

# Frankenstein comparative paper

Literature, Russian Literature



Compare the Frankenstein novel with Kenneth Branagh's film version. Which is the better example of a gothic text?

Gothic texts enable audiences to be immersed in a world of the supernatural involving horror and romance. Mary Shelley's novel Frankenstein, and the film adaptation directed by Kenneth Branagh, are both texts that portray the gothic genre. The film may share the same gothic elements as in the novel; however the novel allows the reader to use their own imagination, thus bringing to life this genre.

Through the comparison of supernatural events, heightened emotions and the atmosphere of mystery and suspense in both literary mediums of Frankenstein, the differences and similarities will be compared to find the better example of a gothic text.

Most gothic texts have a series of supernatural events that help the progression of the story, yet Frankenstein has only one. This event being the creation of the monster sets the entire story in motion. When comparing the novel and film adaptation, the monster was somewhat made in the same way.

Various deceased body parts were sewed together to form the shape of a man, and then the use of an electric element brought the monster to life. However, in the novel the monster's birth was more archaic compared to the seemingly humorous, clumsy behaviour of the monster's birth in the film as Victor Frankenstein helped it to its feet. When the monster was 'born' the emotions and senses were much more detailed in the novel, since it almost

portrayed the monster as being a child that explored and discovered such things as clothes and fire:

“ I found a fire which had been left by some wandering beggars, and was overcome with delight at the warmth I experienced from it. In my joy I thrust my hand into the live embers, but quickly drew it out again with a cry of pain. How strange, I thought, that the same cause should produce such opposite effects!” Monster (p. 123)

When this is compared with the film adaptation, once the monster was ‘born’ somehow it already knew what clothes were used for and how to construct makeshift shoes out of cloth. When any child is born the most natural and childlike thing to do is explore your surroundings. The novel Frankenstein, allows the reader to understand the childlike nature of the monster thus building up emotions, which the film did not allow as it took away the childlike innocence when the monster was created.

Heightened emotions are a gothic feature Mary Shelley’s novel Frankenstein portrays clearer than the film adaptation. This is evident when the monster and Frankenstein were conversing in an ice cave. In this scene the tensions were very high between them. The way Shelley portrayed these emotions was by the use of eloquent wording. In the novel, the monster was well spoken when addressing Frankenstein about his experiences of life, and also quite intelligent. When compared to the film, in which the monster stuttered sounds, was not clear at all with many emotions being lost through clumsy wording, thereby portraying him as unintelligent. The build-up of emotions such as rage, disgust, sadness and refusal expressed by Victor in the ice

cave when asked to create another like the monster had greater impact in the novel:

“ Shall I create another like yourself, whose joint wickedness might desolate the world? Begone! I have answered you; you may torture me, but I will never consent.” Victor (p. 176)

In the film, Victor simply agreed without the degree of emotions expressed in the novel. With the use of Shelley’s eloquent wording in the novel, heightened emotions are seen clearly compared to the film adaptation in which heightened emotions are rarely seen, thus not supporting a gothic text.

Shelley used a very gothic and gloomy atmosphere throughout the novel to put an emphasis on the horror that comes when men try to play God. As a novel can only use the reader’s imagination and descriptive wording by an author’s command of literary skills, a film adaptation of a novel has what may seem to be an advantage in being able to portray a mysterious and suspenseful atmosphere through effective use music, lighting and visual elements to create a gothic atmosphere, something that is not necessarily available in a novel. Yet a novel can create music, lighting and visual elements through the effective use of words. One technique in which the film proved better than the novel was pathetic fallacy; when the atmosphere changed with the mood of the character.

An example of this was when the scenes changed from Geneva to Ingolstadt. In Geneva a sunny, happy and vibrant atmosphere was seen through Victor’s relationship with his family and beloved, Elizabeth. With the film also being

able to use the effect of a symphony orchestra, it really brought this atmosphere of happiness together. In Ingolstadt the atmosphere was dark and gloomy, and with the effect of the symphony orchestra it was obvious that Ingolstadt was a place where Victor would encounter horrible misfortunes. Compared to the film, the novel was at a disadvantage by not having the ability to engage other senses besides the use of imagination. However, the descriptive wording Shelley used was sufficient enough to build a full picture of Victor's misfortunes:

“ As I still pursued my journey to the northward, the snows thickened and the cold increased in a degree almost too severe to support.” Victor (p. 257)

In the quote, Victor tracks down the monster in the Arctic; Shelley uses this desolate location to show the isolation of Victor and the monster creating a gothic atmosphere. Even though the film version had the ability to use music and visual elements to create a fuller atmosphere of mystery and suspense, the novel's descriptive wording proves greater.

The film adaptation may share the same gothic elements as in the novel; however the novel lets the reader use their own imagination thus bringing to life this genre. The novel allowed the reader to understand the childlike nature of the monster through the supernatural event, which the film did not. The use of Shelley's powerful wording expressed heightened emotions better than what was evident in the film adaptation. Even though the film had an advantage in creating an atmosphere of mystery and suspense through the use of creative cinematography, Shelley's descriptive wording was sufficient enough to create a far better gothic atmosphere, thus being the better example of a gothic text.