

Why Not Theatre Company presents:

# FRANKENSTEIN

by Tanja Mastilo  
based on the novel by Mary Shelley



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## WELCOME

Dear teacher,

We hope you will find this teaching material helpful - both for preparing your students before coming to see our production of *FRANKENSTEIN* by Tanja Mastilo based on the novel by Mary Shelley, and for post-show discussion and analysis.

We are always more than happy to conduct Artist Talks after selected performances, so please let us know if you would like us to organise one of these sessions for your group. Our experience shows that it can be hugely beneficial for students to have the opportunity to ask questions after seeing the show and to chat informally with the actors and Director.

We look forward to welcoming you back to the theatre and hope you will have an enjoyable evening in our company.

With best wishes

Sue Hansen-Styles  
Artistic Leader of Why Not Theatre Company



## WHAT HAPPENED TO FRANKENSTEIN?

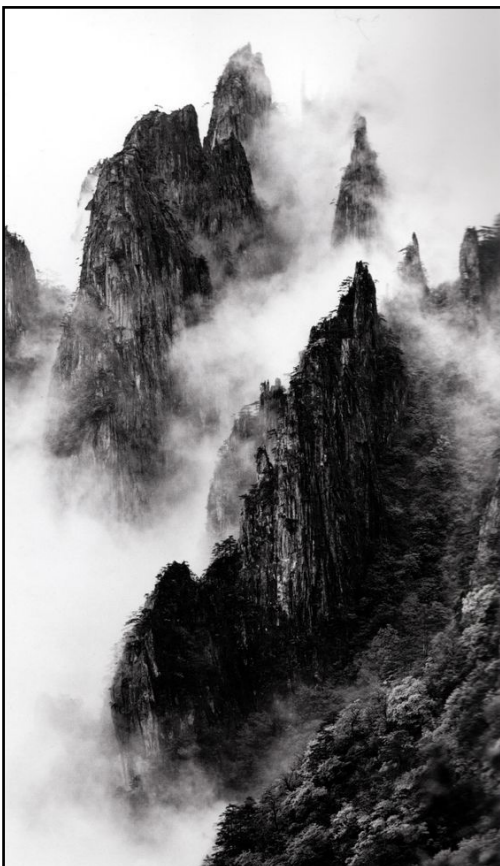
An introduction to the show and this material

This winter Why Not Theatre Company is embarking on a new project where our in-house playwright, Tanja Mastilo, has pointed her sharp mind and pen at Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*, letting it inspire her to explore the nature of what is considered monstrous.

In doing so we have taken a well known classic novel and transformed it into a contemporary play, exploring the themes laid out by Shelley and seeing how they resonate in our time. While respecting the original text Mastilo has managed to mould this story into her very own gripping rendition and has added new perspectives and narratives that question both modern day science and shifts to our collective tolerance.

In this version of *Frankenstein* one of the boldest and innovative changes is that a gender-swapping has taken place. The roles of Doctor Frankenstein and the Creature are played by women; respectively Jessica O'Hara Baker and Sue Hansen-Styles.

And with this dramaturgical twist the entire approach to the story changes. The failed project that drives the creator, Doctor Frankenstein, from ambition and excitement to fear and destruction is still evident but the fear is different. The fear of ageing is in some ways more subtle, yet ultimately connects with the fear of death. The foreboding sense of the darker motivations of hardcore science is still present but it's a new form of science that is much more akin to gene technology and DNA manipulation. At the very core lies the question of how rejection and isolation affects a life. This pain transgresses the centuries and ultimately informs our creature and her motives, as well as the original creature in Shelley's tale.



In this material you will get a short introduction to the fascinating life of Mary Shelley that informed her work and a summary of Shelley's novel. You can read about our modern day rendition of *Frankenstein* in a breakdown of the acts and we will look at some of the themes in the play and explore how they connect to the world around us. Finally there will be some excerpts from the text by Tanja Mastilo and some questions that can help you access it.

Oh, and before we really get started: let's not fall for any misconceptions - Frankenstein is the doctor, not the creature.

Nina Larissa Bassett  
Stage director and dramaturge

## Mary Shelley (1797 - 1851)

Mary Shelley was born Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin as the daughter of a remarkable couple; the radical philosopher William Godwin and the famous defender of women's rights, Mary Wollstonecraft. Mary's mother died 11 days after her birth and this had an impact on her throughout her life. Godwin remarried, however Mary and her stepmother, Mary Jane Clairmont, never took to each other. Mary grew up with five half-siblings in an unconventional household that evolved around Godwin's intellectually progressive bookshop.

At the age of 16, Mary eloped with the passionate and fickle poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, who visited her father's bookshop as an admirer of Godwin's work. Shelley was married at the time, but still they defied all protocol and followed their hearts. In doing so they also brought along Mary's younger sister; Claire Clairmont. This daring and fool-hearted act resulted in Mary's estrangement from the Godwin household. The three runaways joined Lord Byron and Dr. John William Polidori in Geneva in the Summer of 1816, where they spent many rainy afternoons discussing German ghost stories. Byron suggested each member of the group (Percy, Byron, Claire Clairmont, Mary, and Dr. Polidori) should write a ghost story in the same vein. After a harrowing night Mary had a vision and over the next few weeks Mary produced a short story which, when expanded, became *Frankenstein*.

The Geneva adventure ended 29 August 1816, when Mary, Claire and Percy returned to England. Then came a series of shocks: Mary's half sister, Fanny Imlay (daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft and Gilbert Imlay), committed suicide on 9 October; a month later Shelley's wife, Harriet, drowned herself. Harriet's death left Shelley free to marry; on 20 December he and Mary were wed at St. Mildred's Church on Bread Street, London. They had several children, of whom only one survived; Percy Florence Shelley.

By May of 1817 Mary had finished writing *Frankenstein*. Knowing that the public had a romantic interest in their elopement and that it would take some time to see her novel through the press.

In 1818 *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus* was finally published but anonymously, as female writers were not taken seriously and certainly not one with Mary's reputation. Reviewers and readers assumed that Percy Shelley was the author, since the book was published with his preface and dedicated to his political hero William Godwin. Her name would first appear in the second edition, which was published in Paris in 1821. Percy became increasingly in debt and the couple decided to leave England and settle in Italy.

After Percy Shelley's death in 1822, she returned to London and pursued a very successful writing career as a novelist, biographer and travel writer. She also edited and promoted her husband's poems and other writings.



## Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus

### A summary

In a series of letters captain Robert Walton tells his sister of his dangerous mission to reach the North Pole. Trapped in the ice, Walton encounters Victor Frankenstein, who is exhausted from travelling by dogsled across the ice. Walton takes him aboard and nurses him back to health, and is told the incredible tale of the Creature that Frankenstein created.

Victor tells of his early life in Geneva and his love of his adopted sister, Elizabeth Lavenza, and his friend Henry Clerval. Victor enters the university to study natural philosophy and chemistry. There, he is consumed by the desire to discover the secret of life and, after several years of research, becomes convinced that he has found it.

Feverish with ambition Victor spends months making a creature out of old body parts. One dramatic night he brings his creation to life. When he looks at the monstrosity that he has created, however, the sight horrifies him. After a fitful night of sleep, interrupted by visions of the monster looming over him, he runs into the streets.

Victor receives a letter from his father informing him that his youngest brother, William, has been murdered. Grief-stricken, Victor hurries home. Passing through the woods where William was strangled, he catches sight of the creature and becomes convinced that the creature is his brother's murderer. Arriving in Geneva, Victor finds that Justine, a gentle girl, who had been adopted by the Frankenstein household, has been accused. She is condemned and executed, despite her assertions of innocence. Victor is racked with guilt thinking that the creature he has created bears responsibility for the death of two innocent lives.

Victor takes a vacation in the mountains. The creature approaches him one day as he crosses an enormous glacier. The creature admits to murdering William but begs for understanding. Lonely, shunned, and forlorn, he says that he struck out at William in a desperate attempt to injure Victor, his cruel creator. The monster begs Victor to create a mate for him, a monster equally grotesque to serve as his companion.

Victor refuses at first, horrified by the prospect of creating a second monster. The monster is eloquent and persuasive and he eventually convinces Victor. Victor heads for England, accompanied by Henry, to gather information for the creation of a female creature. One night, struck by doubts about the morality of his actions, Victor glances out the window to see the creature glaring in at him with a frightening grin. Horrified by the possible consequences of his work, Victor destroys his new creation. The creature vows revenge on Victor's wedding night.

Later that night, Victor takes a boat out onto a lake and dumps the remains of the second creature in the water. The next morning he is arrested, accused of murder. Victor denies and when shown the body, he recognises his friend Henry Clerval, with the mark of the creature's fingers on his neck. Victor falls ill and is kept in prison until his recovery, after which he is acquitted.

Victor returns to Geneva and marries Elizabeth. He fears the creature's warning and suspects that he will be murdered on his wedding night. He sends Elizabeth away to wait for him. As he waits he hears Elizabeth scream and realises that the creature killed his bride. Victor returns home to his father, who dies of grief a short time later. Victor vows to devote the rest of his life to finding the creature and exacting his revenge.

Victor tracks the monster ever northward into the ice.

Walton tells the remainder of the story in another series of letters to his sister. Victor, already ill when the two men meet, worsens and dies shortly thereafter. When Walton returns, several days later, to the room in which the body lies, he is startled to see the creature weeping over Victor. The creature tells Walton of his immense solitude, suffering, hatred, and remorse. He asserts that now that his creator has died, he too can end his suffering. The monster then departs for the northernmost ice to die.



Frankenstein is an epistolary novel, which means it is a novel told through fictional documents, such as letters, diary entries, or newspaper clippings. It is credited to belong to both the Gothic tradition as it deals with monsters and supernatural experience but it also leans on the Romantic movements as it deals with nature and isolation as major thematics. Some even argue that Frankenstein could be seen as the first true science-fiction story.

Frankenstein has the subtitle - a modern Prometheus. Prometheus is the Greek Titan god of fire. Prometheus is known for defying the gods by stealing fire from them and giving it to humanity in the form of technology, knowledge, and more generally, civilisation. Victor Frankenstein represents technology and civilisation vs the Creature that relies on the nature of survival. Furthermore Frankenstein takes on the role of a god by trying to give the Creature life and suffers, like Prometheus, by having all he loves taken away from him.

The novel has inspired countless books, movies, plays and animations. Possibly the most epic is Boris Karloff's portrayal of the creature in James Whale's film from 1931.



## FRANKENSTEIN

This is not a horror story

Now you know the classic, welcome to Frankenstein 2023!

### ACT I

The play is set in the near future where we encounter an exchange of letters between Doctor Victoria Frankenstein and her husband, Edward. They are far apart but the exchange is warm and loving. Edward is visiting a remote society that has turned its back on civilisation. He marvels at how they manage in such primitive conditions and is appalled by the fact that they embrace the ageing process counter to all medical advice. Victoria is deeply engulfed in her research, she believes that she is on the brink of creating a new species, a human being where the cells regenerate indefinitely allowing it to live forever. Her work is cutting edge and also crosses some lines of ethics and moral responsibilities, however, she is convinced that this experiment will lead to glory, save the world and possibly her own, blind mother.

### ACT II

Victoria has proceeded with her experiment and created her new human being. She is enthralled in her work. The being is about to be birthed but the result is horrifying. Victoria has created an old woman. Signs of ageing is an abomination in society and must be shunned at all cost. Disgusted and disappointed with the outcome of all her hard work she leaves, unable to face her creation. The creature is left to fend for herself. Quickly the creature realises that society is repelled by her appearance, so she seeks refuge in nature, where she evolves and learns how to survive.

### ACT III

Victoria is in bed, sick with grief. Her mother has died unexpectedly. Edward does his best to comfort her but she is inconsolable. It appears that the creature has resurfaced and is seeking revenge on Victoria, and the creature has caused the death of her mother. Edward leaves and the creature appears, Victoria is too weak to run away and is forced to listen to the creature's story. The creature is lonely and completely rejected, she killed Victoria's mother out of desperation, in an attempt to reach the mother she never had. Victoria is horrified and condemns the creature. The creature is unfazed and asks for one thing in return for peace: For Victoria to create her a mate. Reluctantly Victoria agrees.

The date of animating the creature's mate approaches but Victoria is stalling. The creature senses trouble and threatens Victoria by reminding her that she has other loved ones still alive. Victoria destroys the creature's mate and the creature runs away, heartbroken.

Time passes and Edward and Victoria's wedding approaches. On the wedding day Edward is visited by the creature, who murders him. Victoria finds his lifeless body and swears she will hunt down the creature and only death will separate them.

At the North Pole Victoria is lying exhausted on the ice. She is found by Walton, who works in a research centre nearby. Victoria is hallucinating heavily and thinks he is Edward. She tells him that the creature is out there and to be aware. Victoria dies before help arrives.

The creature appears to say goodbye to her creator. Walton witnesses the sad scene. The creature leaves to spend her final days on the ice apart from all living creatures.

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein is written as a compilation of letters and layered narratives. As an homage to this storytelling technique, Why Not Theatre Company is creating a performance that brings together video, audio, movement and live performance.



Shelley's classic has become associated with horror and monsters, but that doesn't quite do Shelley's tale justice. In her story, the prospect of creating life artificially and the consequences of rejection from society do indeed result in a tragic outcome, but the essence is about loneliness, dangerous knowledge and ambition. This is at the core of *Frankenstein* 2023.



## WHAT IS A MONSTER?

Rejuvenation, youth worship and living forever

Frankenstein deals with many themes such as dangerous knowledge/unlimited science, nature and the sublime, isolation and dehumanisation, the importance of family and the maddening power of revenge.

However, with Tanja Mastilo's very deliberate dramaturgical choice to swap the protagonists' genders we find that the relationship between the creature and Doctor Frankenstein opens up some new and highly topical thematic questions. So, let's dive down into one of the more controversial themes: the subject of ageing as a socially unacceptable factor.

The failed experiment, the creature, is an old woman in a world where ageing is no longer acceptable. This could seem like a far-out notion or a science-fiction plot, but is it? Take a closer look at how most advertising, movies, social media, music and even sectors of the health industry chose to portray the ageing process, in particular in regards to the ageing of women. We are being told over and over again that youth equates strength, vitality, success and fame and that age or ageing is something to be avoided and somehow "cured".

Ageing is the accumulation of damage to macromolecules, cells, tissues and organs in and on the body and when this damage no longer can be tolerated by the organism, finally it leads to death. So, can we consider that the pursuit of younger looks ultimately is an attempt to deny or defy death itself?

The dream of eternal youth is of course nothing new. As soon as human beings became conscious of their own mortality they probably sought ways to preserve life, be it through relying on the benevolence of fickle gods or making sacrifices to icons of nature. The quest for rejuvenation became refined with the emergence of alchemy, traditions that spanned from China to Europe (dating back to around 200 AD) and involved rituals, transformation of materials, astrology and philosophy. The alchemists were looking for the Philosophers' Stone, a mythic alchemical substance that could prolong life and restore youth. The medical profession took over the immortality pursuit from the alchemists and their early experiments included ideas we would consider as far-fetched, such as grafting monkey's testicles onto the bodies of working men or ingesting sheep's foetuses. As the medical profession advanced preservation and extension of life shifted into focus areas such as medication, diet and surgery.

And the worship of youthful looks has accelerated rapidly. One explanation can be the expansion of the internet and the subsequent reliance on visual exchange due to the need to be present online. If our existence has extended to a life online where exchanges happen rapidly and (our posts are judged in a matter of seconds) naturally aesthetics will play an increasingly important part in our communication. And currently there is a lot of money to be made in an aesthetic that claims that: Young is Beautiful.

Recently Harpers Bazaar asked 41 female celebrities if they had used cosmetic surgery. Their ages ranged from 84 years old, actress and activist Jane Fonda, to 24, actress Ariel Winter. Each one admitted to having some form of procedure from "A little bit of Botox," influencer Kim Kardashian, to "a few cosmetic procedures, including breast implants, a brow lift, and eyelid surgery", singer Dolly Parton. These are all women who are in the public eye and are under constant scrutiny. The keyboard warriors are more than happy to point out any sign of weakness in order to get clicks or hits, so it's not hard to imagine succumbing to a bit of chemical or surgical assistance in order to stay in the game and free from being shamed for being your age.

However, the striving for younger looks does not only affect celebrities and there are multiple industries making fortunes on our need to defy those dreaded signs of ageing. A study from 2019 shows that in Denmark alone 220.000 women were considering a breast operation.

You can find the cosmetic industry will offer endless tubs of wrinkle creams and magical cover sticks, the fitness industry with programs that re-sculpt your body in 21 days, the cosmetic surgery industry that provides everything from lip-fillers to genital reshaping, and the superfood and supplement industry that offer

you powders and tonics from exotic regions that feed your system to give you that inner, youthful glow. In addition to all this there is a new youth seeking industry that is making waves: the Longevity technology. This is where the future market in anti-ageing lies and the tech billionaires such as Mark Zuckerberg, Peter Thiel and Jeff Bezos are already involved, investing in companies such as Altos Labs. According to a recent article in Forbes Magazine \$4.1 billion has been invested in the field of rejuvenation tech. This is where biotechnology is used to prolong life by among other things altering the development of human cells in order to prevent them from ageing. CEO and Founder of Longevity.Technology, Phil Newman envisions the future in Forbes:

*"I'm confident that we'll see public health bodies like the FDA or the UK NHS approving longevity therapeutics within 7 years that either stop or reverse age-related decline; hopefully sooner, the burden on individuals, families and healthcare systems is increasing every year."*

Seemingly the project comes across as altruistic. It can save millions of people from going through the sicknesses, pain and the general deterioration that comes with the ageing process. It can protect health services that are overburdened in many countries and allow people to live full and rich lives, throughout their lives. This is amazing. But the big question is: Who will benefit from this technology? It is not free to produce and will not be free to consume, so will it create a class division of the "ever-youngs" and the "ageing"? And what other consequences follow if a population starts to live much longer. Will the "ever-youngs" need jobs and housing that could go to the next generations? Do we have the natural resources to feed more and more people if they live longer and longer? These are uncomfortable questions.

Frankenstein's creature may very well be a fictional character forged in a meeting between the creative minds of two women across almost two centuries, but her reality seems much closer to ours than it appears.

In Frankenstein Why Not Theatre Company will be exploring the consequences of extreme worship of youth and beauty, but also of the qualities of ageing and how it reminds us of our most valuable asset: Our humanity.



## Excerpts from FRANKENSTEIN by Tanja Mastilo

### ACT 3, SCENE II

*Victoria is still in bed, asleep. The Creature appears from the corner. She stands next to Victoria and silently observes her for a while and then reaches and touches her hair. Victoria opens her eyes and she freezes.*

CREATURE: He cares for you so much.

*Victoria is paralysed, just silently observing the Creature. They stay in silence for a while and then Victoria jumps and almost falls. She is still weak.*

VICTORIA: How did you find me? How did you get in?

CREATURE: Oh, I've been here many times before. I enjoy watching you. And him.

*Victoria is disgusted. She is weak and she slowly sits down back on the bed.*

VICTORIA: You pathetic piece of...

CREATURE: Please calm down. There's no need for that. I hoped we could be civil.

VICTORIA: Civil? A murderer wants to be civil!

CREATURE (*smiles*): Let us entertain that idea for a while.

VICTORIA: I'm not entertaining anything with you. Get out of my house before I call the police.

CREATURE: Yes, we both know you're not going to do that, so let's cut to the chase, doctor Frankenstein. I came here to talk to you.

VICTORIA: I don't care.

CREATURE: I'd like you to listen to what I have to say. Even the guilty are allowed to speak, don't you agree?

VICTORIA: Why would I listen to a word you have to say? Either just kill me or let me kill you and let's get this over with.

CREATURE: You think I want to kill you? Why?

VICTORIA: Why!? Why!? Are you seriously asking me that?

CREATURE: Please calm down.

VICTORIA: You already did kill me. You heartless monster, you...

CREATURE: Is that how you see me?

VICTORIA: That is who you are.

CREATURE: But you created me. Why did you create a heartless monster?

VICTORIA: I'm not getting into this with you.

CREATURE: You created me, did you not?

VICTORIA (*shouts*): You think I can forget that for a second? It's the first thing on my mind when I wake up and the last before I fall asleep - if I even manage to fall asleep at all anymore. Had I known...

CREATURE: Had you known what? That I won't be exactly what you wanted me to be?

VICTORIA: That you'd be a murderous psychopath...

CREATURE: Oh, is that what I am? Is that what you created me to be?

VICTORIA: Of course not...

CREATURE: Then who's to blame?

VICTORIA: You seem to be intelligent enough, so I assume that I don't have to explain the concept of murder to you. Usually, the one pulling the trigger is the one who gets the blame.

CREATURE (*smiles, and then turns and starts walking around, observing the room*): I became very good at observing things, you see. When you so heartlessly abandoned me and cowardly ran away when you saw me for the first time, I was left alone. Helpless. Desperate.

Did you even know that? Did you ever wonder what happened to me? How I was doing?

You created me, and then deserted me, in this world... full of beauty. Full of perfection.

I had to teach myself how to walk. Talk. Eat. Live.

Everyone I came across was so young and flawless, but they all reacted violently when they laid their eyes on... me. Some just ran... others... others tried to hurt me. I was spat on by random women more times than I care to remember.

VICTORIA: Why are you telling me this?

CREATURE: I guess I'm looking for some answers. What have I ever done to them to cause all that hatred?

## Questions for FRANKENSTEIN

Why do you think Doctor Frankenstein created the creature?

Is it ethical to create life artificially?

What if it can save lives?

What is the relationship between Doctor Frankenstein and the creature?

Is Doctor Frankenstein responsible for the creature?

Why do you think the creature became a murderer?

Was it inevitable?

Can the Creature be considered a sentient being?

Does she have human rights?

How do you feel about ageing?

Should we try to stay young as long as possible?

How should we go about it?

Why do you think that new tech businesses have a growing interest in anti-aging?

Are there any limits to what science should do to extend life?



## Why Not Theatre Company

Why Not Theatre Company is a professional theatre association founded in 2011. Today it is one of Denmark's leading professional, English-speaking theatres. Our mission is to tell captivating stories that are relevant, engaging and inspiring. We delve into texts of high literary quality and tell thoughtful stories that enthrall our audiences. We play exclusively in English in order to reach a wide audience with an interest in international performing arts. Why Not Theatre Company is known for successful performances such as *Vita and Virginia* at CaféTeatret ( 2011) and Teatret ved Sorte Hest (2016) , *Wit* at Bådteatret (2014), for which CPHCulture named Sue Hansen-Styles "Best Female Lead of the year" and the production 'Best Foreign Theatre of the Year', *Secrets* at Halm-lager, and in recent years *The Art of Falling*, *Mairead*, *Dance with Me*, *The Cheyenne are Leaving* ( for which our in-house writer Tanja Mastilo won the Reumert award for "Playwright of the Year" 2021) and *Happy Days* - all performed at Teatret ved Sorte Hest.

### Cast and crew of FRANKENSTEIN

The creature: Sue Hansen-Styles  
Doctor Frankenstein: Jessica O'Hara-Baker  
Edward: Nathan Meister

Written by: Tanja Mastilo  
Directed & dramaturgy by: Nina Larissa Bassett  
Music design: Barry Wesil  
Set & Lighting design: Peter Rasmussen  
Technician: Sofus Sean Bassett and Angelique Giroir  
Produced by: Why Not Theatre Company

FRANKENSTEIN photos by Robin Skjoldborg  
Makeup by Dajo Vande Putte

### Facts

Dates: January 6 - 28th @ Teatret ved Sorte Hest, Vesterbrogade 150, 1620 København V.  
Times: Mon- Fri 8 pm; Sat. 5 pm  
Duration: Approximately 1 hour 30 minutes without interval

Tickets: [Frankenstein - Teaterbilletter.dk](https://www.frankensteintheater.dk)

This production is generously supported by: William Demant Fonden, Knud Højgaards Fond, Danske Dramatikeres Produktionspulje, Konsul Georg Jorck, Hustru Emma Jorck's Fond, I.F.Lemvig Müller and Beckett Fonden.

## References

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<https://venturebeat.com/entrepreneur/billionaire-peter-thiel-may-want-to-live-forever/>

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### Movies:

Mary Shelley (2017)

Director: Haifaa Al-Mansour

Writer: Emma Jensen/ Haifaa Al-Mansour

Frankenstein: Birth of a monster (2003)

BBC

Director: Mary Downes

Writer: David Nokes

### Radio:

In Our Time/ BBC

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m00051n6>