

One evening in October of last year, I went to check out this new bookstore that was opening in my area. I've never been much of a reader. I mean I read a lot of comics but I'm not usually one to pick up a novel because my brain gets distracted unless there are pretty pictures on every page to hold my attention. But I love bookstores--I love the outing, I love the smell, I love the cute little bookmarks and stickers at the check-out counter.

Because it was October, this bookstore had a little set up in front of a collection of spooky or gothic books that they had on sale. A little old book called "Frankenstein" caught my eye. I remembered a Tumblr post I saw of how someone was trying to erase Madam Mary Shelley as the mother of all science fiction, and that got me thinking. I usually conceive of old science fiction novels as these dark tedious things written by old men. But Frankenstein is totally science fiction! And it was written by an 18-year-old girl! Not only did she write the first science fiction novel, but she wrote Frankenstein, a story so intertwined into our culture for the past 200 years that you couldn't escape it if you tried.

Long story short, I bought the book, it changed my life, and I got myself a new special interest! I love when I can turn my interests into school projects, so that's what this video is--me talking about my interest in how this little book lodged itself forever into the world of science fiction.

Shelley grew up in a wealthy household in London, England full of words, ideas, and stories. Her parents were all also very accomplished writers. Her mother wrote one of the earliest feminist writings as we know them today, all the way back in 1792: *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Structures on Political and Moral Subjects* by Mary Wollstonecraft. This explored her opinions on the importance of female education and rights. Mary Shelley's father, William Godwin, also explored political and controversial topics in his novels and journalism.

In 1816, Mary married the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. Percy was very radical in his views of the world, so much so that it differentiated him greatly from the rest of his aristocratic family, but paired well with Mary's and her parents' liberal ideals.

That same year, the couple went off to Switzerland to spend the summer with poet Lord Byron in the countryside. Due to heavy rain, they were confined to the house for days at a time. The three of them would sit by the fire and tell each other ghost stories--as you do when surrounded by the misty hills of the Swiss countryside. Sitting around the fire, the three challenged each other to write a spooky short story to entertain themselves with while fighting away the cabin fever.

As Mary says in her author's note for *Frankenstein*: “

After days of brainstorming, Mary had a breakthrough in the form of a “waking dream.” As a child, she would see magnificent stories splashed out and dancing across her mind, vivid and intricate. Now one of these daydreams frightened her so much she wished to write it out with the hope that it would terrify her readers too.

She states in her Author's Note in 1831, how the full novel wouldn't have been created and published without her husband's influence. It was meant to be merely a short story as a source of entertainment, and he was the one who convinced her to make it into a full novel.

She mentions that; "At this time he desired that I should write not so much with the idea that I could produce anything worthy of notice, but that he might himself judge how far I possessed the promise of better things hereafter." pg 8

From my point of view, a girl her age 200 years later, Percy seems extremely dismissive of her abilities. He was the person she was the closest to in the world. And here she was with two adult men who were accomplished writers, and she was so much younger and less experienced. Even so, her work would outshine them all.

Her husband died only 4 years after the release of Frankenstein. Not only did she lose a loved one, but in that time period she also lost her protector and provider. But at this point and forward she would become a very accomplished writer, continuing to write for years after Frankenstein. Talking about all the loss she would experience so soon after her success, she says in her author's note: "I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper. I have an affection for it, for it was the offspring of happy days, when death and grief were but words, which found no true echo in my heart". Pg 12. One quote I really like talking about the passing of her husband: "I think that I can maintain myself, and there is something inspiring in that idea." The idea that a woman such as herself is able to prosper without clinging on to the hands of men.

So how did this young woman write such a monumental text?

This book is very dark and gloomy (if you can believe) in how often it explores the concept of grief and living on after the death of others. Shelley's mother died when she was a baby, already born into grief, destined to mourn throughout her life. Two of Shelley's children had died by the time Frankenstein was published. Back then sickness frequently took people's lives. Grief and death is a big recurring motif in this somber novel, exploring how a loved ones' sudden disappearance affects peoples' ability to live on as they used to. The fear of dying, of death, affects how a person lives.

Frankenstein's character goes through a lot of sudden loss throughout the book.

"My mother was dead, but we had still duties which we ought to perform; we must continue our course with the rest, and learn to think ourselves fortunate, whilst one remains whom the spoiler has not seized."

"It appeared to me sacrilege so soon to leave the repose, akin to death, of the house of mourning, and to rush into the thick of life." pg 45

Shelley explored this tension between death and living on. Her character developed a fascination with life. The novel asks the question--What does it mean to have life and what does it mean to live it? She explores the questions through the scientific advancements that were happening in the world around her.

Benjamin Franklin's taming of lightning and conquering of the sky brought endless new opportunities. Machines and new inventions seemed to bring inanimate objects to life, able to

move on their own without the further interference of humans. It brought the thought of if we are able to make non living things “live”, can we make things that were once living, live again?

For years, the theory of electricity being vital and existing in all living beings, had been discussed. The first studies in galvanism were in the late 1700's by Luigi Galvani (hence the name). His experiments involved connecting the two ends of the spinal cord of skinned frogs to a source of electricity. When shocked, it triggered a reaction in the legs, causing them to twitch upwards.

After Galvani's death, His nephew, Giovanni Aldini continued the research of his uncle. In 1803 he attempted a public experiment on the corpse of a man who murdered his wife and child. This showed interesting results as the man's lifeless body was “brought back to life”.

“On the first application of the process to the face, the jaws of the deceased criminal began to quiver, and the adjoining muscles were horribly contorted, and one eye was actually opened. In the subsequent part of the process the right hand was raised and clenched, and the legs and thighs were set in motion. Mr Pass, the beadle of the Surgeons' Company, who was officially present during this experiment, was so alarmed that he died of fright soon after his return home.” - 1803 George Foster trial journal

The discoveries of new and interesting science, seemed to bring along the possibility of corpse reanimation.

On the topic of reanimation; I want to talk very briefly about the mythical origins of this concept. When we think of the definition of reanimation, a once living being coming back into life, our minds would usually go to zombies.

A big fear that our scary stories contain is the fear of death. More specifically The fear of the unknown. Our loved ones now lost to us by this unstaoppable force we know nothing about is a terrifying thing. On Haitian plantations, death was of course feared, but at the same time, a better option than being enslaved for the rest of your life.

“The plantation masters thought of suicide as the worst kind of thievery, since it deprived the master not only of a slave's service, but also of his or her person, which was, after all, the master's property. Suicide was the slave's only way to take control over his or her own body.” - A Zombie Is A Slave Forever, Amy Wilentz

Many Haitians believed that after death, the person could be brought back to life via necromancy, but would be forever tied to the sorcerer or witch that brought them back to life, having no free will, and forever enslaved.

One theory is that the myth of zombies became another way to control the enslaved people, to keep them from freeing themselves the only way they could, through death.

I want to talk about how the usage of the word “monster” for his creation goes to show just what he thinks of what he has done. First of all, the monster does not have a name, he never names it, only to refer to it with degrading words throughout the book.

“Words

Throughout history we have found that when given a name, the thing or person now has worth. A spirit, life, even. You began to care for that thing or person and appreciate its newly given humanity. Without a name, He makes an effort to strip it of all the humanity the monster might have had. With no name, Frankenstein's creation now disgusts him even more. Without a name, he is known simply as "Frankenstein's monster". Forever and always tied and belonging to his creator, he may never experience the same individuality that is granted to the human race.

I think the subject of the monster not having a real name is important to the story. It outcasts the monster outside of society even more. Frankenstein believes his creation not worthy of a name, only to be called simply; the wretch, that awful creature, and devil.

Another one of Shelley's likely inspirations for an object reanimated is in the Myth of golem. Like all mythology, the stories vary endlessly. Also the christian involvement blurred the original story a bit

From the Jewish Museum Berlin, Golem is described as: "a creature formed out of a lifeless substance such as dust or earth that is brought to life by ritual incantations and sequences of Hebrew letters. The golem, brought into being by a human creator, becomes a helper, a companion, or a rescuer of an imperiled Jewish community. In many golem stories, the creature runs amok and the golem itself becomes a threat to its creator."

--- something here

One thing that always sticks in our imagination is how a person can contain life. What makes an object move around of its own free will? Who then takes that movement away? Frankenstein, overcome by grief, was very set on figuring this thing out. Once he masters life and how to control it, no one he ever loves can ever die again. But once the golem refuses what they put in its mouth, once it disobeys its creator, what then? When the creature they brought to life now finally has life; now that it can think for itself, now that you cannot control life anymore, what does that make you? Powerless.

--- how to transition here?

On the title page of the book, you see the tag line "aka The Modern Prometheus".

The tale of the god of fire explores hubris; by defying the olympians' wishes, he takes their fire and gives it to humanity, granting them knowledge, technology, and human advancement. This is a story told again and again, one that supplies the warning of what happens when you defy the gods and take their powers into your own hands (for the overall advancement of the human race). I believe Frankenstein's project started out as a way to further advance science but as it went on, became a more selfish endeavour.---should I expand on that?

This same tale of giving fire to humanity as a rebellion to the gods, is a metaphor for the evil of knowledge now brought upon the human race. This way of describing fire is shown in many

cultures' mythology. It is something to be feared and appreciated, gives death and life, is destructive and useful.

Just as Prometheus gave power and life to humanity, Frankenstein gave power and life to his monster.

--- how to start off this section?

The “monster” looked down upon by society, looking different, acting different or inhuman. The public’s fear of these differences.

Once halfway through the book, the monster tells his experiences with the human race after escaping Frankenstein's apartment. He wanders into a small house, filled with wonder and curiosity for this new discovery. The shepherd takes a break from his dinner to take in the sight of this creature who has just walked into his open door. He shrieks, runs out, and doesn't return. The next day, he walks into a slightly larger house, the children cry, the mother faints and he leaves once again.

A consensus that many people come to, that I've seen, after reading Frankenstein, is what they believe are metaphors for social outcasts and minorities. Throughout sci-fi as it exists today, monsters, creatures, and aliens are used often as allegories for different marginalized communities. For most of history, there were bans or strict rules around including controversial or unusual communities in published media which led creators to present these people in different ways.

I think the first science fiction novel having a creature used so strongly as a metaphor for people who are different, marginalized, and hated really set up the next 200 years of science fiction. Something that I have always liked about science fiction is how the stories tend to make you sympathize with the creatures or monsters. While everyone else in the story is hunting or hating this monster, we learn to love it.

Ever since our monster was forced into life, he was hated for things that were out of his control. Such as, his looks, how he talked, his mannerisms, and, of course, his upbringing. Because of this, he became miserable. No one understands him, he is alone weeping under the shade of the trees in the forest; the only living things that do not spurn him for what he is.

--- does any of this next stuff matter? I think I'm just giving examples from the book.

This loneliness causes frustration with humanity. Confusion considering just how innocent and non-malicious he was to them and how still he was treated in return. Throughout the book, he never refers to himself as “human”. He refers to others this way, just digging deeper into that hole that is his separation from humanity. From this, he understands he is not one of them and never will be.

Frankenstein's prejudice against his creation is shown in how he automatically assumes the deaths are his monster's fault with no evidence nor proof of any malicious intent coming from him. He is angry at himself, he experiences guilt for these deaths that he believes he has played a large role in. He assaults him, verbally and physically, anger taking over his grief and placing it on this new enemy.

Though as we learn about everything through the monster's eyes, we find out that his monster was in fact the one to blame for the murder of his brother. He was angry at the human race, angry for how he was being treated after only wanting companionship and love. He wanted to hurt Frankenstein too, he was angry with his creator.

"Quote from the monster why did you create me something something"

--- I was kinda waiting to finish off that last section once i finished all if frankenstein but i take forever to read bc i just want to draw all the time

The effects on scifi and all stories and fiction since

One of the most fundamental stories created for science fiction. It has been played off of, referenced, redone in so many different forms. It's been around for so long and talked about so much by so many different people that its original purpose and story has been warped so that our current popular culture sees it in a certain way. This is the same for many myths and stories of monsters and creatures that have been capitalized off of or changed to better fit the time period.

--- briefly talk about well known products that were inspired by

I dont want to touch on it too much, because Final Girl Studios already made a great video talking about Poor Things. What she did mention briefly at one point, was the differences on how the male artists and writers handled this similar subject compared to Shelley's first interpretation. How this woman becomes an sex object right after being reanimated versus Frankenstein's monsters' exploration of and discoveries of his love for humanity and his need to be loved in return. They are very different stories with the same original subject matter. I really do suggest you go watch Final Girl Studio's video on Poor Things, I'm obsessed with all her videos. She is so clever.

conclusion

---how to start this off?

Shelley was born right after the French revolution and grew up in the aftermath and of that society rebuilding. This was a time for huge changes and progression in the government, economics, and working class people. And as always happens in times of societal change, art is made.

Written in the midst of the industrial revolution, Frankenstein showcases fears that the public were having about the new giant machines moving on their own and taking people's jobs that have always been done one way from since the beginning of time. This, as it commonly does, created a lingering fear of the future in the people of that time. This fear of the future is always

reflected heavily in our science fiction media, and did so too in the pioneer that was Shelly's books. Always asking questions like "what monstrosities does the future hold? Will I still have a job? How heavily will my life be affected by these changes?". All questions that we still ask in today's climate.

The want to advance into the future will never be possible if we do not heed the warnings of the past. As long as we all struggle to grapple with the new advancements in technology, or the changes in the political or economical status of our communities, we will have science fiction.

This story written by an 18 year old girl in the year 1816 had become not only a classic, but something actually woven into our culture. We could not escape from it no matter how hard we tried. Her words are written into any story with a monster who seeks for love, a monster with no name, a monster looked at like it's a freak of nature, hunted for it does not belong.

--- should i still add any of this? Does it add anything to what I'm talking about?

Alchemy being one of the earliest forms of science, fused with magic because that is what they were used to.

Homunculi being one of the first instances of men trying using their hubris to create life without a mother's womb is so interesting to me. Men and their discoveries using alchemy to see if they could create life without the help of a woman. The one thing that women are useful for-- if they could take that away, they would not have to be dependent on them to procreate anymore.

From a Christocentric standpoint, all of this reanimation nonsense is very demonic. Wanting to take God's job and purpose into their own hands is automatically disobeying the will of God, so whatever they end up making will be demonic in nature. These creatures, once brought to life, are known to wreak havoc on their creator and its world around them for one reason or another. This demonic entity can not be permitted to live any longer. Forget whoever's idea it was to let this beast live, it's the gross looking monster guy who we want dead.