

Social issues in "frankenstein" film essay (movie review)

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Directed by James Whale in 1931, Frankenstein is a chef-d'oeuvre horror film depicting several social issues in Europe after the First World War. The war caused unparalleled destruction, which threatened to tear the social fabric characterized by declining human welfare and stagnation in most societal issues. James Whale adapted Mary Shelley's 1818-masterpiece book, Frankenstein. The movie Frankenstein can be interpreted from the disparate point of view as it covers many issues touching on politics, religion, sexuality, and human origins, among other issues. This paper is an analysis of the movie Frankenstein by focusing on the social themes in it.

In the opening scenes of the movie, Heinrich Frankenstein creates a lifeless human figure, but he desires to get life into it, which would culminate in the successful creation of an artificial human being. His girlfriend, Elizabeth, tries to convince Heinrich to abandon his plans, but she fails terribly on this attempt. Fortunately, for Heinrich, he manages to 'breathe' life into his creature, which turns into a docile and obedient being.

However, the being becomes an aggressive monster upon being locked up after its creators start thinking it is unfit for society. The monster attacks Frankenstein and his friend, Waldman, as they labor to rescue Fritz, who apparently dies from the monster's attack. At this point, Frankenstein realizes that the monster should die, and he hatches a plan to inject it with a lethal substance. He manages to execute his obliterating plans, and he leaves for his wedding, knowing that the monster is dead. Waldman is left behind to watch over the dead creature as Frankenstein leaves for his long-awaited wedding.

The monster resurrects and attacks Waldman before escaping to the unknown. In its escape, it meets a lovely girl, Maria, and after the two playing an interesting game of tossing flowers in a water body, the monster ultimately tosses the girl into the water as the final flower of the game. The monster then attacks Frankenstein's fiancée on the wedding day and escapes without being seen. In confusion, the father of the drowned girl arrives carrying the lifeless body, which angers the villagers to pursue the monster. In the closing stages of the movie, the monster attacks Frankenstein in the mountains, but he survives after being trapped in an old mill. The monster is also trapped in the mill, and the villagers set it on fire, thus ending its spree of destruction.

As aforementioned, James Whale, the director of the movie, hinged his script on the social difficulties that swept across Europe after the First World War. Those who participated in the war came home devastated emotionally with nothing to pride in except that the architects of the war had won. Normal people were turned into death hungry soldiers, and after the war, the majority of them suffered post-traumatic stress disorder due to the vagaries of the war. According to Remarque (1996), one of the returning soldiers from the war lamented, " We feel as if something inside us, in our blood, has been switched on...we are dead men with no feelings, who are able by some trick, some dangerous magic, to keep on running and keep on killing" (p. 38).

These soldiers could not continue living normal lives, and their integration back into a society called for a series of therapies. Just like Frankenstein's monster, the soldiers were ' created' by the authorities for what was

believed to be a noble course. The soldiers became monsters after a spree of killings in the war, just as Frankenstein's monster, which left a trail of destruction wherever it went. Frankenstein's monster represents the mangled and depressed soldiers returning from the war only to find an economy in crisis, given that the Great Depression was in the offing after the war.

In a bid to understand James Whale's motives for such a script, it is important to explore his role or participation in the war. Gatiss (1995) posits that James joined the army in 1915, and his duty "was no mean feat for the son of a Dudley furnace man, even allowing for the tremendously high casualty rate among junior officers on the Western Front" (p. 72). After returning from the war, James did not disclose a lot concerning what happened to him, but some claim that the Germans held him as a prisoner of war at one point. Therefore, Whale experienced how it feels to be involved in war only to return home to an ailing economy coupled with the trauma that accompanies killing fellow human beings in a war. In addition, during a war, soldiers crave love, affection, and romance that come easily in normal social settings. As aforementioned, Whale adopted the work of Mary Shelly, Frankenstein, which was written in 1818.

In the story, the monster requests Victor, its creator, to create a mate for it in a bid to escape loneliness. In the movie, Whale includes the love and romance aspect as he prepares to marry his longtime sweetheart. However, the monster tries to kill the fiancée on the day of the wedding. This occurrence is symbolic, and the monster, in this case, can represent the

government or the mutilated soldiers returning from the war, as explored in the next two paragraphs.

The majority of the soldiers involved in the First World War were normal civilians who enlisted in the army solely to help their nations win the war. In normal circumstances, such civilians would not have enlisted in the army. However, as they entered the war and participated in the bizarre killings that normally occur in wars, these soldiers changed forever. They became bloodletting monsters with killing and death, becoming a commonplace in otherwise innocent citizens, who were pulled into a senseless war serving the interests of its architects. The monster in the film, Frankenstein, is initially docile and obedient. However, at one point, its creator seeks to seclude it from society, as it is allegedly unfit to be in such an environment. Frankenstein creates the monster for a noble cause that seeks to have an alternative human being.

Unfortunately, the monster becomes aggressive and starts harming people, including its creator. In the same way, the government created monsters by sending civilians to the war. Curtis (1998) posits that the soldiers were "wrapped in tattered bandages, some limping, some blind walking with upraised arms, some stumbling like Frankenstein's monster" (p. 56). Upon their return, the depressed soldiers found an ailing economy, and they had nothing to celebrate. Suicides were widespread, and some soldiers committed suicide, while others killed people around them out of frustrations. In addition, some of the surviving soldiers returned to haunt Europe.

Babington (1997) posits, " All the senior members of the Third Reich were veterans of WWI driven mad by four years of bombardment on the Western Front, they unleashed their madness on Europe, subjecting every major city to the experience of bombardment...they brought the madness of the trenches to the whole world" (p. 83). Just like Frankenstein's monster, which turned against its creator, some returning soldiers regrouped to form the Third Reich. This group started tormenting Europe, its creator. The European authorities, especially France and Britain, created these soldiers for a noble course just like Frankenstein with his monster. In the movie, Frankenstein uses a laboratory to create a monster, which symbolizes battlefields where normal soldiers turn into monsters.

On the other hand, the monster can be taken to represent the European governments at the time of World War I. The governments turned into monsters towards the soldiers involved in the war. The returning soldiers were evidently traumatized, and their lives had changed. In Britain, the government could not deal with the increasing number of shell shock victims, and thus it ordered their execution (Gregory 2013). Babington (1997) laments that most returning soldiers were " deliberately picked out and convicted as a lesson to others... they were selected, charged, and subjected to a mock trial often without defense one day, convicted, then shot at dawn the following day" (p. 91). In this case, the government is the monster for killing its citizens. In the movie, Maria's father carries her lifeless daughter in his arms with sorrow all over his face.

Similarly, the soldiers returned home to find a government that had ravaged their families and the economy. Whale directed the movie in 1931 as the society started experiencing the effects of the Great Depression. The farmer holding his dead daughter symbolizes the soldiers coming home to find their shattered families and dreams. They had lost everything, including their lives, as living with post-traumatic stress disorder was unbearable. Even to the government, such soldiers could not be accepted back into society, which explains why the government authorized their killing. Therefore, the movie Frankenstein seeks to highlight the plight of soldiers returning from the First World War. James Whale, the film's director, was a victim of the vagaries of the war as a soldier, and this aspect validates the claims made in this paper concerning the impact of the war on soldiers.

In 1931, James Whale directed the horror film, Frankenstein, in the quest to highlight the repugnance of the soldiers who were involved in the First World War. Whale fought in the war, and thus he had firsthand experience on the effects of the combat. Just like the monster in the film, the soldiers turned violent upon their return from the war as they were suffering from the post-traumatic stress disorder. A majority of them committed suicide while others were killed under the watch and command of the very institutions that created them.

In the movie, Frankenstein tries to kill his creation, the monster, after its attempts to kill his fiancée. In the same way, the British government executed its own soldiers for different reasons, and this aspect ties the movie to the events of the First World War. In addition, some soldiers

regrouped to form the Third Reich, which started tormenting its creator, viz. Europe. In the same way, the monster returns to haunt Frankenstein by killing people close to him, starting with Fritz. Therefore, the movie Frankenstein highlights the social issues surrounding the First World War, especially on the soldiers that participated in the combat.

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