

The modern frankenstein: an analysis of the similarities and differences between ...

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At first glance, the sci-fi movie *Ex Machina* and the classic romantic novel *Frankenstein* seem to project two distinct dynamics between the creator and his creation. Nathan is far from being a stereotypical ‘mad scientist’ such as Victor Frankenstein, his creation is far more elegant than Frankenstein’s monster, and the dynamic between him and his robots seems far more complex than the revenge plots that Victor and his monster have for each other.

However, upon closer examination, it becomes clear that both *Ex Machina* and *Frankenstein* model the exact same character dynamic at their core: one that tells the tale of a mad scientist obsessed with creating life, unprepared for the consequences that follow. Perhaps the most glaring difference that one will notice is between the ‘mad scientists’ themselves. Victor Frankenstein is the character that has defined the ‘mad scientist’ stereotype. Completely absorbed in his work and without involvement in anything except for his own studies, he often falls ill, and is often portrayed with a frail figure. Nathan however, breaks this stereotype from the very moment he is introduced in the film. He is masculine and — from his beard to his boxing to his habit of calling people “dude” — he is oozing with a sense of swagger that the stereotypical scientist simply does not possess.

However, at their cores, Nathan and Victor are almost identical. They are obsessed with creating life, excluding themselves from the rest of the world to immerse themselves in their studies. Victor “kept [his] work-shop of filthy creation” (page 55) in “a solitary chamber”, hidden from the rest of the world, where he worked tirelessly for many months on creating the creature.

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Nathan's property presents a very similar situation, as his research facility in the wilderness takes over two hours by helicopter to travel to. Both characters are also completely unprepared for what to do after their original mission to create life has been complete.

This results in the neglect of their own creations throughout their growth: Ava's learning process and development are ignored by Nathan and Victor immediately abandons his creation after bestowing it life. Another difference that a viewer may notice is in the contrast between Frankenstein's master and Ava themselves. Frankenstein's monster is portrayed as large, male, and visually grotesque, while Ava is slender, female, and possesses a stereotypically-defined attractive figure. These two creations almost seem to be opposite, but beyond appearance, they serve an identical role in the creator-creation relationship. Both Ava and Frankenstein's monster are incredibly smart—smarter than their creators—and incredibly manipulative.

Slowly but surely, both Ava and Frankenstein's monster are able to exact revenge on their predecessors. Just as Ava manipulates Caleb to gain her own freedom, Frankenstein's monster manipulates Victor's loved ones to bargain with Victor and convince him to create a partner for him. Through this process, it becomes clear that they have developed into superior beings than their creators, even in terms of their conscience. Ava's knowledge and understanding of human emotion is far superior to that of Nathan, who is already adept enough to pressure and manipulate Caleb into doing things such as signing the nondisclosure agreement. In this situation, Caleb realizes that he is being pressured, but he agrees to the contract anyways.

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However, in Ava's manipulation, neither Caleb nor Nathan realize that they are being manipulated. Frankenstein's monster also shows that his ability to think in a logical pattern is greater than that of Victor's. He is able to craft an incredible logical argument when pleading with Victor to listen to his story, "urging [Victor] to comply with [his monster's] demand" (page 107). Such a logical argument is even lacking when Victor presents his own story, as he constantly and illogically cites the fear of his words being seen as "the ravings of insanity" (page 80) as a reason for his silence. The differences between the relationship and the dynamic between the creator and his creation themselves are notable as well. Victor, when faced with his own creation, is disgusted by the "detested form" (page 106) of his creation, yet feels a strange sense of responsibility, as he recognizes to a certain extent "the duties of a creator towards his creature" (page 107).

Nathan seems to have an opposite approach. He is incredibly proud of his creations, showing off Ava to Caleb, yet acts as if he feels completely irresponsible for the development of his creation. A clip in the movie shows past droids breaking their arms in attempts to escape while Nathan simply stands and watches, showing no regard for what his creation is doing to itself. However, both Nathan and Victor seem to recognize their creation as their own. Just as Victor seems to feel a sense of responsibility and duty towards his creature, Nathan is able to recognize that he is liable for Ava (but perhaps only her successes). He even says to Caleb once that, "if you think about it, I'm like her dad".

Nonetheless, in both of these situations, the end result is the exact same. The abuse and neglect through the development of both Ava and Frankenstein's monster results in the creation of the identical emotion towards their creators: a vehement and fiery hate. Ex Machina and Frankenstein are distinct pieces of work that ultimately tell the same story and tackle the same issues regarding the dynamic between any kind of creator and their creation. The various differences in the creator, the creation, and their relationship are simply different lenses from which the audience can view this story. Just as Frankenstein is a modern take on the story of Prometheus, Ex Machina is a modern take on the story of Frankenstein.