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CREATURE, AN AUTOPSY
A solo performance by Bruna Longo

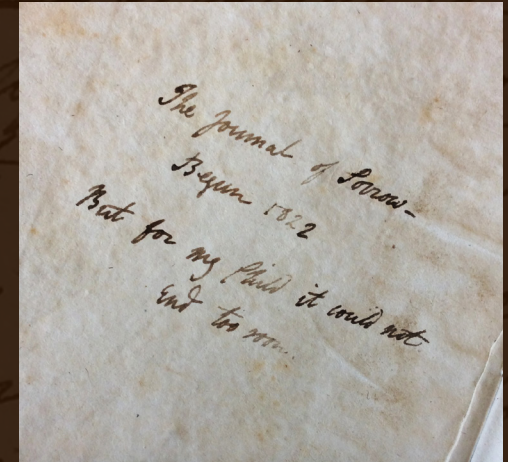


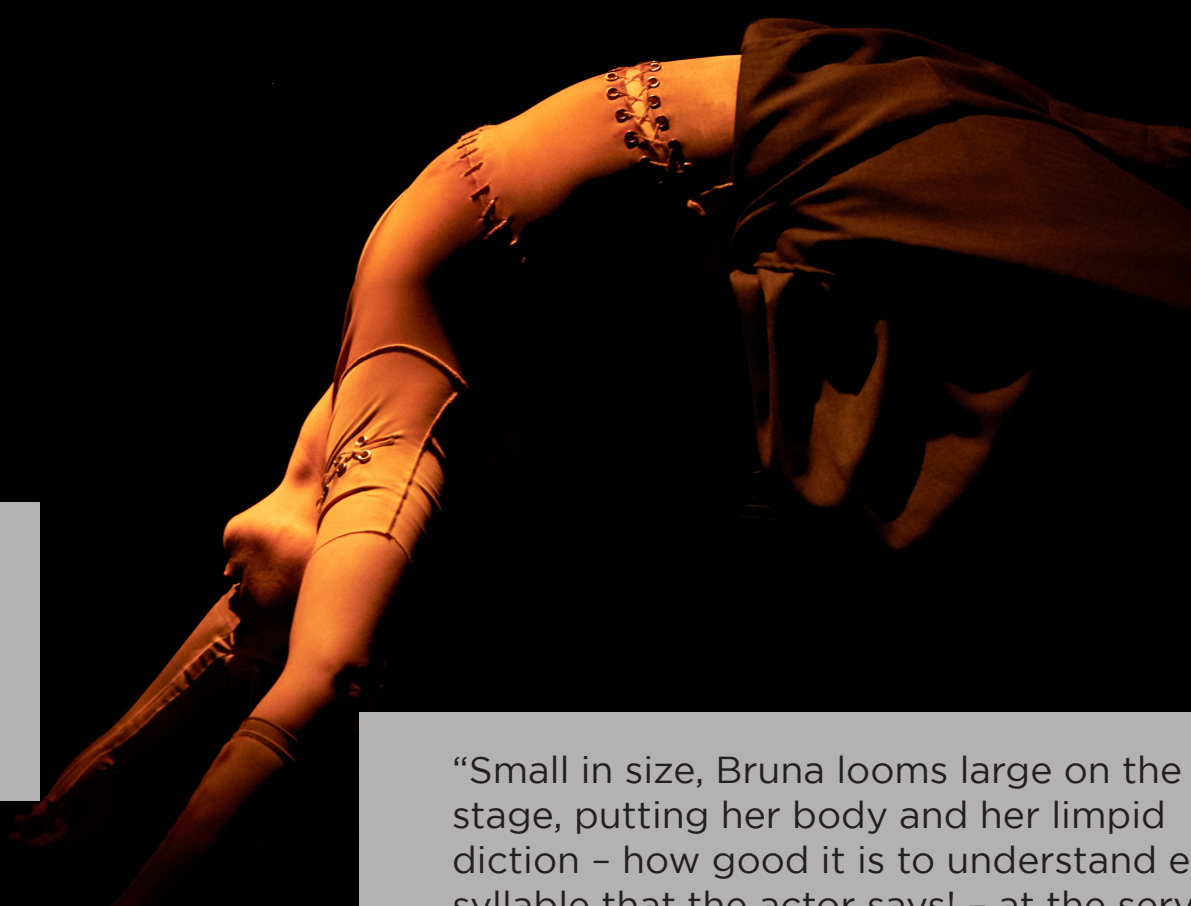
A work of friction between the romance *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*, and the life of its author Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin (Shelley).

THE AUTOPSY OF A BOOK, OF AN AUTHOR AND OF A CHARACTER

Creature, An Autopsy is a solo performance by Bruna Longo, a work of friction between the novel Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus, and the life of its author Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin (Shelley). After a successful debut run in São Paulo, Brazil, it was streamed online during the covid-19 pandemic.

The result of two years of research, the performance was originally envisioned as a stage adaptation of Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus, from the Creature's point of view. But the paths of research are often mysterious: sometimes something is sought and something else finds us. In trying to speak about the Creature, every action, every word, every pain met Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin (later Shelley), the young woman who had written the book. Her story imposed itself through the narrative that she wrote.





“Bruna Longo is among the actresses who shone in 2019.”

Kyra Piscitelli, Aplauso Brasil Award.
November 2019

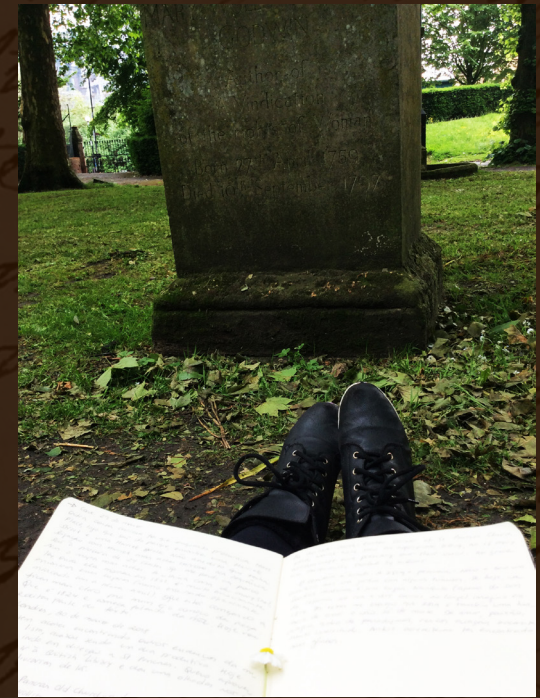
“Skillful interpreter, she builds the trajectory of an entire existence without using words.”

Amilton de Azevedo,
Blog Ruína Acesa.
September 2019

“Small in size, Bruna looms large on the stage, putting her body and her limpid diction – how good it is to understand each syllable that the actor says! – at the service of her characters..”

José Cetra, Blog Palco Paulistano.
September 2019

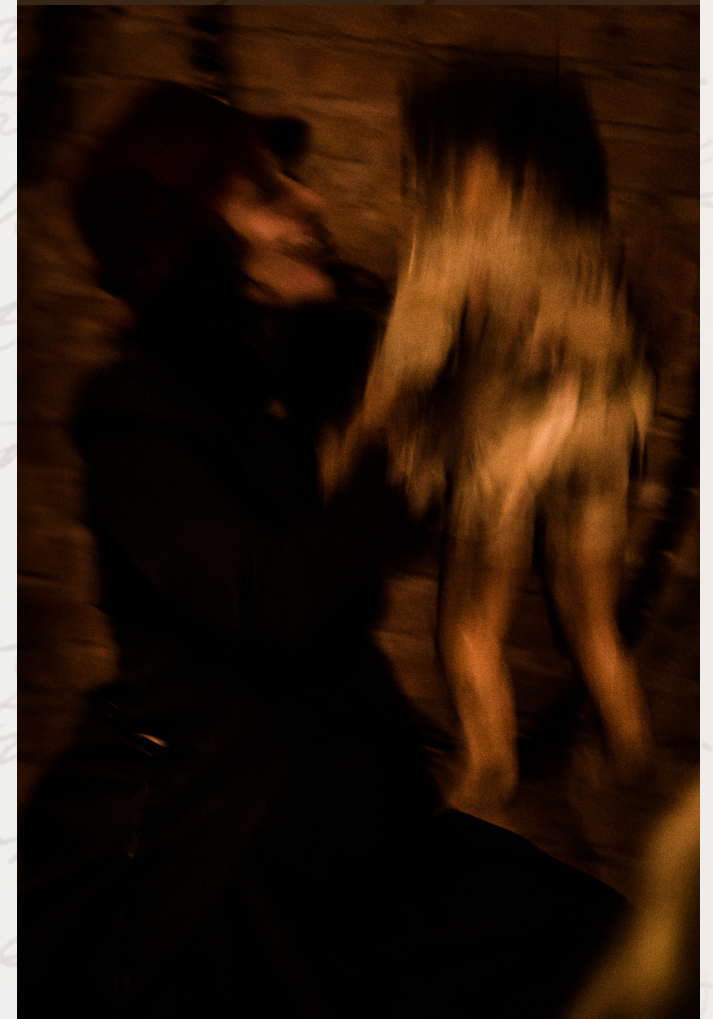
In June 2018, amid rehearsals, Bruna Longo is invited by the Bodleian Libraries at the University of Oxford to have full access to Mary Shelley's diaries, letters, and original manuscripts, reserved usually only to academics linked to large research centers. The visit to England also took her to all the places relevant to Mary Shelley's life in London and Bournemouth (where the family grave is located). In addition, she had access to other documents held at the British Library. Returning to the rehearsal room, the actress arrives at the final version of the physical dramaturgy, developed based on two narratives: that of the novel and that of the life of Mary Shelley, seeking the points of friction. Two years after the beginning of the research, the performance that was never intended to be a biography of the Creature or the author, became an autopsy of a novel and a character, revealing the entrails, arteries, musculature of personal and universal pains.



CREATOR

The romance *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*, published in 1818, is considered the first work of science fiction and one of the most famous books ever written. The Creature, whom we erroneously call by the name of its creator, is fixed in our imagination thanks to the performance by Boris Karloff in the famous movie released in 1931. We use *Frankenstein* as an expression for everything that is created from disconnected or non-harmonious parts, and when we talk about man's manipulation of life "trying to play the role of god." It is curious to note, however, that most people have never read the book. Even less is known about its authorship. Many are surprised to discover that it was written by a woman, and more than that: an 18-year-old girl.

***"How I, then a young girl, came to think of,
and to dilate upon, so very hideous an idea?"
(Mary Shelley in the introduction to the 1831 edition
of *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*.)***



Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin (Shelley) was born in London on August 30, 1797, the daughter of two of the most celebrated intellectuals of her time. Mary Wollstonecraft, her mother, is considered one of the forerunners of feminism, having written, among other books, "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman", still studied today in universities around the world. William Godwin, her father, was a famous political philosopher and author of "Enquiry Concerning Political Justice". Both controversial figures and whose way of life caused amazement in English society. Wollstonecraft, before meeting Godwin, had had an affair with the American Gilbert Imlay and an illegitimate daughter, Fanny. She and Godwin lived in separate houses and were only married when she found out she was pregnant with Mary. Unfortunately, Wollstonecraft died 10 days after giving birth to her daughter, as a result of puerperal fever. Godwin remarried, this time to Mary Jane Clairmont, a widow with two children: Charles and Claire, and raised Fanny as his daughter.

Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin grew up in a home filled with intellectual discussion and frequented by intellectuals and writers, admirers of her parents. An avid reader since childhood, she used to visit her mother's grave in the cemetery adjacent to Saint Pancras Church, where she spent afternoons studying the vast library they owned. One of Godwin's admirers to visit the family was Percy Bysshe Shelley, then a poet famous only for having been expelled from Oxford University. Covert encounters with Shelley, whom she took to Wollstonecraft's grave, would trigger the events that would lead Mary to flee her home and eventually write her first novel.



AND CREATURE

Frankenstein's origin story is famous and much has been written about it. Books, plays, movies. Shelley, Mary, and Claire leave England for the first time in 1814. Mary was probably already pregnant with her first child. Eventually, Claire becomes the lover of the famous poet Lord Byron and in 1816 the trio sets out to meet him in a village on the shores of Lake Geneva. The year 1816 was known as the year without summer. A year earlier, eruptions on Mount Tambora, India, affected the climate across Europe. Confined inside Villa Diodati, Mary, Shelley, Claire, Byron, and his personal physician John Polidori read poetry, discuss science and the origin of life, and tell macabre stories around the fireplace. Boredom brings Byron the idea for a challenge: each one should write a ghost story. The famous poets soon abandon their work, but Mary and Polidori persist. And it was then, in a sleepless night, as Mary herself described in the introduction to the 1831 edition, that the idea arises: "I saw—with shut eyes, but acute mental vision, —I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half vital motion. (...) His success would terrify the artist; he would rush away from his odious handywork, horror-stricken". Mary immediately begins to work and writes the first sentence that would become the book's most famous: "It was on a dreary night of November, that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils."



DANCING LONELINESS

***“Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay
To mould me man?
Did I solicit thee
From darkness to promote me?”
(John Milton, Paradise Lost, X, 743-5)***

Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus, can be read as a science fiction novel, as a fantastic story, as a metaphor for human hybrids. But the philosophical aspects of the work, especially in the voice of the Creature, point to even more human and universal themes. The Creature's tragedy is the tragedy of loneliness. As Adam, the only one of its kind, without any connection to its fellow man, it is condemned to, having only humans as a reference, become an outcast even to itself. But unlike the Christian myth, its only request to its creator, a companion, is denied. The Creature's loneliness is echoed in the loneliness of Mary, who writes in her diary when she hears of Byron's death in 1824 – “(...) feeling myself as the last relic of a beloved race, my companions extinct before me”. Mary by the age of 27 had already lost not only three of her children but also Shelley, Fanny, Harriet (Shelley's official wife), and John Polidori. All in the short period between 1814 and 1822. It is no surprise that she wrote to a friend: “I, you know, am an old woman. I am now on the eve of completing my five and twentieth year.”





**To me, life and death appeared to be inseparable bounds.
(Victor Frankenstein,
in *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*,
1818, Volume I, Chapter III)**

Beyond loneliness, one of Frankenstein's recurrent themes is the Creature's quest for understanding not only its origin but its identity. Both the Creature and Mary are the result of births intrinsically linked to death. The Creature, formed from pieces of bodies stolen from cemeteries, is like a feral child abandoned at birth and forced to raise itself. Mary, for her part, carried a sense of responsibility for her mother's death, evident in her journals, and spent much of her life defined by those around her. Famous surnames she carried, first as the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, later as the companion of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Just as the anonymous Creature is still erroneously called by its creator's name today, Mary suffered the consequences of the anonymous publication of her first great work: it was first believed to have been written by Shelley (since it was dedicated to one of his masters, Godwin, Mary's father) and even today some theories question its authorship. Mary is aware in writing the book of the weight of choosing not to baptize the creature: "This nameless way of naming the unnamable is rather good" she writes in her journal. "Who was I? What was I?" is the question that haunts the Creature and that haunts us all.

PATHS OF CREATION

To start work on the dramaturgy, a framework was defined, inspired by the poem that Percy Shelley wrote about the death of his son with Mary, William:

***We look on the past, & stare aghast
On the ghosts with aspects strange & wild
We two yet stand, in a lonely land,
Like tombs to mark the memory of joys & griefs...***

Death, present in Mary's life from birth, would be the "marker" for the dramaturgy. Two parallel narratives were chosen and turned into physical scores: that of the book, with the actions of Victor Frankenstein and its Creature, and that of Mary's biography. The narratives were then "stitched" together using the points of friction found between life and romance. In the first act, Mary and Victor share the same body and actions – from the collection of materials in the cemetery to the making of the Creature as a parallel to the inspirations that triggered the themes of the book. In the second act, the Creature and the book are born and we follow Mary-Creature exploring the sensations of this violent postpartum and the world around. The death of her beloved son William shortly after the book's publication finds a chilling parallel to the Creature's first murder in an act of revenge against its creator. Mary had named Victor Frankenstein's brother after her father William, not knowing that tragedy was to come to her own son, a victim of malaria at the age of 3 years.



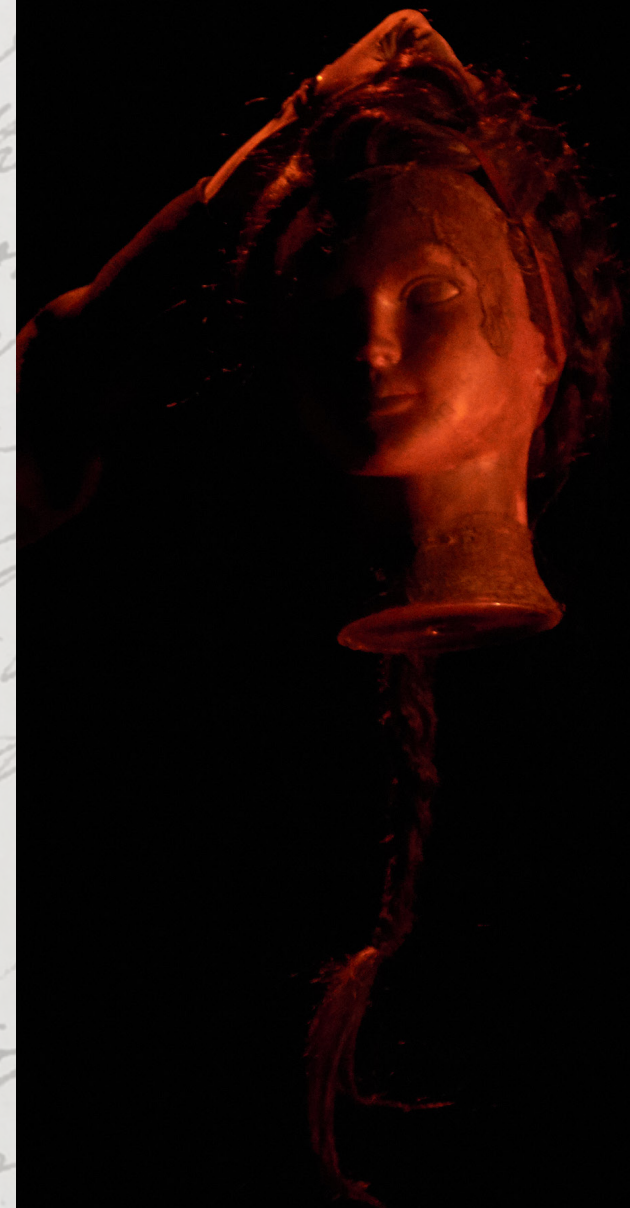
Each death in Mary's life is a piece of the great corpse that is reanimated. In the year she wrote the book, two suicides: her sister Fanny drinks laudanum at age 22, and Harriet, Shelley's wife and mother of their two children, throws herself into the Serpentine Lake in London. The two deaths bear the specter of her mother's suicide attempts before her birth: the same methods, although both times she was saved. Years later Mary Wollstonecraft wrote "that she had only one lament. That when the bitterness of death was past, she was **inhumanly brought back to life and misery**".

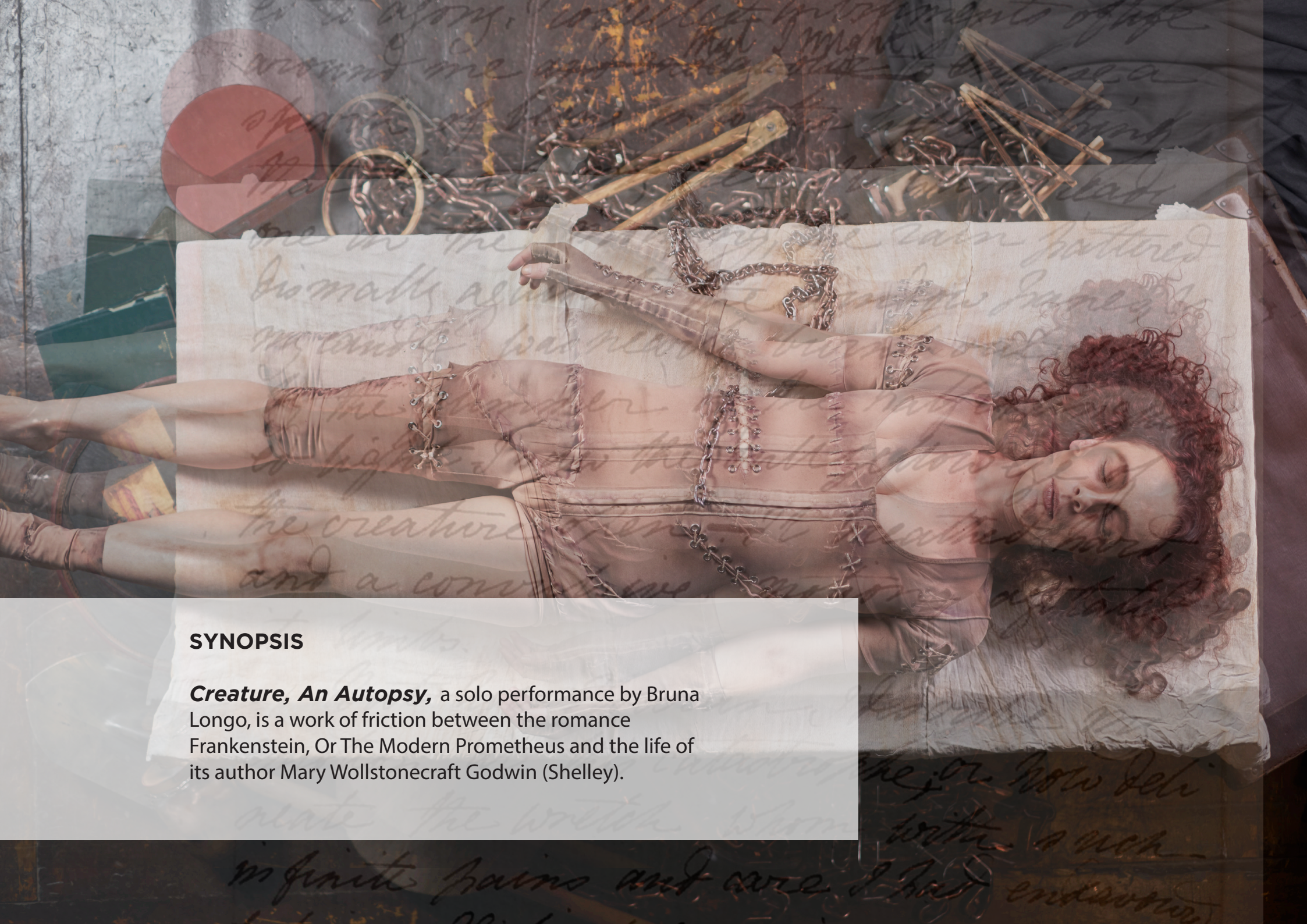
Texts were added to the physical scores, having as sources the countless letters and journals written by Mary, in addition to material from the book: a long and detailed curatorship was carried out to find what could, concisely and essentially, complement the images created by giving the context to the viewer without didacticism. The creation of the Creature character does not seek to remain faithful to the novel as far as its physical description is concerned, nor does it carry any reference to the classic image of the green monster with screws around its neck. The main inspiration was the phenomenon known as "feral children", abandoned by their parents at birth and raised by animals or alone, without any human cultural or behavioral reference. One feral child, in particular, served for the study of movement composition: Jenny, an American girl discovered in the 1950s and extensively documented by specialists in child development.



Both the dramaturgy, which intertwines and juxtaposes the novel *Frankenstein* with events from the life of its author, Mary Shelley, and the aesthetic elements that make up the set design, lighting, costumes, and music, were researched theoretically and on-site in London, where Mary Shelley was born and lived. Aesthetically, the performance is greatly influenced by the steampunk movement which combines historical elements with anachronistic technological features. The scenography is inspired by English factories and hospitals from the Victorian era, with their exposed pipes and the advent of electric light. Two metallic structures limit the scenic area, as well as two long chains forming a corridor. Victorian surgical objects are part of the scenic design. The light design, created by Rodrigo Silbat, is also inspired by the temperature of Victorian lighting and uses filament lamps added to the scenography. The soundtrack, created by actress Bruna Longo, was conceived using fragments of industrial noises and organic sounds (breathing, voices, etc.). Kleber Montanheiro created the costumes: Mary Shelley in a dress and coat that conform to the silhouette of her time, over the patched and reconstructed surgical leotard that covers the Creature's body.

The entire research, rehearsals process and first run of the performance were carried out without public subsidies or sponsorship, and had the collaboration of several partners: Lino Colantoni (soundtrack editing), Mateus Monteiro (voice acting), Victor Grizzo (art direction), Anna Toledo (singing), Kleber Montanheiro (costumes) and Rodrigo Silbat (light design), in addition to the two general assistants who accompanied the actress in the last months of rehearsals: Giovanna Borges and Letícia Esposito. Friends who offered their time and talents to make this work possible.





SYNOPSIS

Creature, An Autopsy, a solo performance by Bruna Longo, is a work of friction between the romance Frankenstein, Or The Modern Prometheus and the life of its author Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin (Shelley).

CAST AND CREW

Conceived and devised by **Bruna Longo**

Assistants: **Giovanna Borges e Letícia Esposito**

Dramaturgy: **Bruna Longo**

Set design: **Bruna Longo e Kleber Montanheiro**

Set Construction: **Evas Carreteiro e Nani Brisque**

Costumes: **Kleber Montanheiro**

Objects: **Bruna Longo with the collaboration of Larissa Matheus**

Lighting design: **Rodrigo Silbat**

Sound Operation: **Giovanna Borges / Leticia Esposito**

Light Operation: **Rodrigo Silbat / Giovanna Borges.**

Soundtrack: **Bruna Longo**

Photos: **Danilo Apoena**

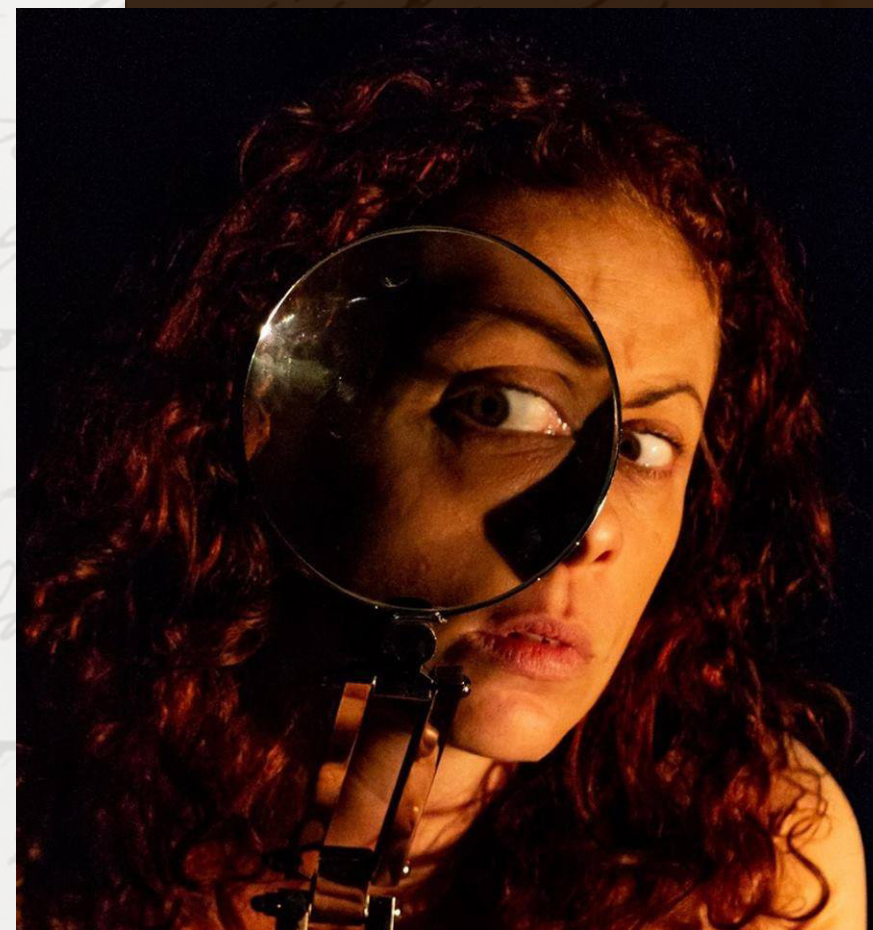
Graphic Design: **Kleber Montanheiro**

Artistic collaborators: **Larissa Matheus (dramaturgical provocations), Lino Colantoni (soundtrack editing), Mateus Monteiro (voice acting), Victor Grizzo (art direction) and Anna Toledo (singing).**



PERFORMANCE HISTORY

Creature, An Autopsy premiered in April 2019 and was performed at Espaço Elevador (SP, Brazil), Teatro Irene Ravache (SP, Brazil), Teatro de Container Mungunzá (SP), Nucleo Educatho (São Francisco Xavier / SP, Brazil), Escola Nacional de Teatro (Santo André / SP, Brazil), Oficina Cultural Oswald de Andrade (SP, Brazil) and Espaço Cia. da Revista (SP, Brazil). It was nominated for the Aplauso Brasil 2019 Award in the Best Actress category. In 2021, during the covid-19 pandemic, an audiovisual version was streamed in the social networks of four theaters in the city of São Paulo (Teatro Cilda Becker, Arthur Azevedo, João Caetano and Alfredo Mesquita) as part of the Project Anonymous Was Often a Woman, conceived by Bruna Longo and awarded the 11th Edition of the Zé Renato Award for Theater in the City of São Paulo. In 2022, it was performed in the festival Mostra Solo Mulheres, at Teatro de Container (São Paulo), Festival Monofest22, organized by Tyiatro Medresesi in Sirince, Turkey, and in the Mindelo International Theater Festival – Mindelact, in Cape Verde. In 2023, it will return to São Paulo in public theaters as part of the project Memento Mori . Memento Vivere – Or We need to talk about death, awarded by the 16th edition of the Zé Renato Award for Theater in the City of São Paulo.



BRUNA LONGO

Actress and playwright. MA in Movement Studies from the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama – University of London, United Kingdom, 2010. Among her most recent works as an actress are: *Os 3 Mundos*, directed by Nelson Baskerville, at Teatro Popular do SESI (2018); *One Ten A Hundred A Thousand Enemies of the People*, by Cassio Pires based on play by Henrik Ibsen. Directed by: Kleber Montanheiro (2016); *Opera do Malandro*, by Chico Buarque de Hollanda. Directed by: Kleber Montanheiro (2014/15); *Chronicles of Knights and Dragons*, by Paulo Rogério Lopes. Directed by: Kleber Montanheiro. SESI Popular Theater (2013); *Kabarett*, Directed by: Kleber Montanheiro (2012/14); *Cabeça de Papelão*, written by Ana Roxo based on a short story by João do Rio. Directed by: Kleber Montanheiro. Best Actress Award at the Festival de Teatro de Taubaté in 2013 (2012/16); *Cada Qual no Seu Barril*, physical dramaturgy by Bruna Longo and Daniela Flor. Directed by: by Kleber Montanheiro. Nominated for best actress at the FEMSA Children and Youth Theater Award in 2012 (2011/2018); *Carnavalha*, by Bruna Longo. Directed by: Kleber Montanheiro (2011); *The Marriage of Medea*. Directed by: Eugenio Barba. Holstebro, Denmark (2008); *Landrus & Cassia*, written and directed by Brian O'Connor. Virginia, USA (2007); *Shentai – The Circus Must Go On*. Directed by: Martha Mendenhall. Virginia, USA (2007); *Ur-Hamlet*. Directed by: Eugenio Barba. Ravenna, Italy – Helsingør, Denmark - Holstebro, Denmark - Wroclaw, Poland (2006/09). Bruna Longo is also a movement researcher and movement director, having worked on dozens of projects in Europe, Brazil and the United States.

