
Frankenstein Will Not Go Away

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a literary masterpiece that for the past two centuries has fascinated the imagination and interest of diverse readers. The word "Frankenstein" refers to the monster because it is universally accepted that the creator named so became, metaphorically at least, the Monster he created. As such, the two questions are intuitively linked. The central theme of monstrosity, which is supplemented by curiosity and rejection, make up the "monster" and are packed within the novel. As they are considered timeless because of their existence in human nature, Shelley's cunning exploration of them, along with the innovative nature of her plot, must be credited with why 'Frankenstein just won't go away.' Furthermore, *Frankenstein* continues to hold relevance and magnetize enthusiasts because of numerous appropriations that have captured the essence of the monster but have adjusted the content to suit specific contexts. Most notably, James Whale's 1931 filmic adaptation *Frankenstein* with Boris Karloff playing the Monster has since been recognized as the foundation of the popular tradition. More recent versions, such as Mel Brook's *Young Frankenstein* (1974), a hilarious parody of *Frankenstein*, and Edmund Burton's *Edward Scissorhands*, a film of multiple genres which sits in its own category, have ensured that *Frankenstein* remain in the public eye.

Monstrosity, which in this case will be defined as evil, vice and malevolence, is a key aspect of Shelley's novel and develops within the two main characters. The Monster itself obviously displays monstrosity, which is triggered and intensified by its repulsive exterior. After repeatedly been physically and mentally "bruised by stones" thrown by humans, he experiences "for the first time the feelings of revenge and hatred" and turns into an embittered and brutal soul. These charged emotions see the Monster killing the innocent boy William after learning he is related to Victor Frankenstein, to whom the monster had "sworn eternal revenge", and framing the sleeping woman Justine for the murder as the "fiend" within it was stirred. After Frankenstein renounces his promise to create a mate for the Monster, the creature kills Victor's best friend, Henry Clerval, his bride, Elizabeth and finally causes Frankenstein's own death. Frankenstein is similarly a monster. He embodies the selfish beneficiary, the overly ambitious, the irrational and reckless, the vengeful and unrepentant and more concisely, the defective creation. His role as a stereotyped mad scientist, as a violator of creation and as a negligent protector is censured throughout the novel. He is perceived as an obstinate troublemaker who whines about his misfortunes, abandons his creation and sends his loved ones to their graves. The fact that he develops hate towards his monster without even trying to find virtue and callously believes the Monster "ought to die" on his own deathbed, even when it forgives and mourns him, condemns Frankenstein as more monstrous than the Monster.

The monstrosity of monsters in *Frankenstein* is main contributor to the *Frankenstein* legend. *Frankenstein* won't depart from popular culture because monstrosity and the monster are present in the laissez-faire nature of human beings and subsequently, in every aspect of life and popular culture. Although in a supposedly civilised society human are, for the most part, disgusted by real-life acts of monstrous horrors, such as sexual assault or murder, and recognise the evil inherent in these actions, human instinct is and cannot be converted from enjoying and showing dominance over others. This argument is supported, for example, by the origin of Shelley's monsters. According to critic Lee Sterrenburg, conservatives depicted

Shelley's father, William Godwin, as a nascent monster that had to be eliminated and long before Shelley wrote her novel, Godwin's utopian theories, like Frankenstein, were "symbolically reviving the dead." She insists that Frankenstein's Monster rises from the body of writings on the French Revolution, citing such evidence as anti-Jacobin Edmund Burke comparing military democracy to "a species of political monster, which has always ended by devouring those who have produced it." In concise terms, humans enjoy vicariously savouring the victories of the strong and physical, whether it is good or bad. Furthermore, as columnist Ron Miller argues, young people especially "require a good monster to root for while growing up...this is a character-building thing." Frankenstein, like other texts such as the comic books Vault of Horror or Tales From the Crypt in the 1950s and horror, science fiction or action blockbusters such as The Ring or Star Wars and even the Harry Potter series today are popular merely because they were able to tap into this market with mesmerizing and often inventive plots.

Playing God with science is another eternal sentiment delved into by the text allowing it to prevail. The story is still relevant today, perhaps even more so than it was in 1818, as the story of an experiment gone appallingly wrong has retained its significance. In Frankenstein, Frankenstein, a scientist, discovers the secret of creation and creates an unnatural looking creature that he abandons and reviles at birth. Continual subjection to oppression and suppression at the hands of its creator and human beings eventually lead the creature to turn into the Monster and exact his revenge. The audience comes to feel deep sympathy for the Monster who in reality is a softhearted creature seeking home comforts and love. At the same time, readers understand the fear and disgust other humans felt in encountering a physically superior and unnatural creature which leads them to repel it and begin the destabilising cycle of catastrophe. As science and technology continues to develop in the pace it did two hundred years ago, moral and ethical questions will incessantly be raised. The book ventures into both the ambiguous nature of creation and the responsibility for the created. As the tale of Frankenstein raises the issue of what is "natural", the humanity of artificial creation and the consequence of playing God, the book has and will always be a reference for scientists and the general public alike when examining the potential science may offer. "Frankenstein just won't go away" because its ideas are a rough foreshadowing of both advancements in science and technology and the apprehension besieging the consequences of them.

Popular tradition appropriations of the Monster in film productions have placed a heavier emphasis on the Monster's physicality and mental underdevelopment than in the literary tradition. Frankenstein's Monster in Frankenstein, Frankenstein and Young Frankenstein and Edward in Edward Scissorhands were artificially created, misunderstood, emotionally sensitive and after enduring groundless discrimination and hatred, become monsters. They are also fully developed as an adult from birth because of being made up of adult tissues. The identicalness ends here. In Frankenstein, the monster is erudite, sophisticated and almost superhuman in abilities and intelligence. It learns to think, read and reason without instruction from others and comes to analyse advanced literary works such as Paradise Lost, Plutarch's Lives and the Sorrows of Werter. It is usually unnoticed by everyone except Frankenstein, emerging only in darkness, and erupting into a physical presence in isolated episodes of violence. The monster in Frankenstein and Young Frankenstein has an abnormal brain, a feature emphasised in each film by an individual scene. Consequently, their Monster is usually mute, illiterate and uncivilised. It can express passionate but simple, inarticulate feelings, e.g. anger, enjoyment, dislike and impatience, through mime. Edward is placed in between, possessing neither the super intelligence of Frankenstein's Monster nor the exaggerated interactive immaturity of other

adaptations. Like Frankenstein's Monster, Edward is educated, though by his creator on etiquette and limericks rather than the literary classics of the 17th century. However, all three films have the Monster as a highly visible and recognisable figure, appearing in most shots. In particular, the plot of Edward Scissorhands revolves around Edward and the audience is given the more insight into his character than any other.

Each Monster in the film adaptations discussed varies in their appearance. All correspond with the book's description of "lustrous black" hair, pearly white teeth, watery eyes in set dun-white sockets, "shrivel-led complexion and straight black lips", however with diverse results due to context and cinematic developments. However, none has managed to convey the book's Monster's "yellow skin scarcely covered [with] the work of muscles and arteries beneath", though probably due more to technological limits than anything else. The Karloff Monster is a tall flat-headed creature with broad shoulders, a built-up forehead and a metal bolt through his neck, all set in the generally static black and white shots. The look became a definitive Frankenstein icon after the picture's release. Subsequent Frankenstein's, such as Bela Lugosi in Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man, Glenn Strange in House of Frankenstein and Peter Boyle in Young Frankenstein, all wore the same look. On the other hand, Edward bears no likeness to the Karloff Monster. He is a futuristic take of Shelley's Monster with his black leather body suit, spiky jet-black hair and pale, scarred face. Even his human clothing of a formal white shirt and blackish-brown trousers create a solemn mood, distinctly in contrast to the colourful array of 1950s-inspired fashion adorned by other characters, to reinforce Edward's outsider status in an unremarkable close-knit town. The main disparity with appropriations of the Monster's appearance is that they are all fully clothed throughout their onscreen appearances, distinctly in contrast to the animalistic, insinuatingly naked original Monster. This has been staged to give the Monster a more human aspect, which in book is achieved through its intellectual equality.

Other elements of the monster genre are again portrayed differently in Frankenstein, James Whale's led appropriations and Edward Scissorhands. In Shelley's book, the monster's creation and existence is kept painstakingly clandestine and known only by Frankenstein. Therefore, the deaths are attributed to mystery figures or other characters. In Frankenstein adaptations, knowledge of the creation's existence is in the public domain although in some productions, such as Frankenstein, the creator feebly tries to keep it secret. As such, characters other than the creator observe it and evils that occur are automatically attributed to the monster. Edward Scissorhands ventures further in this aspect by experimentally integrating Edward into society as an oddity.

Shelley's monster is also sentient, wonderful and able to relate to and attract the sympathy of readers. It is genetically normal and turns evil only because of repeated and undeserved ill treatment as a form of revenge. In addition, even when it alone is "irrevocably excluded" from bliss, it begs Frankenstein to "Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous." In the Karloff film, the monster is biologically abnormal, because of its brain, and so biologically evil as well. The creator's abandonment of the monster after its birth is presented as justifiable because of its natural violence, an intuition confirmed in the final scene where life for Frankenstein seemingly returns to normal. Young Frankenstein gives a similar outlook though the Monster becomes mentally normal in the end after its creator has transferred some of its intellect to it. The Monster in Frankenstein and Edward in Edward Scissorhands are athletic and agile on various terrains. In the popular tradition, the Monster is childishly slow and clumsy because of its size and immaturity. Furthermore, it has a pathetic weakness for music, been ecstatically drawn to its beauty and harmony

An element of the monster tradition is rejection. In Shelley's novel and in the Karloff movie and the interpretations it inspired, Frankenstein admits after first beholding the accomplishment of his toils that "the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust" filled his heart. The monster in both texts is prejudiced against, ostracised and treated like animals. Dr Waldman in the 1931 Frankenstein for instance says, "Kill it like you would any savage animal". The exception is the pretty girl Maria in Frankenstein and Young Frankenstein, whose acceptance of the Monster shows that prejudice stems from the human environment. The murder of William and the subsequent execution of Justine, or figuratively, the death of innocence and beginning of the creature's monstrosity, is represented by a series of events in film appropriations. In Frankenstein, this is the Monster unwittingly drowning Maria, sparking community fury and a manhunt. In Edward Scissorhands, the community accepts Edward at first because of their fascination with his freakiness rather than due to real compassion. The fast-paced break-in at Jim's father's office and Edward's subsequent arrest act as a prequel to the neighbours' horror at Edward's supposed rape of Joyce, attack on Kevin and stabbing of Jim, all innocent blunders which are mentally twisted to confirm their underlying suspicions of Edward as a malicious outsider who needs to be exterminated or driven away. The high shot of Edward running along the main road back towards the castle he came from, pursued by siren ringing police cars depicts Victor's and the angry mob of villagers' thirst for revenge after Justine's execution, Elizabeth's murder and Clerval's death by hunting him down on rocky boulders in mountains or in Arctic ice in Frankenstein.

Although civilisations publicly dislike and dispute evil, people love to witness it. Therefore humans, perhaps unwittingly, set out to create "monsters" in the media. In terms of Frankenstein and the monster tradition it partially adapted from older creation texts and partially created for modern readers, Mary Shelley does have a lot to answer for its popularity and relevance. However, what she does contribute is an engaging plot or vehicle rather than the enduring ideas of monstrosity and scientific creation behind it, which are the actual explanation for why Frankenstein won't go away. The extent others have appropriated Shelley's idea of the monster certainly backs this line of reasoning. Frankenstein, Young Frankenstein and Edward Scissorhands have all dramatized the storyline, or in a visual sense, increased the physical monstrosity of the monster, to better attract viewers.