

# READER'S GUIDE



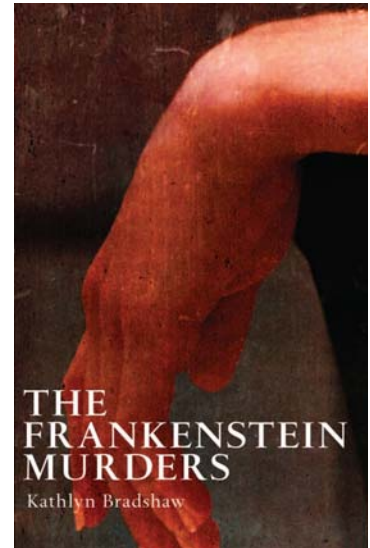
## *The Frankenstein Murders* by Kathlyn Bradshaw

*Cormorant Books Inc.*

### INTRODUCING *The Frankenstein Murders*

Detective Edward Freame is hired to investigate the strange circumstances surrounding the murder of Henry Clerval only to be tormented by the writings of the man who was originally tried for the crime – Dr. Victor Frankenstein.

Following the trail left by the late Dr. Frankenstein, Freame scours the European countryside, trying to find the clues that will lead him to the truth behind the murder of Clerval and its connection to the deaths of William Frankenstein and Elizabeth Lavenza, and the disputed existence of a monster birthed by Frankenstein himself. With the doctor's dictated journals as the only account of the murder, Edward must explore the undocumented life of Victor Frankenstein, collecting interviews and observations from a revolving door of Victorian aristocrats and caddish ne'er-do-wells that knew Victor during his lifetime. In the process he reveals Dr. Frankenstein's inner triumphs, deepest fears, and the nature of his horrific experiments.



Throughout his investigations, Freame becomes attuned to the mind of Dr. Frankenstein, finding he has more in common with the scientist than he would like to admit. Renowned for his rational mind, Freame is torn between believing in Frankenstein's story of an inhuman monster brought to life from dead flesh, and accepting Dr. Frankenstein's story as an elaborate cover-up to hide something even more sinister.

### IMPORTANT THEMES

#### *Secrecy*

The entire novel is based upon silence and secrecy, forcing Detective Freame to constantly push his way through the web of secrets he encounters. The commissioning letter from George Clerval to Freame insists on silence, as do many of the characters Freame interviews throughout the novel. Everyone is worried about releasing information, but all they do is mask their own ignorance of the truth.

#### *Family*

Family is the one constant source of safety for the characters in the novel. George Clerval is the one who hires Freame to bring justice to the murder of his son. Always a source of strength and consistency, Mr. and Mrs. Clerval insist on the safety of family and encourage Henry to help Victor with his problems. The same strength and consistency is evident in Alphonse Frankenstein and his protection of his son Victor. Even when he is convicted of murder and appears to have become a wandering recluse, Mr. Frankenstein fights for and saves his son. The only person in the novel who does not see family as safe or comforting is Freame himself, who ignores his duty as a father until it is too late.

#### *Violence*

Violence is not only a constant threat in the novel, it is also the driving force of the mystery behind it all. Again and again, Freame questions the nature of a creature that could show such inhuman violence against another human being. It is his utter astonishment at this violence that allows Freame – and the reader – to believe in Frankenstein's tale of a monster that embodies death itself.

### *Trust*

This falls hand-in-hand with the theme of secrecy. Along with the fear of revealing one's secrets goes the question of who to trust with those secrets. As Freame discovers, being hired as George Clerval's personal detective does not mean gaining the trust of Clerval in the slightest. This lack of trust becomes the downfall and ruination of several characters, from the secretive Victor, to his abused and deranged assistant, and even to Captain Walton, all of who are affected by either placing their trust in no one, or placing their whole-hearted trust in the wrong person.

## Q&A WITH KATHLYN BRADSHAW

**1. There must have been a lot of detailed research in writing a book that so closely mimics the writing of Mary Shelley. Could you explain the process you went through in researching the characters and settings for the novel?**

Not surprisingly, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was my primary resource. I read and reread that novel numerous times — in whole or in part — at the same time taking many, many notes. While I never had any illusions that I could write like Mary Shelley, my goal was to create a story that connected as much as possible to *Frankenstein*.

In terms of research, a few of the characters in my book do appear in Shelley's novel: Victor Frankenstein's professors at university, Henry Clerval's father, and Ernest Frankenstein all have (modest) roles in her narrative. I gave them all moderately bigger parts, building on whatever information I could glean from *Frankenstein*. The rest of the characters in my book were my creation.

The settings were another matter. Mary Shelley definitely had the advantage over me in that she actually had seen most of the places visited by Victor Frankenstein, and at a similar time in history. I was writing from a twenty-first century perspective about places I had never been. Had I kept track of the historical and travel books and websites I consulted to attempt this task, the list would be lengthy.

**2. The epistolary novel is always an interesting medium because it constantly calls into question the reliability of the narrator. Was there a conscious interplay involved in choosing what Edward would include in his letters? In your imagination, was there anything that Edward chose to leave out?**

Certainly, I had to pay a great deal of attention to what was included in Edward's journal entries or letters. While it is usually expected that someone will read a letter, I also imagined that Edward was very aware that at some point someone else would read his journal. Indeed, he had the journal of Captain Robert Walton as an example. In that way, Edward's journal could be looked at not simply as a place to record his own observations and conjectures, but also as a kind of report to Sir Arthur Gray and George Clerval. As a result, Edward likely leaves out details that he deems not of interest to his audience. That being said, there were also moments when Edward simply used the journal as a place to air his thoughts.

**3. What sort of struggles did you have to deal with in writing this book? Was there a learning curve in writing your first novel?**

To write a novel of this length and maintain coherence and continuity, while at the same time building the story was a big challenge. Technically, I had written a novel — of sorts — before this book. My first attempt at book writing, however, had little merit beyond giving me the opportunity to practise developing a story of such length and detail.

**4. How does Edward’s relationship with his own son influence his investigations of Victor?**

I am not certain Edward’s relationship with his own son plays any role at all. Only after Edward has removed himself from England and involved himself more deeply in the Frankenstein family does he seem to consider his own.

**5. Were there any specific books or movies, besides *Frankenstein*, that inspired you while writing the novel?**

Anything written at or around the time that Mary Shelley was writing was definitely helpful, but any stories with a gothic and/or mysterious setting were also useful, for instance, classics such as *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, and stories by Edgar Allan Poe and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Movie and television adaptations of stories such as these helped in two ways. First, they provided visual and aural inspiration, and second, they too were derived from someone else’s novel.

**6. Where did you get the idea to re-imagine the story of *Frankenstein*?**

Basically I started out with a question: “What if everything is not what it seems?” At the end of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Ernest Frankenstein is the sole surviving member of his family, and Mr. Clerval has lost his son. What would have been their reaction to Victor’s story? What I wanted to do was to consider Victor Frankenstein’s story from a different perspective. When Captain Robert Walton meets Victor, the captain seems to take everything Victor says at face value. I wanted to present the responses of characters either unconnected to or at least less enamoured of Victor and, therefore, more critical of his story.

**7. Freame is forever questioning his own conclusions in the novel. Is this meant to reflect the reader’s own uncertainties about the murderer, or is it meant to enhance them?**

Edward Freame undertakes the investigation of the murder of Henry Clerval alone. While Edward has an assistant with him, Mutt is more of a silent partner, bodyguard, and sometimes errand boy. In short, Edward has no Watson to play to his Sherlock Holmes. The whole book is based on uncertainties about the murders and also the murderer, and Edward’s questioning of his own conclusions is a forum for both he, and hopefully the reader, to consider or reconsider what has gone on.

**8. Out of all of the characters in the book, who has changed you the most?**

I suspect that the act of writing a book in itself causes change. If I could select the character that has most changed me, I would choose William Moutton (Mutt). I would like to have some of his characteristics — the strong, silent type, with a hint of mystery.

**9. As the novel progresses, similarities between Edward and Victor start to come to the fore. Is this from an obsession on Edward’s part to understand Victor, or is it the reason that Edward is able to understand Victor so well in the first place?**

Most likely it is a bit of both. Initial recognition of, or attraction to, Victor Frankenstein would have helped motivate Edward Freame to accept the investigation. An increasing fascination and identification with Victor convinces Edward to persevere in a seemingly impossible task.



**ABOUT KATHLYN**

Kathlyn has lived her entire life in the Ottawa region, where the gothic architecture of parliament has become embedded in her subconscious. She presently works at the Algonquin College School of Advanced Technology as a professor of English. This is her first novel.

## 10. What do you hope readers will take from this novel?

On a basic level, I would hope that readers would get some enjoyment out of the book. If readers also took away a new perspective — that they, unlike Captain Walton, do not take the story at face value — that would be good too.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Symbols of death, decay, and isolation are abundant in the novel. Identify a few and discuss their importance.
2. Kathlyn Bradshaw wants the reader to question the narrative of *Frankenstein*, to look beyond the words on the page and find the story within. In writing her story in epistolary form, does she create an unreliable narrator herself?
3. How must Freame contend with the issue of identity throughout the novel?
4. What is the turning point in Freame's investigation?
5. What does Frankenstein's monster truly represent in the novel?
6. There is a mirroring effect in the novel between Victor and the monster and Freame and Mutt. How are the two pairs different and how are they similar?
7. How is Victor's mother a key component of his adult psychology?
8. Discuss the role of women in the book. What do they represent to the more abundant male characters?
9. How is Freame, as a widower, affected by his investigation? Does his child alter his psychological ability to conduct the investigation properly?
10. Why is Freame able to understand Victor better than anyone else?