

Frankenstein: The Monster Within

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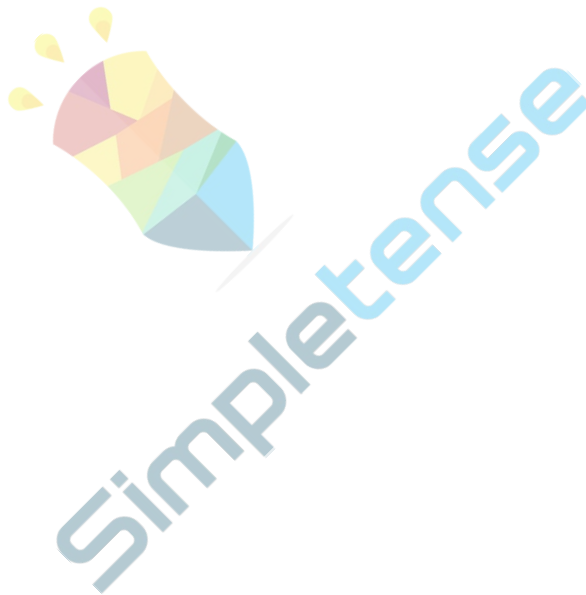


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Abstract

People often mistake the monster for Frankenstein, but that is precisely the reason that Mary Shelley created this book this way. Seeing early cover designs makes one believe that the monster is called Frankenstein, when it is actually the inventor's name. This is a critique of who the real monster is, the thing created or the madman who brought it life and abandoned it. This horror novel paved the way for others in this genre for being uncanny and for questioning scientific advancement in the face of ethics and morals.

Keywords: Frankenstein, monster, inventor, science, social critique



Frankenstein: The Monster Within

Monsters are more than skin deep. While Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is ambiguous in its portrayal of who the monster is, one can assume that they are both monsters, just in a different way for each. Victor Frankenstein ignores the code of ethics that define him as a scientist and inventor to create life, something only God is allowed to do. He betrays the ethics of his practice when he brings his monster to life, and then leaves it to fend on its own. On the other hand, the monster is terrible because it kills and runs around without a care for human life. However, it is not necessarily its fault because he was abandoned upon creation and was forced to endure hardship and pain at the cruel hands of the environment and people around him. It was on the negligence of Victor Frankenstein that this monster was created and left to its own devices, which is a social criticism Shelley has for science and technology. In a sense, Shelley holds scientific fields in contempt and also questions the ethics involved in such practices.

The history behind the conception of this novel is pretty straightforward. In a summer get away with Lord Byron in 1816, the rains around Lake Geneva straddling the border between Switzerland and France forced the members of their party to stay indoors and tell each other stories. Lord Byron suggested they try writing their own ghost stories, surrounded by poets and authors as they were. Mary Shelley came up with Frankenstein at Lord Byron's suggestion for a ghost story and at the encouragement of her husband. She wanted to explore the human condition and how it was slowly deteriorating. "Reanimated corpse" was one of her beginning thoughts when she first thought of Frankenstein. It was a sick and twisted beginning, one that kept her up at night and forced her pen across the page. What began as a short story soon developed into the novel seen fictionalized and quoted in popular culture.

Needless to say, this story horrified her early audience. It continued to do so and still does to this day. It questions whether science is right or wrong in its pursuit of “eternal life” and criticizes those who would argue that the ends justify the means. Frankenstein’s sick obsession with this creation supersedes everything in his life, including his social circle, his health, and his academia. He manages to whip up this creature on one dreary November, when he finally realizes his mistake: “I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart” (Shelley, 1818, p. 59). Perhaps his expectations were too high. Perhaps he envisioned an altogether different outcome. Whatever his reasoning, he abandons his creation because of his disgust. His reaction is all at once superficial and shallow, dismissing his creature with disdain because it is an uncanny mesh of human parts. What he perceived as beautiful in individuals or in those cadavers surrounding him, he could not connect to the thing brought to life in front of his eyes. He unwittingly and then forcefully refuses responsibility for his actions. Instead of getting rid of this monstrosity before it can wreak any havoc or trying to civilize the beast he had spawned, he runs away. Weak and cowardly, anything is easy to say or do when no one knows what one is doing and why they are doing it.

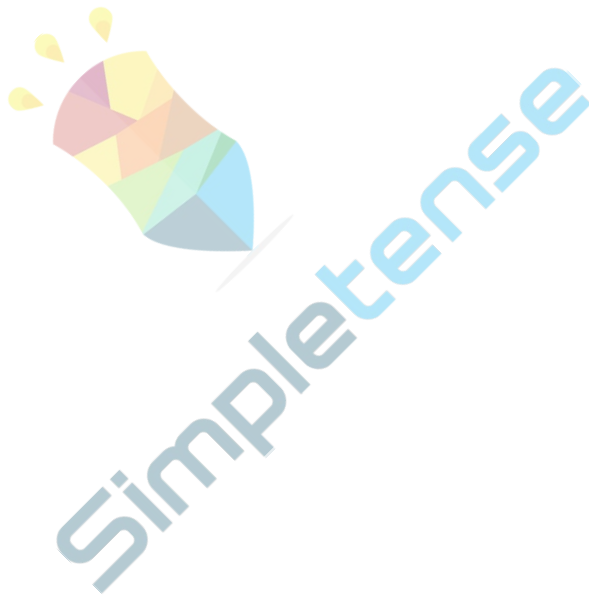
This again reinforces Shelley’s disdain for the science fields. One wonders who are these scientists to claim eternal life or to make it seem like they are gods in their lab coats. She criticizes the extent to which science will go. Victor is utterly traumatized by what he creates. The reader does not know if he regrets it because of the horror he has unleashed or because of him breaking through the glass ceiling of morals and standards. He spirals into depression, which one may look at as a form of regret for his actions, but it is actually his cowardice. He is terrified by being found out by his academic peers or by his creation. This feeling of despair follows

Frankenstein throughout the book. His monster is introduced briefly and disappears to try and survive on its own, but the affect produced is still pronounced. Frankenstein feels the presence of his monster and cannot do much of anything because of this. He is depressed and lonely and sickly with fear for the Pandora's box he has opened. In this light, it makes sense that he is terrified for his life.

Shelley does not outright condemn medicine and those who practice it. Instead, she questions the validity of some to use their intellect for the wrong things, just like Victor Frankenstein. The entire novel is a criticism on what scientists are allowed to do and whether or not they should be bound by ethics. He is even tempted to give his monster a mate until realizing that "I thought with a sensation of madness on my promise of creating another like to him, and trembling with passion, tore to pieces the thing on which I was engaged" (Shelley, 1818, p. 203). He is weak in the heart, fallible, and unable to keep himself to his own promises. In the sense of a man who is proud and courageous, Frankenstein is weak-kneed and pathetic. He is cowed by what he creates, fears what he does not understand, and follows his life almost aimlessly. He is a terrible role model and a terrible representative of the science field. He broke conduct when he tried to tread in god's domain. In a way he is a warning to those who want too much from advancing science and technology. Beware, his character seems to be saying. Beware of the power of the mind. Once drawn from the brain, it is not easily replaced.

Mary Shelley created a masterpiece that is *Frankenstein*. The book has spawned movies, short stories, horror genres, and a number of other uncanny propaganda. It is a tale of lust, love lost, scientific failures, and the human condition of existence. It cannot be categorized as easily as a romance or a drama because it dips its pages into each thought that a human may have. Humans covet the unattainable. Unfortunately, wanting such unreasonable things can lead to our

undoing. Shelley looks at how one man loses everything in the pursuit of his strange obsession with reanimation. Even though his professors and peers influenced his thinking at university he is the one who made the mistake of creating a monster, and it was his mistake for abandoning it.



References

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