



## The Culture at Large

June 7, 2012, 11:54 AM

# 'Frankenstein' Comes Alive in the App Store

By JENNIFER SCHUESSLER

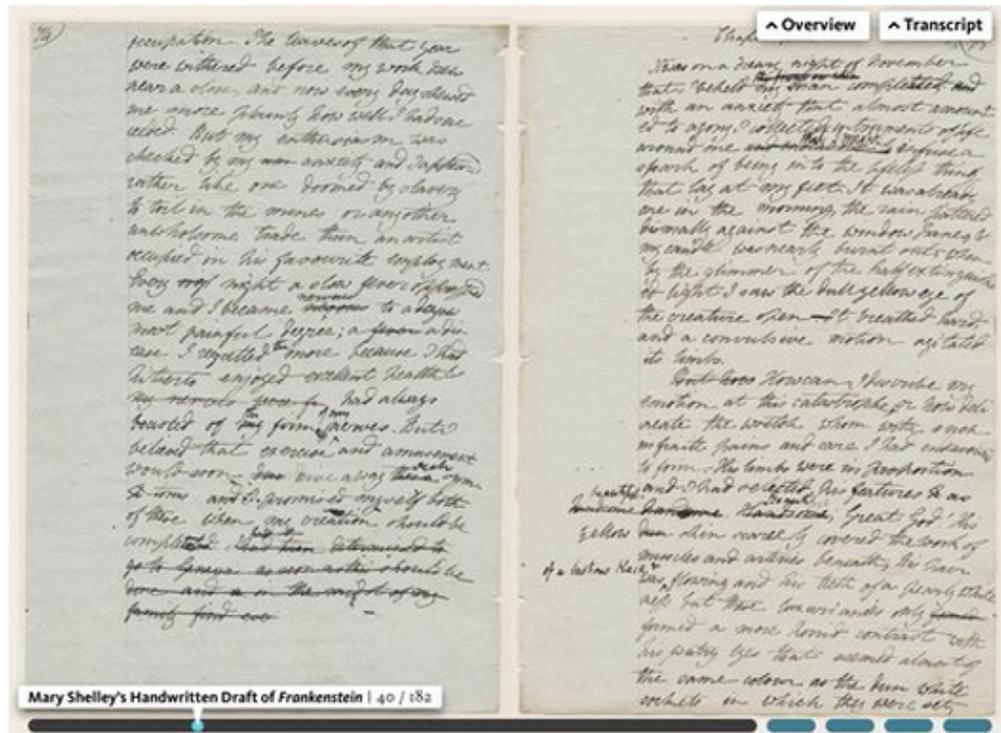
An iPad app by Inkle Studios and Profile Books based on Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" drew some rave reviews for its sophisticated choose-your-own-adventure approach when it was released in April. Now a second ambitious interactive take on the classic monster novel has jolted to life in Apple's App Store, courtesy of the New York Public Library.

"Frankenstein: The Afterlife of Shelley's Circle," created with the developer Potion and downloadable free, is the second release in the library's *Biblion: The Boundless Library* series. Based on the library's Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and His Circle, it includes full digital scans of Mary Shelley's 1816-1817 handwritten manuscript, on loan from the Bodleian Libraries, her husband Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Esdaille Notebook* (containing his earliest known poems) and the stunning scrapbook-like "friendship albums" of two women from the larger social and literary circles surrounding the poet.

But from there the app spins out widely and wildly, with some 50 essays and image galleries exploring questions like the relationship between "Frankenstein" and early arguments about minority rights, the history of horror movies (Boris Karloff preferred to think of them as "terror movies," his daughter says in a Q & A), and the provenance of a guitar held at the library and believed to have been the inspiration for Percy Shelley's poem "With a Guitar, to Jane." One essay even uses astronomical data and GPS measurements to resolve the contradictions in Mary Shelley's various accounts of how she came to write "Frankenstein." (Could bright moonlight really have shone into her bedroom at the Villa Diodati in Switzerland on the night of June 15-16, 1816?)

Enhanced digital versions of "The Waste Land" and "On the Road" drew headlines when they were released last summer, with the Eliot app at one point outselling more obviously commercial fare like a Marvel Comics app. But "Frankenstein," despite being almost 200 years old, might be even more in keeping with today's ethos of remix and mashup. A section of the app called

“Creation and Remix” includes essays on the Shelleys’ relationship with the “proto-paparazzi” who swarmed their Swiss villa, an especially unlovely posthumous bust of Shelley in the library’s collection (described as “resembling Art Garfunkel in cheesecloth and cataracts”) and videos of preparations for the “Monster Ball” anti-prom to be thrown by the library’s Teen Program on June 8. (The app also contains two original short graphic novels.)



Courtesy of the Bodleian Libraries

A digital scan of Mary Shelley's handwritten manuscript of "Frankenstein," included in a new app from the New York Public Library.

The app, which is also available in a Web version, emphasizes interactivity and reader response. There are transcripts of discussions of the novel by a reading group at the federal Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn and by patrons of the library’s Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Books Library (who parse the episode where the monster meets a blind man), along with tabs that allow users to answer various questions and view an updated tally of the results.

“Frankenstein: The Afterlife of Shelley’s Circle,” which contains more than 550 images and clips, may be one of the most ambitious literary apps yet released. But its makers also seem aware that they too may have created a kind of monster, if a far more beautiful one than Victor Frankenstein’s. “Can we see e-books, now in their infancy, leading to the fulfillment of a dream — or staring down a path that leads to the ultimate horror, the dream turned nightmare?” one text asks. Alas, there’s no place for readers to answer that one.