

Iconic Gothic novel on aspiration, responsibility

The seventh part in this series on the classics of English literature features Frankenstein, Mary Shelley's 19th century masterpiece. The novel resonates with anxieties prevalent when it was written, yet is also relevant today amid developments like artificial intelligence & genetic engineering sans ethical restraints.

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What happens when we are born into a world that is full of pain and suffering? One that desists goodness and despises benevolence. Do we all carry monstrosity within us, or do we become monsters with time as the hurtfulness of the world slowly devours our heart?

Mary Shelley's novel, Frankenstein, probes deeply into issues of humanity, ethics and empathy. This masterpiece of Romanticism weaves together themes of ambition, isolation and the complex consequences of unchecked knowledge. It resonates with anxieties of her time, particularly fears about the advancements in science and technology in the early 19th century and reflects the tension between human aspiration and moral responsibility – that also remains relevant in the present age of artificial intelligence and genetic engineering sans ethical restraints.

Written when the author was only 18, Frankenstein was conceived as a writing challenge between friends over conversations on science, philosophy and the supernatural. The novel has been adapted into films, theatrical reproductions and comics, cementing Shelley's name as one of the most canonical female writers. As early as 1910, the first cinematic production based on the novel was released as a 15-minute silent film and another movie adaptation is set to be released this year. The image of a green monster with a squarish head and bolts in the neck has become a popular culture figure. It has been referenced in shows such as Scooby Doo, The Simpsons, and Sesame Street, apart from becoming a Halloween mainstay.

Today, references to "playing God" and the "Frankenstein complex" highlight society's apprehensions over creations that can turn catastrophic. Frankenstein is an ageless masterpiece that plays with human mortality and morality and reflects the blurry distinction between humanity and monstrosity.

Tale about dangers of overreaching ambition

One of the first works of Gothic and early science fiction, Frankenstein is a chilling novel that follows Victor Frankenstein, a young scientist who, driven by an obsessive pursuit of knowledge, reanimates lifeless matter to create a sentient being. It is a cautionary tale about the dangers of overreaching ambition. Horrified by the grotesqueness of his creation, Victor abandons it, leading to tragic consequences. The creature, loving and intelligent yet shunned by society, seeks companionship and, after repeated rejection, turns to vengeance as it internalises the ugliness of the world. As the story unfolds, Frankenstein takes the reader on a journey of shifting sympathies as it blurs the line between victim and villain. The brilliant but flawed scientist defies the

natural order by creating life and then rejecting it. The nameless monster, full of vital warmth, is endowed with morality and a kind human conscience. The novel's layered narrative structure, biblical and mythological metaphors, as well as moving language add depth to this tragic story of parricidal violence. The scientist and the creature chase each other to the North Pole, consumed by the obsession to destroy the other.

Ultimately, Victor dies due to ill-health. Left alone, without purpose, the remorseful monster declares that "I, the miserable and the abandoned, am an abortion", and vanishes into the cold Arctic Ocean, wishing its own annihilation. Frankenstein continues to captivate readers and inspire debate as both a thrilling Gothic tale and profound philosophical inquiry.



Mary Shelley



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