

Frankenstein (1994)



Directed by Kenneth Branagh

Writing credits: Mary Shelley (novel) Steph Lady (screenplay)

Genre: Drama / Horror / Fantasy / Sci-Fi

User Rating: 6.0/10 (4,652 votes)

Runtime: 123 min **Country:** UK / Japan / USA

(Note: Kenneth Branagh directed & appeared in Shakespeare's "Much Ado About Nothing" and appeared in "Rabbit Proof Fence")

Plot Outline: When Victor Frankenstein rejects the artificial man he just created, the monster escapes and later swears revenge. Sticking close to the original novel, Kenneth Branagh guides us through the story of Frankenstein's quest for knowledge, and his creature's search for his "father".

During the course of more than thirty adaptations, the name of "Frankenstein" has become associated with one of the world's most recognizable movie monsters. Rarely, however, has a cinematic interpretation approached the level of three-dimensionality with which it is portrayed in the novel.

As conceived and written by Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* was more of a gothic melodrama than a horror story. Considered in its most basic terms, the tale is one of actions and their consequences, and of what happens when man attempts to play the role of God. For the most part, however, motion pictures have chosen to ignore the weightier issues of the book to concentrate instead on the "monster movie" aspect. Kenneth Branagh has taken a less-traveled path..

Can a man create life, then abandon his creation because its appearance horrifies him? To whom are its actions then attributable: the creature or the being who brought about its existence? Shelley did not answer these questions, but she certainly posed them. Following her example, Branagh does the same.

The greatest strength of *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* is that it illustrates both the good and evil qualities in each of its main characters. Of the two - Robert De Niro's creature and Kenneth Branagh's Frankenstein - the former is, perhaps surprisingly, the more sympathetic. The creature seems almost the more "human" of the two. In its own words, it is capable of great love and great rage. Frankenstein, on the other hand, often comes across as petty, self-serving, and ambitious. Only towards the end, when he finally grasps the full consequences of his actions, does the scientist capture a measure of our understanding.

Discussion:

1. Which scene did you find most effective? Why?
2. Which character did you find most interesting - Dr Frankenstein or his creature? Are they both "monsters", of a kind?
3. Was Dr Frankenstein's experimentation morally wrong? Should scientists be given unlimited freedom in the pursuit of knowledge?
4. In your view, what is the main theme of the film? Summarize it in a sentence.

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797-1851)



English Romantic novelist, biographer and editor, best known as the writer of FRANKENSTEIN (1818). Shelley was 21 when the book was published; she started to write it when she was 18..

Mary Shelley was born in London. Her mother died 10 days after giving birth to her. She was one of the first feminists. Her father was a writer and political journalist. In her childhood Mary Shelley was left to educate herself amongst her father's intellectual friends. The Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley came into her father's circle in 1812. At the age of 16 she ran away to France and Switzerland with Shelley. They married in 1816 after Shelley's first wife had committed suicide by drowning. The story of Frankenstein started in the summer of 1816 near Geneva in Switzerland. Mary took a challenge to write the most frightening ghost story. With her husband's encouragement, she completed the novel within a year. In her Introduction to the 1831 edition Mary revealed that she got the story from a dream, in which she saw **"the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with a uneasy, half vital motion."** When the book was published in 1818, it became a huge success. The story of Frankenstein's monster has inspired over 50 films.