

FRANKENSTEIN: “WHAT CHANGES DARKNESS INTO LIGHT?”

Frankenstein is, according to the horror-film historian Carlos Clarens, “the most famous horror movie of all time,” and, as John Baxter says in *Hollywood in the Thirties*, “deservedly so.” Frances Marion in her autobiographical *Off With Their Heads!* recalls the “curious fact” that even in Hollywood “scarcely anyone old or young in the audience viewed the picture without some nerve-tingling reaction” when it was first shown in 1931. And the film still retains most of its impact, despite the familiarity of the monster’s features even to those who are seeing it for the first time. Ivan Butler reports that the “first sight of Karloff . . . still manages to shock,” and it has been my experience with recent showings of the film that it can still hold its own with an initially uninterested or even hostile audience — which cannot be said for Tod Browning’s *Dracula*, Karl Freund’s *The Mummy* or Victor Halperin’s *White Zombie*.

The source of *Frankenstein*’s continuing popular strength does not really lie in its shock value, for audiences don’t scream at it the way they used to do, or the way they still do at *Night of the Living Dead* or *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. It appears to lie rather in the slow transformation of that initial shock and horror

into a sympathy, both for Henry Frankenstein, whose dreams have gone fatally awry, and for the monster himself. Ivan Butler has noted the depth of this sympathy and described it as "more than sympathy — a tragic sense of human potentiality wasted, destroyed by a lack of understanding which leads so quickly to panic and disaster." He attributes that sympathy to Boris Karloff's skill as an actor and to James Whale's "dignity of treatment; a respect, not only for the 'normal' people, not only for the monster, but for the whole inherent significance of his subject." When he continues by ascribing to the film "a largeness of purpose, a hint of the grandeur of mysteries beyond our knowledge," he has certainly touched the source of the film's success, and he offers a starting point for an examination of *Frankenstein's* nature.



In Frankenstein, Boris Karloff's makeup is a remarkably subtle fusion of the grotesque and horrific with the recognizably human.

However, to attempt to explain the film's largeness by examining its technical virtues is really a futile exercise. For example, most of the film's horrific quality is usually ascribed to Jack Pierce's makeup, and certainly that is true, and to Karloff's gaining sympathy for the monster despite the makeup. But an examination of photographs of earlier versions of the monster reveals that the makeup was toned down, was made more human — in an earlier version, the monster's forehead was marred by two metal rings with ropes of flesh twisted through them. For all of Karloff's genius as an actor, some of his later success must, then, be ascribed to Pierce's makeup and its remarkably subtle fusion of the grotesque and horrific with the recognizably human. And to say that the film's sense of dignity is solely the work of Whale is to deny the soundness of the screenplay by Garrett Fort and Francis Edward Faragoh or the suggestions of the first director on the picture, Robert Florey. Whale's direction is impeccable, but it is not stamped with Whale's identity to anything like the degree that his later films *The Old Dark House*, *The Invisible Man* or *Bride of Frankenstein* are. And certainly Arthur Edeson's photography, Clarence Kolster's editing and the sets themselves—deserve proper credit, to say nothing of the acting of Colin Clive, Dwight Frye and Frederick Kerr.

The only effective approach to the film is to disregard the efforts of its makers and look directly at the thing they made, the film as an esthetic entity with its own life and qualities and values. The film is problematic as any genuine work of art must be, but it is its own solution. It has an integrity and wholeness which offers itself up, not only to emotion or even to imagination, but to understanding.

The initial problem which confronts the understanding of any horror film is that one which is involved in the approach to any work of fantasy or fable. The theme appears too readily available; a simple allegorical reading seems to milk the work of its substance all too quickly. And certainly such is the case with most horror films — an evil invades the lives of a group of people, and they repel or destroy it by their resourcefulness, their caring for

each other and their faith in the general rightness of the nature of the world. A viewer may expand that allegorical reading as far as he likes, but the film itself has little more to offer. He may see a film like Robert Siodmak's *Son of Dracula* more than once, but only for the pleasure of re-covering familiar narrative ground or perhaps for the imaginative *frisson* which may be gained from, say, the image of Count Alucard floating across the dark swamp water, standing on his coffin. The film will offer his understanding very little more than it did on a first viewing. Its matter is drained by a simple rational and allegorical reading of its symbols and events; it remains as essentially abstract experience with minimal existential concretion, an experience which does not bear thorough and continuing acquaintance.

The temptation is to read *Frankenstein* in that way, allegorically and quickly. It is a temptation compounded by the Edward van Sloan introductory remarks, in which he says that it is "the story of Frankenstein, a man of science, who sought to create a man after his own image without reckoning upon God," or by Mary Shelley's explication of the film in the opening scene of *Bride of Frankenstein* when she describes it as an account of "the punishment that may befall a mortal man who dares to emulate God." That is a tidy explanation, one that would reduce the film to a retelling of the medieval Faust legend as if Goethe or the passage of several centuries had not occurred. And since James Whale did direct both pictures, that must have been what he had in mind, or so the argument goes. But van Sloan's preface is scarcely appropriate to the film and its values, and *Bride of Frankenstein*, for all its virtues, is not *Frankenstein*, and the temptation to identify them must be avoided in order to arrive at the genuine substance of *Frankenstein*.

Frankenstein does have to do with a man's overreaching himself, but the failure lies not so much in the daring or in the act, but in his inability to cope with the product of his actions. The real Mary Shelley puts it much better than her later film avatar when she has her monster point out to his creator that he has not fulfilled the duties of a creator: "Remember that I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel, whom

thou drivest from joy for no misdeed." The film has much to show us about the nature of creation and its moral consequences, but even an examination of that thematic element will not exhaust the film, for it has as much to show us about the fact of death and the resiliency and strength of life in its face, about the very nature of human experience and of life itself. Frankenstein's experience and his moral pilgrimage can only be fully understood in the context of the larger texture and motion of the film itself; the form gives the matter of the film its value and meaning, just as that matter fills out and gives substance to the abstract idea of the form. The film's complex texture of physical and mental fact not only explains its thematic specifics but is actually its "meaning."

The symbols in the film are not static, nor are they exterior to the texture of the film itself. Fire, for example, carries its traditional meanings in the film, but it never appears except when it is a functional element in the narrative. It is not imposed on the film; the film creates and recreates its own symbolic levels as it goes. This narrative activity of the film's symbols is one of the major reasons why it is in this respect superior even to so fine a film as Carl Dreyer's *Vampyr*. *Vampyr* is a book film; its symbols are drawn directly from a European literary heritage (a book even serves as one of those symbols in the film). The static shots of weathervanes and still water are striking, but they are essentially extraneous to the remarkably poetic moving texture of the film itself. Only the reversal of traditional black-white symbology which reaches its functional climax with the doctor's death in the white


Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is marred by the interposition of static and exterior symbols such as the statuette of Cupid and Psyche.



flour of the mill develops into a fully cinematic and organic use of symbol in the film. Even so fluid a film as Rouben Mamoulian's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, with its brilliant and completely integral metamorphosis scenes in which physical motion and moral change are identified as fully as they ever have been in any work of art, is nevertheless marred by the interposition of static and exterior symbols such as the statuette of Cupid and Psyche offering ironic commentary on Hyde's murder of Ivy.


Frankenstein is an interpretation of Mary Shelley's novel, but it is no book film. It is a thoroughly cinematic film, drawing its symbolic texture and meaning out of its own narrative movement. That the monster's life begins in lightning and ends in fire, for example, is a simple enough observation and a rewarding one, but it would be a misleading one if the whole complex pattern of fire, light and darkness were not also taken into consideration.

Frankenstein opens in darkness in a graveyard. The first shot is of a gravedigger's hands pulling up the rope with which he has lowered a coffin into a grave. The grave is seen in the context of the graveyard with its leaning crosses and an effigy of skeletal Death (who at first seems almost to be one of the graveside mourners), but those are not the vital and ongoing symbols in the scene. Rather the fact of death and the literal darkness become symbolic when the gravedigger strikes a match to light his pipe, introducing fire in the film to darkness and death. By the light of



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the moon, a dim and reflected natural light partially obscured by night clouds, Henry Frankenstein and Fritz set about robbing the grave and then cutting down a hanging corpse from a gallows. During these activities, Fritz carries a lantern. His clothes are also much darker than those of Frankenstein, and Fritz is thus texturally more closely involved with fire, darkness and death than is Frankenstein. This initial context establishes a pattern which develops throughout the rest of the picture. Elizabeth, Victor and Doctor Waldman are introduced by lamplight, fire tamed to civilized uses, and their symbolic context in the film is one of ordinary light rather than darkness and fire. When Henry reveals that he has been searching for a ray beyond the ultraviolet, "the great ray that first brought light into the world," his ambiguous relation to fire and darkness is explained; he moves through a context of fire and darkness seeking a light beyond seeing, the answer to the very question, "What changes darkness into light?" The movement of the first part of the film is that of Henry's search through darkness for the source of light and life, against the advice of Doctor Waldman, Elizabeth and Victor, none of whom can really see into that darkness because of their civilized vision of tamed light, with the assistance of the hunchbacked Fritz who is integrally a part of that darkness. In this part of the film, only Henry is a free agent, moving purposefully through a dark context; it is Henry who literally flings dirt in Death's face in the cemetery. Fritz merely does his bidding, unencumbered by either higher vision or normal daylight vision, and Doctor Waldman, Elizabeth and Victor merely react to Henry's actions which they cannot properly see or understand.



Henry literally flings dirt in Death's face in the cemetery.

The actual creation scene is literally an explosion of the higher light into the darkness, guided by Henry Frankenstein (in white clothes) with the aid of Fritz (dressed in black). The shrill electricality of the scene is certainly appropriate to its content. Light and dark tangle and crackle in the atmosphere and dance wildly down into the laboratory. The monster's inert form with its skin noticeably dark and dead is raised into the night to the light — the lightning, that most active and meaningful fusion of light and fire. When it is lowered back into the room, the rigid dark hand has now relaxed. And when that hand moves with a wondrous grace, Henry cries out, "It's moving! It's alive!" At that moment, he has achieved a triumph that enlarges the scale by which humanity must be measured. He has joined the light and the dark (and, despite his lack of awareness, the fire) into an electrical tension which is life itself. He has repeated in small the original creation of man by joining earth and air (flesh and spirit) together — a joining made symbolically specific by the infusion of the lightning's life into a body pieced together from dead bodies dug up from the earth. He has become what Mary Shelley wished him to be, "The Modern Prometheus.")

Henry Frankenstein is, then, in the first part of the film an heroic figure, the moral free agent who can see that the apparently fixed distinctions between light and darkness, life and death are not unalterable. And he acts upon his vision. But his triumph is, like his creation, inextricably involved with his defeat. The end is in the beginning. After the harnessing of the great ray and its gift of movement and life to his creature, Henry relaxes under a bright light, dressed in light clothes, speaking lyrically of doing the dangerous and pressing beyond. When Doctor Waldman warns him that "You have created a monster, and it will destroy you," Henry replies calmly, "Wait until I bring him into the light." Even the revelation that the monster's brain is a criminal brain gives him only a moment's pause. But he is smoking a cigar, and fire is present in the relaxed scene, however tamed and harmless. When he hears of the brain, he abruptly removes the cigar and puts it down. Then the monster makes his first full appearance, and light,

darkness and fire, earth and air, come actively together, not to be successfully parted until the final scene of the film.

Henry darkens the room. The monster backs through the door and then turns to face his creator, moving from shadows into a lighter context. Frankenstein shows no revulsion or dismay towards what he has created — the first irrefutable proof of his blindness to certain essential values of the light, for his creature is huge and ugly, an emblem of death in life. As Ivan Butler puts it, "His gaunt features and dark-socketed eyes have a true charnel-house appearance." But when the monster is shown sunlight for the first time, spilling down onto him from a skylight, his appealing innocence, his yearning for the light and his confused hurt when it is withdrawn reveal to the viewer the beauty that Frankenstein alone has been able to see in this monstrous figure. The monster, sewn together from dead bodies and with a criminal brain, does nevertheless yearn for air and the light like a flower. The life that animates him is the life we all share, created though he was by a fellow man. Paul Jensen reads this scene as "a small-scale allegory of man's efforts to grasp the intangible unknown, and of his bewilderment at a creator who keeps him from it." But then Fritz runs into the room with a torch, and the monster's innocent struggle to regain the lost light turns into something much uglier as darkness, earth and fire assert their ascendancy in his nature. As John Baxter points out in *Sixty Years of Hollywood*, the light for which he yearns is "a symbol of reason and grace from which he is forever barred." And, as he might have added, the monster himself is an emblem of fallen and unredeemed man. After he is subdued, he is chained in the cellar below earth level like a wild beast, tormented by Fritz with a whip and with the fire of his torch. Frankenstein turns away from his creation, betraying its potential, and he reveals his dangerous flaw.

Henry, in his idealism, has become a half man. By yearning for the light beyond seeing, he has forgotten that he is a mortal man, susceptible to error and to sin. While venturing out into the dark, he has forgotten the darkness in himself; while reaching into the air, he has forgotten the earthiness of his nature. He and Fritz have become two halves of one man — not allegorically but

actually. Henry has become all brain and nerve, idealistic, daring, able to think and to do the impossible, and he uses Fritz as his body — fearful, ignorant, crippled, dark Fritz, whom Henry called “fool” in his first line in the film. They have become like Aylmer and Aminadab in Hawthorne’s “The Birthmark,” and Henry, like Aylmer, is striving to be more than man while forgetting what it is to be a man. In the film, Henry’s forgetting is more than symbolic or even psychological; it is experientially active. He has not only forgotten his own lower self, he has also ceased to think of Fritz as a separate entity.

When Henry is forced to allow Doctor Waldman, Elizabeth and Victor to observe the act of creation, he scorns their imputation that he has gone mad. He says to them, “One man crazy, and three very sane spectators.” And, of course, there are five people in the room. He has forgotten to include Fritz. In strictly narrative terms, he has forgotten the man who will teach the monster fear and hatred, who will introduce him to fire and pain, who will transform him from an innocent seeker of the light into a murderer. Fritz, whose fear and trembling give the monster his crim-

“One man crazy and three very sane spectators.”



inal brain, is the agency by which the new Adam will be transformed into the new Cain. And in the symbolic terms flowing out of the narrative, Henry has forgotten what it is to be human and to be limited and, therefore, who and what he is. The future should be a quickening of what now is, but Henry’s imagined future grows out of a false present, and cannot then be what he dreamed. Henry as a creator and an artist has forgotten that the imagination feeds upon the real and paradoxically causes the real to fulfill itself by that feeding. He has forgotten that his new creation is composed of dead flesh. “That body is not dead,” he brags to Waldman, “It has never lived.” The statement is true in the sense that any work of art or any earthly creation is something new. But, as Poe reminds us, that same work of art is the product of “multi-form combinations among the things and thoughts of Time.” It is this latter truth which Henry earlier expressed when he spoke of the freshly exhumed corpse in the first scene as “just resting, waiting for a new life to come,” and that he has now forgotten. Henry’s imagination has come to feed only upon dreams, and when the real reasserts its primacy, he cannot face what he sees. “Oh, come away, Fritz,” he says, aware again of who he is and who Fritz is, “Leave it alone.” But in his shocked recovery of his own identity, he blinds himself to the nature of his creation — the “him” has become again an “it” — and he betrays even the potential life his imagined future might have in a real world.

When Frankenstein loses sight of his creation’s reality, he also loses his moral force and his control over Fritz. He allows Fritz to torment the monster, and when the monster turns on Fritz and kills him, Henry loses heart completely. He is able to recognize his moral responsibility for what has happened as he says of the monster (granting him again the dignity of a personal pronoun), “He hated Fritz. Fritz always tormented him,” and later when he mumbles, “Oh, poor Fritz! Oh, my poor Fritz! All my fault!” But this recognition does not give him renewed vitality. He collapses, surrenders his belief in his work and passes his responsibility on to Doctor Waldman, beginning thereby a new cycle of death and darkness and forcing the dark of his creation to escape into the very light of day. He allows himself to be taken home by his

father, back to a childhood dependence on a man who, by Henry's own confession, "never believes in anyone."

The Baron Frankenstein, an irascible, comic figure, represents the whole world Henry has been struggling to transcend, a world in which men are creatures of material comfort — tamed light and tamed fire — with fixed positions in an unchanging social order, a world of unalterable facts and unalterable values. The Baron cannot imagine what Henry could be doing in his laboratory, for what more could he want than a home, food and a beautiful girl? He is a kindly but utterly condescending local ruler. The good wine, he tells us, would be wasted on the servants, and the full extent of his knowledge of human nature would seem to reside in his observation that the villagers are happy on Henry's wedding day as they are drinking beer, but that tomorrow they will be fighting. He is by his own lights a good man, but his is a mundane and static goodness, stifling the possibility of genuine moral growth. His sole wish is for Henry to settle down and produce an heir — "A son to the House of Frankenstein!" — which will assure the preservation of his orderly world. The wine with which he toasts Henry's wedding was his grandmother's, as are the carefully preserved orange blossoms which have served for the weddings of the Frankensteins for decades.

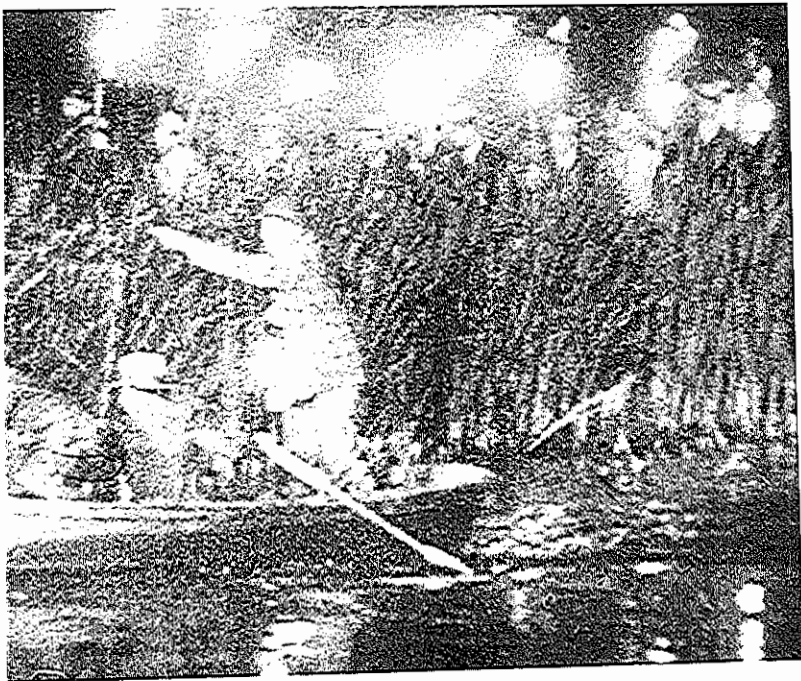
It is at his father's house that we see Henry and Elizabeth for the first time in bright sunlight, sitting in comfortable ease on a terrace. Henry tells Elizabeth, "It's like heaven being with you again," and she replies, "Heaven wasn't so far away all the time, you know." The scene is the most brightly lit and romantic one in the film with one exception — the parallel scene between the monster and little Maria, a scene that proves that even in heavenly surroundings, hell is never very far away. Henry is smoking on the terrace, so that fire is present even in that romantic context, its smoke literally dividing Henry and Elizabeth while he promises not to think of "those horrible days and nights" any more, the time when he "couldn't think of anything else." And, of course, the idyllic quality of the scene has already been undercut by the preceding scene in which the monster and the darkness have entered the open air.

Frankenstein's monster, introduced so suddenly to life and light, to fire and death, gains strength as rapidly. Doctor Waldman reports in his journal as he prepares to vivisect him that he requires increasingly stronger injections to remain inert. Waldman, also a good man and the father of Henry's intellect, cannot cope with the living force that Henry has created, and shortly after sunset (after 7:30 in the evening) he prepares to kill the monster but is killed himself. The gracefully beautiful first movement of the monster's hand in the creation scene is repeated in this scene, but it has now become an expression of menace and strength. The monster raises his hand and strangles Doctor Waldman. He then stumbles clumsily downstairs in the tower, rejects the cellar of pain and death, and wanders out into the night.

The monster continues to grow in strength and skill as the film proceeds. He opens the door of the tower only accidentally, but by the time he arrives at Frankenstein's home, he is able to move silently and to open a French window. His growth into life

The two children, both left alone by their fathers, play together by the lake.





Fire even enters its natural antagonist, water.

is, however, always ironically a movement toward death — the deaths of others at his hands and finally his own. Without the guidance of his creator, he is forced to be only a creature of his senses. He leaves the tower mainly to escape the awful cellar room below the ground. He meets the little girl Maria in the sunlight by a lake, and her kindness and innocence rouse the yearning for light in him again. The two children, both left alone by their fathers, play together, tossing flowers into the lake to watch them float. But the monster cannot differentiate between Maria and a flower, so he drowns her while only hoping to see her float. Light, air and water have become as deadly for the monster as darkness, earth and fire. These elements continue to mingle dangerously for the rest of his life. After the discovery of Maria's death and the monster's attack on Elizabeth, he is tracked down by the villagers bearing torches. Fire offers the only illumination under a blurred and cloudy sky of dimly mingled light and dark, and in one striking and significant shot, fire even enters its natural antagonist,

water, as the villagers' torches are shown burning in the night air and reflected beneath them in the lake. The hitherto controlled camera moves freely from high to low, moving over the water and into the barren hills as it tracks the villagers and their prey through the dark and elemental landscape.

Henry Frankenstein reassumes the moral responsibility for his creation after the attack on Elizabeth. He first attempts to protect her by locking her in her room, just as he had earlier locked his visitors in the tower and then locked his monster away. But he realizes that a man cannot simply lock up his values and his life and expect them to be safe from the dangers of day and night. He rejects the Baron's world and its preserved flowers once again when he sees the necessity to face his creation directly and handle it with his own hands (not Fritz's or Doctor Waldman's). He thinks of Elizabeth, as he had not done in his laboratory, when he places her in Victor's care — a selfless act, for Victor loves her. (Earlier Elizabeth had said lightly to Victor, "I'm far too fond of you," and

As Henry and the monster struggle, Henry rolls on the ground into the fire



Victor had replied, "I wish you were.") His home responsibilities in relative order, Henry ventures out, dressed in a light suit, to face his dark creation. But now too late, the damage of his earlier failure beyond undoing, Henry vows not to create further (nor to redeem his creation), but to destroy: "I made him with these hands and with these hands I will destroy him." Henry is acting now in full consciousness. He admits the manhood of his creature (he calls him "him"), but his moral reactions to that man are dark ones, those of justice and vengeance.

The monster meets his maker in the mountains, and Henry meets darkness, earth and fire as he meets his creature. The monster knocks Henry's torch away, and as they struggle Henry rolls on the ground into the fire. The monster then carries him to a windmill, and there the two face each other—alone but surrounded by an angry humanity, their faces given to the audience identically as they stare at each other through a turning wooden gear in the mill, two living faces in a context of motion beyond either's control, not creator and creation now, but fellow creatures, victims each to each.

The monster was born in an abandoned watch tower, given life by the fire and light of the lightning and the great ray, the light beyond seeing. He dies, trapped and in a frenzy of fear, by fire in another tower, a windmill; Paul Jensen says that "Frankenstein's laboratory was originally to have been located in the old mill, so when the monster returns there at the film's end, it is because that is the only refuge he knows," and the Baron still refers to Henry's tower as "an old ruined windmill." The elements gave him birth, and they now conspire to give his life back to the air and him to death. He hurls his creator from him like a broken doll, almost as if the life of them both were contained solely in the monster. But it is the creator who survives, saved by the vanes of the windmill and dropped back safely to the ground. Earth and fire, joined by the gravedigger in the initial scene, separate again, as Henry comes finally to earth and his creation is destroyed by fire, the only light which was ever given him without denial.

The final scene in the film takes place in the light. Henry is restored to a comforting Elizabeth, but he is a figure in the dis-



The last real shot is a descent away from the windmill itself a torch now against a dark sky.

tance, seen through a doorway. The Baron is in the foreground, talking to the maids about his grandmother's wine again. The door is closed, and the Baron repeats his toast. "Here's . . . Here's to a son to the House of Frankenstein." But it is his toast; it is not shared by Elizabeth and Henry. There may well be a son, but the order of the Baron's world has been forever shattered, for all the appearances to the contrary. The Baron gets the last word, but the last real scene in the film was at the burning windmill, the last real shot a descent away from that windmill, itself a torch now against a dark sky. It is no wonder that Orson Welles copied this shot so scrupulously at the end of *Citizen Kane*, for both films close with the burning of a great man's dream and the camera's appropriate withdrawal down and away from the ruins. The last time we see Henry's face clearly is there, by firelight, the face of a broken hero but of a man who has dared look himself and his actions directly in the face.

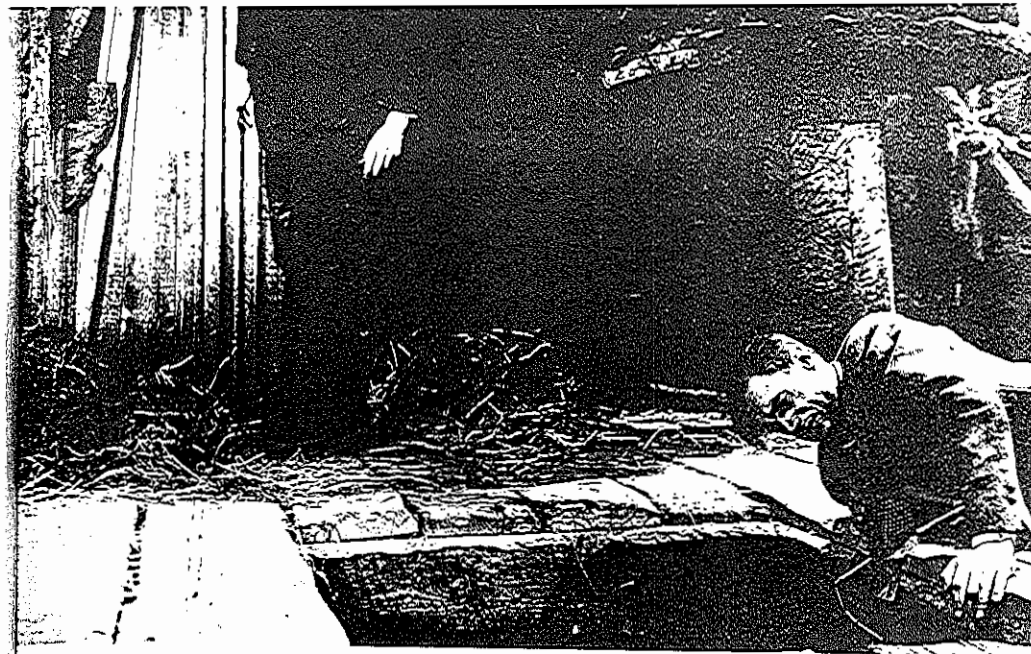
The texture of the film will not allow an easy triumph of the tamed light of the Baron's house. The Baron's preserved orange blossoms are no longer in evidence, but there are fresh flowers in

Henry's room by his bed. The light which finally shapes the film is the whole pattern of light and shadow and fire. We first see Henry's face in a domestic context at Elizabeth's home, where her framed picture of Henry shares the frame with a burning candle. The whole movement of the film indicates that for Henry, the man who dared to be free, the light will never be free of the flame, or of the night.

If the pattern of light and dark in the film helps enrich the moral and thematic ambiguity of the conclusion, another structural pattern certainly helps to shape that ending. The movement in the film is not primarily horizontal, but vertical — a movement which the film shares with much Romantic art. Henry Frankenstein strives to transcend his earthbound mortality; he wants to discover just one answer, "what eternity is, for example," and he dares ask that question and act to answer it. He reaches to the heavens for his answer, just as his monster reaches upward for the light and was raised to the lightning for his birth. The film is an elaborate structure of vertical movements to match and give esthetic substance to Henry's striving (and that of his creation), but for all the striving and movement upward, the general movement of the film is downward.

The clearest vertical movement in the film's structure is the plot's. From a hillside graveyard up to the tower, the narrative then moves down into the village as the monster and Henry descend to the depths of what they are. The film rises again to the windmill and those two characters' mutual recognition of themselves and of each other. But that movement is halted by fire. The monster dies in the collapsing windmill, pressed to the floor by a fallen beam, and Henry falls to the earth and is taken back down to his home. (The Burgomaster says, "Take him down to the village, and let's get him home.")

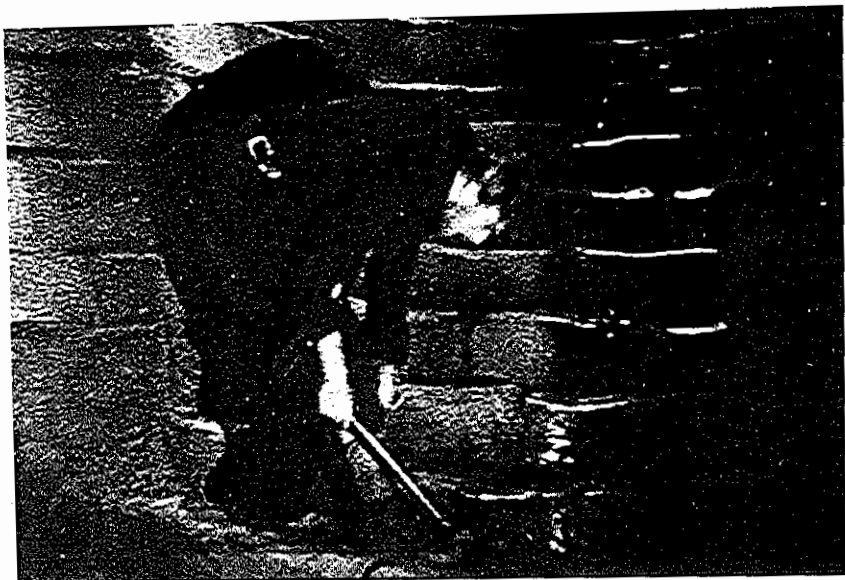
All of the upward movements in the film are concluded by a movement down. The coffin is buried and then dug up, but the body in it returns to earth in the dying monster's form. Fritz climbs the gallows, but only to cut down the corpse and leap after it himself. Frankenstein's first command to Fritz, his first words in



The monster's and Henry's mutual recognition of themselves and each other.

the film, are, "Down, down, you fool!" His commands later to Victor and then to the monster echo those first words; he tells them both to "Sit down!" All of Fritz's journeys up and down the stairs in the tower end in his death by hanging (a last small up and down) in the cellar room. Henry comes down from the tower to the village himself in defeat. And the monster's first journey as a free man is to come down the tower steps and on down into the village.

The camera moves into the village and up to the Burgomaster's door on Henry's wedding day — an upward movement that reveals the town at its most cheerily innocent and happiest. But Ludwig follows that exact journey carrying little Maria's dead body, and the music that escorted the camera on its trip is stilled by Ludwig's movement over the same way. (Even the sock that Fritz tugs up over his skinny shanks on the steps in the tower reappears in re-



Even the sock that Fritz pulls up appears in reverse on the pulled-down sock on Maria's swinging dead leg.



verse on the pulled-down sock on Maria's swinging dead leg.) And finally the men of the village retrace that journey in reverse with burning torches as they go out to hunt down the murderer.

The chase moves up into the mountains, but that movement is also a reversal of an earlier movement rather than a new positive one. Frankenstein and his monster move back up to a windmill, only this time the creature brings his creator to the heights. The death reverses the birth, and the spent Henry is finally brought down again to his ordinary life.

What goes up, in *Frankenstein*, does finally come down. The Baron does have the last word. But the gained awareness, earned by violence and pain and death, of the necessity of the descent as well as the ascent is itself perhaps the final ascent in the film. Henry will never be able to ignore the real or the fallen again, and the audience, because of the complexity and integrity of the film's textural structure, will never itself be able to ignore either the power of the yearning for the ascent and the light, nor the awesome necessity for the descent and the darkness as well. The source of the film's largeness and of its sympathy and dignity is in that gained awareness. Mary Shelley's monster claims that human sympathy is all that he requires to become a moral man: "If any being felt emotions of benevolence towards me, I should return them a hundred and a hundredfold; for that one creature's sake I would make peace with the whole kind!" No one offers Frankenstein's monster that sympathy except for an innocent child, with the possible exception of Frankenstein himself for that one moment in the windmill when he faces the monster through the turning gear. And the monster does not die at peace with human-kind.

The texture of the film seems to indicate that Henry has grown morally in the course of the film, perhaps not to the heights of which he dreamed at the beginning, but to heights of perception that most men (the Baron and the villagers) never reach. But the film itself demands another ascent, the development of a genuine sympathy for the monster, the figure of horror and fear, by the audience itself. Karloff said that "Whale and I both saw the character as an innocent one" and that "What astonished us was the

fantastic number of ordinary people that got this general air of sympathy." Give the credit to Karloff's astonishing performance or to Whale's direction or to the film as a whole, but that sympathy is gained and the film's ultimate moral structure finds its resolution in the individuals in the audience. That sympathy is finally the film's "meaning." Its narrative and symbolic and thematic texture is the necessary medium for that meaning's creation, its flowering in actual experience.

This discussion has by no means exhausted *Frankenstein*. If it had, it would have been its own refutation. The film's conscious and expressionistic artificiality in setting and costume, its use of flowers and of dogs, its emphasis upon the ceilings of its rooms as well as the walls and floors, the camera's movement and rhythm, the sparse and extraordinarily effective use of music, the use of numerous sets of paired characters, the film's social implications (the evil's flowing down from the upper class to the ordinary villagers), the contrasts of the solid earth with the fragility and hollowness of man's structures and even with water — all of these approaches to the film will add much more to what I have suggested here. *Frankenstein* is a genuinely vital work of art in which matter and form are actively one. It expresses the human need for growth and largeness, and it also expresses the limitations which hamper that growth and give to life both its tragic possibilities and its heroic potentialities.