

In the case of Percy’s costume, Karpyshin was able to pull one element from the wardrobe department and to purchase and amend the other. For Percy’s pants, Karpyshin wanted him “to be lighter and have cropped trousers to contrast Mary,” which would also highlight the fact that Grau was barefooted in the production. While she was able to pull cropped pants, Karpyshin had to venture outside the wardrobe department for Percy’s shirt to accommodate her and Donovan’s idea of integrating the production’s paper motif into his costume. In our production, Donovan extended the idea of Percy being reanimated through his writing by depicting him as a living body of work, which reflected in his physicality. This notion extended to his costuming and Karpyshin envisioned creating a shirt for the character that integrated a paper element. Karpyshin purchased a dress shirt from Value Village and used it as the base on which she attached shredded strips of paper. Speaking to “the paper texture” of Percy’s shirt, Karpyshin explained that she wanted the effect to be “organic and monster-esque.” Furthermore, she noted that she wanted it “to have a movement to it,” so she only attached one end of the paper strips to the shirtfront. The resulting effect was a costume that evoked the visual style of



Kalmer, Kelsi. "Production Photo from *Justified Sinners* in Performance, Featuring Morgan Grau as Percy," 29 August. 2017, Edmonton. Design by Sarah Karpyschin.

the historical Percy's pictorial representations, but that extended the realism of his portrayal through distinctive paper elements. Accounting for how the timeframe of the project affected her design of Percy's shirt, Karpyschin noted that "if I had more time and could do it again, I would like it to become more sculptured a little bit," but the shirt and its paper details helped integrate the production's paper motif into the costuming. Furthermore, like the symbolic use of objects and the visual combination of paper and water in general, introducing paper into Percy's costume underscored the almost supernatural aspects of *Justified Sinners* and highlighted the ways in which the performance was, as Donovan said, a "theatrical event" rather than a mimetic re-creation of the Shelleys' lives (489).

Finally, the production's sound design continued to inflect the paper and water motifs and the music used also served as an auditory reference to Percy Shelley's own musical interests. In addition to directing the play, Donovan also created the sound design from sounds collected by Chris Pereira. Speaking to his sound design process, Donovan noted that because "water and paper were a huge element of the set design," he "wanted the sound design to complement the set." To accomplish this consistency, he employed "a number of water and paper sounds, albeit highly edited" into the production's soundscape. This conscious continuation of the water and paper motifs into the production's soundscape through "highly edited" recordings of water and pages turning again reflects the integration of these elements throughout the design. By exploring the aural dimension of paper and water, Donovan's sound design delved further into the sensory nature of these recurring production motifs. Speaking to how he used sound and music in the play, Donovan explained that he did not want to "oversaturate the play with music because the words themselves were already providing a rhythm and I didn't want to counteract that with the sound." Overall, he explained that he "tried to remain subtle with the sound design and only use

it for special moments.” Speaking to the effect of only sparingly using music and sound throughout, Donovan suggested that “it helped to create the world of our play by highlighting some of the more mystical moments of the show (like when touching a book sucks them into a memory, etc.).” By using music and sound sparingly throughout the play, primarily using them to highlight memories or dreams, Donovan not only allowed room for the “rhythm” of the language, but he also delineated those key moments as distinct departures from the rest of the play. Resultantly, the appearance of music and sound in the play, and their sonic evocation of paper and water, was used to alert the audience to a temporal shift that saw the Shelleys’ transported through memory.

While Donovan chose to use music and sound sparingly during the play, he wanted to begin the performance with music that inspired his reading of *Justified Sinners: Mozart’s Requiem* (1791) as the pre-show music and the overture for his *Don Giovanni* (1787) at the start of the performance.¹⁶⁰ Donovan observed that because “Percy Shelley was a big fan of Mozart and his operas,”¹⁶¹ he “spent a great deal of time listening to Mozart’s work” in preparation for the production “and was inspired by the dynamic rhythms of the music.” Discussing his decision

¹⁶⁰ During my conversation with Professor Muneroni in the script development process, he suggested that I consider adding musical cues that specifically noted the songs I wanted for the opening and closing music. While I had again been resistant to prescribe any technical cues, he thought it would help me, and any potential director, to understand the intended tone of the piece. Accordingly, I chose two songs that were intentionally anachronistic, modern, synthesized, and whose lyrics reflected my characterization of the Shelleys in *Justified Sinners*: “Skeletons” by the Yeah Yeah Yeahs and “Pretty Boy” by Young Galaxy. While our production did not employ the first song as our opening music, Donovan did use “Pretty Boy” for the curtain call.

¹⁶¹ In *Memoirs of Shelley* (1858-62), Thomas Love Peacock recalled his friend’s love of music, especially Mozart: “From this time till he left England he was an assiduous frequenter of the Italian Opera. He delighted in the music of Mozart” (46).

to open the performance with the overture to *Don Giovanni*,¹⁶² Donovan reasoned that “overtures, of course, are meant to set the tone of a piece, just as Mary’s opening monologue does” in *Justified Sinners*. He felt that the *Don Giovanni* overture was “powerful and visceral and lets the audience know that they will experience an explosive force at some point in the play.” In choosing to use music to begin the production that he conceived as “powerful and visceral,” Donovan used the production’s sound design to imbue the performance with a sense of gravitas that carried forward into Mary’s opening monologue. In selecting two pieces by Mozart to introduce the performance, Donovan knowingly conscripted Mozart’s own cultural legacy as a Romantic artist and keenly employed contemporary music to situate the play in its historical context. Finally, in selecting music by Mozart because of Percy’s interest in him, Donovan embedded yet another referential detail to the Shelleys within the play’s sound design, thus reinforcing the direct link between *Justified Sinners* and its sound design in production.

By recalling and examining each aspect of the production design for *Justified Sinners*, we can better understand the many and varied ways that Karpyschin and Donovan integrated elements from the play into their set, lighting, prop, costume, and sound design. The decisions they made not only significantly enhanced the play-in-performance, but their ideas served as a creative complement to the script and demonstrate artistry, resourcefulness, and thoughtful

¹⁶² Further addressing how the use of this piece influenced his conception of the production, Donovan disclosed that he “looked at the play as three distinct parts.” He conceived of the first third as “melodic and soft, setting up our world and the thesis of the play (think *Piano Sonata No. 9 in D*).” From there, he imagined that it “crescendos into the second part where the conflict comes to a head in our antithesis and it is loud, pounding and sudden like Mozart’s *Le Nozze di Figaro*.” He imagined that it then “slowly decrescendos into part three where it is occasionally explosive, but also melodic and soft at times, a perfect synthesis of the first two sections” and a manner he compared to *Serenade in G Major*. Finally, in the play’s finale, Donovan explained that “we end with a requiem for the dead as Mary monologues to us, just as she did in the overture.”

engagement with the play. This concerted effort to inflect the play's themes in the production design is thus reflected through their thorough integration of paper and water as the production's dual motifs and their detailed attention to the Shelleys' lives and writing, as exemplified through the re-creation of Percy's journal pages, the decision to dress Mary in dark colours based on popular depictions of her, or the choice to include Mozart's music based on Percy's own interest in him. As this section based on the production's design has helped show, the design for *Justified Sinners*' premiere production not only enhanced and enriched the script, but became an essential, constitutive element of the play-in-performance that transformed it into something entirely new.

Having initiated this discussion of the production's design elements and their influence on *Justified Sinners*' staging, I now shift my attention to the play's performance by beginning with how the play was promoted and framed for audiences. As part of this investigation, I will now account for how the play was advertised and supported by paratextual materials, such as the playbill. Finally, I will here conclude my study of design by turning to the role of the production poster in informing audience reception of the play-in-performance.

***Justified Sinners* in Performance**

Poster and Promotion

To ensure that our three performances of *Justified Sinners* had audiences, we had to work to promote the show. The time of year was an important factor in our promotion; the performance opened three days after the Edmonton Fringe Festival closed and six days before classes reconvened at the University of Alberta. While this meant that we were avoiding conflicting with many other productions, it also meant that we had to combat fatigue from participating in or attending fringe shows and drawing students before the start of term. Resultantly, we had to actively promote the show and attract audiences. I created a succinct

writeup for advertising purposes that introduced the concept for the play. For the writeup, I wanted to be specific enough that people would know what the play was about, but to also frame *Justified Sinners* in broadly thematic terms so that individuals might be interested in attending, even if they were not specifically intrigued by the Shelleys themselves:

Beginning two years after Percy's accidental drowning, *Justified Sinners* opens as Mary Shelley is editing, curating, and preparing to publish the first collection of her husband's poetry: *The Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (1824). In re-reading Percy's words, Mary resurrects his haunting presence in her mind and imagines what she would say to him, if given one last chance. *Justified Sinners* uses the lives and writing of the Shelleys as a point of departure to explore themes of Romantic love, the often-difficult dynamics of artistic collaboration, the power of words, and the potential human costs of living a creative life.

In addition to introducing the play's premise to potential audiences, the advertising also provided essential information, including the time and location of the performances and the fact that admission was free. The production was promoted across social media by the entire creative team, aided by Kalmer's production poster and select photographs she took during the dress rehearsal. An event was created on Facebook, through Imaginary Circumstances Theatre's page, and was widely shared to attract individuals who might not have otherwise heard about it. Through the Department of English and Film Studies, I advertised the production via the department email listserv and a news story was prepared for the Faculty of Arts website. Additionally, Professor Muneroni worked to bring in audiences, sending out an email to the Department of Drama faculty, personally contacting individual faculty members from the Department of English and Film Studies, and contacting his students. Furthermore, my husband

contacted campus and community news outlets, although the play's staging outside the school year limited our exposure in that regard. Furthermore, he reached out to a range of Romanticism professors from across Alberta, including Professor Mark Smith from MacEwan University who attended the performance on September 1st and offered feedback on the play-in-production. Finally, Donovan printed copies of the production poster and hung them across campus, especially in the Fine Arts Building. This poster campaign, coupled with the widespread use of the image across social media, meant that the production poster became the public face of *Justified Sinners* and played a key role in attracting audiences and informing their initial impressions of the play-in-performance.

When it came time to make a production poster for *Justified Sinners*, Donovan brought in Drama student, Kelsi Kalmer, to design and create the poster. As I mentioned earlier, Donovan and Kalmer had worked together previously, with her designing posters for two productions he directed earlier in 2017. Furthermore, Kalmer's previous involvement with Alberta Theatre Projects during their 2013 staging of *The Apology* connected her to that earlier Romantic Biodrama, marking another of many links between the plays featured in this project. The final poster for *Justified Sinners* actively contributed to audience perception of the play-in-performance, since it featured prominently on the front of the playbill, through other promotional and was displayed outside the theatre. Additionally, I gave no input to the poster's conception or aesthetic, which were left solely up to Kalmer's judgment, in consultation with Donovan. Thus, the poster not only contributed to the audiences' experience of the production, but it can also be critically viewed as both an important element of the performance and a visual response to the play itself. It can then be treated as an imagistic encapsulation of the play-in-performance that warrants further consideration.

In an interview after the production, Kalmer discussed how she initially conceived of the idea for the poster and the process of creating its central image. In her first meeting with Donovan about the poster, they discussed the key elements of the play, namely “water, paper, loss, drowning, writing.” Building on these early conversations, Kalmer decided to create a focal image for the poster that would form the basis of its overall design: a face. She described the decision to use a face as the central image for a theatrical poster as “common, yet effective” and ultimately decided that the choice could be “dynamic” for this production. Having decided that a face would be the central image on the poster, she determined that “if the image was only going to be of one face, then it should be Mary’s,” since “it is essentially her story/journey being explored.” Resolving to focalize Mary Shelley’s image and story, Kalmer considered how Mary’s enduring legacy as “a mother of horror” could be reflected through the poster image. She began by “immediately recalling images of the age-old horror trope of figures emerging from walls/solid surfaces” and, while she conceded that this approach “would have been too complex for my given timeline,” it did ultimately inform her decision to depict “a face emerging from water.” Kalmer’s decision to evoke “figures emerging from wall/solid surfaces” was not only a nod to Mary Shelley’s associations with horror through *Frankenstein*’s filmic adaptations, but her decision to create an image that was “reminiscent of drowning” also underscored the importance of drowning in the play. Finally, Kalmer completed her concept for the production poster by planning to acknowledge “the prevalence of the writing/text/books in the lives of these characters and in the design of the show” through the visual treatment of text in different forms. In anticipation of the photoshoot, she purchased a used copy of *Frankenstein* and “cut each page up into individual lines/strips (of the entire novel).” These strips of text from the novel became a

key component of her poster design and were one of the ways that Kalmer worked to establish a salient, visual link between the Shelleys and the finished image.

Due to the limited timeframe she had to work in, Kalmer realized that she “wasn’t going to be able to use the actors for the poster” and so she became the model for the poster. To create the photograph for the poster, Kalmer first styled herself in “vintage inspired fashion to evoke an earlier time” and “applied makeup in a high contrast.” She then filled her bathtub “with water and some clay,” explaining that this was so “the water was murky, which made editing easier and helped define the barrier of the water.” With assistance from a friend, she then “lay in the water with the paper strips sprinkled on top me.” The strips were arranged around her face and hands, thus serving as a frame for her face and adding a sculptural dimension to the physical text that directly, though coincidentally, mirrored the design of Percy Shelley’s shirt in the production. Kalmer characterized the process as “definitely a team effort, since I couldn’t see myself,” but it was important to her that she could “take a look at the images” as they worked so that she could try “to direct our next attempt in the correct direction.”

After taking a series of photographs and selecting, Kalmer worked to create “the ethereal/misty version that became the poster.” To continue pulling the Shelleys’ writing into the poster, she also chose “to add in texture in the background, in the form of some of Percy Shelley’s writing.” Contrasting the materiality of *Frankenstein*’s pages, cut into strips and physically placed in the initial photo, the addition of Percy’s words in post-production created an ephemeral, liminal effect in the poster. Coincidentally, the appearance of Percy’s words written across the water’s surface therefore visually evoked John Keats’ famous epitaph: “here lies one whose name was writ in water.”



Kalmer, Kelsi. "Production Poster for *Justified Sinners*," 2017, Edmonton.

Once she had created a first version of the poster, Kalmer sent the draft to Donovan, who requested that she “make the face even more anonymous (by perhaps covering the eyes).” To cover the eyes, she selected two “classic silhouette portraits” one of a man and one of a woman, since she “wanted one for each character.” These two silhouettes, representing each of the Shelleys, were imposed over Kalmer’s eyes in the photograph. In addition to making the face “even more anonymous,” Kalmer felt that this change also served as a visual reference to “the burial practice of placing coins over the eyes” and that this change further enhanced the “morbid undertones of the poster and the play.” Coupled with the pallor of Kalmer’s makeup, the murkiness of the clay in the water, and the overall colour scheme for the poster, the addition of these coin-like silhouettes thus helped underscore the image’s deathly associations.

Reflecting on the overall aesthetic of the poster, Kalmer characterized it as “an image of sadness, passing, peace, despair, unease, and mystery.” She observed an inherent tension in the tone evoked through the poster image, explaining that “the tone of the poster is physically light,” whereas “the emotional tone is one that is rather eerie.” Overall, she described it as “just a little unsettling,” but stated that, for her, “that is where the magic in a lot of horror lies...in the time in-between.” Further discussing the overall mood or feeling that she attempted to capture through her poster, she first identified “suspension.” Finally, she elaborated that “there are things in the poster that should be moving (water, floating paper, human), but they shall always remain unmoving; photographs, and death, never quite capturing the reality of life, and leaving everything feeling ‘off.’”

Kalmer’s description of the production poster and the process behind it provides important insight into how an important element of *Justified Sinners* in performance came together and sheds light on the play itself. The need for Kalmer to take on multiple roles in the

creation of the poster was born out of our production's limited timeframe and budget, but it also bred ingenuity and allowed her to maintain control of the creation process. The striking image of a woman's face at the center of the poster, clutching and crowned with the shredded text of *Frankenstein*, represented Mary Shelley. Mostly submerged in murky water and barely breaking through the surface, Kalmer as Mary Shelley was presented here in a liminal state: the "time in-between" synonymous with horror, as Kalmer described it. The Mary Shelley in the poster is neither alive nor dead, not fully-submerged nor completely free of the water. Instead, like her husband's epitaph, this version of Mary has visually "suffered a sea-change into something rich and strange." Adorned in her own text and breaking through her husband's words, which are imprinted on the surface of the water, the Mary Shelley of this poster is not a mimetic representation of the historical writer, so much as an impressionistic vision of Mary as we encounter her in *Justified Sinners*: "in the time in-between." Consequently, Kalmer's poster for the production not only offered a thoughtful visual commentary on Mary Shelley's characterization in *Justified Sinners*, but also helped frame audience expectation and interpretation in that same manner.

Production Playbill

In addition to being featured prominently across campus, shared across social media, or blown up and hung beside the theatre, the poster image was also used on the front of the production playbill. The playbill not only credited the members of the creative team and provided special thanks to the production sponsors, but also played an important role in the audiences' experience of the play-in-performance. Furthermore, the playbill included two sections "Thoughts from the Director" and "Thoughts from the Playwright," which helped frame how *Justified Sinners* was perceived and ultimately received by audiences.

“Thoughts from the Director”

Donovan’s director’s note in the playbill offers insight into his thoughts on the play and the staging process, which were informative for the performances’ audiences and offer insight into his takeaways from the play and its staging. Donovan began his note by connecting the play and its depiction of canonical, literary figures to his personal experience, explaining: “my mother would be very proud of this production, from a young age she instilled in me a love for literature and made sure I never forgot that, as she would eventually become my English teacher in high school.” Following this personal connection, Donovan elaborated that “we approach literary icons as higher than thou, as untouchable figures of grace and genius. We tend to forget that they are merely human, and deal with the same insecurities and pain that many of us experience throughout our lives.” This emphasis on the humanity and flaws of “literary icons,” such as the Shelleys, is an important component of *Justified Sinners* and a unifying feature of Romantic Biodramas, which work to elaborate, complicate, or even contradict the known histories of these famous figures. Having provided this personal and thematic context, Donovan discussed the evolution of *Justified Sinners*’ script, commenting that:

Brittany has worked tirelessly to bring this piece to you, and I can say that the first edition I received of this play is almost unrecognizable from what you see today. I have always believed that a play is only as good as its edits, and in this Brittany has edited fearlessly.¹⁶³ It takes a surefooted and skilled writer to assess where things could be

¹⁶³ In reading Donovan’s director’s note, I was struck by the little ways that his immersion in the script was reflected in his language. For example, his observation that I had “edited fearlessly” recalls Percy’s assertion in the play that “but in this, as in every other respect, I have written fearlessly” (19), a line that was itself adapted from Percy’s preface to *The Revolt of Islam* (1818).

improved, but it takes a truly deft writer to actually improve them. I am pleased to say you are in the hands of a truly deft writer this evening.

Donovan's description of the script's development and recognition of the ongoing editorial process behind *Justified Sinners* alerted the audience to the living, ever-growing nature of the play text. It also highlighted the importance of editing to the successful development of a performance text and offered insight into the journey the script took from its first drafts to the version that appeared at the time of performance, which I would still resist calling the "final" draft. Donovan concluded his director's note with an acknowledgement of the creative team, calling them "all stunning artists in their own rights," and an advisement that the audience "read their names above and remember them," since they "will certainly be seeing them again." This closing sentiment again drew the audience's attention to the highly collaborative nature of this production and the important role that each member of the creative team played in its staging.

"Thoughts from the Playwright"

Once I realized that *Justified Sinners* would be staged, I started imagining what I would want to include as textual framing in the production playbill. My close reading of these framing materials for other Romantic Biodramas made me self-conscious about my own note living up to criticism and I was made newly aware of the difficult balance of providing the audience with necessary historical context, while also offering meaningful insight into the composition and staging processes. I knew that I wanted to include a brief background on the Shelleys themselves and to situate within their families and their sociocultural context to make the performance accessible for all audiences, regardless of their prior knowledge of Romanticism:

During the period now referred to as the Romantic era (approximately 1789-1837), artists throughout the western world responded to the period's sociopolitical, industrial, and

cultural revolutions with works that were themselves revolutionary in both form and content. Today, two of British Romanticism's most famous and enduring writers are Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), who continues to be celebrated for his social consciousness and lyric poetry, and Mary Shelley (1797-1851), the author of *Frankenstein* (1818) and the daughter of political writers William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft.

Additionally, because *Justified Sinners* picks up after Percy's death, I wanted to gloss the Shelleys' relationship so that audiences would be at least somewhat familiar with the eight-year relationship that preceded the events of the play:

The Shelleys' romantic relationship was revealed to their families in 1814, when then-married Percy and teenaged Mary escaped to the continent to be together. From this unusual beginning, their eight-year-long relationship was a chaotic whirlwind of artistic collaborations, personal tragedies, and many lifetimes worth of beautiful writing.

Again here, my intention to create a Romantic Biodrama that emerged from the established documentary record, despite the fact that it extends beyond the Shelleys' lives and introduces a supernatural element through Percy's posthumous return, influenced the way I wanted to frame the performance. I wanted *Justified Sinners* to creatively extend the (after)lives of the historical Shelleys and so ensuring that audiences were not coming in completely unaware of their biographies, relationship, context, and significance was important to me. While I hope that *Justified Sinners* could meaningfully stand on its own as a play, I intentionally wrote it to complement and enrich the history of the Shelleys' lives and writing and so providing that background information was therefore essential.

In addition to offering a basic introduction to the Romantic period and the Shelleys for audiences, my playwright's note also offered a brief summary of the play itself that clarified the exact year it is set, established the mystery surrounding Percy's drowning in Italy, and explained that *Justified Sinners* begins as Mary is "completing the first edition of her late husband's poetry: *The Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (1824)." While this information is perhaps not necessary to understanding the action of the play, I felt it was important here to specify what Mary was working and when the action was taking place so that the audience could feel historically-grounded and more inclined to get lost in the emotions of the story, rather than working to piece together what was happening. Furthermore, I introduced the central conceit of the play in the playwright's note, that Mary resurrects Percy's "haunting presence in her mind and imagines what she would say to him, if given one last chance" to again prepare the audience for what they were going to see so that they could understand the premise and accept it easier when Mary outlined it in more detail through her opening monologue.

Having established the play's historical subject and introduced its setting and narrative structure, I offered background to the project itself, explaining how the play emerged as part of my doctoral project and began as "an experiment: a modest attempt to explore my topic from a practitioner's point of view by writing a biofiction that employed the Shelleys' own poetry, prose, letters, and journals as its textual basis." Professor Muneroni and I agreed that it was important to explain the context from which the play emerged and to inform the audience of my research work. Accordingly, I established the textual basis for the play, the Shelleys' own writing, and explained how I imagined this play as addressing a gap that I perceived in the genre of Romantic Biodrama:

In my research, I had not yet come across a play that focused on their dynamic as a couple and, because they were so often in the company of family and friends, I was curious to see them alone together onstage. Furthermore, I wanted to explore their remarkable personal and professional bond by meeting up with them at an unusual moment in both of their stories: after Percy's death and during Mary's noble attempt to 'write his life.'

By situating *Justified Sinners* within the larger genre of Romantic Biodramas here, I hoped to inform audiences about the multitude of contemporary biographical plays about the Shelleys and to situate the play in relationship to this important history of performances. My decision to write a play about the Shelleys' lives is not itself an innovation, but a conscious contribution to an ever-growing collection of plays. I wanted to acknowledge the existence of this burgeoning genre and to point out my attempted contribution so that audiences could consider the performance in terms of how it treated the Shelleys as a couple and re-framed their relationship as it continued after Percy's death, through Mary's editorial, biographical, and curatorial efforts. Finally, after thanking the creative team and my supervisory committee, I ended my playwright's note about this "little-script-that-could" by referencing the last line of Mary Shelley's 1831 introduction to *Frankenstein*: "I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper."

Reviews and Reception

After a whirlwind of intensive and condensed rehearsals over two weeks in Edmonton, it was time for the play to open. Nothing could have properly prepared me for what it was like to see *Justified Sinners* in performance. I never aspired to be a playwright and my critical writing is so often a solitary, private act that is only shared with one or two readers. I felt immensely proud, and surprised, and exposed, and elated. It was terrifying and exciting and so much more than I

hoped the experience would be. As an audience member, I felt deeply connected to the performance, since I was both the playwright and a witness to the production process as a dramaturg. But I also felt, watching it alongside three audiences of individuals who were experiencing the play for the first time, that I too was seeing the characters, the performance, and the source material with new eyes as if for the very first time. I learned so much in watching the play each night and I was unspeakably proud of the production and honoured that I was associated with the amazing story that was created anew each night.

Another key element of the production that figures into reception and response was our nightly post-show talkbacks, facilitated by Professor Muneroni. Through these talkbacks, we were not only able to discuss the writing and staging processes with the audience, but we were also able to get a sense of their feelings towards the play-in-production. As the frequency with which I have cited these talkbacks in this chapter suggests, the audience's insightful questions and the creative teams thoughtful and generous responses became an important part of the performance experience and have made an invaluable contribution to the story of *Justified Sinners* in performance. The talkbacks also provided the creative team, including myself, with an opportunity to respond to elements of the production from the perspective of audience members. For example, during the August 30th talkback, Donovan disclosed ““I am always so shocked how powerful it is at the end when he leaves because obviously he isn't real, but there is something about this, about this losing of it and that moment of having to see someone say goodbye and to get the goodbye that she could not get in life” (486). In response, Professor Muneroni similarly shared that “that's the moment of the play that always gets me” (486). During the September 1st talkback after the play's final performance, I was struck by something that I realized in watching the play that I had not initially realized when I was writing it:

Watching the play this last time, I actually felt very emotional in realizing that Percy somehow gets off the hook and there is not that reckoning that Mary says she wants so badly from her husband and realizing that, in conjuring up her husband, Mary doesn't let herself fully realize all those truth she wants from him. She preserves that image of him at the end, for both her and for us, so that was a very noble gesture that I saw, both in the real Mary Shelley and the Mary Shelley that I saw so beautifully through Jessy's performance, and it just made me love them even more. (496)

As I shared in this response, getting the chance to watch the production as an audience member allowed me to learn new things about the play, and its historical subjects, that I did not intentionally write into the script. Because the play was given new vitality and immediacy through its physical realization onstage, it evolved beyond the story I had initially conceived to become something different and far better. Furthermore, although I had seen the production many times by that point, I was still making new discoveries in it during that last performance, which is both a testament to the strength of the actors' performances and an indication of the ephemerality and mercuriality of live performance.

In addition to learning more about the creative team's responses to the production, our nightly talkbacks also initiated a dialogue between us and the audience that allowed us to learn more about their response to *Justified Sinners* in performance. Accordingly, although our production did not have any formal reviews per se, our talkbacks as well as accounts from the creative team offer important insight into audience response. In their interviews after the production had closed, Donovan, Grau, and Ardern all discussed their perception of audience reception to the play-in-production. While Donovan conceded that, "this is always a difficult thing to judge," he deduced that "people seemed to really enjoy the play and were surprised by

how moved they were by it.” He explained that “we often have a stuffy attitude when it comes to historical characters,” but that, in his experience, “people seemed to really engage with the material and the Shelleys’ story.” Ardern thought that “there was a real fascination with the characters, particularly when they started to come into conflict.” She also felt that “there was more resentment of Percy from the audience than from Mary!” which led her to surmise that she was “not sure they forgave him in the end.” Finally, Grau recalled thinking that “audiences were surprised to see such a realistic and grounded dynamic between artists who are known for their poetry and fiction, especially from an era of big ideas and bold proclamations on the nature of humanity.” Furthermore, he elaborated that “from feedback I received, people were also struck by how easy the poetry and fiction weaved its way into the dialogue and was informed by Mary and Percy’s relationship and how it gave audience members a new (if not first) foray into understanding the work of the Shelleys.” Donovan, Ardern, and Grau’s accounts of audience response to *Justified Sinners* indicate that, despite the subject matter’s historical distance or the use of poetic language, many viewers were able to “really engage with the material and the Shelleys’ story.”

After the production closed, I also received an email response from Professor Mark Smith from the Department of English at MacEwan University. In our efforts to contact individuals who might be interested in the play or its subject, we had reached out to Professor Smith and invited him to attend the production. Smith’s interest and expertise in Romanticism made him an ideal candidate to respond to the play-in-production and his response offers valuable critical insight on *Justified Sinners*. Speaking to the September 1st performance of the production that he attended, Smith said “I thought the acting and staging was excellent.” He described the script as “well-crafted” especially “in its overall architecture and movement.” However, Smith also

addressed specific features in the script that he felt went overlooked or were underdeveloped. For example, he felt that there were qualities in Percy that “went missing.” Specifically, Smith described his perception of Percy’s characterization, which he felt was not thoroughly developed in the play itself, namely:

His deep erudition; the trenchancy and non-triviality of his political analyses of Regency Britain; his own enormous and unconscious class privilege (as scion of one of the two hundred most wealthy families in Britain—much, much wealthier than the Godwins); the way that his personal irresponsibility and selfishness was hell on his children (I go so far as to think, with Richard Holmes, that Lord Eldon was right to deny him custody of his children with Harriet).

While he conceded that, “for a two-act script with a focus on the relationship between Mary and Percy, it does very well indeed,” these aspects of Percy’s character were missing for him in the play. In addition to these general thoughts on the play-in-production, Smith also took exception to a scene that involved a kind of writing battle between Mary and Percy.

The scene is an important moment in the play’s rising action that helps incite the initial conflict between Mary and Percy. At Percy’s insistence, the couple partake in a literary match intended to invoke the conventions of a fencing duel. Framing the duel as an “exercise in contrast,” Percy initiates a competition between her early draft of *The Last Man* (1826) and his “Ode to the West Wind” (1820). The match was intended to exasperate Mary and to show her getting increasingly frustrated by his constant need to compete and compare their writing:

They each take a page from the desk and prepare to read from their respective texts. This is a common competition for the Shelleys, with Percy as the obvious initiator and Mary openly resenting these duels. Mary and Percy approach each other, holding their

respective pieces of paper. They perform a kind of literary fencing salute, in which they face each other, raise their pages vertically in front of their faces and lower them.

Percy: En garde! Pret...

They separate and walk to opposite sides of the stage. They get into position, holding their respective pages up in front of them and preparing to read.

Percy: Allez!

Mary begins reading to the audience with reservation and quiet vulnerability, while Percy imbues his performance with spirited theatricality. The effect should be of a combative and highly physical exchange as they jockey for audience attention, a series of verbal thrusts and parries. (425)

As the duel proceeded, Mary read lines from her then-unfinished novel, while Percy interjected with lines from his famous poem as an “exercise in contrast and comparison” (425):

Percy: And, by the incantation of this verse...

Mary: The very trees waved not...

Percy: Scatter, as from an unextinguish'd hearth / Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!

Mary: And mocked the stability of architecture with like immovability.

Percy: Be through my lips to unawaken'd earth...

Mary: The city was the prey of pestilence...Death had become lord of Constantinople.

Percy: *(Almost shouting with intensity)* The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind, / If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind? *(Breaking to chide Mary)* I have bested you again! A hit, a very palpable hit!

Mary: *(Cutting him off sharply)* Halt! (426)

In performance, this scene showed Mary becoming emotional, sometimes stumbling over lines, while Percy performed his text and emphasized the aural quality of his verse with vocal and physical flourishes. My primary aim with this scene was to establish a sense of competition between the Shelleys and to dramatize the possible tensions that underpin artistic collaboration. While I do not necessarily imagine that the historical Shelley' edited their texts in such a theatrical way, I wanted to dramatize their editorial process in a way that was vibrant, kinetic, and playful. Furthermore, I hoped to depict their different approaches to writing and their distinct energies as individuals in a way that would easily translate to audiences and would also play into Mary's growing frustration with Percy at this point in the play.

Commenting on his perception of the scene in performance, Smith characterized it as "sort of a textual slam or rap-off." While he assessed that it is "a crowd-pleaser and amusing," he felt that it "makes little sense, on Percy's side anyway, with 'Ode to the West Wind,'" since he felt that the poem was one of his "hard-won emotional maturity." He elaborated that "Ode to the West Wind" is "the poem of a grown-up person, who understands despair," which he attributed to the fact that "it was written after the deaths of the children in Europe, and in the shadow of Byron's career successes." Smith acknowledged the temporal limitations of the re-embodied Percy in the play, noting that "I'm not sure at what developmental moment in a life a ghost is supposed to come back embodied as, or if a ghost is free of such mortal limitations." He suggested that "in the play, it seems to be the young, insufferably cocksure Percy," but he felt that "'Ode to the West Wind' was not written by that Percy." Moreover, Smith took issue with how the lines were interspersed in the scene, claiming that "breaking the lines up into little syntactically fragmentary bursts destroys the poem as verse" and "destroys its subtle musicality and profound emotional force." He further suggested that he "just cannot imagine Percy

Shelley—or anyone who knows the poem well—reading it in that way,” which led him to wonder if “perhaps it would work better with an early Percy poem.”

Smith’s response to the play, and his pointed criticism of the literary duel between the Shelleys, offer valuable critical insight on the play-in-production. As a Romanticist, Smith’s point-of-view is important to determining how *Justified Sinners* works as a Romantic Biodrama and, by extension, a creative work of Romantic biography. In responding to Smith’s critique, I echoed his sentiment about the unsuitability of “Ode to the West Wind” as the poem used in the literary duel, since I could appreciate the context in which it was written. Admittedly, I bandied back and forth with the idea of using “Ozymandias” for the duel instead, to mirror the fact that Percy had in fact composed that poem as part of a sonnet-writing competition in 1818 with Horace Smith. However, my rationale for ultimately settling on “Ode to the West Wind” was that I thought its vivid imagery and ode structure made it both aurally-pleasing for the audience and set up a kind of call-and-response between the speaker and the west wind that would be compelling onstage. Second, “Ode to the West Wind” is one of Percy’s most famous poems and I thought that sense of recognition, even if in name alone, would help connect the audience to that moment. Finally, at the end of the play when Percy leaves, he instills a sense of hope in Mary by turning the original question that ends “Ode to West Wind” into a declarative statement: “but I’ve thought on it and I am now convinced that if winter comes, spring *cannot* be far behind” (32). By having the poem, and its famous closing line, spoken earlier in the play, I thought it would create a nice sense of balance and completion at the end.

But while I had a rationale in mind for selecting “Ode to the West Wind” for that scene and presenting it in that manner, what I came to realize in reading Smith’s response is that my intentions and latent ideas did not ultimately affect his interpretation of that scene, nor should

they. In addition to offering insight into audience response, the reason I wanted to include Professor Smith's critique in the chapter was to demonstrate the distance between intention and affect in performance and to show how my experience writing a Romantic Biodrama required me to experience and empathize with the experience of playwrights. Throughout this project, I have read, analyzed, unpacked, and even problematized how playwrights have variously depicted the Shelleys' lives and writing through their plays-in-production. However, the experience of writing my own play, participating in its staging, and becoming aware of its reception, gave me first-hand insight into the challenges associated with creating a Romantic Biodrama that upholds the standards of every audience member, including Romanticists. Going into this project, I thought that my intention to create a play that emerged from the Shelleys' writing and endeavored to depict their lives as faithfully as possible would produce a play that was critically-sound and theatrically-compelling. What I came to learn instead was that such a play was perhaps impossible, certainly outside my own reach at least, and that Romantic Biodramas, like Romantic biography at large, is a genre defined by contingency, contestation, and subjective impressions. Resultantly, what the audience response to the play-in-production, and especially Professor Smith's analysis, helped to realize is that everyone has their own vision of the Shelleys' lives and writing, a multiplicity of perspectives that is reflected through the many plays, biographies, and critical studies that continue to be based on the couple. While my own version is not everyone's, nor could it ever hope to be, it is another contribution to the ongoing cultural tradition surrounding Mary and Percy: my own offering to the Shelley shrine.

Endings and Beginnings: After *Justified Sinners*

“The idea so possessed my mind, that a thrill of fear ran through me, and I wished to exchange the ghastly image of my fancy for the realities around. I see them still...I could not so easily get

rid of my hideous phantom; still it haunted me” (Mary Shelley’s 1831 preface to *Frankenstein* 4).

On September 1st, 2017, the premiere production of *Justified Sinners* closed with its final performance. With that final show, an experiment in writing and staging an original Romantic Biodrama ended after two years of working toward that goal. Almost exactly two years before that closing performance, I first challenged myself to write a script that focused on the Shelleys’ posthumous relationship and emerged from their own writing. From this initial idea, I set out to write a play in which Percy returns to his wife as she edited and curated his collected works, beginning with *Posthumous Poems* in 1824. I soon imagined what this reunion between the Shelleys would look like, what Mary would say to her husband if she had the chance. I thought about how the experience of death might have affected Percy’s views on life and literary immortality and what this vision of him would look like. I could see Mary’s face as she saw Percy return to her through his words: her best love, her Doppelgänger, her own version of *Frankenstein*’s Creature resurrected. With no playwriting experience, I set out to capture these images as best as I could, relying on my critical understanding of, and imaginative interest in, the Shelleys’ lives and writing. Guided by this initial inspiration, I created a script that formed the basis of *Justified Sinners*.

As this chapter has demonstrated, although the idea for this play came about quickly, the story of *Justified Sinners*’ journey from page to stage did not end there with that first draft of the script. Instead, the next two years saw many stages of script development and different iterations of that initial story. Additionally, after pursuing various staging opportunities, it was only through my supervisory committee’s involvement and generous support that the production process finally began. Thanks to the Department of Drama, and Professors Kelly, Demers, and

Muneroni, the staging process for my little one-act script began in earnest in spring 2017, which entailed assembling the creative team of incredible student-artists from the University of Alberta. An intensive rehearsal and dramaturgical process followed over eight rehearsals in August 2017 that culminated in three well-attended performances and, for me at least, a production that exceeded my most private hopes for this play.



Kalmer, Kelsi. "Production Photo from *Justified Sinners* in Performance, Featuring Jessy Ardern as Mary and Morgan Grau as Percy," 29 August. 2017, Edmonton. Design by Sarah Karpyschin.

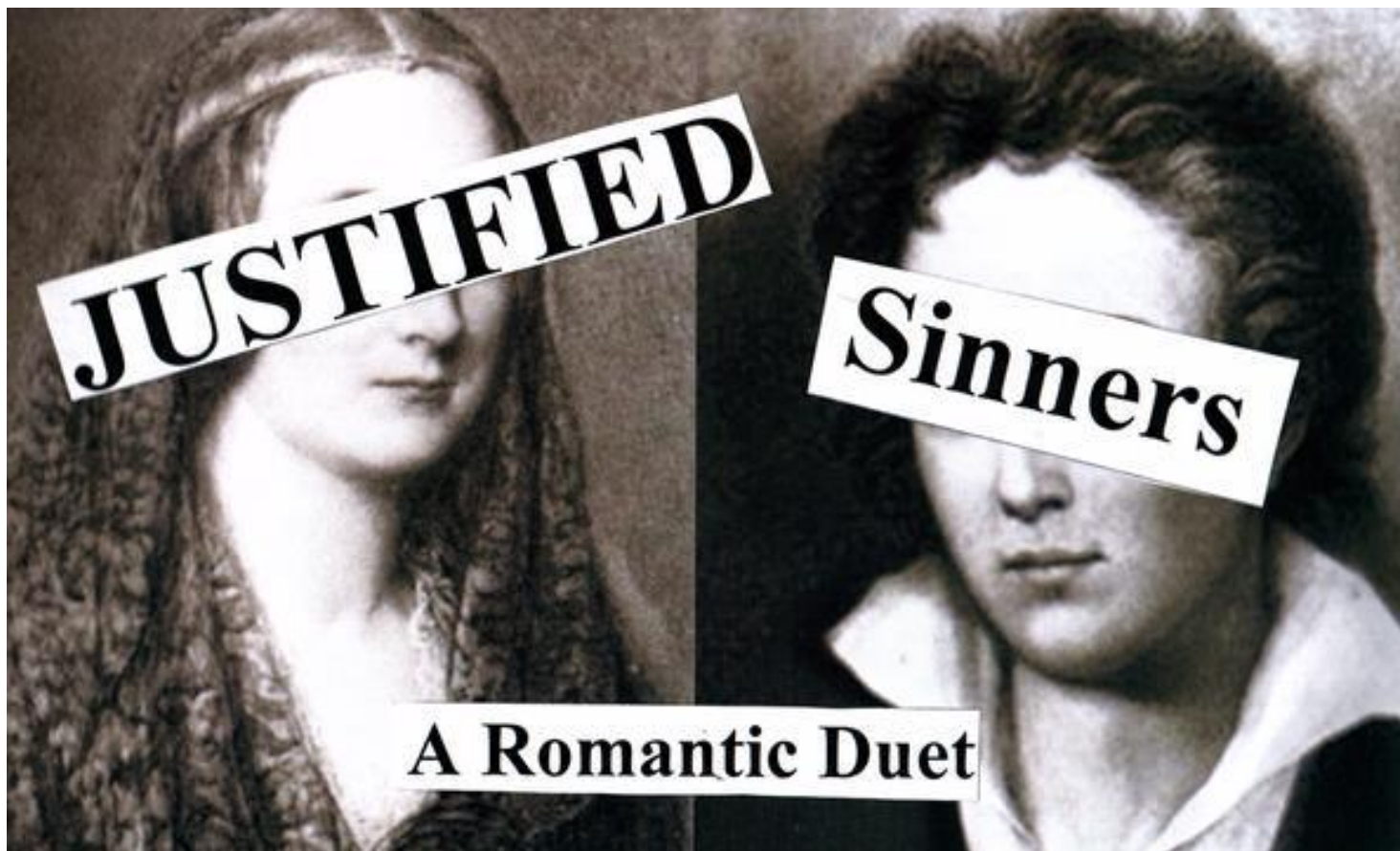
Reflecting on the production's closure in our September 1st talkback, Professor Muneroni spoke about "the ephemerality of theatre," noting that "this production ends, so there is a sense of ending, of eschatology." But although the premiere production of *Justified Sinners* ended on September 1st, 2017, he also observed that, although "it ends here tonight," "hopefully it will go elsewhere" (498). After our opening night performance, Professor Muneroni expanded on what a potential future for the play could look like and how it could find new and wider audiences. Most importantly to me, he expressed hope that the play would live on and a belief that it deserved to be staged again:

I'm assuming this play will have legs, I really hope so. We are talking about what we can do now that we have a fully rehearsed show, can we sell it to a theater in town? Can Brittany apply for a grant to move it somewhere else in Canada? I think it has a lot of potential, I actually love this script and the production that we did. (488)

As I write this chapter, I do not yet know the future of *Justified Sinners* and when, if ever, it will ever again be staged. Certainly, my research into Romantic Biodrama has revealed that, while some plays become popular performance texts and transcend the genre, such as Howard Brenton's *Bloody Poetry* (1984), still more never receive a second production, such as, presently, *Caves of Fancy*. But I do maintain hope that it will find new audiences and that I will be able to share this Romantic story with even more people. Just as I refused to give up on this little-play-that-could in the two years between its initial composition and staging, I will continue to pursue other opportunities for it to be read and staged: beginning with this chapter and the inclusion of the complete script in my dissertation. What began as a small story about Mary and Percy Shelley and a desire to discuss Romantic Biodrama from a practitioner's perspective led to the creation of a play that was read, adapted, developed, interpreted, worked-on, and viewed by so

many people and I hope to preserve those processes by documenting the efforts of those who worked on the production. Furthermore, the experience of participating in the composition and staging of a new Romantic Biodrama greatly informed my own conception of the genre and has nuanced my own discussion of other plays-in-performance, renewing my appreciation of theatre's collaborative nature and the intrinsic link between the script and the stage when discussing how a play makes meaning.

And so, although I am certainly not ready to give up on *Justified Sinners*, and will continue pursuing new staging opportunities and potential audiences for it, this play-in-production has already irrevocably altered my critical perspective on Romantic Biodrama and the biographical representation of the Shelleys at large. By giving me the opportunity to witness how collaboration and performance bring stories to life, this play-in-production has shown me that Romantic Biodramas have the unique ability to reimagine, revitalize, and resurrect their historical subjects on the contemporary stage.



Performance Script

2017

Characters:

Mary Shelley – Twenty-seven years old at the time of the play (1824). Romantic writer and wife of Percy.

Percy Shelley – Twenty-nine years old at the time of his death in 1822. Romantic writer and husband of Mary.

Justified Sinners: A Romantic Duet

1824; Kentish Town in Northern London. Percy Shelley's desk sits center stage. Inside the desk and unseen by the audience is the burned remnant of Percy's heart, wrapped in the pages of his poem "Adonais." Two small books are inside (Percy's "Queen Mab" and the Shelleys' elopement journal). The desk is strewn with a large pile of Percy's loose papers and journals, many of which are water-logged or damaged through heavy use. The pages themselves are filled with scribbled notes, frequent edits or scratched out phrases, and liberal doodles (especially of boats). Among these pages, a large book sits closed. This book represents what will become *The Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, which was edited by Mary and published later that year.

As the house lights darken, "Skeletons" by the Yeah Yeah Yeahs plays. The music gradually fades as the lights come up.

Mary sits at the desk, sorting through the many pages as the play begins. She looks up to directly address the audience.

Mary: I am Mary Shelley, author of *Frankenstein*. I am Mary Shelley, wife of the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. I am Mary Shelley, daughter of revolutionaries and supposed heir apparent to their creative genius. I am Mary Shelley, mother of monsters, sole survivor of collapsed literary empires, and last keeper of a dying flame.

After my husband's death at sea, suffering was my alpha and omega. For a long time after this tragic turn, all life was choked out of me by the lonely state of singleness which hemmed me in.¹⁶⁴ But although all the poetry, all the brilliancy, all the sunshine of my life has vanished, I am determined to persist and continue in this world. And the reason is that my late-husband is not truly dead and gone. No.

You see, a strange thing happens when you immerse yourself in the ideas of someone who has passed. There is magic in the language. There is life within the words. For what are we if not the physical embodiment of our words? And after we are gone, our words will remain to tell our tales to those we left behind. To keep our stories going. To address all the questions that have been left unanswered. We writers understand this ancient alchemy of language better than anyone.

And so, I am not just Percy's biographer. Not just his editor. I am bringing him back to life. These were his words, his own remarkable creations, but I have the power to bring my Shelley forward through these sacred pages. Not through mean materials, not through bone nor blood nor brain. But like a posthumous poem. Like a living body of work. And as I arrange, collect, and curate his perfect words, I can hear what he would have said if, speaking thus to him, he could have answered me.

As Mary opens the book, LX change and SFX change as light instrumental music plays. Percy is alive again.

Percy: Mary, it is Shelley.

¹⁶⁴ Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*

Mary: (*To the audience*) I thought I heard My Shelley call me—not my Shelley in Heaven—but My Shelley—my companion in my daily tasks...

Mary turns and sees Percy, alive. She runs into his arms and they embrace tightly.

Percy: Dearest love, be well, be happy, come to me—confide in your own constant and affectionate Percy.

Mary: My best love. I miss you so much today— (*Realizing she has imagined him*) I am not in a fitting place.

Percy: I am here with you now, there is no need for us to miss each other.

Mary: (*Still resisting*) I'm not doing very well. Some days are harder than others.

Percy: My dearest, are you very lonely?

Mary: I am just a shadow now—what a change.

Percy: Confide in me, be yourself again.

Mary: I have been trying to keep myself busy with all of this (*Indicating towards the desk*). At least it has given me some sense of purpose.

Percy: Come on, Mary! You really haven't finished it yet?

Mary: I'm trying the best I can. I want to get it right.

Percy: While I appreciate that, you are taking longer to compile everything than I did to write it.

Mary: I promise, I will be done soon. It's a big responsibility and I'm just having a hard time letting it go.

Percy: Don't think of it as "letting go." Think of it as "letting it take flight."

Mary: (*Smiling*) Ever the poet, aren't you?

Percy: But try and forget about all your work for a moment. Tell me more about you and your spirits, let me back into the fold.

Mary: (*Finally relenting to his presence*) Well, as I have lately spent many long hours alone with your writing, I have had cause to reflect on these last ten years we've spent together.

Percy: Ten years, am I really that old?

Mary: Suffice to say, the experience of living it all back has been a world of pain and pleasure.

Percy: "The marriage of Heaven and Hell," as William Blake would say?

Mary: Indeed. But fortunately, it has mostly been a Heaven. After all, in having your words I still have you.

Percy: I always told you that, for a poet, there is no such thing as death. A poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one.¹⁶⁵ I can't be gone when my words were written to transcend, to reflect the universal truth, to inspire every individual in every epoch to action.

Mary: (*Laughing*) There you go, making me fall in love with you all over again.

Percy: And there you go, making my heart sink and sicken with excess of love¹⁶⁶

Percy puts his arm around Mary and kisses her head.

Mary: Tell me, my Elf, do you still remember how we met?

Percy: Feeling sentimental, my Pecksie?

Mary: As always.

Percy: Let's see. I first met you as one of William Godwin's renowned daughters. And as the only one related by blood, you were a true object of curiosity.

Mary: To be fair to my sisters, I was the only one forced to claim that heritage as my birthright. For better or for worse, the title of "author" was not foisted upon them by heredity.

Percy: Nevertheless, I was married then and you were only a child in my eyes. A pretty, loving, and supremely gifted child, but a child nonetheless.

Mary: "A child." How disappointing.

Percy: But don't despair. When we did meet again, once my ill-fated marriage had become fraught with hardships and Time had blossomed you into a woman, then I looked at you with new eyes. And there you were before me. A woman, beautiful as morning.¹⁶⁷ The worthy daughter of two literary luminaries. Yes, I remember...

Suddenly inspired, Percy grabs the book from the desk. He opens it and turns it to a page.

Come, Mary, help me set the scene!

He takes Mary by the hand.

Mary: (*Laughing*) Oh ho, a change from narrative to a drama!

Mary and Percy both touch the book. LX change SFX change as light instrumental music plays. The Shelleys become lost in memory.

Percy is lost in thought as he sips tea. Mary distractedly enters the room and sees Percy.

Mary: Oh, hello.

Percy jumps, letting out a high-pitched shriek and nearly dropping his tea cup.

(*Slightly shocked by his reaction*) My goodness. I am...so sorry.

¹⁶⁵ Percy's "A Defence of Poetry"

¹⁶⁶ Percy Shelley's "Alastor"

¹⁶⁷ Percy Shelley's *The Revolt of Islam*

Percy: (*Containing himself*) No, no. It's my fault, I was dreaming.

Mary: That...was quite the reaction.

Percy: (*Smiling, a bit embarrassed*) Ah yes, well, I'm afraid that courage has never been my strong suit. As a young boy, my schoolmates took great pleasure in using that deficiency to their advantage when they tortured me. "Shelley-baiting," they would call it.

Mary: How horrible!

Percy: Yes, I suppose so. But, as our Napoleon has said, "there are only two powers in the world: saber and mind. At the end, saber is always defeated by mind."

Mary: ...I'm sorry, but who did you say you are?

Percy: Goodness, how terribly rude. Naturally you wouldn't remember me, we only briefly met before. And, of course, you were younger then...

Mary: (*Realization dawning on her*) ...Shelley...is it...is it Percy Shelley?

Percy: Yes! The very same, madam!

Mary: Right, I remember now. Good to see you.

Percy: It is lovely to see you again, Miss Godwin. It has been too long.

Awkward pause as both smile and nod.

Mary: Are you waiting for my father?

Percy: I am, yes. He was supposed to be home by now, but I suppose he hasn't returned yet.

Mary: Yes, well, he takes his time. Sometimes. Not all the time, but, sometimes.

Percy: Yes, well, I suppose this is just one of those times.

They both smile. Pause.

Mary: Did my stepmother let you in through the bookshop?

Percy: No, it was your sister.

Mary: Oh Fanny.

Percy: No, it was the striking brunette with the melodic laugh.

Mary: Ah, you mean Claire. We are only stepsisters. No blood or anything like that.

Percy: Yes, well, blood only ever makes things messier.

Awkward Pause.

Mary: Well, since I see Claire has already offered you tea, I will just collect the books I needed and leave you to your dreaming. I would hate to frighten you again with more sudden movements.

Percy: (*Smiling*) Prudent decision. I don't know if my heart could take much more of you.

Mary smiles politely and starts busying herself with collecting books as Percy watches her, still drinking his tea.

Percy: (*Abruptly*) I love your ribbon.

Mary: I'm sorry?

Percy: (*Indicating the tartan ribbon in her hair*) Your ribbon.

Mary: Oh, I forgot I had a ribbon in my hair.

Percy: Well...that can certainly happen! I mean...I would imagine.

Pause.

Mary: (*Suddenly*) You can have it, if you like.

Percy: I'm sorry?

Mary: No, I mean, you said you loved it. The ribbon? So, you can have it. (*She hurriedly takes the ribbon from her hair*) It's from Scotland and I have a few of them. I just got back, I was living there for a time.

Percy: Of course, I heard. Are you and your stepmother getting along any better now—

Mary: (*Interrupting*) So this is a souvenir from Scotland. And you can give it to a friend, or your daughter, or your wife...

Mary hands Percy the ribbon, he holds it tenderly in his hand.

Percy: Oh...okay. I mean, thank you. Miss Godwin.

Mary: Mary.

Percy: Mary.

They both smile. LX change as they return to the present.

Mary: (*Fondly*) I cannot tell you how many times I have returned to that memory in my mind. It is just so unremarkable. So...seemingly mundane. It feels like too ordinary an origin for our story.

Percy: Not at all, I think it's perfect. We were so painfully nervous then, you can tell that the meeting affected us both. (*Teasingly*) And you! Well, you were wearing so much tartan.

Mary: (*Breaking down in laughter*) Of course, me in my tartan frock. But be merciful—I had just returned from Scotland and tartan was the fashion there.

Percy: Nonsense, you were a vision in tartan, a woman unlike any I had ever seen before—or have ever since seen. In fact, your outfit was made particularly memorable to me when you gave me this token of remembrance.

He takes a tartan ribbon out from inside his jacket.

Mary: My ribbon? It isn't!

Percy: (*Mocking her surprise*) It is!

Mary: You didn't!

Percy: I did!

Mary: You told me how much you loved it and I felt my cheeks flush scarlet under your gaze.

Percy: (*Laughing*) I meant that I loved it "on you," of course. Nevertheless, I was touched by the gesture and vowed to keep it for always.

Mary: (*Laughing*) How embarrassing; you must have thought I was mad!

Percy: Not at all. I'm the mad one, remember?

Mary: Okay, Mad Shelley, but I still can't believe you did that. I never knew you held it with you all these years.

Percy: Naturally, I kept it. It belonged to my Mary and it signaled the beginning of our life together. (*He ties the ribbon around her hair*) "Thy lips did meet/ Mine tremblingly..."

Mary: "...Thy dark eyes threw / Their soft persuasion on my brain..."

Percy: "...Charming away its dream of pain."¹⁶⁸

Mary: That's from the poem you wrote for me that year. You called it "To Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin." Who would have guessed then that I would one day be "Mary Shelley?"

Percy: I knew. From that day on I knew.

Mary: Well, my sweet prophet, it appears you weren't the only one who was clairvoyant. I also kept a memento from our early meetings.

Mary goes to the desk and produces a small volume, passing it to Percy.

Percy: Is this a copy of my "Queen Mab"?

Mary: You had it sent to the house after one of our many...late night conversations. I thought my stepmother was going to kill me when it arrived. A gift from a married man!

Percy: "Queen Mab" has always had a special place in my heart. And I knew after our discussions of philosophy that you were worthy of your parents' noble heritage, which made you the perfect person to read it.

Mary: I was just so nervous any time we spoke. It was all so new. I had never felt so happy.

Percy: You there by my side.

Percy gives Mary the copy of "Queen Mab," takes her hand, and leads her downstage. They sit, facing the audience, stealing glances as they vividly recall these early meetings. They gradually move closer together as they speak.

¹⁶⁸ Percy's "To Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin"

Mary: We were in my father's study and I was so afraid of getting caught alone with you.
(Realizing) No, that's a lie. I did not care about what anyone else thought of me, for I saw my all in you.

Percy: During those nights, I spoke with a rigor and intensity that no other soul had ever brought out in me. You were hanging on my every word and I recall gazing into the amber flames in the hearth and sensing you edging closer beside me—

Mary: Uncertain but inspired. And you—

Percy: Simply exhilarated. The poet's mind thirsts for intercourse with an intelligence similar to itself and I finally found that in speaking with you.¹⁶⁹

Mary: "Her voice was like the voice of his own soul / Heard in the calm of thought;"

Percy: "its music long, / Like woven sounds of streams and breezes, held..."

Mary: "...His inmost sense suspended in its web"¹⁷⁰

They are now right beside each other, holding hands, almost laughing with excitement.

Percy: And still now you mesmerize me—ensnaring my spirit in yours.

Mary: You were the one that first captivated me—getting to read your work only made me feel closer to you.

Percy: *(Returning to the book)* So here it is: my own token of remembrance given to mark those most memorable nights together. *(Almost lost in thought and awe at himself)* My first poem. My own aerial creation. It must be fascinating to re-read it now—I was filled with such youthful fervor then.

Mary: Truth be told, that same fervor animated you all your life. It even shone through during the dark days that came *(Brief pause)*. But I almost forgot—you wrote my name inside the cover.

Percy: Ha! And so, I did: "Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin."

Mary: My heart leapt seeing my name there, written in your fine hand. And underneath, you wrote an inscription in a hurried scrawl—

Percy: *(Reading)* "You see, Mary, I have not forgotten you!" Well of course I hadn't! You had already made yourself utterly unforgettable to me. But what's this written on the next page? It's not in my hand, what does it say—

Mary: *(Realizing with Horror)* No, no, no, no...

Mary tries to grab the book away from Percy.

¹⁶⁹ Percy's "Preface to 'Alastor'"

¹⁷⁰ Percy's "Alastor"

Please don't read that, I'm begging you...

Percy: (*Plays keep-away with the book, Mary chases him*) Well, well, well, what do we have here? My word, this Shelley fellow you keep writing about sounds simply enchanting.

Mary: Give it back, I hate you!

Percy: Oh, won't you read it for me? It's just not the same unless I hear the love and longing in your voice.

Mary: No thanks, I might die of embarrassment.

Percy: Worry not! If you happen to pass on, I will be there to embrace you in the afterlife! (*Turns on Mary, tickles her*).

Mary: (*Laughing*) Fine, fine! Stop it, I concede! (*He stops tickling her*) You always win because you cheat.

Percy: Cheaters always prosper, my love. Don't be a sore loser, just tell me how much you adore me.

Hands her the book.

Mary: (*Reading, still embarrassed*) "This book is sacred to me, and as no other creature shall ever look into it, I may write what I please. I love the author beyond all powers of expression and I am parted from him. Dearest and only love, by that love we have promised to each other, although I may not be yours, I can never be another's. But I am thine, exclusively thine. Shelley has told me..."

Percy: (*Reading over her shoulder*) ... "You are now, Mary, going to mix with many, and for a moment I shall depart, but in the solitude of your chamber I shall be with you." And was I not with you then, just as I am now?

Mary: Of course, you were with me. No matter what happens to separate us, you always seem to come back to me.

Percy: And I always will. We are destined for each other.

Mary: Okay then, here is a tough question for you.

Percy: You can try your best to fool me but you know my memory is exceptional.

Mary: All right. Do you remember where we first proclaimed our love for each other?

Percy: Well that's an easy one! (*Gesturing to a spot downstage*) Sitting in St. Pancras churchyard, leaned against your mother's gravestone.

Mary: You're never wrong, are you?

Percy: Come, be happy!¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Percy's "Misery, a Fragment"

Mary and Percy both touch the book. LX change and SFX change as light instrumental music plays for a memory scene. They sit together at the spot designated as Mary Wollstonecraft's grave. Mary sits with her legs out with Percy's head in her lap. Percy is reading aloud from his journal and Mary has stopped reading her own book to listen.

Percy: (*Reading with great emphasis*) "Before man can be free, and equal, and truly wise, he must cast aside the chains of habit and superstition; he must strip sensuality of its pomp, and selfishness of its excuses, and contemplate actions and objects as they really are..."¹⁷² (*Pause for effect*) What do you think?

Mary: Well. That sounds lovely, my Elf.

Percy: Do you really think so, Pecksie? I'm particularly fond of the part about the "chains of habit and superstition." I think it will really shake people and rattle their religious convictions.

Mary: Certainly. I mean, yes. I suppose that is one approach you can take. It is a very vivid image.

Percy: (*Shocked horror*) You don't like it.

Mary: No, I do! It's just...

Percy: What?

Mary: (*Sighs*) Forgive me. It's just so...incendiary.

Percy: Exactly! I'm trying to be "incendiary." I am working to eradicate our broken social system, to subvert decaying power structures, to force men to action and revolution. I want to start a fire in the hearts of my readers.

Mary: Yes. I know all about that. It's just that you are such a talented poet and a gorgeous writer. Read to me again the part you wrote earlier about love.

Annoyed, Percy flips back through his notebook.

Percy: (*Reading*) "Thou demandest what is Love. It is that powerful attraction towards all we conceive, or fear, or hope beyond ourselves, when we find within our own thoughts the chasm of an insufficient void, and seek to awaken in all things that are, a community with what we experience within ourselves."¹⁷³

Mary: There! That is such a beautiful sentiment. It's so hopeful and optimistic and...light.

Percy: Perhaps, but to reach that point of lightness I must first tear down the structures that blind individuals to their greater potential and free them from captivity.

Mary: Naturally, it's just that...

Percy: Maybe you haven't written much of anything, but your parents were writers and revolutionaries. You know the important, foundational work that I must first do to change the world through my writing.

¹⁷² Percy's "On Christianity"

¹⁷³ Percy's "On Love"

Pause.

Mary: (*Consolatory*) I may not be a poet, but there is something that I *do* know very intimately.

Percy: (*Still somewhat annoyed*) And what do *you* know?

Mary: I know that your nose crinkles when you get upset. And I know that your voice gets high when you get excited.

Percy: Well, that is ridiculous. You know even less than I thought.

Mary: (*Persistently*) And I also know that you care a lot about your “chains of habit and superstition” because (*Pinches his nose*) that little nose is crinkled again and (*Making her own voice higher*) your voice is starting to get pitchy.

Percy: (*Getting up*) Stop it, you are being childish.

Mary: (*Teasing, holding him*) And *you* are being fussy. Which tells me that you are passionate about what you wrote and feeling especially defensive of those words.

Percy: I...suppose so.

Mary: Then it doesn't matter how I feel about them or what I would want to write. What's important is that I think you are wonderful and brilliant and even incendiary. A real creature of fire (*They smile together*). But most of all, nothing matters as much to me as your happiness. And these words seem to make you incredibly excited, so those are the right words for you.

Percy: (*Smiling*) I love you, Mary Godwin.

Warm pause.

Mary: (*Surprised*) I love you too, Percy Shelley.

Mary closes the book, LX change, return to the present. Mary and Percy are still sitting together from the memory scene.

Mary: You really are a lover of love, aren't you?

Percy: Yes, but mostly I am a lover of you.

Mary: (*Laughing*) Well aren't you a Don Juan, sir.

Percy: That was a scene more befitting of our love story, wasn't it? Behind us, a gravestone bravely stood sentinel, offering sanctuary for our clandestine meeting. A monument in honour of your exceptional mother. Your namesake. Although she has departed, “Still her fame/ Shines on thee.”¹⁷⁴

Mary: (*Reading the imagined epitaph*) “Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin. Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman.” My mother's death played the backdrop to our union, just as her ideas helped form our philosophies. (*Laughing*) How deeply symbolic. How theatrical!

Percy: How macabre! But then, that was always our way.

¹⁷⁴ Percy's “To Mary”

Mary: Indeed, I recall you sitting here beside me in the glow of the summer sun, writing such ghastly stanzas about death and decay. (*Performing with great theatricality*) “The dead are sleeping in their sepulchres: / And, mouldering as they sleep, a thrilling sound, / Half sense, half thought, among the darkness stirs, / Breathed from their wormy beds all living things around.” Really, Shelley, these were the lovers’ words you used to woo me?

Percy: Are we so different? If I’m not mistaken, you yourself have a certain penchant for horror. Or are these not your words: (*Reciting from memory with equal theatricality*) “I embraced Elizabeth, but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel”¹⁷⁵ (*He goes to tickle Mary*).

Mary: You remember my *Frankenstein*!

Percy: Well of course I remember it—don’t you recall the many hours I spent editing it for you?

Mary: A handful of corrections, perhaps...

Percy: For God’s sake, Mary, you misspelled “enigmatic!” Imagine sending that mess to a publisher without my editorial overview—you would have disgraced your parents’ legacies.

Mary: Well then, my family is forever indebted to you and your benevolence.

Percy: Oh, don’t be cross with me, you know I mean no harm. But speaking of your *Frankenstein*, have you been keeping up with your writing as we discussed?

Mary: Of course, I write. Throughout these two long years without you by my side, my literary labours have been my only reprieve. Late into the night, I go on scribbling until, exhausted, I throw aside the pen.

Percy: Excellent, then read me something. I am interested to hear how you are living up to your parents’ literary reputations and adding still higher renown to your name.

Mary: I will confide that, in my long and lonely hours, I have been tinkering with a small story. (*She reads from a page on the desk and sets the stage for the telling of her tale*) “Darkness gathered round. The objects about me became indistinct as I descended from my station and, with difficulty, guided my horse so as to avoid the slain. Suddenly I heard a piercing shriek. A form seemed to rise from the earth”¹⁷⁶—

Percy: (*Cutting Mary off*) Excuse my interruption, but what exactly is this work?

Mary: I have tentatively titled it *The Last Man*. It’s the story of a lone survivor at the end of the world. I feel something of an affinity for the abandoned protagonist, as I too am the last relic of a beloved race, my companions extinct before me. As his plight worsens, he appeals to the deaf heavens, asking “all extinct, save myself, should I walk the earth alone?”

¹⁷⁵ *Frankenstein*

¹⁷⁶ *The Last Man*

Percy: It's an interesting enough idea, but I wonder if it's not too bleak and overwrought in its present form. And besides, didn't our Lord Byron already cover this subject with great succinctness and poignancy in his poem "Darkness"?

Mary: More than one writer can meditate on the same subject.

Percy: Of course, but when the earlier writer is Lord Byron, the later writer must be very sure of her step.

Mary: And am I not surefooted?

Percy: (*Laughing it off*) My beloved, I have always warned you to expect severity from me—it is in my nature to be particular with words. But here, let me help you through an exercise in contrast and comparison, like we did with *Frankenstein's* early drafts.

Mary: I recall.

Percy: Perhaps we should place your *Last Man* beside my... "Ode to the West Wind?" Just as a thought experiment. I think it could develop the aural dimension of the text if you heard your words and mine juxtaposed. You will start, my love. Don't be shy, I'm sure you have more written than those few meagre lines.

They each take a page from the desk and prepare to read from their respective texts. This is a common competition for the Shelleys, with Percy as the obvious initiator and Mary openly resenting these duels. Mary and Percy approach each other, holding their respective pieces of paper. They perform a kind of literary fencing salute, in which they face each other, raise their pages vertically in front of their faces and lower them.

Percy: En garde! Pret...

They separate and walk to opposite sides of the stage. They get into position, holding their respective pages up in front of them and preparing to read.

Percy: Allez!

Mary begins reading to the audience with reservation and quiet vulnerability, while Percy imbues his performance with spirited theatricality. The effect should be of a combative and highly physical exchange as they jockey for audience attention, a series of verbal thrusts and parries.

Mary: Even our soldiers were awed to silence.

Percy: Be thou, Spirit fierce... / ¹⁷⁷

Mary: the music paused...

Percy: My spirit!

Mary: the clang of arms was hushed.

Percy: Be thou me, impetuous one! (*Breaking, to Mary*) Ha! One for me, wouldn't you agree?

¹⁷⁷ Percy's "Ode to the West Wind"

Mary: (*Persisting, to the audience*) From within the city neither shout nor cry, nor aught except the casual howling of a dog broke the noon-day stillness.

Percy: Drive my dead thoughts over the universe, / Like wither'd leaves, to quicken a new birth.

Mary: No form could be discerned on the terraces of the houses; in the higher parts of the town no moving shadow bespoke the presence of any living being.

Percy: And, by the incantation of this verse...

Mary: The very trees waved not...

Percy: Scatter, as from an unextinguish'd hearth / Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!

Mary: And mocked the stability of architecture with like immovability.

Percy: Be through my lips to unawaken'd earth...

Mary: The city was the prey of pestilence...Death had become lord of Constantinople.

Percy: (*Almost shouting with intensity*) The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind, / If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind? (*Breaking to chide Mary*) I have bested you again! A hit, a very palpable hit!¹⁷⁸

Mary: (*Cutting him off sharply*) Halt!

Percy: (*Laughing triumphantly*) Oh ho! Are you ready to declare the victor so soon?

Mary: That's enough. I see now that your piece is better. Thank you very much, as always.

Both Mary and Percy let their pages drop to the floor.

Percy: See? You have a good start here, but the whole story wants moral discrimination and modesty, more restraint and precision. A more measured approach could create a more poignant sense of melancholy, while also enriching the emotion through an upward movement towards hope, as I accomplished through my poem. In my poem, for instance—

Mary: Yes, I said I get it. I am a writer too, as you well know.

Percy: Of course, but sometimes the coarseness of the prose form that you insist on working in simply cannot capture the prismatic and highly nuanced...

Mary: I said I've got it, Shelley. I have been doing a fine job of writing without you here.

Pause.

Percy: (*Gesturing to the book*) You brought me back, Mary. I never asked for this.

Mary: No. You would never return to me if you had a choice, would you?

Pause.

¹⁷⁸ *Hamlet*

Percy: Perhaps we should move on from comparative study. It seems you are no longer in need of an editor.

Mary: In fact, I am not. But since you are still in need of *me* to be yours (*Gesturing to the book*), let's press on with reading *your* texts.

Percy: Very well then. So, how have you enjoyed my words?

Mary: Your words?

Percy: Yes. I'm curious to know how you have enjoyed my writing since I have been gone. Are there any details or flourishes that have become more pronounced with time?

Mary sits at the desk and begins turning the pages of the manuscript.

Mary: I will say this. I had always sensed it, but your words are truly haunting. I know in my heart that people will remember your poems because there is something in your voice that is impossible to forget.

Percy: Thank you most sincerely, my love. I endeavored to carve out my place in literary history with my own distinctive voice.

Mary: In fact, thinking further on it, the effect is truly remarkable. You see even when I am no longer reading your words, I hear them echo through the chambers of my mind. Every one. Every stanza and syllable. Perfectly-placed words and snatches of beautiful phrases endlessly loop through my mind.

Mary takes a stack of papers from the desk and hands them to Percy. As he reads each in turn, he lets them fall to the floor.

Percy: (*Reading from each page, to the audience*) "Life and the world, or whatever we call that which we are and feel, is an astonishing thing. The mist of familiarity obscures from us the wonder of our being¹⁷⁹" (*Reading the next page*) "I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar" (*Reading the next page*) "To defy Power, which seems omnipotent; / To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates"

Mary: See? Just lovely. However, memorable words can be both a blessing and a curse. Because, my love, try as I might, I cannot forget a single one of yours. Good or bad. So, although I wish that I could preserve only your words of love and beauty, my head is also filled with ones that I wish I could forget.

Mary hands a stack of pages for Percy to read from. Again, he allows each page to fall to the floor after he reads from it.

Percy: (*Reading from each page, to the audience*) "Mary considers me as a portion of herself, and feels no more remorse in torturing me than in torturing her own mind" (*Reading the next*

¹⁷⁹ Percy's "On Life"

page) “I like Jane more and more” (*Reading the next page*) “I only feel the want of those who can feel, and understand me...Mary does not.”

Mary: And although I wish it were otherwise, I hear them all.

Percy: All right, I think I see now what is troubling you. My writing has brought out some of your sensitivities again.

Mary: My “sensitivities?”

Percy: But every literary estate contends with the potent power of memories. A life of literature must be viewed with cool logic and rationality, lest rash emotions take over. Remember too that your task is not unique to you alone—your father himself prepared your mother’s memoir after her death. And it could not have been easy for him to read stories detailing her tawdry affairs—especially in her case where there were so many. Let this experience then test your mettle and reaffirm the nobility of your bloodline.

Mary: I see. Well you have made your point: my pain is unjustified.

Percy: I do believe that these fears are essentially baseless.

Mary: You are telling me that the words you wrote and the havoc they have reeked on my memory are not as ill as I have imagined them to be.

Percy: Well, in a sense—

Mary: And pray tell, what sense is that?

Percy: One’s mental fortitude and strength of character should be able to withstand the benign discoveries made in a poet’s private journals. You yourself are a writer. You should be able to separate your Shelley standing before you from the one I conjured up through my literary fantasies.

Mary: But you see, my love, perhaps my problem is that the more I read, the more I realized that “Shelley the Man” and “Shelley the Poet” are deeply, intrinsically linked. And while both figures have the capacity for immense love and affection, they are also profoundly selfish and cruel.

Percy: This is a joke. You’re joking.

Mary: No, I’m very serious. Because in reading your letters, your journals, and your verse, I have been made privy to your growing animosity towards me—yes, up until the day you drowned. (*Percy scoffs*) Don’t pretend you can’t recall it all now. Your view of me as your “Poor Mary” made “too idle to write” through her needless lethargy—

Percy: Dear me, it seems as though you *have* been creating fictions in my absence. This really is one of your best stories yet, although it is a tad far-fetched.

Mary: This isn't funny, Shelley. I have been very patient and I am entitled to some answers, you owe me that much.

Percy: I haven't heard a question yet.

Mary: Tell me, as I stand before you now do you have any affection left towards me? Or do you still envision me as I am in your poetry: the frozen and weary moon...

Mary hands Percy a page from the desk. He reads from it and then allows it to fall to the floor.

Percy: "ever changing, like a joyless eye / That finds no object worth its constancy"¹⁸⁰ Enough. Enough of this needless outrage. You have no right to anatomize me and my words any longer. You may be my wife and my editor, but you will not be my tyrant.

Mary: Of course. Any attempt to assert myself, whether creatively or otherwise, would be read as a tyrannical act. Meanwhile, your opinions and views are merely altruistic assertions. Simply a prodigious talent deigning to assist his inferior wife at every turn.

Percy: Mary, what has gotten into you? I have done nothing to earn such a cold reception from you. I don't know what you think you have read but, in life as now, my heart was only warm and welcoming to yours!

Mary: "Warm and welcoming"? You mean to say that you never spurned, nor rejected me?

Percy: Nothing to warrant the accusations you have just made against me. This baseless attack launched on my character, on my writing—

Mary: I see. You have forgotten every word you ever wrote. Yes, death has granted you forgiveness in the form of forgetting.

Percy: These are indeed bizarre machinations, my dear. Quiet your restless thoughts.

Mary: If you have benefitted from death's absolution, then at least have the courage to confess your sins from life.

Percy: What are you talking about? I am no sinner. Though I will confess that I am being sinned against by you.

Pause.

Mary: Curious. Curious how quickly you have rewritten our story. Death truly is merciful, I can see now why you sought it out!

Percy: I am warning you, Mrs. Shelley. I will not stand here as my wife slanders my life and reputation.

¹⁸⁰ Percy's "To the Moon, a Fragment"

Mary: Very well. I will not slander your name and be assured that I will protect and preserve your legacy in print, like a good little Mary. But I will not let you cower from your words. With you and I at least, there must be a reckoning.

Mary begins rapidly flipping through the papers.

I don't have any evidence to support my claims? Let's see about that. Shall we begin with your women?

Percy: My "women?"

Mary: Oh yes! Don't you know that your shrine is littered with your broken-hearted lovers? Swarms of ruined and writhing women—blowing kisses to the worms that gnaw at the remnants of your withered flesh. With your mourning harem around there is hardly any room for your widow to even pay her respects.

Percy: (*Clapping in mock admiration*) Very evocative description. But don't let me or the truth stand in the way of your flight of fancy. Please, proceed—I look forward to hearing more about my own biography. (*Pause*) Well don't stop now, it was just getting interesting. You last left off talking about my "women." Finish the thought.

Mary: Poor Shelley. You can't even remember your muses and harlots. Perhaps we should refresh your memory more thoroughly.

Mary hands Percy a page from the desk. He reads from it and then allows it to fall to the floor.

Percy: (*Reluctantly, to the audience*) "I never thought before my death to see / Youth's vision thus made perfect. Emily, / I love thee; though the world by no thin name / Will hide that love, from its unvalued shame"¹⁸¹

Mary: Well? And what of those words?

Percy: Please quell your jealousy. This is a poem, nothing more. And although, at times, women that we knew inspired me, I was strictly interested in romantic love in the abstract. It is no more autobiographical than any story you yourself have written.

Mary: Yes, of course, it's all very honourable when presented through the conventional trappings of courtly love. But I get it, you've created a kind of chivalric romance populated by your obvious mistresses—

Percy: Well...well...

Mary: And, you know what, I'm sure they all love it—I know my sisters did.

¹⁸¹ Percy's "Epipsychidion"

Percy: Do not bait me. This routine of yours isn't cute. You know very well that these are poetic tributes to beauty itself and nothing more.

Mary: Look, what have we here? "To Jane: The Invitation." And what, *precisely*, were you inviting Jane to do in this poem, dear husband? Let's see if we can figure it out or if it's too rarified and esoteric for my little woman's brain to comprehend.

Mary hands Percy a page from the desk. He reads from it and then allows it to fall to the floor.

Percy: (*Hesitantly, to the audience*) "Radiant Sister of the Day, / Awake! Arise! And come away! To the wild woods and the plains, / And the pools where winter rains..."

Mary: (*Takes the paper from him, laughing*) Oh yes, I think I understand perfectly. Or am I to take it that you simply wanted to go away with her to pick wildflowers? You know, make a day of it? Pack a lunch?

Percy: Enough. You've had your fun at my expense.

Mary: No, not yet, I'm afraid.

Mary takes another page from the desk.

Percy: What new horror is this?

Mary: It isn't my fault that you can't remember what you wrote.

Percy: You are loving this, aren't you? You torture artist.

Mary: How little do you care for me that this one of the last things you ever wrote?

Mary hands Percy a page from the desk. He pauses, panic stricken, before he reads from it and then allows it to fall to the floor.

Percy: (*Quietly, to the audience*) "Alas, I kiss you...*Jane*"

Mary: Speak up, please.

Percy: (*Slightly louder*) "Alas, I kiss you, Jane."

Mary: Who?

Percy: (*Loudly*) "Alas, I kiss you...*JANE!*"

Mary: That wasn't so hard.

Percy: Surely you realize that I never meant for you to see that—

Mary: Oh, so that's why it was so secretly concealed beside the last lines of your final, unfinished poem. Such a pity. To see "The Triumph of Life" thus defeated by death and marred by adulterous aspirations.

Percy: That is enough, Mrs. Shelley. I am asking you to stop this nonsense at once. You know my views on this kind of childish behavior. Possessiveness is a sign of weakness in a man or a woman—

Mary: But it doesn't even stop there, though that would be plenty for any spouse to bear. Just look at these titles: "To Jane," "To Sophia," "To Harriet," "To a Lady...with a Guitar!" And surely there must be many verses dedicated to my sister Claire in these pages—

Percy: I'm sorry, but my revolutionary aspirations were made clear from our first discussions. We agreed to adopt a consciously vanguard approach to living and writing. You should have been aware of all that that would entail.

Mary: Oh, I knew.

Percy: Then why are you so surprised? If you wanted me to be a gentleman, befitting my grandfather's title, you were always bound to be disappointed. As disappointed as I am in you.

Mary: Believe me, I have sacrificed much for our cause and I have done so without complaint. All I asked in return was that you be forthright with me, that you not harbor ill will towards me and lust towards our friends, neighbours, and family.

Percy: First, these accusations are baseless. I will concede that I have pursued phantom spirits through the poetry of my dreams, but that is what a poet should do. He should be attuned to all that is beautiful and sublime in this world and beyond it. So yes, I have written about other women, but in this, as in every other respect, I have written fearlessly¹⁸²

Mary: Yes, you fear nothing. Not the consequence of your actions, not hurting your wife—

Percy: Do not re-imagine yourself as the innocent lamb while you play with your food like a tiger.

Mary: Excuse me?

Percy: History is written by the victors. So, I suppose you can create whatever tale you want now that I am secured in my grave. Congratulations, you won. You will always have the final word in our story.

Mary: Please, speak your piece. The floor is yours.

Percy: How gracious, my love. Let me ask you a question: were the tenets of my philosophy not made clear to you through the same words that first ensnared your heart? You read the notes that accompanied my "Queen Mab"—you wrote of your love for me on those same pages. I confess that I was filled with an all-consuming fire then, but don't pretend I was ever vague.

Percy holds out the book for Mary to read. Pause.

Mary: No. I don't want to say that.

¹⁸² "Author's Preface to *The Revolt of Islam*"

Percy: Oh ho! It's not so fun when you aren't winning, is it? But please deliver the evidence to your awaiting jury (*indicating the audience*). After all, we are all here because of *you*. Just because you can't stand to be alone and admit to yourself what really happened between us.

Mary: I know what happened.

Percy: Lovely. Then tell them what I wrote. What you *knew* I felt in my heart when you married me.

He holds the book out to her. Mary reaches for the book and Percy lets it fall to the floor in front of her.

Mary: You are disgusting.

Percy: I love you too. Now, read it.

Mary picks up the pick, preparing to read it.

Mary: (*Bitterly, To the audience*) "Prostitution is the legitimate offspring of marriage and its accompanying errors."

Percy: Precisely.

Mary: I see. I am your prostitute now.

Percy: My dear, you flatter yourself. And, as you know, it was your father's own philosophy that helped shape my world view. Look no further than his *Political Justice* to see it. Sing for me, my skylark, I know you know those words by heart.

Mary: (*Reluctantly, recalling to the audience*) "The institution of marriage is made a system of fraud"

Percy: And that marriage, as now understood—

Mary: (*With ferocity, to the audience*) "—is a monopoly, and the worst of monopolies!" (*Slams "Queen Mab" to the floor*) Are you happy now, you abhorred monster?

Percy: (*Sighs*) Come on, Mary, don't act so surprised. I compromised my principles in marrying you, but I did not completely abandon my ideals. So no, I am not sorry for my artistic dalliances and I do not ask for your forgiveness.

Mary: (*Exasperated*) You were well within your right to operate as an autonomous being in this world. I only ever asked for some small amount of respect. But to go through your papers after your death and read letters to your ladies, describing my austerity as...

Percy: (*Without reservation, to the audience*) "the ash which covered an affectionate heart." Yes? And?

Mary: A cold heart! Have I a cold heart?

Percy: I am a poet, not a liar.

Mary: Oh? And what exactly is the difference?

Percy: (*Stung, laughing*) I am dead and buried, but does any blood pump through *your* veins?

Mary: (*Indicating the desk*) I've seen your heart. Held it in my hands. It is ugly and shrivelled and useless.

Percy: My body was burned on a beach and my ashen heart was ripped from my charred corpse and locked away in that desk. But does the one in your chest beat any stronger than mine? (*He brings his head to her chest, listening*) No. I weep for you. For yours is still as cold as ice.

Mary: A cold heart! Yes! It would be cold enough if all were as I wished it. Cold, or burning in that flame—that flame in which your heart, beloved one, lay unconsumed!

Percy: (*Mocking*) Such impressive theatrics! The London stage is surely in your future!

Mary: You know what, I should just set fire to your journals, your notebooks, your lies, and watch them go up in smoke with you. Make you into kindling again. Burn you, singe you, scorch you.

Percy: Settle your spirit.

Mary: Beware, for I am fearless and therefore powerful.¹⁸³ I could destroy everything. I could rewrite your life. I could tell everyone things that would ruin your legacy forever.

Percy: Calm down—

Mary: Nobody knows what is in this book—I could fashion it into a textual monstrosity. A hideous progeny created in your own grotesque image.

Percy: I really hope you are happy with the woman you have become. I promise, I never would have married you if I knew you had this in you.

Mary: I really don't want to do this anymore. I just want to tear you apart and be done with it all.

Percy: If you are trying to hurt me, it won't work. But you have certainly let me down.

Mary: (*Low*) At least I didn't die like a fool.

Percy: What did you say?

Mary: (*Louder*) At least I didn't die like a fool! You took your pathetic boat out sailing. You went out even though you knew a storm was blowing in. You left your wife and child alone so that you could play sea captain with your mistress' husband. And you can't even swim! Who is that stupid? You are supposed to be a great poetic genius and you don't even understand how water works! You don't understand anything about what people need to live.

Percy: Please, enlighten me! Because the uneducated, untalented, uninspiring, and increasingly unattractive Mary Shelley knows everything about life and death.

¹⁸³ *Frankenstein*

Mary: (*Pause*) Did you always hate me?

Percy: That depends. Have you even lived enough to understand love and hate?

Mary: (*Regarding him with horror*) Dear God, Shelley. Were you always a monster or did I make you into one?

Percy: You would like that. To have made me in your own image. To have contorted me into the villain of your own sick fantasy. That sort of narrative suits you—you always preferred horror to romance.

Mary: How could you know me so long and yet still know me so little?

Percy: I know you well, my dear. I know all your tricks. And I know that you resented me and my persistent desire to keep *living* long after you had given up. You wanted me to be a pathetic shut-in like you. You would have preferred that I sit on my hands in the corner waiting for the ice queen (*indicating Mary*) to thaw out.

Mary: Good Lord. You really aren't as beautiful as your words.

Percy: And you are *exactly* as beautiful as *yours*.

Pause.

Mary: Leave me alone. I'm done, this is all too horrible.

Percy: No. No, you don't get to quit. You don't get to rip me, tear me, shred me and then pull away.

Mary: Please, Percy—go away. I'm tired and I don't want to play anymore.

Percy: I'm not playing here, my dear. You see, unlike you, I take my writing and my legacy very seriously and I am disgusted to know that both have been left in such incapable hands.

Mary: Fine! Fine, you are absolutely right. You want me to agree with you? I agree. I was an unworthy wife to you and now I am your unworthy editor. After all, that's what your friends have been saying about me since you died.

Percy: (*Taken aback*) What?

Mary: And none of you are wrong either. I didn't deserve to be the wife of a brilliant poet and I am unfit to read your poems, let alone edit them. I should have died instead of you—everyone would be so much happier!

Percy: Please, stop. I'm begging you...

Mary: No, you are right. I am a terrible editor and a wretched writer. Is that what you want? To know that I know all of that?

Percy: Of course, that's not what I want—

Mary: I know I'm not good at any of this. I know I'm not good enough to be your wife or my parents' daughter. You want to talk about literary legacies? You read the reviews of

Frankenstein. “A tissue of horrible and disgusting absurdity.” That’s my legacy: an embarrassment.

Percy: Walter Scott gave it a very positive review...

Mary: Of course, only because he thought *you* wrote it. Then my next novel was not only reviled, but I was accused of promoting suicide and incest. It was all so awful.

Percy: (*Quietly*) You didn’t do anything wrong...

Mary: Do you really think I’m proud? I hate myself. I hate my writing. And now I can’t even lie to myself and pretend that I was a good wife to you. You refuse to let me forget the fact that I have never been good enough for anything.

Long Pause, Mary returns to the desk.

Percy: Mary?

Mary: Yes?

Percy: I’m sorry. I went too far.

Mary: Yes.

Percy: You know I don’t know how to argue properly.

Mary: Yes.

Percy: Too much fire.

Mary: Oh yes.

Percy: I think you are a brilliant writer. I really do mean that.

Mary: Okay.

Pause.

Percy: Can you forgive me? For everything?

Mary: I don’t know.

Pause. Percy watches her, tentatively.

Mary: “The ice queen?” Really?

Percy: I’m sorry.

Mary: Was I really that bad?

Percy: (*Pause*) Forgive me, but there were times when I didn’t know how to get through to you.

Mary: I apologize. I really do. But I was having a hard time.

Percy: Of course, it was horrible. No parent should have to experience everything that we did. To lose so much so quickly.

Mary: I confess that I never learned to be happy again. But I thought you of all people would understand why.

Percy: I knew why you were distant with me, what made you so unfeeling. To have so little respite from pain is too much for anyone to bear.

Mary: I was alone. Completely and utterly alone.

Percy: You were not alone, I was right there too. But I'm not just comprised of words and ideas. I was still young and alive and in need of love and companionship. My soul was a roaring lion and our marriage bed was its cage.

Mary: (*Wryly*) Well then, it seems we are both monstrous in our own ways. You too hot-tempered and filled with lust—and me too cold. “Hell is empty and all the devils are here”¹⁸⁴

Percy: Neither one of us was malicious then. Just contending with profound grief in our own imperfect ways. Losing one child would have been hard enough—

Mary: Please, don't bring them up.

Percy: Why not?

Pause. Mary indicates the audience, Percy looks at them.

Percy: Oh, no. No, I can't stand that. That is pathetic. You haven't even mentioned them yet. You intend to hack them all out of our story.

Mary: No, of course not!

Percy: Honestly, something is broken inside you.

Mary: I didn't want to talk about them, all right? It's my story to tell or not and I can't keep re-telling it. It's killing me to re-live it again and again and again.

Percy: If you tell my story, if you tell *our* story, without them in it, then you are a liar. If you don't include them, you may as well burn everything to the ground. After all, that's what you want.

Mary: Fine! Fine, you win again. You always get your way.

Percy: Nobody is winning here, Mary. You are a writer, for God's sake. Have the courage to tell your own damn story.

Mary: (*To the audience*) I am Mary Shelley, mother of William pre-deceased, Clara pre-deceased, an unnamed infant daughter pre-deceased, a miscarried child, and my little Percy Florence—so named after his late-father. I was the Mother of beautiful children. But they did not stay with me. Every time I lost another child to the cold grip of Death, Shelley sought to rectify the hurt with another one. Replacement parts for a broken heart. I've pored over his letters and they are littered with blind optimism, as he forecasted how—

¹⁸⁴ *The Tempest*

Percy: (*Hopefully, to the audience*) “The birth of a child will probably retrieve her from some part of her present melancholy depression.”

Mary: (*To the audience*) But no solace came—no reprieve from sorrow. Instead, all but one of my children fled from me, never to return. Am I so monstrous that they had to leave me? After losing my first child, a tiny girl who passed before I could name her, I dreamt that my little baby came to life again; that she had only been cold, and that we rubbed her before the fire and she lived. But I awoke to find no baby. She left no words, so how am I supposed to tell *her* story?

Pause.

(*To Percy*) That past. It is a torture to think upon.

Percy: I beg you, do not be tortured by it any longer.

Mary: Please, tell me how to move on You had your friends and your women, but it was just me. And now it will always be just me.

Percy: I said I was sorry, but I became tired of having to comfort and console you—tired of your tears and your messiness. I could not be expected to write from a place of such despair.

Mary: Excuse me? Your verses *benefitted* from my sorrows! My coldness played muse to your pen. You used the image of my grief to emphasize the passion you felt for another woman. *I* was your exercise in contrast—you made me your moon to cast her as your sun!

Mary hands Percy a page from the desk. He reads from it and then allows it to fall to the floor.

Percy: (*Reservedly, to the audience*) “The cold chaste Moon, the Queen of Heaven’s bright isles,
/ Who makes all beautiful on which she smiles / That wandering shrine of soft yet icy flame /
Which ever is transformed, yet still the same, / And warms not but illumines.”

Mary: Well, now I am truly cold moonshine. But you must admit that you were intolerably cruel for leaving me to suffer in solitude.

Percy: All suffering is solitary. In our pain, we are “companionless as the last cloud of an expiring storm.”¹⁸⁵

Mary: It doesn’t have to be that way. You could have waited for me.

Percy: I didn’t have time to wait. And you gave no signs that springtime would come and your heart would thaw to me. So, I ran away. I became a solitary spirit—a phantom among men.¹⁸⁶ I hid from you in darkened rooms, in poetry, in the arms of my fantasy women. I retreated to brooks and river banks where the water could wash away my memories of lost children and forgotten laughter. Without progeny, without hope, our project was over. The dream of revolution and reform would die with us.

¹⁸⁵ Percy’s “Adonais”

¹⁸⁶ “Adonais”

Mary: We could have faced it all together, as we always had in the past.

Percy: No. I could not look in your eyes, and you could not look in mine.

Pause.

Mary: Strange, isn't it? We became most unfamiliar when we needed each other most.

Percy: We never look to each other for help anymore.

Mary: Never. For we are no longer "the Shelleys" now. Just Mary and Percy.

Percy: We are a world apart.

Mary and Percy: "The quick coupled with the dead."¹⁸⁷

Percy: There you are—

Mary: A shell of my former self. And you—

Percy: Haunted by the past...

Mary and Percy: ...and uncertain about the future.

Mary: We learned to communicate through polite conversations...

Percy: ...and the briefest interactions possible.

Pause, as they gather the courage to stare at each other and reluctantly ask their questions.

Percy: "How is little Percy doing today?"

Mary: "And how was your sailing today?"

Percy: "And have you copied out my poem?"

Mary: "And have you read my latest draft?"

Percy: "And when are the Gisbornes coming to join us?"

Mary: "And when is Byron coming to join us?"

¹⁸⁷ Percy's description of his relationship Mary, which he shared with Trelawny the last year of his life: "She can't bear solitude, nor I society—the quick coupled with the dead" (Rossetti 49).

Percy: “And when are the Hunts coming to join us?”

Mary and Percy: “And won’t somebody please come to join us?”

Mary: General niceties to pass the time and save ourselves from each other’s prying eyes.

Percy: Don’t look at me, Mary.

Mary: Don’t touch me, Shelley.

Percy: But sometimes, despite our best efforts, I can occasionally see you. Really see you.

Mary: Sometimes in a passing look, other times in a lingering embrace.

Percy: And there you are again. That same vision in a tartan frock.

Mary: That same poet with the soul of fire and the crinkled little nose.

Percy: But just as quickly, that fleeting image passes—

Mary: And here we are again. Two solitary figures marooned in our private griefs.

Percy: Just Mary on her own...

Mary: And Percy by himself. It wasn’t until the very end of your life that I started to see pieces of you again—

Percy: But by then, I was already lost in my own mind. I felt like I had drifted so far away and I could barely see you waving back at me.

Mary: In the midnight hour, my mind often returns to the image of you during those blackest days before you...before it all happened. I could tell that you were unwell...

Percy: My spirit was restless and my thoughts grew increasingly darker...

Mary: Did you ever consider—

Percy: Ending it? (*Beat*) Yes.

Mary: (*Realizing*) Oh God. That’s why you wanted Trelawny to bring you prussic acid.

Percy: I confess it would have been a comfort to me to have that golden key to the chamber of perpetual rest.

Mary: My poor love. Your sleep was disturbed by the hellish visions that nightly visited you.

Percy: Mary, if only you had seen what I saw during my final, grim nights. If only you had dreamed what I dreamed, then you would understand. Death was upon me and there was no evading it any longer.

Mary: (*To the audience*) Shelley dreamt that, lying as he did in bed, our friends Edward and Jane came in to him. They were in the most horrible condition. Their bodies lacerated, their bones starting through their skin, their faces pale yet stained with blood. Edward said...

Percy: “Get up, Shelley...”

Mary: His tissue-paper lungs: filled and soaked and sodden.

Percy: "...the sea is flooding the house..."

Mary: His water-logged heart that would not burn in the funeral pyre.

Percy: "...and it is all coming down."

Mary: His body only identified by the book of Keats' poetry in his pocket. The sea had devoured his beautiful features beyond recognition.

Percy: (*To Mary*) Imagine dying exactly as you dreamed you would. It is an uncanny sensation. And it certainly takes away some of the surprise.

Mary: Death by drowning. You saw it coming.

Percy: I think I always knew it would end that way. I was compelled towards the water, but I never learned to swim. A perfectly poetic end.

Mary: You were never practical, it's not who you are. I shouldn't have expected anything different from you.

Percy: No, you were right. I was so reckless. But I felt like I was speeding toward my own tragic end. I just didn't want to take you down with me. I didn't want my worst nightmare to come true.

Percy and Mary touch the book together. LX change and SFX change as light instrumental music plays and the Shelleys return to the memory. The music continues below the scene, faintly at first and then rising dramatically. Mary guides us, both aware of the present and pulled back into the past.

Mary: (*To the audience, as Percy, trance-like, silently acts it out*) Shelley dreamt that he got up and went to his window that looked out on the terrace. He thought he saw the sea rushing in. Suddenly his vision changed and he saw the figure of himself strangling me.

Percy grabs Mary from behind, placing his arms around her neck and shoulders

Mary: Round my neck thine arms enfold—/ They are soft, but chill and dead; / And thy tears upon my head / Burn like points of frozen lead...

She works to resist him as they engage in a macabre dance. SFX: the music begins to rise. A deathly waltz ensues and she becomes temporarily seduced by him

Percy: Thy frozen pulses flutter / With a love thou dare not utter. / Thou art murmuring—thou art weeping— / Is thine icy bosom leaping / While my burning heart lies sleeping —

Mary: Clasp me till our hearts be grown...

Percy: Like two shadows into one;

Mary: Till this dreadful transport may...

Percy: Like a vapour fade away...

Mary: In the sleep that lasts always...¹⁸⁸

Percy pulls Mary to the ground and covers her mouth. She stares ahead with terror until she breaks his hold over her. SFX: the music swells to an alarming crescendo. Mary breaks free from him and SFX change as the music abruptly ends.

LX change, return to present. Both gasp for air and look with horror at what has just occurred between them. Pause as Percy, now awake, regains composure. Mary cautiously watches him from a distance, taking sanctuary at her desk.

Percy: What a scene to recur to!

Mary: My poor, paper boy. All crumpled and torn.

Percy: The curse of this life is that whatever is once known can never be unknown. You think to leave it, you leave it not. It clings to you.

Mary: Having come to your senses, you later told me that you—

Percy: ...had many visions lately; I had seen the figure of myself, which met me as I walked on the terrace and said to me...

Mary: 'How long do you mean to be content?'

Percy: What has happened here? All is not lost until we wish to forget. And oh, how I want to forget.

Pause.

Mary: Well "Dear heart, how like you this?"¹⁸⁹ (*Indicating their chaotic surroundings*) Here lies the last remains of our all too brief love affair: the tragic sum of our years spent together. As it turns out, we are not soul mates after all, but fated counterparts locked in a death spiral. That's how it must end for us.

Percy: No. No, Mary. Death is not the end of our story.

Mary: Look around you, this is the end.

Percy: We have endured much and have encountered seemingly insurmountable hurdles together. But ours will be a tale of lasting love, despite the many tribulations. Despite the accidents of mortality that tore us apart in this life.

¹⁸⁸ Percy's "Misery, a Fragment"

¹⁸⁹ Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress"

Mary: You can't possibly have hope after everything that has come between us. How, after all this, are we deserving of a happy ending—if it were even possible.

Percy: Because no matter the obstacle, we have always overcome it together. Even the darkest days could not extinguish our passion for each other. The legacy of our lives and our love will be hope and perseverance in the face of incredible hardships. It's how we began and it is how we will continue to endure.

Percy returns to the desk and produces a small, battered book from inside it. He turns to a page near the beginning, and hands it to Mary.

Mary: What is that?

Percy: Our origin story. The elopement journal we kept during our travels abroad.

Mary: You kept the original in your desk.

Percy: Yes, because I used to read from it every day.

Mary: All this time, I didn't even know it was there.

Percy: I kept it tucked underneath everything as a kind of talisman—like a tartan ribbon or a private love note written inside a book.

Mary: You are full of surprises.

Percy: Read that first entry there on the left-hand side.

Mary: *(Reads)* “July 28th, 1814.”

Percy: Is the date familiar to you?

Mary: Of course, I would never forget it. The day we ran away to be together.

Percy: That entry tells of our journey to France. Do you remember how it began?

Mary and Percy become immersed in acting out their escape as they describe it, vividly reliving it through their narration. Their enthusiasm begins to return as they get lost in their fond memory.

Mary: Yes. I can still see your carriage waiting outside my father's house.

Percy: You peaked through the curtains of the front window as you heard me approaching.

Mary and Percy: I've never been so afraid and excited in my life.

Percy: I came to quietly collect you at the side door—

Mary: And I met you with a hurried frenzy of dizzy kisses.

Percy: Your luminous eyes were so filled with excitement...

Mary: Your perfect smile made my heart hurt with love...

Percy: There we stood together. Two fugitive lovers stealing away into the inky black of night.

Mary: Like Tristan and Isolde!

Percy: Like Romeo and Juliet!

Mary: No...

Mary and Percy: *They are like us.*

Mary: We looked intently at each other—knowing that all the promise and potential of the world lay before us.

Percy: Knowing that everything we could ever need was on that stoop in that very moment.

Mary: And we breathed deeply, gathering the last bit of courage we needed to leap together into the great forever.

Percy: Then we turned away from that house on Skinner Street, believing that it could be for the last time—

Mary: Believing that we were all each other wanted in this world and that all the pain and sacrifice would be worth it and—

Percy: We ran!

They run, laughing as they go.

With the speed and certainty of wingéd Hermes journeying into the immortal realm of eternity.

Mary: We ran. Like the hounds of hell were after us.

Percy starts running faster away from her.

Percy: (*Teasing*) My dear, you will never outrun any hellhounds like that!

Mary: A gentleman waits for his wife!

Percy: I told you, I am no gentleman!

They both run back to the desk and tag it. They are out of breath but laughing.

Mary: You cheated!

Percy: Maybe, but I also won!

Mary: Everything about that day was magical. Like there was electricity coursing through our veins.

Percy: And it was on that fateful day that we journeyed to France to start our adventures abroad—to start our lives as intertwined spirits from that moment onward.

Mary: That's right! I forgot about that hellish boat trip where we nearly capsized. Looking back, it was disastrous from the start.

Percy: Looking back, I wouldn't trade that time with you for anything.

LX change, the Shelleys return to memory, while both also guide us through the scene. SFX and LX begin to indicate a growing thunderstorm.

Percy and Mary quickly huddle together on the boat, with Mary resting on the floor between Percy's legs.

Percy: *(To the audience)* We were proceeding slowly against the wind when suddenly a thunder squall struck the sail and the waves rushed into the boat. Even the sailors perceived that our situation was perilous. Mary did not know our danger.

Mary: *(To the audience, confiding)* I knew. But I was too afraid to say anything—I was so certain that we were going to drown. My mother tried to drown herself, Shelley's first wife drowned herself, then my husband died at sea. Water is the vengeful god of our story.

Percy: *(To the audience)* She was resting on the boards between my knees. She did not speak or look, but I felt that she was there. I had time in that moment to reflect and even to reason upon the possibility of death. She and I could never be separated, but in death we might not know and feel our union as we did then. I could not stand the thought of losing her...

SFX and LX: the sounds of the storm reach a crescendo.

SFX gradually recede as we return to the light of memory.

Percy: *(To the audience)* In time, the morning broke. The lightning died away, the violence of the wind abated. We arrived at Calais while Mary still slept. We drove upon the sands and suddenly... *(To Mary, pointing towards the audience)* Look, the sun rises over France.

Mary: (*To Percy*) Much brighter than it ever did in England.

Pause, both smiling at each other.

Percy: (*Looking at Mary*) Mary was there.

Mary: (*Looking at Percy*) And Shelley was with me.

Percy closes the book, LX change as they return to the present. Pause.

Mary gets up and they form a tight embrace.

Percy: Hello, Pecksie.

Mary: Hello, my Elf. It's good to see you again.

Percy: I didn't really go anywhere, did I?

Mary: No, I guess not. But I don't think I've really seen you in a long time.

She lightly touches her finger to the tip of his nose, smiling.

Percy: How are you, my best love? How have you sustained the trials of the journey?

Mary: I feel as though I have survived a trial by fire.

Percy: Indeed. We have endured much together.

Mary: I was only seventeen-years old when we left together for the continent. Thinking back, I can hardly remember the person I was when you fell in love with me.

Percy: "How beautiful and calm and free thou wert / In thy young wisdom, when the mortal chain / Of Custom thou didst burst and rend in twain / And walked as free as light..."

Mary: Ah, of course. I recognize those words from "To Mary." You dedicated pretty verses to me as well.

Percy: (*Smiling*) I adore your fire.

Mary: And my ice?

Percy: I have loved you in all ways and I shall love you always.

Warm pause.

Mary: Perhaps that's enough for today.

Percy: As you wish. It may be that, at last, we are on that verge where words abandon us¹⁹⁰

Mary: Maybe so.

Pause.

¹⁹⁰ "On Life"

Percy: What's the matter?

Mary: Shelley...do you believe that morning will ever come again for me? That I will live long enough to experience love and joy and laughter again? Tell me, for now you know all things.

Percy: I can, of course, tell you nothing of the future. But I've thought on it and I am now convinced that if winter comes, spring *cannot* be far behind.¹⁹¹ Remember, and take solace in the words etched on my grave: "Nothing of him that doth fade—

Mary: "But doth suffer a sea change into something rich and strange"

Percy: By the way, maybe you should consider letting that book take flight. As writers, it is sometimes wisest to lay our projects to rest.

Mary: Well said.

They kiss and Percy exits.

LX change to the lights at the top of the show.

Mary: (*Sighs, calling faintly after Percy*) Stay, illusion...¹⁹²

Mary again looks to the audience as she returns to the desk and draws the book towards her.

Mary: Pay no mind to our lovers' quarrel. Except perhaps to marvel at how flawed we are compared to the beautiful words my husband wrote about us...(*smiling*) well, at least some of his words. Believe me, I know that he isn't perfect. Far from it. Truthfully, he might not have been as lovely as the version of him that I have created through my memories. But he is my Shelley. My own perfectly, imperfect Shelley. And, in the end, that is enough to justify everything. Don't you think?

(*Gesturing to the large book on the desk*) In the private hours of my widow's grief, I have been working to curate and create this: *The Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Through this book, I shall write his life and try my best to galvanize the spirits of future admirers for many ages to come. Its pages speak of many a walk and many a conversation when I was not alone. My companion was one who, in this world, I shall never see more.¹⁹³ Yet perhaps, he is not entirely lost after all. (*Thinking back*) "Nothing of him that doth fade..."

Mary closes the book.

Well, I close my book. Good night, Good Book. Book dedicated to Silence, Night, and Shelley. Goodnight. A tear consecrates your use and a full heart reposes its overflowing, until I open you again—

Mary places the book inside the desk as the lights fade to blackout. As the lights dim and the house lights come up, "Pretty Boy" by Young Galaxy plays.

¹⁹¹ "Ode to the West Wind"

¹⁹² *Hamlet*

¹⁹³ Mary's 1831 Introduction to *Frankenstein*

Romantic Biodrama's Next Stages

“But lo and behold! I’ve found myself famous!” (Mary to Leigh Hunt, September 9th, 1823).

At the 2017 Toronto International Film Festival, a biofictional film about the life of Mary Shelley debuted. The movie, an Irish-American co-production directed by Haifaa Al-Mansour, attracted much fanfare and was subsequently purchased for mass distribution.¹⁹⁴ Although the film features both Mary and Percy Shelley and dramatically re-creates the events of the famous Haunted Summer of 1816, its title and promotion leave little doubt as to whose life and writing it focalizes. The title, *Mary Shelley*,¹⁹⁵ reflects the movie’s emphasis on Mary and proudly lauds her as its focal figure.

This centralizing of Mary as the eponymous, biographical subject of *Mary Shelley* was further underscored through the movie’s promotion¹⁹⁶ and visually reinforced through the iconography of the poster. The poster features only the movie’s title and a single image: a close-up shot of actress Elle Fanning in character as Mary Shelley. As a result, Mary is not only central, but also singular, since the poster explicitly relies on her name recognition and physical likeness to attract audiences. Coupled with Al-Mansour’s stated desire to “give Shelley her legacy back” through the film, Mary’s exceptionality and detailed depiction in the poster indicate her centrality as *Mary Shelley*’s biographical subject. In this way, this focalizing representation of Mary directly contrasts with her marginalization in Fournier’s 1889 painting, *The Funeral of*

¹⁹⁴ The film was purchased by IFC Films, following its premiere at TIFF.

¹⁹⁵ As Shoshana Felman wrote of the title’s implications: “Johnson’s unexpected act of *naming*—of re-inscribing and *re-naming* Mary Shelley (in the place of Percy Shelley) at the heart of the Romantic circle” (131).

¹⁹⁶ In an interview for CBC radio during TIFF, the film’s director, Haifaa Al-Mansour, addressed the “muted legacy” of the movie’s biographical subject and noted that “it is really important to give Shelley her legacy back. She’s a known figure but people know very little about her life.”



“Poster for Haifaa Al-Mansour’s *Mary Shelley*,” Internet Movie Database, IMDB.com, 2017.

Shelley, which I used to begin this project. Whereas Fournier emphasized Percy Shelley, venerating him as a Christ-like figure on his funeral pyre, he placed Mary outside the Shelley circle as a kneeling, muted, and blurred background character. Considered together, *The Funeral of Shelley* and the poster for *Mary Shelley* visually convey a broader shift that has taken place across Shelleyan studies since the 1980s: the turn from Percy to Mary as the favored biographical subject.

As I argued in the introduction to this project, Fournier's depiction of Mary in his painting both reflected and contributed to the view of Mary as outside the Shelley circle and unworthy of critical or cultural attention. This popular perception continued well into the twentieth century. In much the same way, the poster for *Mary Shelley* visually captures the current cultural view of Mary, as I have traced it through this project. Where she was once sidelined, blurred, and rendered peripheral through critical oversight, Mary is a favored biographical subject in the twenty-first century and her life and fiction remain popular sources for adaptations, such as *Mary Shelley*. Beginning in the 1980s, the extensive work of Mary Shelley scholars to reclaim and recover her life and writing laid the foundation for an entire ecosystem of biofictional representations to develop. Their efforts subsequently brought renewed interest to Mary Shelley as a biographical subject, both within and outside the academy. Resultantly, the twenty-first century has witnessed an explosion of new films, novels, and, most prominently, Romantic Biodramas based on her exceptional life.

In this project, I have therefore explored the efflorescence of the Shelleyan project in the twenty-first century by specifically investigating its theatrical manifestation. By looking at exemplary plays-in-production, I not only learned about the large number of Romantic Biodramas written and staged between 1997 and 2017, but I also observed the emergence of

Mary as their primary focal subject. I began my research with an interest in determining how the Shelleys' relationship had been conceived through contemporary theatre. What I did not anticipate at the time was that Mary had overwhelmingly emerged as the prominent figure of Romantic Biodrama, so much so that no play I encountered focalized Percy as its primary figure. I arrived at this conclusion through my dramaturgical analysis of these plays in performance, which allowed me to account for the writing and staging processes associated with each premiere production. By detailing the journey of each play from page to stage, I documented the development of four Romantic Biodramas from their initial conception to their realization through performance. Furthermore, through practitioner interviews, I gained privileged insight into each play and production that offers valuable context. Finally, in the process of documenting and analyzing my archive of recoverable materials associated with each play, this study became a recovery project designed to collect and preserve the stories behind four Romantic Biodramas from 1997 to 2017: *Caves of Fancy* (1997), *The Apology* (2011 and 2013), and *Justified Sinners* (2017). To account for my findings in these case studies and trace points of connection that emerged between them, the following section outlines some of the key similarities between these plays in performance and considers how they might reflect broader trends in contemporary Romantic Biodrama.

Case Study Results

When I initially selected these play-in-production as my case studies, I was drawn to them for their diverse theatrical styles, unique approaches to biographical theatre, and the fact that they were all written and produced in Canada, which allowed me to compare plays staged in similar geographical contexts. For example, *Caves of Fancy* was commissioned and staged as part of an academic conference, *The Apology* was a small-scale Fringe production and then re-

imagined and extended for a regional theatre, and *Justified Sinners* was an experimental performance-as-research project, written by me as a student-researcher. These differences allowed me to explore the full range of Romantic Biodrama throughout Canada in the last twenty years, acknowledging their unique circumstances of production and approaches to biographizing the Shelleys.

My interviews and writing processes were both completed with the intention of chronicling the writing and staging of each play and without a specific thesis in mind. This approach thus allowed me to comparatively consider each Romantic Biodrama and to observe commonalities that emerged from my research, without tailoring my approach to achieve a desired result. Consequently then, it was not intentional that my chosen plays were all written by women, although this is reflective of the fact that female playwrights overwhelming outnumber their male counterparts in this genre. Nor was it intentional that each play was staged in Alberta¹⁹⁷ at one point. Instead, I worked to recover the story of each play in performance and subsequently determined points of commonality and connection between them. In considering these plays-in-production together, similarities between all four emerged, including the use of anachronistic design elements, the disruption of strict theatrical realism, and references to, or direct uses of, *Frankenstein*. Additionally, each production process featured the continuing involvement of the playwright in an active role, which meant that the script remained an object in flux during each rehearsal process. Furthermore, each of these plays employs a small cast of

¹⁹⁷ While I again acknowledge my own geographical bias in this regard as a student-researcher at an Alberta-based institution, the fact is that, within Canada, Alberta and Ontario have produced a disproportionate number of Romantic Biodramas, compared with the other provinces. I can only speculate as to the reasons behind this imbalance, but a rich history of Shelleyan studies at their post-secondary institutions, such as the Universities of Calgary, Western Ontario, and Alberta does seem like a possible factor.

characters: *The Apology* (2011) has four characters, *The Apology* (2013) has five, with the addition of another love interest for Mary, *Caves of Fancy* employs four actors, although the Creature shifts into several other minor roles, and *Justified Sinners* only includes Mary and Percy. Among the myriad of commonalities between these plays in production, I have identified three important similarities that are significant for the broader discussion of contemporary Romantic Biodrama.

First, in each of these plays-in-production, Percy Shelley is transfigured in significant ways that effectively de-centralize him as the stories' protagonist. When Percy Shelley was buried in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome in 1822, the epitaph¹⁹⁸ etched on his headstone was an excerpt from "Ariel's Song" in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: "Nothing of him that doth fade / But doth suffer a sea-change / Into something rich and strange."¹⁹⁹ In each of the Romantic Biodramas I explored through this project, their distinct characterizations of Percy recalled this famous epitaph. In all four plays, Percy Shelley plays a key dramatic role. In *Caves of Fancy*, he provides the main source of conflict between the sisters as they compete over his affection. In *The Apology*, the youthful Percy is the primary instigator of the group's experimentation and a main cause of their project's ultimate failure. Finally, in *Justified Sinners*, his writing and words lay the groundwork for the play's central conflict over his secret resentments of Mary. In this sense, Percy Shelley's significant role in Romantic Biodrama has not faded in contemporary Romantic Biodrama, although he is not currently the focal figure of most plays. However, although "nothing of him...doth fade" in terms of his continuing significance, his

¹⁹⁸ Another epitaph was also included: "Cor Cordium," or "Heart of Hearts" in Latin. Importantly, it was Edward John Trelawny who dictated the inclusion of both epitaphs and insisted on being buried beside Percy after his own death in 1881.

¹⁹⁹ Act I, Scene ii.

characterization has “suffer[ed] a sea-change into something rich and strange” in each case, resulting in new interpretations of this historical figure and evolving conceptions of his literary and biographical legacies.

As I outlined in my introductory discussion of the genre, early Romantic Biodramas followed the lead of literary biographies, depicting Percy as an idealistic artist-hero and foregrounding his experiences, ideas, and lyrical words. My four chosen plays in performance therefore represent a departure from this archetypal treatment of Percy by instead using the theatrical medium to transform him into “something rich and strange.” But although they divert from the established Romantic biographical tradition in their depiction of Percy, each offers their own unique reading that reflects evolving interpretations of him as a biographical subject. In *The Apology* (2011), Teitel undercuts his idyllic worldview by underscoring his callousness, selfishness, and youthful indolence. This critical depiction of Percy is further amplified and given greater immediacy in the 2013 production through the play’s re-location to the twenty-first century, where Percy’s Romantic heroism is revealed to be impractical, outdated, and unfairly restrictive for the women of the Shelley circle. *Justified Sinners* and *Caves of Fancy* offer even more radical transfigurations of Percy by altering his mode of dramatic representation. Because *Justified Sinners* begins after Percy’s death, his depiction is limited to the haunting presence of his words, brought to life through Mary’s memory. Reflected and refracted in the play through Mary’s recollections, Percy’s status as a textual construction is physically literalized. Conjured through Mary’s memory, he appears as a figment of fiction and fantasy that is only loosely based on the person who once lived. Although he is embodied onstage, he therefore appears as a stand-in for the unknowable, irrecoverable Percy, thus symbolizing the elusiveness of the biographical subject. Finally, in *Caves of Fancy*, although he is frequently discussed, Percy is never physically

represented onstage in any form. This act of omission marks a significant departure from biographical tradition by deferring his physicalization and only depicting Percy through description and recollection. In this way, the Percy of *Caves of Fancy* remains unknowable and frustratingly out of play, only traceable through his affect on others and the legacy he leaves.

Although each Romantic Biodrama studied in this project reimagines Percy in distinctly different ways, they collectively represent a “sea-change” in his biographical representation by offering alternative depictions of him. By revealing the human costs of his experimental lifestyle, reconstituting him only through words and memory, or never showing him onstage, each of these plays transform the biographical image of Percy Shelley, thus demonstrating the creative potential of Romantic Biodrama as both a theatrical genre and an innovative form of Romantic biography. Ultimately then, each of these plays-in-production performed a dual function by both biographizing Percy and self-reflexively commenting on the mechanics, potentialities, and limitations of Romantic biography itself.

Second, although each of these plays-in-production features a different group or family, they all relocate Mary as the center of the “Shelley circle.” This project began with a discussion of Louis Édouard Fournier’s 1889 painting, *The Funeral of Shelley*, as representative of the Shelleys’ intertwined biographical histories from 1822 until the 1980s. An important component of this painting, and the subsequent proliferation of Percy’s life and writing, is the coterie of supporters, friends, and collaborators that surrounded Percy after his death. In *The Apology*, *Caves of Fancy*, and *Justified Sinners*, different configurations of Barbara Johnson’s revised “Shelley Circle” are presented, but in each case Mary is repositioned as the fixed center point: closely connected to each member, highly influential, and the driving force of the group. In *The Apology*, the Shelley circle is an abbreviated version of the Villa Diodati group, with Polidori

omitted as the odd man out. Throughout the first act, which constituted the 2011 version of the play, Mary is shown to be intimately connected to Byron, Percy, and Claire. Although each of the characters form a relationship with one another, Mary is established early on as the embodied point of connection between them. This centrality is further enhanced in the second act of the 2013 production, where Mary's newfound autonomy and commercial success as a writer practically reinforces her dominance within the group and gives her the power to distinguish herself from them. With new financial security and fame, Mary's status as the circle's most influential figure becomes more pronounced and she uses this newfound freedom to explore polyamory outside the group, protect Claire, and secure custody of Byron and Claire's daughter, Allegra.

In *Caves of Fancy*, the Shelley circle is comprised of Claire and Fanny, who are shown to be in the orbit of their writerly sister, Mary. The play charts Mary's gradual eclipsing of her sisters as she becomes a writer, a wife, and a mother, while they fail to realize their dreams. Although *Caves of Fancy* traces Mary's subsequent decline and the destruction of her idyllic world, due to the accidents of mortality, her centrality among her siblings does not diminish and she maintains prominence within both her familial circle and the play itself. *Justified Sinners* offers yet another iteration of the Shelley circle, this time on a microscale: the relationship between Mary and Percy. This group is the most exclusive of all the Shelley circles and it is here where the displacement of Percy as the "solar figure around which all others orbit" is most clearly demonstrated (Felman 134). Within the play, Mary takes on the role of editor and Romantic biographer for Percy after his death. But although Percy is the memorialized subject, it is Mary who holds the power to determine how his life will be remembered. Quoting *Frankenstein* in the play, Mary warns Percy: "'Beware, for I am fearless and therefore

powerful.²⁰⁰ I could destroy everything. I could rewrite your life. I could tell everyone things that would destroy your legacy forever” (21). Consequently, the spectral vision of Percy, embodied onstage through Mary’s own memories, is literally created by and through her and remains under her control. Playing the part of Percy’s literary medium, Mary gives posthumous life to her husband and preserves his biographical legacy at the cost of her own. But significantly, she is the survivor who works to grant her husband a literary afterlife and this power and agency centralizes her within their relationship, both within the play itself and through their twinned legacies in contemporary Romantic Biodrama.

Finally, having transfigured Percy from the main character of the drama into “something rich and strange” and centralized Mary in each iteration of the “Shelley circle,” Mary thus emerges as the protagonist of each play, as seen through the sympathetic and detailed representation of her life. As I discussed in my introduction, for more than a century after her death, Mary Shelley’s biographical legacy was subsumed by that of her husband. This privileging of Percy continued into the earliest Romantic Biodramas, beginning in the mid-twentieth-century, which treated Mary as a secondary character who did not fully understand or support his vanguard approach to living and writing. The four exemplary plays I studied represent a larger cultural shift from Percy to Mary as the more frequently biographized Shelley, one that presently pervades Romantic Biodrama, critical biographies, and popular culture. In each of these plays in performance, the transformation of Percy into a stunted dreamer, a ghostly memory, or an absent figure sets the stage for Mary to emerge as the protagonist.

²⁰⁰ The Creature speaking to Victor: “Beware; for I am fearless and therefore powerful. I will watch with the willingness of a snake, that I may sting with its venom. Man, you shall repent of the injuries you inflict” (176).

In *The Apology* (2011), Mary is shown to be the voice of reason at the Villa Diodati in 1816 and, although she joins in the group's experimentation, she becomes the audience's touchstone in the play as we follow her journey through childbirth and her early conception of *Frankenstein*. In the play's second act, added for the 2013 production, the Villa Diodati group is fractured and Percy, Claire, and Byron are all eclipsed by Mary and her experiences as a modern woman in the twenty-first century. Accordingly, the second act further reinforces her centrality as *The Apology's* main character, as it traces her attempts to find love outside of her relationship with Percy, her psychological emancipation from her late-mother's influence, and the publication and subsequent adaptation of *Frankenstein* into a major motion picture. In *Justified Sinners*, Mary's central role in the play is immediately conveyed through her opening monologue, in which she declares her own multifaceted identity and asserts her role as Percy's biographer. By speaking directly to the audience and sharing her private confessions with them, Mary creates a sense of intimacy and familiarity throughout the play and aligns the audience with her. In *Caves of Fancy*, we follow Mary through a particularly fraught period of her life, from approximately 1814 to 1828. Although Fanny and Claire are also featured in the play, their lives are only depicted in relation to Mary's and, after Fanny and Percy's deaths and Claire's departure, the play traces her individual experiences of love, loss, and perseverance.

Considered together, these plays serve as a corrective for the Shelleyan biographical tradition from Percy's death until the resurgent popularity of Mary in the 1980s. While I did not consciously select these plays for their centralization of Mary as their main character, each of my exemplary case studies focalizes Mary and her experiences. Moreover, while none of these plays omits or reduces the key role that Percy played in Mary's life, they each examine her as a biographical subject in her own right and acknowledge her existence outside her marriage as

both a woman and a writer. In this way, these creative explorations of Mary Shelley's life through Romantic Biodrama creatively account for a longstanding gap in Romantic biography and bring her to the forefront as both their protagonist and primary biographical subject of this theatrical genre.

In reflecting on these four plays in performance, the similarities that emerged between them are indicative of current, broader trends in Romantic biography and Romantic Biodrama as a theatrical genre. These plays adopted distinctly different approaches to their historical subject, as seen through *The Apology's* use of the Shelley circle as a starting point for incisive political commentary and the academic approach that informed the development of both *Caves of Fancy* and *Justified Sinners*. But although their treatment of the Shelleys was different and the resulting performances were unique, each of these Romantic Biodramas was united by three key commonalities: the transfiguration of Percy, the re-centering of Mary within the new Shelley circle, and the subsequent focalization of Mary as their key biographical subject and dramatic character. These four performance case studies thus exemplify broader trends in Romantic Biodrama since the end of the twentieth century and mark a decisive shift in Shelleyan biography. In this way, these plays both reflect and actively contribute to the broader movement in the last twenty years from Percy to Mary as the focal subject of Romantic biography, Romantic Biodrama, and popular culture at large.

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Although this dramaturgical study focused on four exemplary plays in performance across a twenty-year period of Canadian theatre, it serves a valuable point of entry into a burgeoning theatrical genre. The brief history of Romantic Biodrama in my introduction helped indicate that, although the first recorded play was not staged until 1965, the genre has already

changed a great deal since then. Accordingly, since Jellicoe's *Shelley; or, The Idealist* debuted, dozens of Romantic Biodramas have been written, staged, and restaged. Through this project and my critical vantage point in 2017, I was able to offer a survey of the genre's history and observe its emerging trends in the last twenty years. In doing so, I accounted for a heretofore unacknowledged gap in Shelleyan studies and helped establish the documentary history of Romantic Biodrama, as both a theatrical genre and a unique corollary of Romantic Biofiction. But although these foundations have now been laid, the work does not end here. Since I first began researching biographical plays about the Shelleys, more have been written every year. And with each exemplary play in performance, the genre subsequently shifts and evolves. For example, at the time of writing this dissertation, I have not encountered a Romantic Biodrama from the last twenty years that focalized Percy as its protagonist. However, the frequency with which Romantic Biodramas are currently written and staged means that the genre must remain in flux.

In looking ahead to Romantic Biodrama's next stages, this genre has shown no signs of decline in recent years and this upward trend is likely to continue. 2018 marks the bicentenary of *Frankenstein's* publication and concerted efforts²⁰¹ to celebrate the book and its author have already resulted in the planned remount of many Romantic Biodramas and the debut performance of new ones. At least for now, Mary has captured the popular imagination and she currently shows no signs of letting go. As for Percy, although he held the public's attention for over a century after his death, his story is not currently a major subject of interest for contemporary Romantic Biodramatists, who have consistently eschewed him as their favored

²⁰¹ For example, the Keats-Shelley Association of America introduced "Frankenreads:" an international, interuniversity celebration of the novel, its author, and its legacy, culminating in events being held across campuses on October 31st, 2018.

protagonist. Of course, this will not always be true and new playwrights will likely return to Percy as their focal biographical subject. Or perhaps Byron, Claire, or even “poor Polidori”²⁰² will emerge as the key members of the Villa Diodati group. The reality is that, although Romanticism has been a subject of great fascination since the nineteenth century, every subsequent generation has found different figures, themes, concepts, or works to which they have been drawn and this process of change and rediscovery will continue to inform Romantic Biodrama’s own forms and features.

What does seem certain is that Romantic Biodrama will not only evolve in its biographical treatment of the Shelleys, but will also continue to innovate as a theatrical genre. Accordingly, as we have already observed, the genre will shift from historical realism to encompass a broad range of theatrical forms, as mutable and evolving as the Shelleys themselves. These innovative performances, such as Radiohole’s postdramatic performance *Inflatable Frankenstein* (2013), will continue to attract new audiences and reinvent Romantic biography for twenty-first century audiences. In this way, they demonstrate that, although the Shelleys lived and wrote nearly two hundred years ago, their lives and legacies continue to haunt the contemporary theatre.

As my study of Romantic Biodrama in performance has revealed, each of these plays offers new insights into the lives of the Shelleys, thus allowing audiences to re-encounter these Romantic writers in a different context, or even meet them for the first time. In the twenty-first century, Shelleyan scholars must necessarily contend with finding innovative ways to teach students, readers, and audiences about the Shelleys’ lives and writing. Today, it is not enough to

²⁰² David Lorne Macdonald entitled his critical biography of John William Polidori *Poor Polidori* (1991) in reference to Mary’s description of Polidori in her journal from 1816.

accept their canonical status as proof of merit and it is essential to bring them forward through creative means. By employing inventive staging practices and offering new interpretations of these Romantic lives, practitioners in Romantic Biodrama bring new vitality and immediacy to these nineteenth-century writers and reveal their humanity, modernity, and fundamental relatability as dramatic characters. Considered in this way, contemporary Romantic Biodramas have the unique power to allow audiences to physically engage with the re-embodied Shelleys in the theatre. Such encounters offer new opportunities for teaching Romanticism, exploring emergent ideas in Romantic scholarship, and sharing new findings with a broader audience. As I have learned through my research and my own participation in the writing and staging of a play, Romantic Biodrama presents a future for Romanticism in the academy: an opportunity to dramatize the Shelleys in an innovative way befitting of their own vanguard approach to living and writing. In this sense, I argue that these plays in performance best answer Bradley and Rawes' stated challenge in *Romantic Biography* to "re-Romanticize Romantic life-writing" (xiv) by bringing new vitality, interest, and creativity to the Shelleys' lives and writing.

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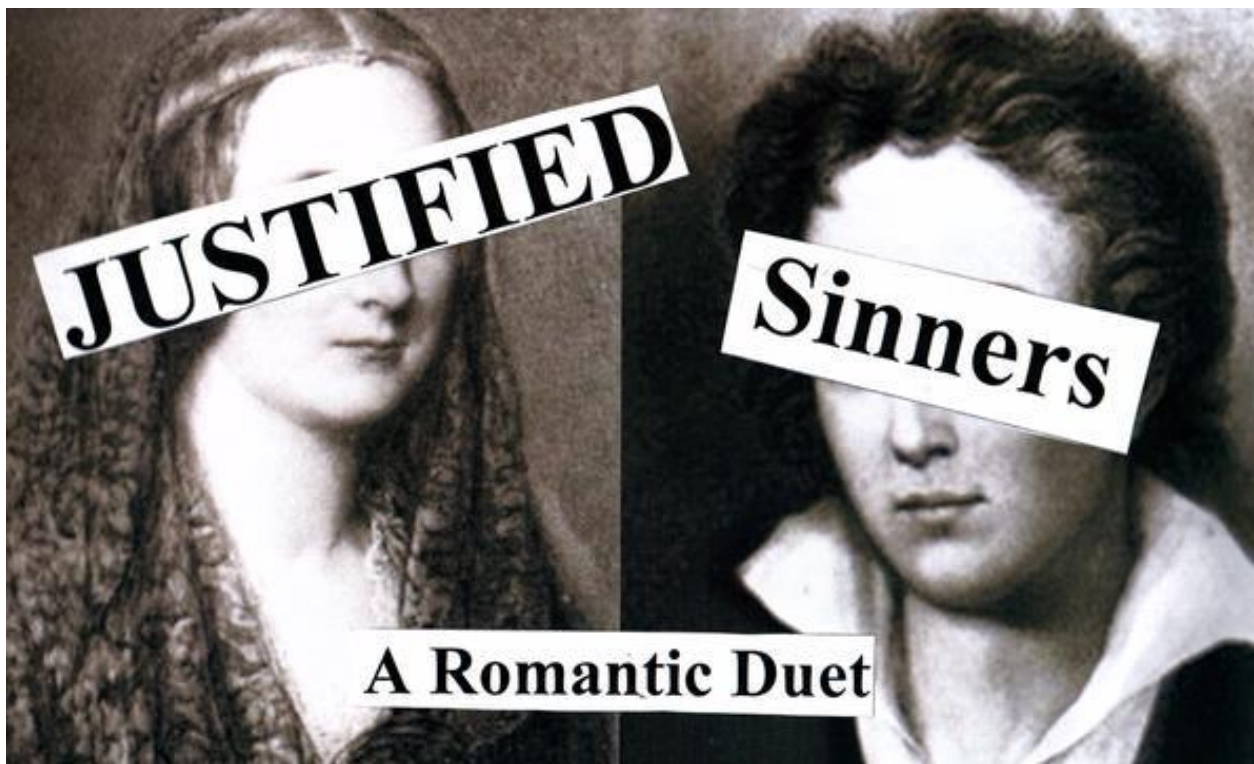
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Appendix A: Select Play List of Romantic Biodramas (1997-2017)

1. *And Lightning Struck: Mary Shelley and the Curse of Creation* (2017) by Robert Weibezahl: Lit Live (Simi Valley)
2. *The Apology* (2011; 2013) by Darrah Teitel: Rabiayshna Productions (Toronto); Alberta Theatre Projects (Calgary)
3. *Beautiful Monster* (2017) by Karlton Parris: Skint Productions (NYC)
4. *Birth of Frankenstein* (2013) by Adriano Sobretudo Jr., Matthew Thomas Walker & Claire Wynveen: Litmus Theatre (Toronto)
5. *Caves of Fancy* (1997) by Rose Scollard: “Writing Lives” Conference (Calgary)
6. *Creating Frankenstein* (2016) by Victoria Hudson-Muir: Brant Theatre Workshops (Brantford)
7. *Don’t Talk to Me of Love* (2001) by Pauline Carey: Looking Glass Theatre (NYC)
8. *Frankenstein Incarnate: The Passions of Mary Shelley* (2007) by Anne Bertram: Theatre Unbound (St. Paul)
9. *Frankenstein: The Year without a Summer* (2010) by Helen Davis: Dorset Corset (Boscombe)
10. *Hideous Progeny* (2010) by Emily Dendinger: Livewire Chicago Theatre (Chicago)
11. *Inflatable Frankenstein* (2013) by Eric Dyer, Maggie Hoffman, Erin Douglas, Joseph Silovsky, Aaron Harrow, Mark Jaynes & Ryan Holsopple: Radiohole (NYC)
12. *Justified Sinners* (2017) by Brittany Reid: Department of Drama and Imaginary Circumstances (Edmonton)
13. *Mary Shelley* (2012) by Helen Edmundson: Shared Experience (Leeds—Touring Production)
14. *Mary Shelley’s Body* (2017) by David Templeton: Main Stage West (Sebastopol)
15. *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein* (2017) by Eve Wolf and ensemble: Ensemble for the Romantic Century (NYC)
16. *Mary Shelley Monster Show* (2014) by Nick Otten with Rachel Tibbetts and Ellie Schwetye: Slightly Askew Theatre Ensemble (St. Louis)
17. *The Mary Shelley Opera* (2002) by Allan Jaffe, Deborah Atherton, and Stephen Hannock: Parabola Arts (NYC)
18. *Monster: An Opera in Two Acts* (2002) by Sally Beamish and Janice Galloway: Scottish Opera and the Brighton Festival (Glasgow)
19. *Phantasmagoria; or, Let Us Seek Death!* (2016) by Chana Porter: La MaMa Puppet Series (NYC)
20. *The Yellow Leaf* (2009) by Charles Morey: Pioneer Theatre Company (Salt Lake City)



Appendix B:
Dramaturgical Research Pack

Historical Context

-*Justified Sinners* is a story about two renowned nineteenth-century writers and collaborators who were also husband and wife: Mary and Percy Bysshe Shelley.

-The Shelleys are both considered **Romantic** writers, since they wrote during the period commonly referred to as **The Romantic Age**, employed many of Romanticism's key features in their writing, and wrote and lived alongside many other individuals associated with the movement (Lord Byron, John Keats, etc.).

-**Romanticism** broadly refers to a period of intellectual, cultural, philosophical, artistic, and sociopolitical revolution that took place from approximately 1789 until 1837.

-Some of the **key features** associated with Romanticism include a belief in the revelation of the divine through nature, an emphasis on imagination, the importance of the individual, return to the Classics, the sociopolitical significance of art, and the celebration of the artist as genius.

Setting the Stage for *Justified Sinners*

Justified Sinners is set in 1824: two years after the death of Percy Shelley. Mary has started working on her new, apocalyptic novel, *The Last Man*. Earlier in the year, her dear friend Lord Byron died from a fever he acquired while travelling to fight in the Greek War of Independence. Mary has moved to Kentish Town in England with her five-year-old son and, as the play begins, she is making final preparations for the publication of *The Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (1824), a collection of her husband's poems that she has curated and edited. That initial collection later formed the basis for *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, which was subsequently published in 1839.

Key Figures

Although the Shelleys' large interpersonal network is not directly depicted in *Justified Sinners*, their many friends, associates, and family members continue to influence the events of the play. Below is a list of figures who are either directly referenced or whose actions are important to understanding what occurs in *Justified Sinners*. While I have briefly noted how they are significant to our play, I have also included links for further reading in case you are interested in learning more about these key individuals:

Percy Bysshe Shelley

<http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/PShelley/bio.html>

-Romantic writer born in 1792

-He drowned in the Gulf of La Spezia in 1822 when he was twenty-nine-years-old

Chronology of Percy Shelley's Life: <https://www.rc.umd.edu/reference/chronologies/shelcron>

Mary Shelley

<http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/MShelley/bio.html>

-Romantic writer born in 1797

-In her later years, she lived with her son, Percy Florence, and his wife until her death in 1851

Chronology of Mary Shelley's Life:

<http://www.rc.umd.edu/reference/chronologies/mschronology/chrono.html>

William Godwin

<http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Godwin/godwin.html>

- Father of Mary Shelley
- Godwin was a political writer and key proponent of anarchism
- Percy Shelley was an admirer of Godwin's writing and sought him out, leading to his initial meeting with Mary
- Godwin did not approve of Mary and Percy's relationship (as Percy was still married at the time) but came around once the couple got legally married in 1816
- Complicating matters, Godwin was financially dependent on Percy, even while he was estranged from his daughter

Mary Wollstonecraft

<http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Wollston/bio.html>

- Mother and namesake of Mary Shelley
- She is often acknowledged as a key figure in the development of modern feminism
- Wollstonecraft died days after giving birth to Mary Shelley
- Percy and Mary were both admirers of Wollstonecraft's work and proclaimed their love to each other at her grave

George Gordon, Lord Byron

<http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Byron/bio.html>

- Fellow Romantic writer
- The Shelleys met Byron when they travelled to Geneva in 1816 and were introduced to him by Claire, who was romantically involved with him (it is during this summer together that Byron proposed the ghost story competition that led to the writing of *Frankenstein*)
- The Shelleys maintained a close friendship with Byron until Percy's death in 1822 and Byron's death in 1824

Leigh Hunt

<http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Hunt/bio.html>

- Close friend and supporter of Percy Shelley
- Hunt was primarily an editor, but also worked as a writer
- Hunt and his family travelled to Italy to start a periodical with Byron and Shelley, entitled *The Liberal*, but Shelley drowned only a few weeks after their arrival

Maria and John Gisborne

- The Gisbornes were friends of the Shelleys who were living abroad in Italy
- Both Mary and Percy maintained active correspondence with Maria and stayed with the couple

Jane Williams

- She and her husband, Edward, were close friends with the Shelleys
- Percy wrote many poems dedicated to Jane and Shelleyan scholars have speculated about the possibility of an intimate relationship between them

Edward Williams

- A retired naval officer, husband of Jane Williams, and friend of Percy Shelley
- Edward drowned alongside Percy in 1822

Claire Clairmont

<http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/People/claire.html>

- Mary Shelley's step-sister
- Claire's mother, Mary-Jane Clairmont, married William Godwin after Wollstonecraft's death
- Claire Clairmont travelled with the Shelleys to the continent in both 1814 and 1816
- She had a highly contentious romantic relationship with Lord Byron that resulted in a daughter, Allegra, whom Byron took from Claire and placed in an Italian convent.
- The close and complicated relationship between the Shelleys and Claire has been a subject of much speculation since the nineteenth century, with many proposing the possibility of a sexual relationship between Claire and Percy.

Timothy Shelley

<http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/People/tshelley.html>

- Father of Percy Shelley
- After Percy's death, Timothy financially threatened Mary, stating that he would not give her money from Percy's inheritance if she published anything about his son

Harriet (Westbrook) Shelley

<http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/People/hshelley.html>

- First wife of Percy Shelley
- In 1814, Percy abandoned Harriet and their two children, Elizabeth and Charles, for Mary
- In 1816, Harriet was found drowned in the Serpentine River in Hyde Park

Percy Florence Shelley

<http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/People/pshelley.html>

- Only surviving child of Mary and Percy Shelley
- At the time of *Justified Sinners*, Percy Florence is five-years-old

*The website for the Bodleian Library collection, entitled *Shelley's Ghost*, offers an interactive family tree that can help keep all the Shelleys' family relationships clear:

- **Interactive Shelley Family Tree:**

http://shelleysghost.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/family_tree_chart

Further Reading (Primary Sources)**Mary Shelley's Writing**

Like her husband, Mary Shelley experimented with literary forms and her works include travel writing, novels, children's verse drama (co-written with Percy), as well as editorial notes and appendices. Mary's most famous work is certainly *Frankenstein* (1818). In addition to

considering the story a key Romantic text, many critics have studied *Frankenstein* for its biographical significance and noted how the novel can be effectively read alongside Mary Shelley's own life story. If you are consulting a print version, both the 1818 and 1831 editions are useful, since the former is written before Shelley's death and the latter reflects Mary's evolving relationship with the novel over time:

- **E-Text of *Frankenstein*:** http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/frankenstein/1818_contents

Perhaps one of the most useful primary sources to consult is Mary Shelley's 1831 introduction to *Frankenstein*, as it not only provides some useful context about the novel and marks the genesis of its famous origin story, but it also reveals Mary's evolving thoughts on the text and her life in the intervening years:

- **Mary's Introduction to *Frankenstein* (1831):**
<https://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/frankenstein/1831v1/intro>

Since our play primarily explores Mary's role as editor/biographer, it might also be useful to consider some of the introductions she wrote for her husband's poems to see how she framed, explained, or tried to soften the effect of his words. Her 1839 introductions to Percy's first major poem, "Queen Mab" (1813), and "Alastor" (1816) help demonstrate her concerted efforts to cultivate his posthumous image:

- **Mary's Introduction to "Alastor" (1816):**
<http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/MShelley/alastor.html>
- **Mary's Introduction to "Queen Mab" (1813):**
<http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/MShelley/mab.html>

The very succinctly named *History of a Six Weeks' Tour through a part of France, Switzerland, Germany, and Holland; with Letters Descriptive of a Sail Round the Lake of Geneva and of the Glaciers of Chamouni* (1817) is the published account of Mary and Percy's travels in 1814 and 1816. Co-written by the Shelleys (although primarily written and organized by Mary) this travelogue usefully documents the couple's elopement trip to the continent and their subsequent journey to Lake Geneva (during which time they stayed with Lord Byron and Mary began writing *Frankenstein*). Importantly for our purposes, keep in mind that the Shelleys were accompanied on both trips by Mary's step-sister, Claire Clairmont:

***History of a Six Weeks Tour* (1817):** <http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/MShelley/sixweek1.html>

Percy Shelley's Writing

Percy Shelley's literary oeuvre is quite extensive (especially considering that he died when he was only twenty-nine-years-old) and contains many poems, but also plays, novels, and essays. While any of his writing is great to consult and can further contribute to his characterization, it might be useful to consult some of his shorter, well-known poetic works (such as "Ode to the West Wind," "Mutability," "England in 1819" or "Ozymandias") to get a sense of his legacy, thematic interests, and distinctive poetic voice:

- “Ode to the West Wind” (1820): <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45134/ode-to-the-west-wind>
- “Mutability” (1816): <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/54563/mutability-we-are-as-clouds-that-veil-the-midnight-moon>
- “England in 1819” (1819): <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45118/england-in-1819>
- “Ozymandias” (1818): <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46565/ozymandias>

Additionally, reading one of his essays (such as his most famous, “A Defence of Poetry”) could give you a sense of his polemical voice:

- “A Defence of Poetry” (1821): <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69388/a-defence-of-poetry>

Frankenstein was anonymously published in 1818 and began with an introduction written by Percy. Because of the introduction’s writing style and the novel’s controversial content, many initially suspected that Percy was the author, not Mary. His introduction not only offers context for reading the novel and insight into how it was initially framed, but it also reflects Percy’s own attitudes toward *Frankenstein* and emphasizes the stylistic differences between the two writers (which could be interesting, given their competitive tendencies in *Justified Sinners*):

- **Percy’s Introduction to *Frankenstein* (1818):** <http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/frankenstein/1818v1/preface.html>

It might also be useful to consider Percy Shelley’s intense fascination with mortality and the afterlife through his writing on the subject. His elegy for fellow Romantic poet John Keats, “Adonais,” would be especially helpful to consult (it’s a long poem, but the last few stanzas are particularly beneficial for understanding Shelley’s conception of the afterlife):

- “Adonais” (1821): <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45112/adonais-an-elegy-on-the-death-of-john-keats>

Further Reading (Secondary Sources)

-Much has been written about Romanticism as an artistic movement. If you are interested in learning more, the *Romantic Circles* website is a scholarly source that provides a lot of great information about every facet and links to other resources. Similarly, the *Shelley’s Ghost* page through the Bodleian Library at Oxford is an extremely useful resource with a lot of great visuals and artifacts. As well, if you are looking for a book on the subject, **Gary Kelly’s *English Fiction of the Romantic Period (1789-1830)* (1989)** is an excellent critical discussion of the period and its developments:

- **Romantic Circles Electronic Resource:** <http://www.rc.umd.edu/>
- **Shelley’s Ghost at the Bodleian Library:** <http://shelleysghost.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/home-page>

-The story of **Percy's death** is important, iconic, and quite gruesome. His friend, Edward Trelawny, wrote a vivid account of Percy's body and funeral. As well, this article from *The Guardian* provides information regarding Shelley's death and the mythology surrounding it:

- **Shelley's Body:** <https://archive.org/stream/recollectionsofl00tre/#page/136/mode/2up>
- **"Death and Destiny" Article (2004)**
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/jan/24/featuresreviews.guardianreview1>

-Further regarding the mythology surrounding Percy's death, be sure to look at these famous artistic memorials to Percy Shelley: Louis Edouard Fournier's painting "**The Funeral of Shelley**" (1889), **Onslow Ford's Shelley Memorial (1893)** sculpture at University College, Oxford, and **Henry Weekes' Memorial to Mary and Percy Shelley (1853/4)** at Christchurch Priory in Dorset:

- **"The Funeral of Shelley" (1889):**
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Funeral_of_Shelley_by_Louis_Edouard_Fournier.jpg
- **Ford's Shelley Memorial (1893):**
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shelley_Memorial#/media/File:UK-2014-Oxford-University_College_02_\(Shelley_Memorial\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shelley_Memorial#/media/File:UK-2014-Oxford-University_College_02_(Shelley_Memorial).jpg)
- **Weekes' Memorial to the Shelleys (1853/4):**
<http://www.victorianweb.org/sculpture/weekes/8.html>

- **Daisy Hay's *Young Romantics* (2010)** is an interesting and accessible collective biography of the second-generation Romantics, prominently featuring the Shelleys, that emphasizes their interrelationships and social context.

There are also many excellent biographies about both Mary and Percy Shelley:

-In terms of books about Mary Shelley, **Anne K. Mellor's *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (1988)** offers a thorough biographical treatment and critical study of the relationship between Mary's life and writing (it is also very popular and easy to find in the library).

-In terms of more creative biographical treatments, **Stephanie Hemphill's *Hideous Love: The Story of the Girl Who Wrote Frankenstein* (2013)** is a fantastic collection of poems that correlate to different events and periods in Mary Shelley's life.

-One of the most creative biographical treatments of Percy is **Ann Wroe's *Being Shelley: The Poet's Search for Himself* (2007)**, in which she treats the subject of "Shelley the poet, rather than Shelley the man" (ix) by exploring his life and poetry in relation to the four elements.

-**Richard Holmes' *Shelley: The Pursuit* (1974)** is one of the best Shelley biographies. It is very thorough, detailed, and the following line greatly influenced my writing of the play: "**Shelley's life seems more a haunting than a history**" (Holmes xvii).

Justified Sinners Project Website: www.StagingtheShelleys.com

Appendix C: Rehearsal Notes for *Justified Sinners* (August 16th to August 29th, 2017)

August 16th

- Read play
- discuss design
- Dramaturgical discussion
- Discuss beats in the first ten pages
- Mary's awareness of audience (never expects them to respond)
- Percy has a better sense of the audience, more theatrical
- How does the paper man come to life (buried beneath paper)
- Does Mary see that he is made of paper?
- Does she expect to see him appear in front of her? Is he real to her? Purely memory?
- moments for both, buying in allows him to break her heart
- What is Percy trying to do when he comes back?
- Knows how to handle her, attempts to get her to finish his book
- scale between remembered/real Shelley in each moment
- Challenges associated with the language, finding the emotion despite differences in tone and diction
- Blocking pages 1-15

August 17th

- The question of "sensitivities"
- Have you had these conversations before?
- Question of elopement: whose idea was it to bring Claire?
- Does Percy really think the other women are "just poetry" –stakes of Percy's philosophy being "right" (and his legacy, his poetry)
- Is Mary coming to the realization now that Shelley "the man" and "the poet" are linked?
(Perhaps Mary married Shelley the poet but she thought she had Shelley the man. Although she comes to realize that the version of him was not unique to her)
- The argument playing out in Mary's mind (if she could imagine the argument, she would win it)
- How much is Percy aware of the fact he's wrong? (seemingly not at all)
- Butting up of the ideal Percy and the "real" Percy?

- Mary's desires to see Percy again and to get an apology
 - Am I the only person who sees that this is wrong?
 - Above all, Percy wants to protect his legacy
 - Percy wants to push her, but knows that Mary has all the power (over protecting his legacy)
 - In life, Mary never had power over Percy (now Mary has power, which is new for her)
 - Is Mary enjoying it? (she enjoys having the upper-hand, very deliberate in her setup)
 - Does Percy have a begrudging respect for Mary at this point? (there is a bit of joy in the game for Percy)
 - Percy cheats, always skews every game in his favor
 - Shift on page 19, Percy brings up what Godwin thought and what he wrote
 - Modern ideas but conservative changes in terms of institutions (marriage, patriarchy, etc.)
 - compromise of principles in getting married (just like Godwin and Wollstonecraft)
 - Percy doesn't have the same pressures (in terms of legacy)
 - Mary as "good stock"
 - Percy acts first, justifies it after
 - Fear of being alone
 - Stupidity of the way that Percy died
 - Would Mary destroy Percy's work (she seems to respect his work and writing, wants to prove herself, feels like she could destroy it in that moment though)
 - Percy seems fine, but probably not
 - Two people who deal with grief in completely different ways
 - Mary kind of breaks down on p.22, but how much does she believe this (completely)
 - How does Percy feel in hearing it (up until this point it has been a game, but now he can see the damage he caused)
 - The Shelleys like arguing (but Percy does, in particular)
 - First time that Mary acknowledges Percy's death to him
 - Moments of seduction vs. moments of realization that show he isn't really there
- Run through of pages 3-23
- Mary's reservation around her children (the kids as her own grief, kept private)

- Why is Percy so adamant on sharing the children (lying if omitted, if publishing entire life, how can you leave out, legacy, if they omit them they are gone forever)
- The difficulty of Mary for remembering
- Difficulty in memorializing children who never spoke
- Question of “moving on” as about the kids and Percy
- Tone deafness of Percy
- Does Mary think this exchange is the “real” Percy here? Is she fooled here?
- The kids as one more thing to talk through, final hurdle
- Coming to terms with lack of connection they have here
- p. 25-26, little moment of healing, ritualistic, seeing each other’s side of it
- never told each other
- grief put them apart, but they felt the same (although they expressed differently)
- Last ten pages, trying to find each other again
- Part 1: Rose-colored glasses, Part 2: conflict, Part 3: trying to find a balance
- the function of the dreams
- What makes Mary accept his death? Understanding where he was at when he died (recognizing herself in it, seeing that it wasn’t an action against her)
- the final moment where death isn’t the end
- end of p.28, realization of chaos and possible finality
- both come back to the beginning (elopement journal) to realize that death isn’t the end
- moment of seeing how happy they were and that their separation is circumstantial, childishly ran away from each other
- p. 32 as when we really see Percy, is there a change? (performance to “being”)
- His acting as a “public” identity, at the end he is more that kid who was pitchy and bullied
- both have a sense of performance

August 18th

- Finish blocking from page 24 on
- Exercise: Run through the script in room created onstage with no audience
- Intention to find emotional beats, dislocate them from their set and theatrical context

- Working to figure out trajectory and emotional quality in a new setting
- Stop-start with direction to find the journey
- explore a bit of the excitement in getting to speak to Percy again
- when in their first meeting does Mary become intrigued by Percy?
- variations within the sweet, angry, sombre, etc.
- couple dynamic, playful energy
- Discussions of the poetic verse, hitting the lists hard, acknowledging punctuation and emphasizing them over the rhymes scheme
- Mary's willingness to defend her work, at first
- pinpoint a moment where Mary decides to attack Shelley (since she has had this information the whole time)
- he goes after her writing (again) and she turns on him
- Mary's ultimate goal in revealing the information: Percy seems to think he has it all figured out, she's striving for his respect and his apology
- Percy feels like Mary gets upset out of nowhere, she's being over-sensitive
- Mary's irritation and desperation to get him to understand (trying to have a serious, actual conversation with Percy)
- the threat that Percy would leave? Menacing threat or warning
- "Alas, I kiss you Jane" x3
- Exasperation and exhaustion (Percy missing the point)
- build-up the energy to want to tear everything apart
- "Beware," -intoxication of power
- humor after the fight "hell is empty"
- the "real" Percy starts to show after the dreams
- full reunion from p.28 onward
- what she loves about Percy is what she hates about Percy
- slight reconnection, need the children, needs to learn about what happened to Percy
- highlighting the revelations and when they hit in the play
- Mary is consciously hiding the children

August 20th

- Treating the fact that he's not really dead as a secret
- "I thought I heard my Shelley" as moment of disbelief
- the reveal of Percy as an event
- moment of disbelief and then excitement
- bewilderment, maintain energy in the opening meeting
- ring of paper at the front of the stage as a sacred memory space
- the set gets created during the stage
- the memory scene (Harry Potter and chamber of secrets, book pages flipping) -lights flash, then snap to a location
- specifying the awkward pauses in the first memory
- pulling her along with the ribbon
- using affected British accent when reading the letter
- approximately 5 books needed as props
- pocket handkerchief needed
- overcompensate deepness when he is called out for having a high voice
- reading over her shoulder, anger-inducing and intimidating
- sending barbs in the fencing section
- energy dip in pages 14 and 15
- "I am warning you" violence behind the threat?
- Don't hold "triumph of life" over the tank, hit the name of the poem
- tracking the books
- "tear me, rip me" -slam the book in front of her
- remove knocking on desk for heartbeat
- more pages for breakdown, flurry of paper
- is Percy angry or upset that she left out the children? Different tactic than was taken before (play with vocal quality in this section) First moment where he drops the theatricality
- p.24, sit down on "so I ran away"
- "won't somebody please" forced smiles to the audience
- "prussic acid" as "ah ha" moment

-blocking during drowning moment: Edward as a rock, Percy as paper, the two sinking into the tank together

-don't go into memory for the nightmare, treating the dream and nightmare as different from the formal memories

p.28: Change to "All is not lost until we wish we could forget. And oh, how I want to forget"

August 22nd

-try on costume pieces

-line run

-continue working from the top of the play

-how well can we hide Percy to not draw attention to him at the top of the play

-establish the importance of the book at the beginning

-not here to live, only to "persist"

-sense of secret that he is not dead

-fire behind her determination

-finding "units"

-mark a turn from loss to determination

-Mary thinking about audience perception of her story

-sound and lights to announce Percy

-allowing it to be shocking

--not believing it is Percy at first, checking in with the audience

-tentatively coming forward to him, extended moment of disbelief and then buy-in

-hesitation, moment of acceptance that it is in fact Percy

-approaching a wild animal

-continue being a little skeptical, watching him be alive

-Mary getting pulled into it, no choice but to accept it

-a little discombobulated for a while

-long hours, sense of time

-a little upset at "child"

-pull her in for question

- ending up in different spots, depending on where paper goes
 - weight to ill-fated marriage
 - breathe in, sell memory transitions
 - Percy enraptured in the fish tank
 - taking a moment with the tea cup
 - realizing she doesn't have anything to say, leaves
 - Mary's nervous energy during the ribbon section
 - memories end: lights and sound, intake of breath
 - playing with the skirt, teasing
 - arrogance to "I knew"
 - game to get "Queen Mab"
 - in the memories (clear page over the room "tracing paper," distinction between literal and imagined space)
 - Boat, study as recalled, instances in the book as a re-animation
 - venom in Mary's initial reaction
 - Percy treading lightly earlier on
 - fluctuations in volume and emphasis for Percy in the duel
 - break down the duel line-by-line, begin by reading the lines in order so we know the entire flow
 - describing Percy's poem here in terms of movements and motions
 - ***She's building his legacy as he is trying to erode hers
 - Mary making the choice that imitating Percy is not "her"
- Notes after running of 3-13:
- establishing at the top a moment where what happens to the book affects Percy
 - coming out of the memory: intake of breath, beat, and we're back (pressing "reset" button)
 - the chase: doesn't have to be perfectly set, a game
 - "handful of corrections:" moment where the rose-coloured glasses come off for her
 - seeing Mary's passion in her writing, child-like enthusiasm
 - important for us to know that she loves her writing and has pride in it
 - good for us to see that Mary's insecurities are not really true

August 23rd

- Run lines
- start running from page 13
- cut two lines on page 16
- when Mary is picking up the papers in the first ten pages, to read things she doesn't like and react to them
- “I see why you sought it out” venom, using it to hurt him
- amplifying Percy's helpfulness early on until “this is a joke,” something for Mary to push against
- hitting “deeply”
- Mary's sarcasm
- Percy talking about “the poem,” recruiting the audience
- pgs. 17-18, the point where Mary is closest to winning
- introducing a bit of chaos into the “alas, I kiss you Jane”
- Percy trying to get a foot hold
- “do not reimagine yourself” Percy regains power
- Mary enjoying the torture of Percy
- discover Queen Mab at the desk
- seeing Mary inflict pain onto Percy
- Mary getting rid of the pages at Percy
- treating the heart in the desk as an Easter egg
- the threat of “I could make this worse than what it is right now” in the heart beat moment
- Mary starts throwing pages and messing the whole set up, manic energy, ruin the space during her time of self-deprecation, a bit of a call-back to the fun of him playing and throwing the pages, zig-zagging through the set
- run through blocking pages 14-23
- collecting the book from the floor as a reason to break away
- Percy's cluelessness and selfishness
- Mary trying to prove her point, complete erasure of female writers
- *Percy as unapologetic as possible for it to be true to it and sink in

- "I'm very serious" moment, intention
- an "uh oh" moment when he grabs Queen Mab
- visibly worried when she holds the book over water (start paying attention)
- Mary's reaction to seeing real, full fear in Percy (with the book)

August 24th

- complete run-through of the play (final third of the script on-book)
- timing with the "look" in the first memory
- balance between poking fun at Romanticism and honouring them
- balancing expectation of a result and element of surprise/uncertainty
- slight sadness right after the "Queen Mab" moment, opportunity for Mary to miss him (adds variety)
- second memory (feeling increasingly playful)
- Abruptness of "That's enough" from Mary at the end of the game
- Percy being helpful, adds a greater sense of maliciousness
- Mary as frustrated, but working to keep her composure "Percy 'the man' and Percy 'the poet'"
- Interest of watching someone try to contain
- The prostitution scene: standing furthest apart from each other, furthest apart that they are in the play
- working the heartbeat moment
- working the physicality of the play
- Mary playing with how close she will put the book to the water
- ** The "Oh god, prussic acid" moment. Will it work better with an emotional beat before that? Resolve to try and make it work *with* the line before revisiting it
- The first ten pages: Jessy mentioned that they have been feeling very broad in terms of tactics, tones, and chunks. This run is the first time that it started to feel a little bit more specific, but there seems to be a need still to break it down: Proposes a game, pausing "how in love are we at various moments?" "distinction between memory and current?"
- Morgan's discovery this run: difference between love and missing
- Jessy: sharing to please him versus sharing because she loves him
- Alexander: when Percy comes back, it's initially terrifying. Extra pressure. Love that he's back, but everything must be perfect. If anything is wrong, you are letting him down.

-first bit, fear of letting him down. First memory, seduces her into falling back in love with him as they do

- "I thought I heard" –did I hear that? Am I crazy

-adding a sense of theatricality back into Shelley's entrance

-Percy tries to corral her early on, but it's too much and she isn't ready here

- "Confide in.." this is a beat of seduction

-moment of Percy seeing himself first when he is resurrected

*allowing Mary to see that he is a dead man. It's going to take time before she gets fully convinced

-something unnerving about his touch at first, it's cold

*moment when he throws the paper in the air as being so like him that it's undoubtable for her

- "well, as I have lately" –letting the "well" be a decision to accept whatever version of Percy this is

*Realization that something wasn't clicking at the beginning of the show. Percy as centered, Mary's nervousness. Good point of entry, with Mary freaking out

*working through the timing of "the look" in the first memory

*working through "my sensitivities" section and work with Mary trying to contain her frustration (deep breath before "but you see, my love")

-hit "the man" and "the poet"

-taking a moment to not scream at him, finding moments to let it out

*working through the heartbeat section

*In rehearsals, difficulty of entering a scene and artificially creating that kind of emotional high

*working through "the at least I didn't die like a fool"

*Anne Bogart, using cliché and making it new; Jessy brings up that we use cliché in real life

- "who is that stupid?" throws down his book

-Percy slams the book on the desk, moment of violent that will push Mary

- "Too fast, too far, not funny #percys Shelley" -Jessy

-treating the first memory as a test of him, not sure it's *really* him yet

*take out "Oh ho, a change from narrative to a drama"

-the book sucks them into the memory, the second they touch it, their arm stiffens, electricity courses through them

*she is fully convinced after the memory that it's him (that he would know it)

- "we are destined for each other" a little bit of a question

August 26th

-Risers are in, set is mostly assembled

-Run lines, finish getting off-book for 23-33

-Listen to music, Alexander completes sound design (Mozart: Shelley's favourite)

-the happy questioning sequence: putting everything they have into smiling manically, don't hear what the other person is saying, rapid-fire questioning

-putting a beat between Percy's "ending it" and "oh yes," giving the moment air to land

*the dreams: Mary *knew* about these things, but here Percy is going to help her experience what the dream *was* and what it felt like for her

*Mary's motivation: Because Mary is leading into both nightmares, expository element for the audience

-question of what is "literally" happening and what is happening in her mind

-why is she talking to the audience?

-realization of this being why he died, the dreams foretold, self-fulfilling prophecy

-dreams driving Mary crazy

-figuring out the dreams; realizing the dreams as a cause of death

-illustration of the dreams onstage

-dream 1: descriptive, dream 2: descriptive, but gives a sense of visceral quality of the dream

-clarifying the concept of the strangling point in the dream section

-the audience becoming part of the dream

-first dream as illustrative moment where he just talks about it

-second dream, trying to get Mary to realize the full significance of this

*second dream as actual revelation of something she didn't know before.

-Percy pulls the journal from the tank, gives new information, the dream pulls them into that dark, "pensieve" place

*revisit the second dream as a death waltz with a strangle

- after the dream, Mary puts the journal back in the tank
- for the boat trip, the scene becomes a little game at the tank
- for the meetup scene, imbuing the emotions of the moment
- “lay our projects to rest” imbue with a sense of needing to go
- “done for today” vs. “lay our projects to rest”

*Notes from full run of the play:

- physical positioning in the Queen Mab memory section
- sightline awareness
- throw the paper on “lethargy”
- hit the comedy of “my marriage became wrought with hardships”
- laughing at himself with “so many affairs”
- small pause after “sought it out” to let it hit him
- lean into the “jane” line (physically and emotionally)
- working through the throwing the papers section
- In the mother monologue, pause after “I am Mary Shelley”
- “Just me, just me, just me” -this is bad, this is worse, this is the worst
- In the moment after “won’t somebody please,” letting the fake smile fade away
- working the exact beats of the strangle, not really strangling at first
- Working sections again
- starting on page 25, the quick, happy exchange (tightening timing, breath release)
- the second dream choreography: trance-like Percy, Mary hitting specific beats for the poetic line
- treating the actions in dream 2 like they really happened
- choreographing the running way scene, rhythm, and timing
- game of the thunderstorm story: Percy taking it seriously, Mary is not

August 28th

- Q to Q

August 29th

- Dress Rehearsal

Appendix D: *Justified Sinners'* Talkback Transcripts

Justified Sinners Talkback – August 30th

Stefano: So thank you for staying. This is such a love project. Let me tell you a little bit about how it came about. I had Brittany in my class in Drama 608, from Aristotle to Artaud, which covered a lot of ground. And then she asked me to join the supervisory committee, which is comprised also of Patricia Demers, she's here and she's also responsible for footing part of the bill for this beautiful production along with Gary Kelly. Brittany is working on this wonderful dissertation about Romantic Biodramas, specifically about the Shelleys, and she wrote this play as part of her ongoing research and practice on the topic of Romantic Biodramas. We thought we could do a staged reading but then, talking about the serendipitous nature of the project, we started thinking that we have some money now and we can do something with it.

Patricia: Money helps.

Stefano: Drama offered all of the resources, I offered myself as a dramaturg, and so we put it all together and we produced this play, which was a labor of love that brings together two of my favorite people actually. Brittany is one for sure and Alexander Donovan, the director, is another. Both former students of mine and both beautiful. So just to give you a framework of the project and the kind of collaboration and creativity that it brought together, I would like to start with a couple of questions for the creative team and for Brittany and then we are going to open up the floor for your questions and thank you for staying. Can you tell us a little bit about what a Biodrama is and then maybe you could go into your interest in the Shelleys and how the play came about?

Brittany: Great. Thank you so much and thank you for that lovely introduction, Stefano, and for everything. Thank you all for being here tonight, it is so lovely that people are watching something that I wrote. If you are involved in English, as I know many of our audience members are, you know that that is quite a strange sensation and quite terrifying in some ways, so it's a pleasure to have you all here tonight. I became involved with the Shelly's very early in my burgeoning academic career and my true loves are both the Shelleys and theatre so Romantic Biodramas, as I am terming them in my dissertation, these plays that are written about the biographies of the Shelleys that explore some aspects of their lives in the contemporary theatre became my love affair by accident. I initially started out in the Department of English thinking that I needed a strictly "English dissertation" where I would talk about performance as an image in the text, very distant, which was as close as I thought I could get to performance working in that faculty. Fortunately, having a wonderful supervisory committee and wonderful people who encouraged my interdisciplinary interests, I was able to have the doctoral project that I wanted to have, so I didn't have to settle, which was a wonderful thing that doesn't happen as often as it should. Romantic Biodramas are plays about the Shelleys lives and the thing that I love most about them is that they take my twin interests in the Shelleys and theater and show how these two writers that haven't been alive for nearly two hundred years, it's Mary's birthday today actually, have continuing relevance. So I came to this project through this unbelieving feeling of wanting to talk about the Shelleys and how they still have cultural currency in the twenty-first century and how, despite the fact that they haven't lived and written

in such a long time, people continue to be interested in their lives and writing. In the process, I discovered that there was, in fact, this entire collection of plays about the Shelleys' lives. If you haven't encountered any of them before, there are dozens of them, so they continue to be a subject of interest. I started to notice, in collecting this archive of different performances, that certain trends and certain ideas started to emerge, and so many talked about *Frankenstein* and talked about the Shelleys as part of their larger circle of writers so you get Lord Byron there and he steals the show. But I was really interested to see this Romantic couple in a very small story that focuses on the relationship between them. My interest in creating a very small story about the Shelleys initially led me to think that perhaps a one-person show would be the way to do it, to show how closely linked they were. But seeing Jessie and Morgan out there and seeing this gorgeous dynamic they have on stage is really proof to me that two people was really the way to go for this play and it was really so lovely to see that dynamic.

Stefano: Tell us a little bit about the way the play has changed in the months before rehearsals until today.

Brittany: Certainly. Well, the first thing I would caution is that, if you are like me and you have never written a play before and you are equal parts brave and naïve and think that you can write a play by yourself, you need excellent collaborators, excellent people on your team. So again, it comes back to having this wonderful, generous, compassionate supervisory committee who helped me at every turn. Stefano has been so phenomenal in giving me script support and bringing the dramaturgical basis and helping me develop this idea. I am, as I say, not used to the idea of writing a script or a dramatic text at all so having people on your side that are great at that is amazing. Following that, I was able to meet up with this stellar creative team and Alexander really became my partner in crime in terms of developing this text into something that we were both proud of. I hope I can speak for him, but it became a labor of love, I think for both of us. He would call me on the phone when we were both away and we would talk and go through the play together. We would discuss everything and, at first, my little, fragile heart was terrified that collaboration meant criticism because I am not used to sharing these words with anyone from my locked, English hermit-space. So again, that is the advice that I would give: to find great collaborators and with Alexander I was so lucky to work with a director who had such great historical experience and play writing experience. Finally, if you are writing a Romantic Biodrama, have the best team in the world. Have whip-smart actors who are writers in their own right, who know the language, who can make your crazy, adapted text from the Shelleys' works makes sense for audiences, who are stunning on stage and have a beautiful chemistry between them. Have an amazing designer who creates a dream set for your actors to work in. Have the best stage manager that anyone could ever ask for. Have a dream team of people and life becomes very easy.

Stefano: Talk to us a little bit about how the world of the play came about through your conversations. Your conversations with Brittany, your conversations with Sarah.

Alexander: It was kind of a whirlwind of fortune, I think, with everything coming together. Well, I will be frankly honest. The first thing that got me interested was when you said "do you want to direct a play it has a budget?" and I said "haha I'm going to get paid, let's do it." And then I read it and I was like "oh, I like it," so that was really nice. It was funny because I

had been working with Morgan and Jessy on my first show here called *Copenhagen* and that was a beast and coming into this I was like “oh, it's one act.”

Jessy: We all thought that.

Alexander: But getting into it, and reading it, and seeing it, and recognizing within it a really strong story about Mary. It's something that this is a bit macabre that I have been thinking about a lot is how you get over the death of someone close to you. No one died, don't worry. I mean, we all die. But thinking about how we get over that and reading this play and then seeing it I thought it was about Mary coming to terms with the death of her husband and trying to understand what that meant and trying to make sense of the positives and negatives of it and trying to figure it out. And it felt very human and very specific and I think that was interesting to me. We can tell very general stories about love very easily and I think we all hopefully will experience love and unfortunately will experience heartbreak and loss. But when it's general, I find that it's not very interesting. It becomes a feeling of “yeah, I get it, and that happens to us all, and that's great” but when you have something like this where it's very specific people and a very specific set of circumstances in their lives and they've done a very specific set of things it becomes fascinating.” You can recognize elements in it that you understand I am always so shocked how powerful it is at the end when he leaves because obviously he isn't real, but there is something about this, about this losing of it and that moment of having to see someone say goodbye and to get the goodbye that she could not get in life.

Stefano: That's the moment of the play that always gets me.

Alexander: It got me too, I would sit there and I would go (*sniffs*).

Stefano: Let's talk about the elements of the set. We've got some of his old papers and books but also the aquatic water theme going on. How was that organically created through the *mise-en-scène* that you and Sarah created together?

Alexander: I was lucky because I was back home in the Maritimes in Cape Breton and we were talking about all this and I was staring at the ocean and getting the idea of water and death. But it had come almost immediately in reading it. Mary says her mother tried to drown herself, Percy drowns at sea, there's something deadly about it for me. I thought their world is made of paper, really that's what they used in life, and I was trying to think “what is the one most destructive thing with paper?” Of course, you could say fire, but fire destroys everything. You set fire somewhere it will burn everything down. Also, they're not going to let me set fire on stage. But water is a uniquely destructive thing for paper. If you just look over at it right now there's a stasis. Those pages are stuck floating in that space. And so, there's something about water that was just perfect for me. It was about being stuck and destroying. It could kill you.

Stefano: It is also about memories and the creation of literary legacies and how they can be shaped and molded.

Alexander: You can shape and mold within water. You can also destroy with water, or water can give you life, or Percy does not understand anything about water, and the more I thought of it

the more it just seemed perfect. It kept fitting the play very well and it seemed like it would add a little element of danger within it because if one of these gets destroyed the whole set is ruined. There's something I like about that. There's something Roxanne probably does not like about that. I originally had crazy ideas like having them in two inches of water the whole time and then I decided to be realistic with two fish tanks.

Stefano: Yes, we had to burst that bubble.

Alexander: I asked, because you never know.

Stefano: Talk to us about your approach to the text. First of all, let me tell you, you were both beautiful, you truly were and a testimony to our BFA acting program. And, of course, I had both of you in my class so I know how great you are. So tell us a bit about what the project was like for you, what do you enjoy about it?

Jessy: I have a background in literature, so I really enjoyed that aspect of these characters and the amount of writing they did. They never stopped writing, they wrote for each other and when they weren't doing that, they were journaling and writing letters. They lived through their writing. As an actor, I love to read about the background of things and what was interesting for me and this project is that we had a relatively short rehearsal period. We've been working on it for two weeks and not rehearsing every day, we have had about eight or nine rehearsals. So what was interesting for me was, on the one hand, having this love of research and wanting to figure it out and solve the mysteries, but, at the same time, in Mary Shelley's life there is thirty-five years of writing there. So that was an interesting thing for me about this project, learning to balance that. And what I came to really love about it was that the more I read, the more I understood that Brittany has done an incredible amount of research, but she has also made some decisions about how she is going to interpret material because so much of what is in this play, including some of the excerpts that you've heard, I've read three or four different interpretations of what those lines meant or he wrote this in a letter about "the ash that covered an affectionate heart" and what does that mean exactly. So that was simultaneously sad, that I could not read more, but it was also exhilarating that we were in the hands of a writer who had done all that research and made some really intelligent choices in interpreting it.

Morgan: What I really love too about working on this play, what I loved about this play in general, is that, if you think about it, she has taken two real people that lived two hundred years ago. Taken their writing, all of their writing, years of writing, and tied their words not only to them and created three-dimensional people out of their poems, but also tied it to their relationship. It's easy to read a poem and to be done with it, but she added such a depth to all those words and what that meant to them, not only as people but to them as a couple and that's insane. Think of another play that does that, it's amazing. And also, speaking specifically for Percy as a character, you can look back at his writing about the women and just go "what a womanizing asshole" and he was, but she takes that and adds such a three-dimensional view to it. You understand why and you understand how that affected Mary and how Mary's attitude towards him affected him. This was an hour and fifteen minutes, just think about the amount of history that you learned about two people. I don't know that much about anyone. We say a lot in

the theatre that “you really brought that character to life,” but you really brought these people to life in a way that not a lot of plays. So, bravo.

Stefano: So do you have any questions for Brittany, the creative team, the director, the actors? I'm assuming this play will have legs, I really hope so. We are talking about what we can do now that we have a fully rehearsed show, can we sell it to a theater in town? Can Brittany apply for a grant to move it somewhere else in Canada? I think it has a lot of potential, I actually love this script and the production that we did. Again, eight days of rehearsal and not full days.

Alexander: They were pretty long days. Eight hours, they were pretty long days. We did not waste time.

Stefano: At this point we are looking at options, but if you want to provide any feedback for Brittany, for the director, or any comments in general feel, free to do so.

Audience Question: It's not really formulated but, just as a general thought, the objects used in the glass fish bowls were really lovely. How did the object theatre idea come together?

Alexander: I'll be honest. A lot of things, I prefer this in general when working, we allowed these things to happen a bit organically, in the sense that I would be like “let's try this set today” because there are a lot of different things that we had going there. We thought he would play with pieces of paper or make a paper boat, but then we realized that the teacup floats and that it was perfect. So it's a lot of playing around. But for me, if we were going to have these things, I needed them to be interactive. If I want something to be symbolic, it also has to fit. I can't just be illustrating for the sake of illustrating. I also have to say that I learned a lot about water physics for the show because we had our cue-to-cue day on Monday.

Jessy: What happens when you put a red book in water, Alexander?

Alexander: Turns out it turns the water really freaking red. So my original thought was that we were going to have these two tanks and put books in that tank and it was going to be great but what I learned was that it's a lot of water, like ten gallons of water, and nothing was sinking. It was all floating because a book is paper and oxygen, so it just floats to the top. So I was like a madman pushing books down, but I eventually realized that rocks were smarter. A lot of it came from experimenting. We had a lot of pieces and I noticed that, with the small tank of water, you could put a page into it and you could literally position it in water and it would stay, which was really neat. I could put it into the middle and let go and it would just stay there because there is not as much force pushing it up. Those have been there all weekend and they will stay there all week.

Stefano: And objects are magical. You can project so much on to the life of an object. They become almost a character in and of themselves and they were very aptly and successfully used.

Alexander: You believe it immediately, is the thing. If he pulls this little teacup and he starts talking about a boat, you think “sure, that's what it is.” And I know it sounds sort of silly, but it's this very simple thing that becomes very effective.

Stefano: It fits the style of the piece too. We aren't dealing with realism in the strictest sense.

Alexander: He's not even alive, he's a piece of paper.

Morgan: Wait, what?

Alexander: That was the idea that we want you to immediately, from when you start the show, be like "okay, we're not dealing with realism here." Because it is much freer and it becomes a theatrical event instead of a perfect re-creation of life.

Audience Question: I have a question, probably mostly for Brittany and Alexander but feel free to chime in, about language. This maybe goes along with the object question about how objects are magic. In the play, you are kind of yawning between eighteenth-century poetry and "okay," and "boop," and "I hate you." How did you think about making that balance work so you had two, lived-in and believable characters, but also ones that strike the audience as believably eighteenth-century.

Brittany: Thank you very much. Well, when I was initially writing this play, part of my lack of fear and the reservations that I should have had in having no experience was that I imagined myself more as how Mary positions herself as Percy's biographer. That is to say that I thought this would be a curatorial effort more than a creative one, which is a great defense mechanism, to tell yourself that you are not am not "writing," just "collecting." So that's how I imagined it at the start, and if you saw my earlier drafts of the script, from which Alexander once again talked me down by encouraging me to become an actual nascent playwright, you would see that it was very much an effort to preserve and keep intact that original text, be it from letters or poems or journals or what have you. So part of that effort was to then find my own place and to collaborate with the Shelleys. To not only be just their biofictional biographer in this context, but to assert myself and have some sense of the dramatic by finding the moments where we could have a sense of slippage that allowed us to concede that we are viewing this performance as a twenty-first-century audience. In particular, I wanted that with those memories and that's something Stefano and I talked about very early, to have this perfect image of their love, this rose-coloured version that we talked about. For those memories, I wanted to have more colloquial language and some more relaxed or contemporary phrasing or moments so that there could be that kind of disjuncture consciously kept in there.

Alexander: I think that also, I was a historian first, and that people spoke like us. It's a thing that we forget, that people did not speak like their poetry. They had the tendencies, it's just that some of the words have changed and it becomes that difficulty of asking "what are you losing if you are going to be perfectly authentic?" and "what do you lose in doing that?" For me, I think there is always that fine balance. You still want to give that hint, but you still want to give that experience. It's more emotional and more charged than affectation and we're not using accents so we're trying to bring it into our world in a way that we can understand it. Because I like to think about the audience when we do this, it's important to think about who is watching.

Jessy: I think it's also an interesting reminder of how ahead of their time they were. We like to say that "she was a modern woman," which really doesn't make sense, but these were people

who really shocked everybody because they were atheists, and they were fine with living together as partners, and being together without being married. And Percy Shelley was quite a radical because he was such a Republican and he believed that everyone should be equal. And so many of Mary Shelley's books were written specifically about people who are not born into privilege or wealth. So I like the language because I think it's a nice reminder that these were people who were living ahead of their time in a lot of ways.

Audience Question: I have a question about a previous play that I had seen. I don't know where I saw it, here or Timm's, where basically Byron was a critical element and their relationship. So were you kind of keen on keeping Byron out and doing it this way in invoking Shelly after his death? How did you want to see a different path from that play?

Brittany: You are right, it is such an iconographic moment, the idea of Shelley's death, that we see in paintings and in the Shelley monuments, so I was really interested in that thanatography of Percy Shelley's death and the obsession with his body, his death, his funeral and his heart. I loved all of that, in a not creepy way.

Alexander: I just want to say really quickly, I don't know if you caught it in the play, but I learned in this play that he drowns, he washes up, so they burn him on the beach. They pulled his heart out and kept it and I'm like "what is happening?"

Stefano: The heart did not burn.

Brittany: Yes, so to go back to to the Howard Brenton play that you discussed, which is so formative in the field of Romantic Biodrama. Part of my initial motivation in doing this play was that I wanted to carve out a place that I hadn't seen filled before by different Romantic Biodramas, which led me to focus specifically on the relationship between the two of them. Although Byron does come up many times throughout this play and through his absence he is even more present in their relationship and remains the same, overbearing figure that he was in their relationship. We have Claire Clairemont as well, who remains as this outside force in their relationship. Initially when I set out to write this play, I wanted to do one about Percy because, as the twenty-first century has progressed, we have moved towards telling the story of Mary more often. So I wanted to focus on him, as he is my favourite writer and so I hoped I could centralize him. As it turns out, the balance skewed and I came to side with Mary so much that it came to be more about her. But I thought that, in taking Byron out of the equation, that sort of figural crutch for them, I could see what they were like if they actually had to be alone together.

Stefano: And as you say in the program, there are not too many plays that deal with the two of them. I would like to remind everyone that, if you like the play, please talk about it and tell people to come. We are having another show here tomorrow at 7:30 and then another one on Friday. Thank you very much.

Justified Sinners Talkback – August 31st

Stefano: Thank you for staying. We are going to keep this short and sweet, I would just like to give you a frame of reference for how the show came about. Brittany is a doctoral student in the Department of English and Film Studies. She has a supervisory committee and I am part of the supervisory committee. This play came about as part of the ongoing writing of an exciting dissertation about biodramas about the Shelleys. Brittany wrote her own play, which we thought could just be a staged reading. Thanks, however, to two professors in English and Film Studies, Gary Kelly and Patricia Demers, who footed the bill for the production, we were able to stage it. So this is truly a collaboration between Drama and English and Film Studies and it has been an exciting journey from page-to-stage, a journey that started months ago, years ago in your case, and ended with this production. It has been a labor of love for all of us. What you saw was rehearsed during the course of eight rehearsals, that is a lot of text to remember. And Alexander Donovan directed the piece and Jessy Ardern and Morgan Grau were in the cast. Usually I ask a lot of questions, but yesterday we ended up having a very long talk back so I think I'm just going to keep it short this time. Brittany, could you just tell us a little bit about the title. It's *Justified Sinners*, subtitled "a Romantic Duet." Tell us a little bit about the title itself and how it came to be.

Brittany: Excellent question. Thank you all once again for coming and for listening to us speak. It is so lovely to have you here and to be able to share in this play with all of you. So to begin, the title *Justified Sinners* was one of the first things that I came up with for the play. I've heard you're not supposed to do that, it's supposed to work in the opposite direction, but I was inspired by the title for the play when I was beginning my work on it when I was thinking of possible ideas for this Romantic Biodrama, this play about the Shelleys lives and writing. So *Justified Sinners* is the shortened version of what I imagined to be the full title of the play, which is one that I took from the title of a Romantic-era novel written by James Hogg, entitled *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. So this novel was published in 1824, which is once again the same year that our play is set, so they take place in the same historical moment. One of the things that I loved about that is the title as a descriptor for what Mary encounters, these private memoirs and confessions of Percy as the potentially "justified sinner" in the play, although we play with the idea of justification depending on how you read his actions. I wanted to take this idea in reference to the book, which is again all about doppelgängers and Romantic doubles and all these things that would come into the play, and to play with this idea of them both potentially seeing themselves as sinners in some way. We can argue over who we perceive to be the larger sinner in this case, if either are "sinners" or ones who acted against each other but perceived themselves to be justified in those actions. So this tension between having been "cold" or having been too "hot" but again feeling justified in those actions was something that I wanted to play with in the play through the title.

Stefano: Thank you. Can you also tell us something about how you see your play fitting within the existing Biodramas about the Shelleys? You told us yesterday that there is a wealth of them.

Brittany: Yes, absolutely. Thank you again. Some of you have heard me talk about this at length before. Going through and studying these plays, collecting them and talking to different practitioners for the dissertation and the critical portion of the project, I realized that so many of them talked about the Shelleys broader circle. So many of them talked about *Frankenstein* and so

many of them also talked about *Frankenstein* exceptional origin story, which if you are not familiar with it involved a ghost story competition at the Villa Diodati at Lake Geneva in 1816 that Lord Byron initiated. So many plays about the Shelleys lives focus on these key events and I was really interested in what it would be like if you created a small, focused story that went back to the text and pulled out so many of the things that I love so much about this Romantic couple, their ideas, their writing, and their relationship. I wanted to see if you just focused on that, if you could create a play that worked. And so, this was my own miniature, unsolicited ghost-story competition for myself, and I didn't think anyone would ever see it, but it is so crazy and wonderful that you all have.

Stefano: Thank you. As we transition smoothly from page-to-stage, we are going to talk a little bit with Alexander. Tell us about how your vision for this play came about. I understand that the script was negotiated very much, even before rehearsal, dramaturgically, but how did you work through it, through the blocking, of course, and the design with Sarah Karpysin.

Alexander: I mean it's beautiful, right? There is some beautiful stuff here. I've always been fascinated with history first and foremost. That was my first degree, working in history, and I am fascinated with how we do historical pieces that can resonate now in a way. When you were in history you read a lot of boring stuff about the past, which is unfortunate because sometimes within all of that there is something very interesting and there is something very important and something very near. And so, in reading this, I was very fascinated. In looking at it, I noticed two huge themes that stuck out immediately: that water and paper were key. Paper is how everything was translated between the two of them, it was the one thing that kept everything they had, and water seemed to be the one thing that destroyed everything in their life. To me, water was fascinating because water is the number one killer of paper, the end of history. It happened to be at the time very close to when I got the script that my uncle, who is a historian back home in Cape Breton, where there was a crazy flood. It just destroyed his archives and all of this paper got wrecked by this water. And the worst part is that unlike something like fire that just burns through everything, water gives you the slight hope that it's going to be okay because when you look at the pages you can still pull them out and it seems like it's fine. But it's when they meet the air and they just get ruined and they are wrinkled or they run and it's terrible. There is that slight moment where it's okay and it's fine. I think it's the same thing with water in the sense that Percy washes up and he might not be dead. There's that question, right? Water is the one thing, and I think it's beautifully said by Mary in the play, but it's the thing that gives us all life, that we are mostly made of, but it can just kill us and destroy us. And so I wanted that in the play and I wanted that sense of the chaos of all this paper and the idea of trying to go through all this.

Stefano: It all fits so beautifully with the epitaph, the inscription on Percy's grave.

Morgan: "Nothing of him that doth fade—"

Jessy: "but doth suffer a sea change into something rich and strange."

Stefano: And that's Ariel, I believe, in *The Tempest*. There's something about the permanence and impermanence of water that does speak to this idea of a love story that keeps on changing,

but it does transform. In a way, your play is like a letter back to the Shelleys, giving them a chance to work out their traumas and transform them into something beautiful, as your play is. I'm going to cut this metaphor right here. Tell us a little bit about the process. It was a short rehearsal process and both of you were working on shows, Jessy is a playwright herself. Tell us about your process as actors dealing with the texts, making sense of the text, clearly negotiating the language.

Jessy: This process was different than my usual process, just because it was so short. I tend to like to start slowly and sitting at a table and doing lots of reading and getting my feet a little bit wet. With this particular process, we had to sort of just jump into the pool, which was actually great. As much as I wish that I could have spent more time with the text, because it is so rich, I think that our playwright has done a really beautiful job of making it work as a play and there is such a strong dynamic between the two characters. They really love each other or they really don't, which made it very beautiful to just jump in and play with. I think that, in spite of the amount of actual literature that is in the play, it was easy to understand, which was great.

Stefano: Morgan, I don't know if you can speak to the fact that you and Jessy have worked together before. Alexander directed a production of *Copenhagen* last term at the University.

Morgan: And plus, we are actually dating.

Jessy: We talked about this so early in the process. There is usually, when you are acting, a period where you are trying to adjust to your fellow actors, especially with a play with intimacy. Trying to make sure that you are respectful of your fellow actors and making sure that everyone is comfortable on stage. And partly because we're dating and partly because we have spent a lot of time on stage together, we got to skip that step, which was great because we managed to just get into it. It's such an awkward stage of rehearsal, and also it eats up a lot of time.

Morgan: So we skipped like two weeks of rehearsal.

Jessy: Just by being able to show up on day one and not worry about shoving each other around.

Alexander: And the fact that we had just worked with each other and I know how you guys work, you know how I work, it removes a lot of that time. With a truncated rehearsal period, it was one of those things where it was short but I never felt like I didn't have the time that I needed, and that's the difference. Now had it been two actors who I had never worked with before, two actors who were not intimate with each other, it would be a whole other story, so that was really fortunate.

Stefano: Thank you, let's open it up to your questions.

Audience Question: You had mentioned that you worked together and that the three of you worked together, but what was the advantage of having someone like your playwright who not only gave you a ton of information based on the background research that she has done and has also been in numerous plays before.

Jessy: I was trying to be helpful to the English student in our midst and explain aspects of the rehearsal process and she was so kind about it at every step. She was always like “thank you.”

Alexander: To be fair, she hid that from me for a long time.

Brittany: This is an important component of the process as well, because for the past few weeks I have been haunting your rehearsals, I think that's the way I would describe it. Imagine a dynamic where you have your stage manager, and your director, and your actors and there's someone with a laptop and they are just typing notes.

Jessy: It's a unique advantage to have the playwright in the room because every rehearsal we would have a question about what actually happened in real life, where does this piece of work come from. I had questions every once in awhile about if it was this, this and this then why this and you are obviously so incredibly well versed in their lives and their literature so it was fabulous for us.

Alexander: It was a relief for me, frankly, because they would ask me questions where I would usually have to think hard, but then I would be like “oh right, Brittany, you wrote this. You turn around and go “actually, what is this?”

Brittany: But I didn't want to assert myself too much either. I never wanted to say “well, in real life it was like this so you are incorrect.” I wanted it to be Jessy and Morgan's Shelleys and I think that's what's so lovely about this play is that the vision that Alexander had, that Morgan had, that Jessy had, that Sarah had is what made the Shelleys that you see. The Shelleys you will take away are the ones that they created.

Alexander: I think that's a unique thing too because I very strategically spent little time at the table because I know the last one we did we spent a lot of time at the table. That is a problem and a thing that I am still navigating in every rehearsal phase, especially when they are real people. How much do we look into them, because you can get stuck in the details with anything historical and it's great if your play is really detailed and it's exact, but if it doesn't mean anything and you don't feel anything, we are just making museum performances.

Morgan: And then on top of that, not only does this have to be historically-accurate but it's also written so poetically. If you have ever done a Shakespeare before, you'll know that you sit down and you look up every word. You look up five different ways the line could be interpreted and then you pick some of them. We didn't have to do that because we could be like “hey, what the hell does this mean?” and she would say “that's directly from this journal and it means this” and it was like “oh great, I don't have to spend hours on that kind of thing.”

Stefano: Perfect dramaturg.

Alexander: That's what you need: a good old dramaturg who knows exactly what they are talking about.

Audience Question: The set is incredible, like it is absolutely gorgeous. Was this your vision predominantly?

Sarah: Alexander and I talked over the phone because he was home in Cape Breton. Once he explained the play to me, because I hadn't read the script yet, as soon as he said that it was about Mary Shelley and Percy and all their writing I knew they were going to be throwing papers around. So then this was the main idea, but I figured that everyone has seen a paper set before. And then Alexander came up with the idea of having water on stage and I was like "yes, that is so good," so the fish tanks are really his baby. He made them as beautiful as they are, but the paper aspect is really what you need.

Alexander: It was actually pretty funny, the phone call, because I was like "I'm thinking about this" and you were like "yup," and by the end we were like "okay, we're on the same page, great." It came out really nicely. That's the perfectionist in me because we learned in doing these things. There's a lot of weird physics involved with water and that is the perfect amount of water to place something in stasis, but in this amount of water nothing freaking sinks. Like paper and books don't really sink, so we had to weigh them down. But it was really fun to get to play with them. I was just so fortunate to have Sarah, who found this desk and all these things, and we got lucky because the sculpting studio was throwing out hundreds of books and we literally walked by one day and it was like "hold the phone."

Sarah: Otherwise, I would have had to go buy books or make fake stacks of paper. But Alexander was like "hold up."

Alexander: Hundreds. And we proceeded to like wheelbarrow these into here. It came out really organically and I'm still rather amazed at how it all came together. It's quite beautiful.

Stefano: Well, it's a great team. Any more comments for the playwright? If you are a writer, you know this is an ongoing process and you take feedback sometimes and go back to the drawing room. We do think that this play has legs and might go elsewhere.

Alexander: Who knows.

Stefano: Thank you for coming.

Justified Sinners Talkback – September 1st

Stefano: I like to define this project as a serendipitous occasion because, first of all, it's a collaboration with English and Film Studies, two professors from the department footed the bill for our little production, our workshop production, and drama provided myself and the resources. Brittany is writing a dissertation on Biodramas inspired by the Shelleys in English and Film Studies and I am part of the supervisory committee, so it was my pleasure to be a part of this journey. It's a journey that is in progress, as the dissertation progresses. I would like to start with just a couple of questions and then to open it up to the public. Brittany, why don't you tell us about your interest in the Shelleys, how it came about, and the origin story of your play. Also

talk a little bit about what you really wanted to say about these two characters, who clearly still fascinated us.

Brittany: Thank you so much, Stefano, I really appreciate that and thank you all for coming and for being here and for listening to us speak now. When I started writing this play, what initially attracted me to this idea was Percy Shelley, who is my favourite writer of all time. I come to the Shelleys as someone who is interested in them from a critical standpoint, who has spent her entire eleven-year post-secondary education being very interested in and writing about the Shelleys, but also as someone who is just such a die-hard fan. I love them with such a purity and a deep passion. They are my people and I love them like family members. So in deciding to write this play, the point of view that I wanted to work through was namely the fact that Percy Shelley is my favorite writer, but often times when I tell people that, if they know anything about Shelley or if they know something about the complex relationship between the couple, I feel like I have to take on a defensive stance. So in writing this play, I read Mary Shelley's "Journal of Sorrows" that she kept after Percy Shelley's death and I know she had a lot of questions from reading his writing that she wanted answers to and, as a would-be biofictional writer of the Shelleys, as a student of them, I too had a lot of questions that I wanted him to answer. So through Mary, I used her "Journal of Sorrows" as a basis to ask those questions of him and I used this play as an opportunity to see what Mary would find out if she was able to actually reimagine her husband and to ask him those questions she had and to find answers and I used the Shelleys' texts to answer the questions that I had. Watching the play this last time, I actually felt very emotional in realizing that Percy somehow gets off the hook and there is not that reckoning that Mary says she wants so badly from her husband and realizing that, in conjuring up her husband, Mary doesn't let herself fully realize all those truth she wants from him. She preserves that image of him at the end, for both her and for us, so that was a very noble gesture that I saw, both in the real Mary Shelley and the Mary Shelley that I saw so beautifully through Jessie's performance, and it just made me love them even more.

Stefano: Thank you. As dramaturgs, we always ask the question "why this play now?" but I can find at least a dozen reasons why this play is relevant and essential today. What is it that resonates with you, first as part of the creative team, and why you think it might resonate with the audience, this story of two exceptional individuals?

Alexander: I think, I mean you touched on it a bit already, but something I've talked about a little before is that it's a very much at the heart a story of someone trying to come to terms with a person who they have lost, of death, and I think that is something that we all will unfortunately deal with at some point in our lives. And so, in reading it, I thought there was just an incredible story about what if you got the chance to get the answers from them, and what that means, and what kind of cathartic journey that requires, and whether this is her just imagining that that happened or really happening to her. It doesn't really matter, you can decide for yourselves, but there is something about that that is so human, but also so wonderfully specific with these two that I think is really incredible because you can tell a general story about losing this person, but I find stories become more powerful the more specific that they get because then you can start filling in the blanks and focus in on the story of these writers, and their incredible lives, and the art that they made, and the real emotions that they faced, and the real hardships they went through, so it really just resonated.

Jessy: I think we live in a time where we are not allowed to have historical heroes, which in many ways I think is a healthy thing. We don't have Romantic heroes the same way that Percy Shelley was held up with his beautiful marble statues of him. I think we live in a time where we really like to go into the nitty-gritty, what they were like in real life, and what were their flaws, and all that kind of thing. And simultaneously, we live in this postmodern world where we always want to dig into the writing very forensically and figure out that it's because he saw this building and the building must be the building from the poem. So we love to do all of that, some of which is great, and one of the things that I think is important about this play, that I really appreciate about it, is that it takes all that important stuff about trying to be clear-eyed about our heroes, and trying to be clear-eyed about their flaws, and trying to understand where they were coming from while also having a really beautiful respect for them as people and as artists. That is something that I really think is missing in a lot of plays as we desperately try to bring them down to a very understandable level that we can break apart. I think this is a great balance between understanding the need to do that, the need to see people as people and flawed, but also being so generous and respectful towards what made them beautiful people in the first place.

Morgan: Just to build on that too, I think just in terms of the story of these two characters that Percy is a man of ideals. Boy, he's got big Romantic ideas about the universe and how things work and how everyone should be coming to terms with the fact that his ideal more harmful, in a way, to the people around him, they weren't clean and idealistic. He didn't make a Utopia with these ideals, he often hurts the people closest to him. In looking at history, but also just in terms of the way that we function as people, how our ideas about everyone else around us, how imposing those ideas can be and harmful, I think that is absolutely valuable right now.

Alexander: Setting out and doing this project, it's very easy to look back on a person, like what you were saying with Percy, and to be like "terrible person." But it is so much more interesting to watch him and to put no judgment on him and to allow everyone else to decide. It just becomes far more fascinating to let him do his moments to let him get out his speeches and to let Mary do the same thing. To let them both do it up and to see the good and the ugly of both of them. It just becomes more fascinating because I think we all have sides like that, some way worse than others, but it is just fascinating to watch in that way.

Stefano: I found it really beautiful that we get to hear Mary's point of view and sorrow and pain and we really get a clear picture of what she might have felt about her husband. But in a way, ironically, I think the play also replaces Shelley in the foreground because we know everything about Mary Wollstonecraft Shelly, not so much Shelley. I mean I knew about Shelley, of course like most people probably, but besides "To a Skylark" and "Ode to the West Wind" I don't know that many people casually know the body of Shelley's work. But we all know *Frankenstein*, so there is that interesting perspective to the whole play that kind of repositions and gives agency to Mary, who was of course the preserver of Shelley's legacy, but at the same time also look at Shelley. He is not dead and buried.

Jessy: I love that we all know *Frankenstein* now because what she says in the play is so true, she felt all her life that she had to live up to her parents. There's this idea that she had inherited their genius and everyone kept waiting for the genius to happen. Her sister Claire, who we mentioned

in the play and who she had a very difficult relationship with, wrote this letter once where she said, “Mary is the family disappointment.” Everyone kept waiting and *Frankenstein* was awful and *Matilda* was holding up incest and now it's so great that we all know *Frankenstein*.

Alexander: So if you feel like a disappointment now, in two hundred years you will be the best.

Brittany: Well the question of the Shelleys’ legacy is actually something that I have become quite obsessed about in the course of my studies and in working on this project because it goes through so many different stages and, in turn, Romantic Biodramas, or plays about their lives, similarly go through these stages. I mean initially, after Shelley's death, there is this push to “write his life” and Mary fortunately, and I think beautifully despite criticisms that she faced, does this wonderful job of preserving his writing, despite the fact that she was under threat from his father had to being muzzled financially by him not to proliferate his writing any further. We go through periods and it's not until the 1960s really that *Frankenstein* comes back into the cultural consciousness, which is hard to imagine now. For a long time, Percy Shelley was certainly held within the academy, partially because of Mary's reframing of him which was able to push him through the Victorian period as the sanitized and not at all revolutionized version of him, which is hard to imagine now when you see the figure of fire that we had in our play. Then, in the mid-twentieth century, Mary comes back to the forefront and ever since then Percy has been very much locked in the academy and Mary has been part of the cultural consciousness, especially through *Frankenstein*. So it's funny how we've seen that movement back and forth with them in those two hundred years.

Stefano: And through popular culture as well.

Brittany: Certainly.

Stefano: We want to open up to the public, but before we do so, I would like to thank you guys for this fast and furious approach to dramaturgy and staging. They only had eight days to stage this whole play, so I am in awe of the things you managed to do. Eight days. Morgan and Jessy had shows at The Fringe too. Congratulations, everybody. It has been a joy to work with you. The ephemerality of theatre. It ends here tonight, but hopefully it will go elsewhere. But this production ends, so there is a sense of ending. Of eschatology.

Brittany: I feel as though I've been this overflowing puddle of emotion throughout this whole process because I am so grateful, but just to again extend so much genuine thanks to everyone who has been here and everyone who has taken in the show and just this incredible team who has been so unspeakably wonderful and has supported this little first-time playwright in her strange, private exercise in writing and the wonderful people have brought this to life. To Stefano, who has been a dream supervisory committee member. If any of you have had interactions with supervisory committees, he's the best person that you could ask for in this process and has given so much time and energy. If you have a chance to take a class at the University of Alberta, please take it with Stefano because he is an exemplary professor. And Alexander has been a generous director, and editor, and friend, and helper, and inspirer at every turn in this process. To have an amazing designer on hand like Sarah, these are literally copies of Shelley's notebooks, who is that detailed? And Roxanne, who is stage manager extraordinaire.

Stage managers never get the credit they deserve and she is an angel who makes everything smooth and wonderful. And Kelsi whose poster, oh my gosh have you seen the poster? The brilliance behind it, shredded pages from *Frankenstein* are in that photo, it's unbelievable. And Jessy and Morgan, who have taken literally my favorite people I have ever encountered through text and brought new vitality and new life to them. When you see writers that you love portrayed on stage, oftentimes there is a fear that they will be ruined. There's a movie about Mary Shelley coming out this year and I am so scared, so think of me when you see it. But you have two actors here who not only live up to your expectations of characters, but transcend everything you have loved and take something that is so beautiful and perfect to you and make it so beyond your wildest expectations. To bring joy, and light, and brightness, and vitality to people who have not lived for hundreds of years and to bring so much dedication, and intellect, and passion. I am so unspeakably grateful to the two of you for the work you have done on these characters. So thank you and I'm sorry.

Audience Question: I just wanted to say that I really liked what you said about the Utopia, because one thing that I often think about is how Utopias are actually dystopias, like wolves in sheep's clothing. There is always a human cost to every Utopia, so I really liked when you said that brought the play together. Mary was this great cost to herself and her husband. I suppose if you go with the sense that he isn't a form, he's a life force, Mary doesn't really allow forgiveness to herself by not getting the forgiveness from him and I thought that was really quite tragic at the end, like really quite beautiful. I liked how you brought that together, it was nice.

Brittany: Thank you so much. I really enjoyed that idea, that Mary eschews forgiveness. She doesn't let herself get that peace in the end, which I think knowing Mary Shelley's life after and knowing that it's debatable whether the good times do in fact come for her and that it is a hard, quiet life after Shelley leaves, I think the haunting presence of that dystopia really does ring true in the end.

Audience Question: What was your hook for identifying with this significant and marvelous story? Which part like it connected for you?

Alexander: What brought us into it?

Audience Question: Yes.

Jessy: I started reading about Mary Shelley and what really drew me to her and what interested me is that everyone described her differently. Her father described her as very spirited and fiery, but too much so, so she got sent to Scotland because she was always fighting with her stepmother. And Shelley described her actually as quite soft and lovely and girlish, until she got enraged by something. This person who was very spirited, but also very kind, and also soft, and wrote *Frankenstein*, which horrified everybody. So she had that in her as well and when her children died, there was a sense of her as being extremely cold, but Shelley himself acknowledged that she seemed cold because she was trying to hide the fact that she was on fire inside. He described it as "the ash which covered an affectionate heart." And when Shelly died, their friends all thought she was so cold and so unfeeling and they had friends who were wailing and crying over his grave and she would sit in a room all day and write and not talk about it and

not do anything. So that's another impression of her, that she was very controlled and very cold, but then those same people came to realize that she was also devastated and spent a lot of her life going through periods of very intense depression. So I was very interested in what looks like contradictory aspects of the character, because she's all of those things.

Morgan: Jumping off that, “contradictory” was the thing that got me into Percy Shelley because he spends pages on pages going off on Mary about his ideals and how she should have expected this, but then admits that he compromised his ideals in marrying her. And I love that he's a guy who never stopped moving and he was always feeling whatever was in the moment and then on to the next thing. She mentions how he thought that more kids would solve the problem of the dead kids. He supposedly brought a little Italian baby home on one of their travels, to replace one of the dead children—

Jessy: Or was it his bastard child? We don't know.

Morgan: He doesn't linger on anything. He's so one thing, then one thing, then the next thing. But then he has adamant ideals about how the world should be, but he doesn't stick to them. And so, you wonder how can you feel that strongly about something you never actually followed. He was just a ball of fire and there are so many different angles to look at him from.

Alexander: We sometimes forget that they were really young. He died at twenty-nine, he was a young man. And she had had all these kids, she had five kids already, of which she lost four. That is a lot happening in such a short span of time. These are young people trying to figure their lives out, and yet to write these masterpieces.

Audience Question: Did he take her seriously as a writer? What did he think of her writing because I didn't get a very clear sense of that sometimes. It felt like he demeaned her, but I wasn't sure of the tone. I wasn't sure if it was for real or what.

Morgan: I would say that he respected Mary as a writer. I got the sense that, if he didn't like her writing, it was because he had his own ideals about what writing should be that she was not living up, which is not necessarily about her or her writing. I think it was just about him.

Audience Question: Yes, but he must have felt that she was inferior to him.

Morgan: I don't think he thought that she was inferior. I think he thought prose was inferior. I think he thought any writing that was not his or Lord Byron's was inferior. I don't think it had anything to do with her writing

Audience Question: Or her gender? That was probably an issue with her, as a woman writer at the time.

Jessy: My impression was, in fact, that he was surprisingly supportive of the writing. He thought prose was honestly not worthy of her talent, but prose was what she loved. They edited for each other all the time, they were constantly handing drafts back and forth, so there are pieces of his writing where we know what a draft was like before and after it got through Mary. He was very

interested in her opinion all the time. It's hard to say and I'd actually like to know what Brittany thinks, but I actually think it was surprisingly progressive. I think he very much respected her, he did not respect prose. That's sort of my impression, that they did a lot of back and forth.

Alexander: He immensely respected her. He talks about how he found in Mary someone who could match him. It sounds to me, and what we see in the play at least, is someone who is not, just because he loves her, going to say her work is great. He's not going to do that and he doesn't want her to do that. We see that even in the memory and the relationship we see is that he's not going to just wantonly compliment her. But he goes too far, he's too fiery, he's just too passionate about it.

Morgan: I think also that their candid nature with each other was part of that respect for each other. Because most people would tell him that they loved his writing, but how many people would actually be like “no, you wrote a crap stanza?”

Brittany: And in terms of the history of their literary relationship, my doctoral project initially began as a study of that collaborative relationship. Now in reading, I came to realize that such territory had been covered by very competent people many times over in the preceding two hundred years. It's becoming a very popular subject. In fact, in recent years, there has been a lot of discussion about the authorship of *Frankenstein* itself because the Shelleys were such close collaborators, so much so that we have Charles Robinson's edition of *Frankenstein*, in which he credits “with Percy Shelley,” because he deems that his interventions as an editor were so intense and creative that he warrants that sort of crediting.” As Jessy said, they passed works back and forth. The elopement journal, which became *The History of a Six Weeks' Tour*, was written collaboratively. We have that moment in the text that we had on stage of “Mary was there” and “Shelly was also with me,” where we actually see the transition from one hand to the next, so they literally finished each other's sentences in text. And *Proserpine* and *Midas* were lyrical dramas written for children that they co-authored, so there was a lot of collaborative writing. And again, Percy did primarily work in poetry although certainly his early efforts were more in prose, so it's ironic that he looked down on it in Mary's case. But I think you are also right that it is important to include the caveat of “for a woman” still because, as progressive as Percy was, there's still that dimension of their relationship, as part of their time.

Audience Question: How long did you spend making this project? The question you asked earlier about “why now?” I had some ideas that came up, but I was just wondering how long ago it started?

Brittany: I started writing the play two years ago. It was when my now husband and I moved in together and we had one month. We had been doing long distance for three years and we had one month where we got to live together. We were in this new apartment and I just poured my heart into this. I thought about how much I'd missed him in the time we have been apart and I thought about the horror, and the pain, and how crippling it would be to never get to see your person again. And so, it came from a very personal place, in terms of putting that emotion into it, and it meant the whole first draft was written in that very finite time. It has since experienced many editions, and changes, and alterations, but it was born out of that flurry of that one month of feeling like I got to see my person again.

Audience Question: I was thinking this story sounds a little bit revisionist. Shelley was revered as this fantastic writer and you are exposing the warts on him. We are doing that right now politically with John A. MacDonald and now Frank Oliver in Edmonton so I was wondering if you talked about some of those current events and how these figures that were worshipped historically are now being exposed and debated about whether we should still be celebrating them. Have any of those discussions come up?

Alexander: I know exactly what you are saying, I was a historian, first and foremost. First, not foremost, I am a director now. I know what you're saying for sure and I think part of the difference perhaps here is that Shelley's faults are of the interpersonal variety between himself and Mary in that sense. Less about destroying people's lives through politics. I think that is a very important conversation that is probably of a larger magnitude than some one of Shelleys' writing.

Morgan: I think also with Shelley that people have been dissecting his life in relation to his works for a long time, whereas Johnny McDonald is still on our ten-dollar bill. Shelley has been under a lens, obviously not in the same sense as he would be today, but has been for a long time, whereas there have been efforts to forget some of the uglier parts with Frank Oliver and John A. and figures like that.

Brittany: And the thing that I think is significant here is context. Studying Romantic Biodramas, I realized that producing a play in Canada versus producing a play about the Shelleys in England has very different implications. There is more of a necessity to explain before then tearing down. So many people need to be acquainted with the Shelleys in the process. For so many people, this may be their first introduction to the Shelleys or to some of their biographical information, so there is a necessity to be both didactic, in terms of demonstrating and outlining some information, and to then question it at the same time, which is a bit of a tough double maneuver.

Stefano: Thank you very much for coming.