

Differences between the Original Work and Its Film Version of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

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Abstract: This paper makes a brief analysis of the differences between the original work—Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and its film version. Two differences are identified: one is that the conductor adds the rebirth of Elizabeth, which is reasonable and meaningful; and the other is that the film cannot show the importance of nature. That is, the film entertains us with impressive sights, while the original text contains more educative and literary features.

Key Words: *Frankenstein*; film version; rebirth; nature

Frankenstein is the famous novel written by Mary Shelley who is the wife of the famous British poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley. This novel has been suggested by one critic that the novel—and particularly the Creature—has become “a metaphor for our own cultural crises.”^[1] Moreover, varied reinterpretations of the novel are made by many comic film versions. This paper chooses one of its film versions to compare with its original work.

The novel relates the tragic experience of Frankenstein, a Geneva student of natural philosophy, who discovers the secret of life and succeeds in imparting life to an artificial human being. However, the “thing” Frankenstein has created is so ugly that everybody dislikes it and even wants to kill it as soon as they see the “thing.” The “thing” was kind and willing to help people first but became a vicious monster after long being treated cruelly and unjustly. It takes its revenge against its creator, Frankenstein. In order to catch this monster and kill it for

human safety, Frankenstein pursues the monster to the Arctic and dies there. The monster makes a decision to destroy itself, too.

Above is the main plot of the original text Mary Shelley has written. Since its plot is so eccentric and intriguing, it is adapted into film and there are many versions. Here what this paper talks about is the one which was conducted by Kenneth Branagh.^[2] This version is mainly conducted according to its original work but there are two obvious differences.

One is the rebirth of Elizabeth. According to the text, the fiend demanded him of "a female for it with whom it can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for its being."^[3] With mutable feelings of compassion and fear, Frankenstein agreed to create a female companion as deformed and horrible as the "thing" who would not deny herself to it. Frankenstein showed compassion to the "thing" when it narrated its peaceful life among the cottagers and displayed the promise of virtues. Besides, its power and threats were not omitted in his calculations: a creature that could exist in the ice caves of the glaciers and hides himself from pursuit among the ridges of inaccessible precipices was a being possessing faculties it would be vain to cope with. And the "fiend" threatens him:

If I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear, and chiefly towards you my archenemy, because my creator, do I swear inextinguishable hatred. Have a care; I will work at your destruction, nor finish until I desolate your heart, so that you shall curse the hour of your birth.^[4]

With too much consideration, Frankenstein destroyed the body when he almost finished it. He was afraid that the "joint wickedness might desolate the world." After knowing this, the despair monster killed Frankenstein's friend Henry and strangled his love at their marriage day.

Then, how sad and raging Frankenstein was, and he began to pursue the monster in order to kill him. That is how the text tells. The film is not like this here. In the film, Frankenstein loves his wife so much that he used his secret technology to bring Elizabeth to life immediately. He used her head but other's body. The second Elizabeth with bloody scar on her body and her face looks as

ugly as the first "thing." She could not accept such an ugly body and burned herself. We cannot say whether the adaptation is good or bad but whether it is reasonable and meaningful.

We know that Frankenstein's determination not to create such a "thing" any more is so firm. The reason the monster related is so persuasive and irrefutable, ("his words had a strange effect upon me. I compassionated him and sometimes felt a wish to console him" ^[5]). Frankenstein had no idea but to do what the monster had requested. Nevertheless he was afraid of the result of his experiment. So he destroyed the female monster before she came to life that caused the monster's revenge on Frankenstein. However, in face of the death of his love, he immediately did such thing again without any doubts and hesitation. There may be two reasons for his action. One is that in his deep heart, Elizabeth is so kind and pure; she would not do those vicious things as the monster does. The second is that Frankenstein is somewhat selfish. He could not put himself in the monster's shoes, so he could not understand the pain the monster suffered. Although he was moved by the monster's words, he did not satisfy him anyway. "I was moved. I shuddered when I thought of the possible consequences of my consent, but I felt that there was some justice in his argument." ^[6] He said to the monster: "Cease to argue the point, for I cannot consent." ^[7] Until he himself suffered such painful things—the deprivation of his love, he totally understood the monster's demand; he himself could not bear such painful things. The desire to impart life to his love became so irresistible and brooked no delay.

When God found that Adam was alone in the Garden of Eden, he created "Eve" for him so that he could have company. In a sense, Frankenstein is the monster's God. He creates him and he can create a female monster for him. But he is not as great and omniscient as God. In the original text, he chooses to be a selfish human being in face of the demand of the monster. In the film, he chooses to be a God for himself—a selfish "God" in face of the need of his heart.

Besides, in the original work it can be easily found that the author puts much emphasis on the positive function of nature, while the film does not. Romanists hold that nature is good for human's mind and health. The author totally agrees with it. In the text, Frankenstein fell badly ill after the monster came to life and

escaped. But he recovered through walking in nature:

My health and spirits had long been restored, and they gained additional strength from the salubrious air I breathed [...] I became the same happy creature who, a few years ago, loved and beloved by all, had no sorrow or care. When happy, inanimate nature had the power of bestowing on me the most delightful sensations. A serene sky and verdant fields filled me with ecstasy. The present season was indeed divine; the flowers of spring bloomed in the hedges, while those of summer were already in bud. I was undisturbed by thoughts which during the preceding year had pressed upon me, notwithstanding my endeavors to throw them off, with an invincible burden. [8]

Later, although he suffered the disaster of the murder of his friends and brother and realized that he is destined to be destroyed, he could still get a moment of serenity from nature:

Sometimes, with my sails set, I was carried by the wind; and sometimes, after rowing into the middle of the lake, I left the boat to pursue its own course and gave way to my own miserable reflections. I was often tempted, when [...] in a scene so beautiful and heavenly. [9]

The immense mountains and precipices that overhung me on every side, the sound of the river raging among the rocks, and the dashing of the waterfalls around spoke of a power mighty as Omnipotence—and I ceased to fear or to bend before any being elements, here displayed in their most terrific guise. [10]

The summit of Montanvert and “the view of the tremendous and ever-moving glacier” made him exclaim: “Alas! Why does man boast of sensibilities superior to those apparent in the brute; it only renders them more necessary beings.” [11]

It is the separation from nature that made his desire and “the whirlwind passions” arise and caused those disasters which filled his heart with “the sullen despair.” Only “the sight of the awful and majestic in nature had indeed always the effect of solemnizing my mind and causing me to forget the passing cares of life.” [12]

It is true that man could reform nature, but this reformation should unify and

harmonize nature and human and not separate and antagonize them, or the destiny of human would be like Frankenstein's.

However, the film puts much emphasis on terrible affection instead of the positive function of nature, so it is better to read the original text. Film can give us impressive vision but the original text contains more educative and literary features.

Notes:

- [1] Levine, George & U. C. Knoepfelmacher (eds), *The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel*, University of California Press, Berkeley / Los Angeles/London, 1979, p. 3.
- [2] 《科学怪人之永生》, Dir. Kenneth, America, 1994.
- [3] Shelley, Mary, *Frankenstein*, 1818, New York: Airmont, 1981, p. 130.
- [4] Shelley, Mary, *Frankenstein*, 1818, New York: Airmont, 1981, p. 131.
- [5] Shelley, Mary, *Frankenstein*, 1818, New York: Airmont, 1981, p. 132.
- [6] Shelley, Mary, *Frankenstein*, 1818, New York: Airmont, 1981, p. 131.
- [7] Shelley, Mary, *Frankenstein*, 1818, New York: Airmont, 1981, p. 132.
- [8] Shelley, Mary, *Frankenstein*, 1818, New York: Airmont, 1981, pp. 54 - 55.
- [9] Shelley, Mary, *Frankenstein*, 1818, New York: Airmont, 1981, p. 75.
- [10] Shelley, Mary, *Frankenstein*, 1818, New York: Airmont, 1981, p. 78.
- [11] Shelley, Mary, *Frankenstein*, 1818, New York: Airmont, 1981, p. 81.
- [12] Shelley, Mary, *Frankenstein*, 1818, New York: Airmont, 1981, p. 81.