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FRANKENSTEIN'S FILM LEGACY

Sara Martín Alegre (ed.).



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Preface. *Frankenstein's* Film Legacy: Into the 21st Century and Beyond

The e-book here offered is based on work contributed by the second-year undergraduate students registered in the core subject 'English Romantic Literature', which I taught in the Spring semester of the academic year 2018-2019 within the four-year BA in English Studies of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. The success of a series of previous projects produced with students¹ convinced me of the suitability of the idea I had for this specific course: publishing a guide focused on the many films that descend directly or indirectly from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), one of the two novels included in our reading list for the course (the other was Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1816)).

Frankenstein is an amazing novel, no matter from which angle it is considered. It was written by a woman who, aged only eighteen at the time, was even younger than my students. This is astonishing considering, besides, the difficult life Mary led after meeting dashing Romantic poet Percy Shelley when she was sixteen and he twenty-one. What is often perceived as a very romantic tale was in fact an extremely difficult relationship led constantly on the move and on the edge of bankruptcy which, besides, ended tragically with his death by drowning in 1822 when he was only twenty-nine. Percy left his wife Harriet to be Mary's lover and she eventually committed suicide by drowning when pregnant, possibly by Percy; he lost custody of their two children because of the scandalous affair with Mary and, also, because of his atheism. Mary's first baby was born practically at the same time as Percy's and Harriet's second child, in 1815. The little girl died and Mary had another child, William, in 1816, a few months before the famous stay at Villa Diodati with Lord Byron, during which she first thought of her novel. The boy William died in 1819 and the Shelleys would still lose another baby before having Percy Florence, the only survivor and Mary's constant companion in her long widowhood (during which she became a professional author).

Feminist criticism made the connection between the anxieties of motherhood and those of Victor Frankenstein's fatherhood back in the 1980s but still many sexist scholars insist that a novel as unique as Mary's could only have been written by Percy Shelley. It is now proven that his intervention only modified in a superficial way about 5000 words. The preface to the first edition was certainly his, as Mary acknowledged in her own preface to the second edition, but, as she stresses, all the ideas and incidents are her own invention. The legend of the Golem –a creature magically fashioned from mud by Judah Loew ben Bezalel, a late-16th-century rabbi of Prague to protect the

¹ See, from newest to oldest, *Gender in 21st Century Cinema: 50 Titles* (2019), <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/206282>; *Gender and Feminism: The Students' View, Vol 2* (2018), <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/129180>; *Reading SF Short Fiction: 50 Titles* (2016), <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/163528>; *Gender and Feminism: The Students' View* (2015), <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/129180>; *Charming and Bewitching: Considering the Harry Potter Series* (2014), <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/122987> and *Addictive and Wonderful: The Experience of Reading the Harry Potter Series* (2014), <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/118225>.

Jewish ghetto— is often invoked as a precedent for *Frankenstein*. It is, however, important to note that, despite the crudity and improbability of Victor's methods, he is a scientist very much intent on dispelling the fog of superstition.

The young man quickly transitions from alchemy to chemistry, which is why Mary Shelley was rightly called the mother of science fiction by British SF star writer Brian Aldiss (in *The Billion Year Spree*, 1973). The more one reads about science in the late 18th century and beginnings of the 19th century—for instance in Richard Holmes's superb volume *The Age of Wonder: How the Romantic Generation Discovered the Terror and Beauty of Science* (2008)—the clearer it is that *Frankenstein* is a novel deeply rooted in its time and that Mary had a keen intellect perfectly capable of grasping where science would soon lead as the Industrial Revolution progressed. She chose to send a technophobic warning to the world about the dangers of creating monsters by abusing science which, in our times of impending catastrophe due to man-induced climate change, is more valid than ever. Of course, there is a second, equally important message about the father's responsibility for the welfare of his children, here a son who is born good but learns to do evil as a reaction against his abandonment and general ill-treatment due to his odd physique and morbid origins.

No film adaptation has truly reproduced Mary's novel and the main victim of this failure is the creature. Whereas in *Frankenstein* Victor's strange son is fully articulate, for he uses his superhuman abilities to teach himself to speak and read, already in the first theatrical adaptation—*Presumption; or, the Fate of Frankenstein* (1823), a melodrama by Richard Brinsley Peake—he was deprived of his voice and transformed into the lurching giant which, later, cinema would inherit. James Whale's iconic film (1931) is actually an adaptation of the 1927 play descended from Peake's by British playwright Peggy Webling. Kenneth Branagh's 1994 film, pompously titled *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, tried to redress the many wrongs done to the original but ultimately it only offered a disjointed, misogynistic discourse which did little for either novel or novelist. In my own view, the best adaptation of Mary's text is Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner* (1982), the cult film based on American SF author Philip K. Dick's post-Shelleyan novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968). Mary Shelley has had the misfortune of having her novel read in the light of the many texts descended from it and found to be not to the taste of contemporary readers, though she certainly is an admirable novelist. At the same time, many have been credited with inventing original plots that actually derive from *Frankenstein* and the Shelleyan motif of science going wrong. *Blade Runner* is the best-known case but there are many others, as this volume shows.

There are hundreds of films based on *Frankenstein* and descended from it or its imitators, and selecting just a few dozens was difficult enough. I tried to strike a balance between the two categories (direct and indirect adaptations) besides covering the whole history of cinema, from *Metropolis* (1927) to *Alita: Battle Angel* (2019), a title actually suggested by one of the students. The volume risks, thus, being incoherent but the function of the essays in each factsheet is to emphasize the links with Mary Shelley's seminal novel. And the other way around: as the 21st century discourse on post-humanism grows, new readings of *Frankenstein* emerge. Victor's decision to manufacture a new species that might revere him as their progenitor suddenly sounds as the very essence of transhumanism. According to this dangerous doctrine we have the duty to direct the evolution of Homo Sapiens using

technoscience until we can transcend our limits and become truly post-human. Yet, as Victor realizes when he decides to destroy the creature's bride, there is a serious risk of our being eliminated by a new species that might regard us as obsolete remnants of the past. This is one of the main topics of current science fiction.

The student contributors and I myself hope, dear reader, that you can navigate your way into a truly exciting selection. And I hope, as the teacher in charge of the project, that the students' work can elicit your curiosity and open your eyes to new ways of appreciating Mary Shelley's immense (film) legacy. Thank you for your time and attention. Enjoy!

[**SPOILER ALERT!!** Please note that the factsheets suppose you're already familiar with the film discussed and contain many spoilers]

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<http://gent.uab.cat/saramartinalegre>

<http://blogs.uab.cat/saramartinalegre>, *The Joys of Teaching Literature*

Metropolis (1927)

CREW AND CAST

Director: Fritz Lang

Screenplay: Thea von Harbou (based on her novel), Fritz Lang (uncredited)

Producer: Erich Pommer

Main performers: Alfred Abel (Joh Fredersen), Brigitte Helm (The Robot/Maria), Erwin Biswanger (11811-Georgy), Fritz Rasp (The Thin Man), Gustav Fröhlich (Freder), Heinrich George (Grot), Rudolf Klein-Rogge (C.A. Rotwang), Theodor Loos (Josaphat)

Company: UFA

Nationality: Germany

Duration: 2h 33m (longest version)



PLOT SUMMARY

Metropolis is a film set in a futuristic city with an oppressive system, where the lifestyles of the rich and the poor are very different. While some people live in the most beautiful places with all their luxuries, others are exploited, working long hours with machines to make the city function. The story narrates how, in order to avoid a revolution among the working class, a robot is given life and the physical traits of the kind-hearted Maria. However, this robot turns out to be an evil and manipulative machine, which causes violence and brings chaos to the city.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Fritz Lang (Vienna, 1890) first studied architecture and painting before entering the world of cinema. In early 1915, he enlisted in the Army to fight in World War I, but he was severely injured the following year. During his rest at the hospital, he wrote some ideas for movies before being eventually sent home. Later on, he was hired by Erich Pommer as a screenwriter for his production company in Berlin. His debut film was *Die Hochzeit im Exzentrik Klub* (1917). In 1920, he met the actress and writer Thea von Harbou, his future wife, with whom he would write the script of *Metropolis* (1927), among many other famous films, such as *Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler* (1922) and *M: Eine Stadt sucht einen Mörder* (1931).

Metropolis was well-received because it impressed everyone with its beautiful and majestic visual effects and its futuristic image, becoming a silent film era blockbuster. On the other hand, it also received many negative reviews because of its

duration, which was considered too long. As a consequence, many scenes of the film were cut, and there exist now a variety of versions. The *Giorgio Moroder Presents Metropolis* (1984) restoration received, likewise, bad reviews in general and was even nominated for “Worst Original Song” and “Worst Musical Score” in the Razzie Awards, though it eventually won the “Best DVD/Blu-Ray Special Edition Release” award (Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films, USA 2012). *The Complete Metropolis* (2010) release was the winner of “Best DVD Classic Film Release” (2011). The film was also nominated for “Best International Film” and “Best Music” in the same edition, and the restoration of 2002 won the “Special Award” of the New York Film Critics Circle Awards. It was also the winner in the category of “Restoration of The Year” in the Rondo Hatton Classic Horror Awards (2002).

In *Metropolis*, one of the main characters is Freder, the son of the most powerful man there, Joh Fredersen. When Freder sees pretty, humble Maria for the first time he falls in love with her, and through his interest in her we become aware of the condition that the poorest citizens live in. Freder follows Maria, who is a sort of lay preacher, and finds out the truth about that place, and how there are people who work till death while others enjoy lives of ease in Freder’s own circle. Later, the young man asks his father about this, and it seems that a revolution is inevitable. So Fredersen visits Rotwang, an inventor who has not got over the death of his beloved, the woman who married Fredersen. This is a crucial moment of the film, because we see the robot for the first time, Rotwang’s biggest invention. This robot and Rotwang mirror the monster and Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, but there are as many differences as similarities between them.

The most evident fact that connects the two creations is that they once were inanimate entities, but they are both given life thanks to two powerful scientists. In *Metropolis*, Maria is kidnapped and taken to Rotwang’s house. She’s connected to the robot and Rotwang gives the artificial woman her traits. That way, Joh will be able to use the robot to manipulate and deceive people using Maria’s beloved image and, consequently, he will prevent any possible revolution. In contrast, in *Frankenstein* Victor’s reasons for creating the monster are utter selfishness, because he just wants to be admired and praised for doing the impossible: bringing life to the dead.

The biggest difference between the robot and the monster of *Frankenstein* is that the former does not have feelings and, so, does not care about anything. She just wants to cause mass destruction and violence, and that’s what she does without worrying about all the lives that are in danger. Even after she is captured, the female robot does not show any signs of desperation or concern. Contrarily, Victor’s creature experiences feelings, like loneliness and sadness for not having anyone in that world like him to understand how he feels. His only wish is to have someone by his side, but this is not fulfilled. He shows great pain when he is not accepted by the family he loved as if it was his own –his “friends” and “protectors”– and he feels anger because nobody tries to understand and love him, not even his creator. He also cares enough to learn how to talk and communicate with humans because he wants to feel integrated, and also feels remorse for his bad actions. For instance, when he sees Victor dead, he shows pain and regrets everything he has done to him. In addition, the creature is kind and demonstrates in several occasions that his soul is good and pure, for example the moment when he saves the little girl’s life in Chapter 16.

In conclusion, the monster of *Frankenstein* is only a monster on the outside, because on the inside he's even more human and kind than other people and, even though some of his actions are horrible, they can be, in a way, justified. On the contrary, the robot in *Metropolis* has the physical appearance of a woman, but on the inside she's just an evil creature without rational thoughts or feelings. As Sara Manvel writes in her review, *Metropolis* shows "how humanity can be swallowed by technology" (2010 online) but in *Frankenstein*, humanity is swallowed by people's prejudices and ignorance.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Mordaunt Hall, "A Technical Marvel", *The New York Times*, 7 March 1927
<https://www.nytimes.com/1927/03/07/archives/a-technical-marvel.html>

It is hardly a film to be judged by its narrative, for despite the fantastic nature of the story, it is, on the whole, unconvincing, lacking in suspense and at times extravagantly theatrical. It suggests a combination of a preachment on capital and labor in a city of the future, an *R. U. R.* idea and something of Mrs. Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Its moral is that the brains and the hands fail when the heart (love) does not work with them. The brains represent capital, and the hands, labor. The production itself appears to have been a *Frankenstein* model to the story.

David Thomson, "The Back Lot: The Menace of *Metropolis*", *The New Republic*, 24 July 2010

<https://newrepublic.com/article/76533/metropolis-classic-movies>

Sooner or later you have to ask yourself why *Metropolis* is so exciting and what it means. And that's where it gets difficult. Its parable of crowds and power, automation and liberty, a saint and a seductress, is not just complex—it's a mess. There were times in its history when some people warned that the film's sympathy with the exploited workers was Communist-inspired.

Sarah Manvel, "A Future Rediscovered", *Critic's Notebook*, 9 September 2010

<https://www.criticsnotebook.com/2010/09/the-complete-metropolis-reconstructed-restored-fritz-lang-movie-review.html#more>

So, the hugely influential set design, art direction and visual effects are major reasons to see *Metropolis*. But what makes the movie more than a well-designed curiosity is its theme of how humanity can be swallowed by technology. The point is explicitly made when Freder has a vision of rows of workers being eaten by a machine which has morphed into a death's-head.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film282386.html>
- IMDb: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0017136/>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/metropolis-re-release>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1013775_metropolis
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metropolis_\(1927_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metropolis_(1927_film))

Frankenstein (1931)

CREW AND CAST

Director: James Whale

Screenplay: Garrett Fort, Francis Edward Faragoh, Mary Shelley (novel)

Producer: Carl Laemmle Jr.

Main performers: Mae Clarke (Elizabeth), Colin Clive (Frankenstein), Dwight Frye (Fritz), Boris Karloff (the creature), Edward Van Sloan (Dr Waldman)

Company: Universal Pictures

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 11'



PLOT SUMMARY

Henry Frankenstein is a scientist so obsessed with creating life that he loses sight of the world and neglects his family. He assembles the parts of different human corpses into a body, although he unwittingly uses an abnormal brain. In the experiment, he takes advantage of the electricity in lightning, and so the creature is brought to life. When his assistant is murdered, Frankenstein sees that controlling his creation is far more difficult than he had expected and decides he must be destroyed. Under the delusion that the creature is dead, he goes back to his family and prepares for his wedding day. Unfortunately, things go wrong again when the monster breaks out and accidentally drowns a little girl. The villagers then turn into an angry mob and, finally, the creature is chased to a windmill, where he meets his end.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Born in a working-class English family in 1889, James Whale has unavoidably become synonymous with classic Hollywood and horror film. Although he demonstrated an artistic sensibility from an early age, it was not until the late 1920s that he began to direct his efforts towards the stage and the screen. The play *Journey's End* (1928), both in its staging and in its film adaptation, was his first success as a director. This success opened the gates of Hollywood for him, and he was signed by Universal Studios in 1931. Some of the numerous films he directed during the 1930s – *Frankenstein* (1931), *The Invisible Man* (1933), and *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) – are often singled out as classics of the horror genre.

Whale is credited too with finding one of the most iconic actors of the period: Boris Karloff. Even though originally Bela Lugosi –the Hungarian actor already famous for his incarnation of Dracula on the stage– was to play Frankenstein’s creation, James Whale chose the virtually unknown Karloff (an English actor born as William Henry Pratt). Indeed, his interpretation has survived as the quintessential Frankenstein monster.

The screenplay for *Frankenstein* (1931) was written jointly by Garrett Fort and Francis Edward Faragoh, and rather than being adapted directly from the novel, its basis was the 1927 play by British author Peggy Webling. Aside from Karloff, the film features various actors that went on to achieve relative popularity: Colin Clive as Dr. Frankenstein, Mae Clarke as his fiancée Elizabeth, and Edward Van Sloan as Dr. Waldman, among others.

In spite of being released during the Great Depression (or precisely because of this), Whale’s film was immensely popular with the general public, and also received very positive reviews. Quite unsurprisingly, though, it did not escape censorship. The way Frankenstein “sought to create a man after his own image without reckoning upon God,” as Edward Van Sloan puts it, appeared as heresy to some people. As a matter of fact, the scene in which the creature drowns a little girl he is playing with had to be edited out. Not until the 1980s would it be recovered.

The novel that Mary Shelley wrote and the film that James Whale directed are clearly different works for several reasons. One of these is, of course, the medium: *Frankenstein* (1931) does not present any type of first-person voice narrating the story, but then this is quite commonplace in cinema. However, the storytelling does contrast with the multi-layered narrative of the original, which allows us to hear what Frankenstein and his creation have to say; as for Walton’s framing letters, they have no place in a 70-minute film. By the time it begins, we discover Frankenstein already stealing corpses in a gloomy graveyard, but he is not alone. His hunchbacked assistant Fritz –who would go on to be remembered as Igor– follows and helps his master, yet he makes a crucial mistake. Because of his clumsiness, he takes an abnormal brain for the creature they are making, something to bear in mind while watching the film.

Later, when the moment of creation comes, Shelley’s insinuations about galvanism in the 1831 prologue materialize in the form of a storm. Here, lightning is the spark that brings the creature to life, after which Frankenstein lets out his famous yell: “It’s alive!” Another relevant departure from the original is that Frankenstein does not feel horrified, nor does he run away when he sees the result of his experiment –he is exultant. Fritz is yet again to blame here, because he attacks the initially tame creature with a torch. This, it could be argued, is what triggers his violent side –perhaps originating in his abnormal brain– and turns him against his captors. As in the novel, rather than being essentially evil, the creature becomes so because of the rejection he faces.

Once he has managed to escape, after choking Dr. Waldman, the creature finds a little girl by a lake. Unafraid, she asks him to play with her throwing flowers into the water. However, expecting her also to float, he drops her into the lake and causes her to drown. The juxtaposition between his playfulness –the monster even smiles– and the atrocity of the murder is extremely shocking. This is “the paradox of *Frankenstein*”, as Tim Brayton puts it (2009 online), “and the audience recognizes in this instant that the monster is nothing but a child himself”. However, this leaves us to wonder

whether the creature is, like Shelley's, choosing between good and evil or merely following his instincts. Judging by his behaviour, the latter seems more likely.

Apart from all this, the most essential difference between Shelley's creature and Karloff's is the fact that the latter never learns to speak (a shortcoming inherited from the first stage adaptation, back in 1823). This is a substantial difference: we cannot hear the other side of the story, and except for a couple of scenes, we only see him being attacked by other people. What is more, we do not even know whether the creature is capable of thought. Precisely because of this, the other characters do not recognize his humanity, and so he remains much more alien to us than his 19th century counterpart. In a way, the villagers see Frankenstein's creation as Gregor Samsa's parents see their transformed son in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915), with all the obvious differences between the two texts.

With *Frankenstein*, James Whale –and Boris Karloff– set the benchmark for all the *Frankenstein*-related films that were to come. It is often stated that its sequel, *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), was the director's true masterpiece, but this was the first film that established the mad-scientist and monster imagery for Hollywood. "In the now-classic mad laboratory," writes reviewer MaryAnn Johanson, "walls shoot off at all angles, distorted shadows rushing up them (...) and the castle is a manifestation of his [Frankenstein's] deranged mind" (2000 online). Even though, more than eighty years after its release, the film hardly frightens us, we cannot deny its artistry and historical relevance. Whether this is enough for us as moviegoers, though, I cannot tell.

FROM THE REVIEWS

David Nusair, "The Films of James Whale", *Reel Times Review*, 3 November 2012
<https://reelfilm.com/jwhale.htm#frank>

The movie's most potent weapon, however, is Boris Karloff; cast as the now-infamous monster, Karloff's spellbinding performance ensures that his nameless character becomes an unexpectedly sympathetic figure that the viewer can't help but root for. And although Garrett Fort and Francis Edward Faragoh's screenplay contains a heaping handful of superfluous elements –e.g. everything involving Frankenstein's crotchety old father– *Frankenstein's* growing emphasis on Karloff's monster paves the way for a climactic stretch that's far more compelling and affecting than one might've anticipated.

MaryAnn Johanson, "*Frankenstein* (1931) (review)", *FlickFilosopher*, 30 October 2000
<https://www.flickfilosopher.com/2000/10/frankenstein-1931-review.html>

And then there is the "monster", with his dead eyes and sad face, a tragic figure chained in the castle cellar and beaten by Fritz; in one scene, Whale's camera lingers on the creature's beseeching hands, asking for release from its torment. After the creature escapes the castle, its attempt at friendship, which might perhaps have redeemed its miserable existence, ends in horrifying calamity.

Tim Brayton, "Universal Horror: Now I Know What It Feels Like to be God", *Alternate Ending*, 14 October 2009
<https://www.alternateending.com/2009/10/universal-monsters-now-i-know-what-it-feels-like-to-be-god.html>

Or what of the justly famous scene where he meets little Maria (Marilyn Harris), who teaches him the tiny joy of tossing flowers into the water and watching them float? I have long thought that this scene, in its restored version (that was apparently never screened for audiences until many years after its initial release), is the heart and soul of the paradox of *Frankenstein*: in the moment that the monster is at his most relatable and human –he has found a child who accepts him who he is, and the audience recognises in this instant that the monster is nothing but a child himself– is the same moment that the monster commits the most unforgivable sin. Karloff’s face as he runs away from the pool where the girl lies drowned is the most beautifully tragic thing in the film: he is aware that he has done wrong and cannot begin to understand how to make it right.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film443503.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0021884/>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/frankenstein>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1007818_frankenstein
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frankenstein_\(1931_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frankenstein_(1931_film))

The Bride of Frankenstein (1935)

CREW AND CAST

Director: James Whale

Screenplay: William Hurlbut, Mary Shelley (characters)

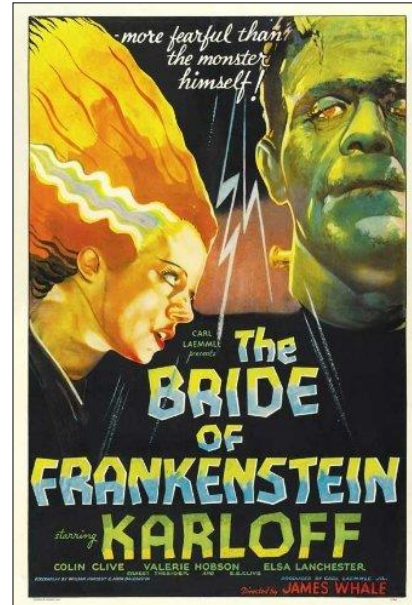
Producer: Carl Laemmle Jr.

Main performers: Boris Karloff (The Monster), Colin Clive (Henry Frankenstein), Valerie Hobson (Elizabeth), Ernest Thesiger (Dr. Pretorius), Elsa Lanchester (Mary Shelley/The Bride), Gavin Gordon (Lord Byron), Douglas Walton (Percy Shelley)

Company: Universal Pictures

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 15'



PLOT SUMMARY

Mary Shelley, Percy Shelley, and Lord Byron appear discussing the novel *Frankenstein*, which she wrote. Mary reveals that the monster didn't die at all when he was persecuted and chained in a dungeon. He escaped to the woods and found the hut of a blind hermit, who later becomes a friend to him. Meanwhile, Dr. Frankenstein abandons his projects to create life. However, he is threatened by his old mentor Dr. Pretorius and the Monster, both demanding that he creates another creature, this time a female one. Dr. Frankenstein has no choice but to accept and manufacture the female creature after his wife Elizabeth is kidnapped by Pretorius and the monster. Nevertheless, when the female creature is brought to life, her reaction to the monster is completely different from what they expected. Her rejection causes the monster to destroy the laboratory, murder his intended mate and Dr. Pretorius, and kill himself.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

James Whale was an English film director, mostly remembered for his four classic horror films. Moreover, he directed films in other genres such as, for instance, the popular musical *Magnolia* (1936). After joining Universal Pictures with a five-year contract, Whale began his first ever project, a romantic film named *Waterloo Bridge* (1931). Later, his second movie was *Dr. Frankenstein* (1931), which was offered to him by producer Carl Laemmle Jr. as one of the many projects that the studio owned. James Whale chose this one in particular as a story contrasting from his previous work, not because he was truly interested in horror.

In 1933 Whale directed *The Invisible Man*, a horror comedy film based on the novel by H.G. Wells and considered one of the ten best films of the year, according to *The New York Times*. However, after making *The Bride of Frankenstein* in 1935, a sequel of his previous project *Dr. Frankenstein*, he grew concerned about being categorized as a horror director. *Bride* was both critical and a box office success. Nevertheless, Whale's last project, *The Road Back*, a WWI film based on the sequel which German novelist Eric Maria Remarque wrote to his own *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929), was a critical and financial disaster. Whale retired from the film industry in 1941 to spend a happy retirement, despite complex personal and health issues. He drowned himself in 1957 at the age of 67 in his own swimming pool in California after being diagnosed with a terminal disease.

Whale's last horror film *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) is considered one of the best films of all time, especially among those made in the 1930s. It has received, however, very few awards. Only Gilbert Kurland, the sound director, was nominated to an Oscar for Best Sound Recording. The film itself didn't receive its first prize until 1998, awarded by the American National Film Preservation Board. In addition, in 2005 it was nominated for a Saturn Award as the Best DVD/Blu-Ray Collection by the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films, also American. Nevertheless, it was not until 2013 and 2017 that it received this award twice for the same category.

The Bride of Frankenstein (1935) is a sequel of Whale's earlier film *Frankenstein* (1931), and both are based on Mary Shelley's original novel *Frankenstein*. Just like in the novel, the monster promises to leave Frankenstein and humanity alone if Frankenstein makes him a mate. He manages to create her, but the mate is repelled by the male creature, who then decides to leave Dr. Frankenstein and his wife alive but destroys himself and his bride inside the laboratory.

Although these two films are connected with the original novel, there are differences between them, mainly regarding the attitude of the monster. Even though in *Frankenstein* he was a murderous vengeful creature, in both films he endeavours to have the audience sympathize with him. In addition, some scenes from the novel were adapted for the film to make the monster look more human. One of the most relevant scenes involves the blind hermit: in it, we see a human being accepting the creature for the first time and establishing good friendship with him; on the other hand, the monster develops the ability to speak which he lacked in *Frankenstein*, the first film. Thus, this gives him the possibility to somehow express his feelings and emotions through words. This new skill completely removes him from the sub-human image of the first film. Nevertheless, his terrifying appearance still causes him to be seen as a perpetrator of violence even when he tries to act nobly. When he rescues a frightened shepherdess, his reward is being shot by hunters. Indeed, he continues to be discriminated against by the villagers when he thought he had found peace in the hermit's hut.

As in the novel, the male creature wants to experience everything that life has to offer, and this includes love as well. Hence, he requests a female mate from his creator, Dr. Frankenstein. It must be noted in any case that Dr. Pretorius is the one who initially proposes to create the bride with the purpose of generating a new man-made species through their reproduction. When the monster enters innocently the laboratory to see his bride for the first time and asks her if she is her "friend" she answers back by screaming, rejecting him, and fleeing terrified. At this moment, the

monster completely loses his faith in being happy with his new mate and in being accepted by anyone: “She hates me, like others”, he concludes. Understandably, his anger and the desire to destroy awaken. Hence, just as happens at the end of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, the monster commits suicide and destroys those who gave him life. In the film, though, he shows empathy and lets the Frankenstein couple escape – which is certainly generous of him.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Roger Ebert, “Great Movie: *Bride of Frankenstein*”, *RogerEbert.com*, 3 January 1999
<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/great-movie-bride-of-frankenstein>

Bride belongs largely to Pretorius and the Monster, despite the subplot involving Frankenstein (Colin Clive) and his fiancée (whose wedding date is postponed by the doctor’s distractions in the laboratory). The climax comes in Pretorius’ gothic tower, with the bizarre apparatus that uses lightning to animate the cobbled-together body parts of the Bride. The scene makes such an unforgettable impression that it’s easy to forget how little of the movie the Bride actually appears in.

Dr. Chills, “*Bride of Frankenstein (1935) Review*”, *Horrorfreak News*, 6 May 2016
<https://horrorfreaknews.com/bride-frankenstein-1935-review/3704>

Bride of Frankenstein begins with an actress portraying Mary Shelley, the *Frankenstein* author, talking to her husband Lord Byron and another Lord [Percy Shelley] about the first novel she wrote. The Shelley character comments that *Frankenstein* is a morality tale about what happens when man thinks he can become as powerful as God. This same theme reverberates throughout *Bride of Frankenstein*, but in this film we are given a deeper glimpse into the heart and soul of The Monster.

Simon Braund, “*Bride of Frankenstein*”, *Empire*, 1 January 2000
<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/empire-essay-bride-frankenstein/review/>

Rejected by his bride and shunned by the world, the monster brings down the laboratory, burying his bride and the evil Pretorius in the debris. “We belong dead” he moans. In the original script Henry and his young wife Elizabeth also perished but at the last moment Whale saw fit to spare them. It seems an odd about face given his take on traditional relationships throughout the film. *Bride* has been seen, with some justification, as a thinly veiled attack on heterosexual values.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film911540.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0026138/>
- Metacritic: [no entry]
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/bride_of_frankenstein
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bride_of_Frankenstein

Godzilla/Gojira (1954)

CREW AND CAST

Director: Ishirô Honda

Screenplay: Takeo Murata, Ishirô Honda, Shigeru Kayama (story)

Producer: Tomoyuki Tanaka

Main performers: Akira Takarada (Hideto Ogata), Momoko Kôchi (Emiko Yamane), Akihiko Hirata (Dr. Daisuke Serizawa), Takashi Shimura (Dr. Kyohei Yamane), Fuyuki Murakami (Professor Tanabe)

Company: Toho

Nationality: Japan

Duration: 96'



PLOT SUMMARY

Japan, isle of Odo. Two ships have been mysteriously sunk in circumstances which the authorities attribute to either man-made or natural causes, such as underwater mines or underwater volcanic activity. The islanders, however, claim that the attacks are due to the legendary monster that supposedly lives nearby, under the sea. Initially, the authorities and the investigators are sceptical but when they reach the island, they see a colossal monster destroying the houses and killing people. Once the nature of the monster, named Godzilla (Gojira in the original Japanese version), is understood to be connected with nuclear radiation, it needs to be decided how to kill him. Scientist Seriwaza's new weapon, the Oxygen Destroyer, appears to be the solution.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

The film *Godzilla*, from a screenplay by Takeo Murata and Ishirô Honda (also the director), started as story about a giant octopus, intent on attacking ships in the Indian Ocean. Honda was so far known for films such as *24 Hours in an Underground Market* or *The New Age of Fools* (two parts). He had directed, as well, many documentaries for Toho's Educational Films Division. He and Murata co-wrote the screenplay in just three weeks, using a treatment by Shigeru Kayama, and in that short time they created a full working vision of the new monster which would be Japan's worst nightmare.

Gojira was released in 1954, with popular actors Akira Takarada and Momoko Kochi as principal players, and was a success, earning 183 million yens during its initial theatrical run. Two years after its release in Japan, a second Americanized version, which was heavily re-edited (see the passages from the reviews below), was released in the United States. *Godzilla* had many sequels and eventually generated a multimedia franchise, recognized by the Guinness World Records as the longest-running film franchise in history (a new version came out in the Summer of 2019). *Godzilla* has become a highly acclaimed film and its singular monster an icon of international pop culture.

Godzilla is clearly connected to Frankenstein's monstrous superhuman, though in an animal version. The Japanese monster is not direct creation but an indirect one. Godzilla evolves from an ancient sea creature, disturbed from his natural habitat due to H-bomb testing (which was going on in real life in the 1950s), to become a lethal terrestrial animal. The creature embodies obviously the fear but also a critique of the nuclear holocaust which took place in Japan at the end of World War II, though it does not blame the Americans for it. The producer of the film Tomoyuki Tanaka stated that "The theme of the film, from the beginning, was the terror of the bomb. Mankind had created the bomb, and now nature was going to take revenge on mankind" (in Ryfle 2005: online). The quote is self-explanatory. According to Page (2004: online; see below), *Godzilla's* screenplay "turns out to be anything but one-dimensional, offering both the larger-than-life tale of a creature unleashed by nuclear testing, and a more intimate look at the human fallout of man's decisions". Honda's film, then, rejects the use of nuclear power in a protest that still endures today and it embodies the fears of that particular era, still recovering from the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Godzilla and *Frankenstein* share, despite the many differences and cultural distance, the same topic: how humankind plays God and then regrets the consequences. Overall, the Japanese and the European monsters share a capacity for aggression fuelled by others, which results in their hate and need to kill. Both are rejected by humans, much more so the gigantic Godzilla, and have special features (making them the monsters that they are) which make them difficult to kill, such as their strength. At the end, Godzilla must be killed with a very powerful weapon, which could also destroy humankind, thus increasing the already existing risk of total destruction. Of course, Frankenstein's monster is much easier to kill than Godzilla but even so, we get the impression that he is indestructible. Both he and Godzilla are so, at least on the screen, to which they have returned again and again.

SEE: Ryfle, Steve. "Godzilla's Footprint". *Virginia Quarterly Review* 81.1 (Winter 2005): 44-68. <https://www.vqronline.org/vqr-portfolio/godzilla%E2%80%99s-footprint>

FROM THE REVIEWS

David Sterritt, "Van Helsing Is no Match for *Godzilla*". *The Christian Science Monitor*, 7 May 2004

<https://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0507/p13s03-almo.html>

For a more thoughtful dose of horror, look for *Godzilla* in its new [2004] release. This isn't the heavy-handed Hollywood remake of 1998, nor the cut-and-

spliced Japanese version that stormed American screens in 1956. It's the true original edition, directed by Ishiro Honda in 1954 and never distributed in the United States until now.

(...) Just nine years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki were destroyed by US atomic bombs, the recently traumatized people of Japan welcomed a commercial movie suggesting that nuclear tests might stir up physical and psychological demons – symbolized by Godzilla– awakened to mass destruction by precisely such tests, that humanity is unprepared to handle. Two years later, Americans were deemed unready for such a message by their own entertainment industry.

Janice Page, “50 Years Later, *Godzilla* Is Restored to its Original Monster Vision”. *Globe Correspondent*, 11 June 2004

http://archive.boston.com/ae/movies/articles/2004/06/11/50_years_later_godzilla_is_restored_to_its_original_monster_vision/

Titled *Gojira* when it debuted in Japan in 1954, this *Godzilla* is definitely not the Hollywood hack job that came out in 1956 titled *Godzilla, King of the Monsters!*, which preserved only about 60 minutes of Ishiro Honda's masterpiece. In a tale that lives in sci-fi infamy, *King of the Monsters!* –starring an especially dour Raymond Burr– was the product of an American distributor and director, Terry O. Morse, who combined to turn Honda's rich atomic allegory into a sanitized generic triumph of man over beast. Critical scenes were cut, the chronology was completely reordered, and Burr's journalist character was awkwardly added to the mix, along with some of the most atrocious dubbing ever heard.

Desson Thompson, “*Godzilla*, Uncut and Unmatched”. *Washington Post*, 14 May 2004

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A22729-2004May12.html>

Given the era, when special effects consisted of low-tech sleight of hand (as opposed to computer-generated imagery), this film is pretty extraordinary. Its miniatures of Tokyo, as well as boats at sea, are amazingly credible. And special effects genius Eiji Tsuburaya devised a convincing 61/2-foot monster suit, framed with wires and bamboo sticks covered in latex, for 'Gojira'. Performer Haruo Nakajima had to wear a suit that weighed about 220 pounds.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity UK/USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film666455.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0047034/>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/godzilla/>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/godzilla_1956/
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Godzilla_\(1954_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Godzilla_(1954_film))

2001: A Space Odyssey (1968)

CREW & CAST

Director: Stanley Kubrick

Screenplay: Stanley Kubrick, Arthur C. Clarke (from his short story "The Sentinel")

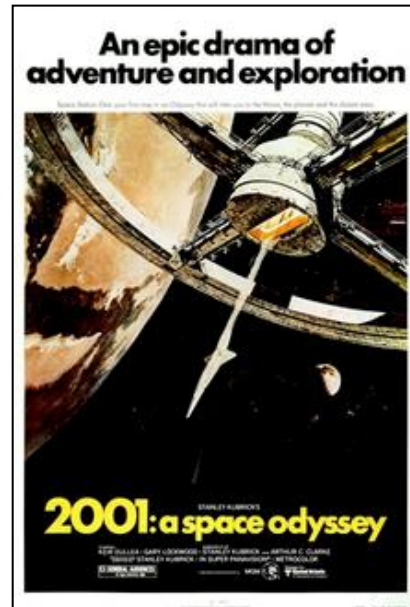
Producer: Stanley Kubrick

Main performers: Keir Dullea (Dr. Dave Bowman)
Gary Lokwood (Dr. Frank Poole), William Sylvester (Dr. Heywood R. Floyd), Daniel Richter (Moon-watcher), Leonard Rossiter (Dr. Andrei Smyslov), Robert Beatty (Dr. Ralph Halvorsen)

Companies: Stanley Kubrick Productions, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM)

Nationality: UK/USA

Duration: 2h 29'



PLOT SUMMARY

Around 4 million years ago a group of apes encounter a mysterious black monolith, and soon thereafter they learn how to use tools, thus eventually becoming Homo Sapiens. The film takes a giant leap in time to the year 2001, when a group of scientists are entrusted with the mission of discovering the nature and origins of the monoliths. The team is provided with an Artificial Intelligence, HAL 9000, which controls all the operations in their spaceship. When the computer makes a very serious mistake, the scientists decide to disconnect it. HAL becomes aware of their murderous plans and decides to kill them. The only survivor, Dr. Bowman, must fight HAL to move on to the next stage of his journey to the stars.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN

Stanley Kubrick (New York, 1928-1999) is considered to be one of the best and most influential directors in cinema's history. He is known for his ability to innovate in the technology of cinematography (film photography), as well as for being able to create a very peculiar atmosphere in his films with the combination of complex set designs and suggestive music. His film career reached a turning point with one of his first master pieces, *Paths of Glory* (1957), which was one of the first anti-war films ever made. Its success was later surpassed by that of *Spartacus* (1960), which was acclaimed by both the public and the critics. Kubrick's talent was again proved in his next film, *Lolita* (1962), an adaptation of Vladimir Nabokov's novel, praised for its fidelity to the spirit of the book. In *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) Kubrick demonstrated an immense talent to produce special effects at a high, pioneering level.

Violence and psychedelia were the keynotes of Kubrick's subsequent work in *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), from Anthony Burgess' controversial novel, and *The Shining* (1980), an adaptation to Stephen King's novel of 1977 which displeased the author but became a major influence on horror.

2001: A Space Odyssey intends to shock the viewer and raise our consciousness about the origins of our species. The perplexed audiences of the time when the film was released did welcome it, although some critics reported the film to be "somewhere between hypnotic and immensely boring" (Adler 1968: online). The film was awarded an Oscar for best visual effects, which was Kubrick's only Academy award win. The Oscar was very much deserved, as the director pioneered an innovative filming technique named Front Projection with Retroreflective Matting, which provided a magnificent and even hypnotic perspective that works extraordinarily for a science-fiction film.

2001 presents the evolution of the human species, from its prehistoric origins as apes to a distant future in which Homo Sapiens evolves into a being made of the stars' power or energy. Kubrick also focuses on the human ability to create at some point in the future (the 2001 of the film) the first truly advanced Artificial Intelligence. This spectacular creation, HAL 9000, is a computer able to control all the functions of a spaceship. The film considers the dilemma of whether HAL has feelings. This query is answered though not as we expect: HAL ends up rebelling against the astronauts by attempting to kill all of them. The AI, then, has feelings and thoughts but this is a condition that leads to its destructive behaviour.

The topic of the creature rebelling against its creator present in so many science-fiction movies –as we see in *The Terminator* (1984), with Skynet's intention to destroy humankind, or in *Blade Runner* (1982), in which replicants yearn for freedom–descends, of course, from the novel *Frankenstein* (1818). Since *Frankenstein* is one of the first novels that presents humans as the creators of other beings, it is also one of the earliest instances of the creations rebelling against their makers. In this sense, the novel breaks with the idea of God being the creator of the Universe and all beings, as the *Bible* states, and offers a completely new perspective by giving humans the chance to develop other life forms. These new creators appear to be not only extremely innovative but also blasphemous dissenters from a religious perspective. Like *Frankenstein*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, deals with the very negative countereffects that "playing God" entails; both work indeed as cautionary tales.

The main cause of the disastrous effects of creating another being appears to be, both in the film and in the novel, the lack of responsibility of the creators towards their creation as well as their inability to understand their work. In the movie this is very well presented when the scientists ask themselves if HAL can ever have emotions. Similarly, Victor Frankenstein shows his own ignorance and even irresponsibility when he abandons the monster and decides to reject and forget him. The fact that both creators are unable to prevent the catastrophic development of their monsters seems to question whether we, as Homo Sapiens, are really at the top of Creation, whether we believe in God or in the process of Evolution. The presence of the mysterious monoliths suggests, besides, that we are someone else's creatures anyway.

Apart from the apparent critique of human limitations, *2001* and *Frankenstein* also offer an insight into the sophistication of the created being's psychology and emotional system. In the film, HAL not only begs for his life and states his fear of being

murdered, but also sings a song that it was taught while it was being created. HAL's death presents an astonishing similarity with human death, as it is a moment characterized by the recall of infancy and one's life experiences. Thus, the computer is depicted almost as a human being, which seems to suggest that the line separating human from non-human machine is very thin and growing thinner.

Developing artificial beings capable of reasoning and feeling could be regarded as the beginning of a new scientific era in which humans will be able to modify and shape the process of evolution, what we call now Transhumanism. Kubrick anticipates this issue by representing the natural process of evolution (symbolized by the monoliths) as an external intervention. We interfere, likewise, by creating a being intellectually superior to any human, HAL 9000. However, the human desire to control evolution ends up in failure, both in the film and the novel. Consequently, the creators are pushed to cancel their project, as Victor Frankenstein does by refusing to create a female monster in order to prevent them from reproducing, and Bowman by disconnecting HAL so that it cannot do more harm. Bowman's journey in the spaceship seems to illustrate this process of failure and, at the same time, concludes by presenting evolution as a steadfast, ineluctable process, though the mystery remains of who, or what, lies behind the monoliths.

SEE: Adler, Renate. "The Screen: *2001* Is Up", *The New York Times* 4 April 1968.
<http://movies2.nytimes.com/books/97/03/09/reviews/clarke-screen.html>

FROM THE REVIEWS

Antonia Sison, "Awe, Humility, Hope Await in *A Space Odyssey*", *National Catholic Reporter*, 1 September 2018

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/media/awe-humility-hope-await-space-odyssey>

A film of such symbolic and visceral power as *2001* invites various interpretations, like a prism you can turn at different angles, each revealing a new facet. I've always seen Bowman's journey as a symbolic narrative of humanity's quest for renewal and definitive wholeness, which, theologically speaking, unfolds in a marriage between human striving and the supreme will of the God of "continuing creation".

Alan French, "50 Year Anniversary: The Wonder of *2001: A Space Odyssey*", *We Bought a Blog*, 10 July 2018

<https://weboughtablog.com/2018/07/10/50-year-anniversary-the-wonder-of-2001-a-space-odyssey/>

When Dave survives, he turns on HAL, unhooking all of his powers. HAL pleads with Dave to stop. "I'm afraid. I'm afraid, Dave. Dave, my mind is going. I can feel it. I can feel it. I can feel it..." The tension and death is horrific, even as you know that HAL has given the same death to at least 4 other humans. Yet this death is sad and heartwrenching. It is cold and callous. It is human. He can feel. It is the exclamation mark that Kubrick puts on his masterpiece. We evolve to the point of creation, then watch our creations surpass us. The message is prophetic in a world that could create true AI. It is a beautiful moment, and in the theater, you are left stunned.

Richard Roud, "2001: A Space Odyssey review: 'An Interstellar Shaggy Dog Story'. Archive, 1968", *The Guardian*, 3 May 2018

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/may/03/2001-a-space-odyssey-review-stanley-kubrick-1968>

NOTE: this review also refers to Don Levy's *Herostratus*

Both Kubrick and Levy are far too self-indulgent. Effects are constantly repeated. (...) In Kubrick's case I would imagine that having spent so much money on special effects – and having achieved such results– he could not resist showing them off as much as possible. (This is particularly true of the machines and the ironmongery in general.)

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film171099.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0062622/>
- Metracritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/2001-a-space-odyssey>
- RottenTomatoes:
https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1000085_2001_a_space_odyssey
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2001:_A_Space_Odyssey_%28film%29

Young Frankenstein (1974)

CREW AND CAST

Director: Mel Brooks

Screenplay: Mel Brooks, Gene Wilder, Mary Shelley (novel)

Producer: Michael Gruskoff

Main performers: Gene Wilder (Dr. Frederick Frankenstein), Peter Boyle (The Monster), Marty Feldman (Igor), Madeline Kahn (Elizabeth), Cloris Leachman (Frau Blücher), Terri Garr (Inga), Kenneth Mars (Inspector Kemp)

Companies: Gruskoff/Venture Films, Crossbow Productions, Jouer Limited

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 46'



PLOT SUMMARY

Dr. Frederick Frankenstein, a physician employed at an American medical school, inherits his family's estate in Transylvania after the death of his great-grandfather, mad scientist Baron Beaufort von Frankenstein. Once in Transylvania, he is welcomed by the estate's peculiar inhabitants: the hunchbacked servant Igor, his lab assistant Inga, and the housekeeper Frau Blucher. Young Frankenstein despises his grandfather's work but after discovering his laboratory and reading his journals, he changes his mind. Frederick decides then to reanimate the body of a recently executed criminal.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

The career of Mel Brooks (Brooklyn, 1926) began with his work as a comedian and writer for the 1950s TV variety show *Your Show of Shows*. Later, he would become very popular thanks to his film farces and comedic parodies, coloured by his peculiar, broad sense of humour. Brooks was one of the most successful film directors of the 1970s, placing many of his films in the list of top 10 money-makers each year. Some of his most popular films are *The Producers* (1967), *The Twelve Chairs* (1970), *Young Frankenstein* (1974), *Spaceballs* (1987) and *Robin Hood: Men in Tights* (1993).

Young Frankenstein was an immediate box office success, grossing \$86.2 million on a \$2.78 million budget. It was mostly welcome by the critics, as well, receiving besides diverse awards. These include two nominations to the Oscars (one of which was for Best Screenplay Adapted From Other Material for Brooks and his co-writer Gene Wilder, the main actor in the film), other two to the Golden Globes (for actresses

Cloris Leachman and Madeline Kahn), and some wins (such as the Saturn Award to Marty Feldman for his unforgettable performance as Igor).

In Mel Brooks's film *Dr. Frederick Frankenstein* (Gene Wilder) is a leading American physician and neurosurgeon, married to the beautiful Elizabeth, a socialite. Borrowing incongruously from *Dracula*, Brooks and Wilder place the Frankenstein's family estate in Transylvania instead of Switzerland. Unlike what happens in Mary Shelley's novel, the original mad doctor, Frederick's ancestor, survives his experiments to have a family and leave his descendants an embarrassing legacy because of his negative reputation. Frederick begins by totally rejecting what his grandfather did, to the point of pronouncing his surname as Fronkonsteen but he falls eventually under the spell of his journals. His attempt to replicate the old experiments does not go as he expected, which is the main source of humour in this comedic film.

Brooks' *Young Frankenstein* maintains, then, many elements from Mary Shelley's original novel though these are also mixed with others borrowed from the 1931 film adaptation by James Whale, to the point that many props from the set of this movie were used in it. Like its predecessor, *Young Frankenstein* was shot in black and white, which was an unusual choice for the mid-1970s. The hunchback servant Igor also connects with the useless Fritz of Whale's film, though he is ultimately a character created by English playwright Peggy Webling for her 1927 play, *Frankenstein*, which is the basis of Whale's version.

In both film and novel, then, the protagonist is a scientist who is obsessed with science and power. In both cases, the monster understands that he is being rejected by his looks but whereas in Shelley's original, he runs away in Brooks' movie the creature returns back to Frederick's castle to complain. There, he starts to act in crazy, violent ways until Frankenstein pacifies him by claiming and he loves him and finds him beautiful –a humane solution to the creature's anguish that never crosses the original Victor's mind. From this moment onward, the movie departs sharply from the novel: far from trying to keep his creature concealed, Frederick Frankenstein decides to display him in public, for he is proud of what he has done. Their dance routine together is one of the most memorable scenes of the film.

There are other peculiarities in the relationship between creator and creation, and in the appearance and behaviour of the monster. Peter Boyle's excellent performance as the creature manages to elicit for his plea much more pity and sympathy than Mary Shelley's far scarier monster can expect to gain. This sympathy also means that other characters, such as Elizabeth, react in ways that have nothing to do with Shelley's novel and that contribute much to the movie's crazy humour. Indeed, Frederick and his creation live in happiness and harmony, while in the novel, Victor Frankenstein and the monster are always at odds and end tragically for this.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Pauline Kael, "A Magnetic Blur", *The New Yorker*, December 1974

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1974/12/30/a-magnetic-blur>

The movie works because it has the Mary Shelley story to lean on: we know that the monster will be created and will get loose. And Brooks makes a leap up as a director because, although the comedy doesn't build, he carries the story through. Some directors don't need a unifying story, but Brooks has always got lost without one. (He

had a story in *The Twelve Chairs*, but he didn't have the jokes.) Staying with the story, Brooks even has a satisfying windup, which makes this just about the only comedy of recent years that doesn't collapse.

Nathan Rabin, "The Mel Brooks Collection", *The AV Club*, 4 November 2006

<https://film.avclub.com/the-mel-brooks-collection-1798201578>

For much of his career, Mel Brooks has had the peculiar distinction of being simultaneously ahead of and behind the times. Brooks ranks as one of the preeminent architects of contemporary comedy, yet his heart remains stuck in Hollywood's Golden Age. But Brooks' reputation largely rests on his genre parodies. *Young Frankenstein* (1974) and *High Anxiety* (1977) are as much loving homage as irreverent spoof. *Anxiety* is nearly as obsessive in recreating Alfred Hitchcock's visual style as Gus Van Sant's *Psycho* was, but to much greater effect, while *Young Frankenstein* even recycles some of the original *Frankenstein*'s props and sets.

Roger Ebert, "Young Frankenstein", *RogerEbert.com*, 1 January 1974

<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/young-frankenstein-1974>

So the movie is a send-up of a style and not just of the material (as Paul Morrissey's dreadful *Andy Warhol's Frankenstein*). It looks right, which makes it funnier. And then, paradoxically, it works on a couple of levels: first as comedy, and then as a weirdly touching story in its own right. A lot of the credit for that goes to the performances of Gene Wilder, as young Frankenstein, and Peter Boyle as the monster. They act broadly when it's required, but they also contribute tremendous subtlety and control. Boyle somehow manages to be hilarious and pathetic at the same time.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film367692.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0072431/>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/young-frankenstein/critic-reviews?%20dist=positive>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/young_frankenstein
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Young_Frankenstein

The Rocky Horror Picture Show (1975)

CREW & CAST

Director: Jim Sharman

Screenplay: Jim Sharman, Richard O'Brien (musical play), Mary Shelley (novel)

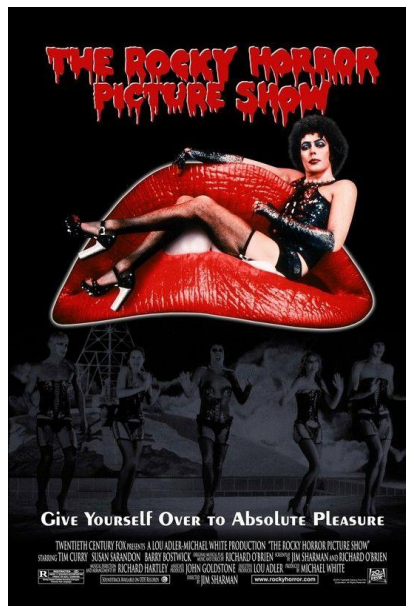
Producer: Michael White

Main performers: Tim Curry (Dr. Frank-N-Furter), Susan Sarandon (Janet Weiss), Barry Bostwick (Brad Majors), Richard O'Brien (Riff Raff), Patricia Quinn (Magenta), Peter Hinwood (Rocky Horror), Eddie (Meat Loaf)

Companies: 20th Century Fox, Michael White Productions

Nationality: USA/UK

Duration: 1h 40'



PLOT SUMMARY

Denton, Ohio. Newly engaged, naïve Brad and Janet enter the castle of Dr. Frank-N-Furter after their car bursts a tyre. This transvestite alien from planet Transsexual (in the galaxy of Transylvania) prepares to animate his creation, Rocky, a beautiful male intended to satisfy the doctor's sexual needs. In a fit of jealousy, Frank-N-Furter kills Eddie, a member of his entourage and a brain donor to the monster. Dr. Everett Scott appears to fetch Eddie, his nephew, and the ensuing chaos leads to tragic consequences for the good doctor Frank-N-Furter. Unable to overcome his maker's loss, Rocky becomes suicidal. Astonished, Brad, Janet and Dr. Scott see the alien castle blast off into space, bound for home.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Jim Sharman (1945) is known as both a film and a stage director. He trained at the National Institute of Dramatic Art in his hometown Sydney and developed an interest for experimental theatre. This was the reason for his involvement in the 1972 production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* in London, where he met actor and composer Richard O'Brien (Cheltenham, 1942). They worked together in the 1973 production of *The Unseen Hand* and O'Brien, interested since early life in horror films, came up with the idea for *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Sharman helped O'Brien to draft the musical, which opened in June 1973. Both collaborated again in the 1975 film adaptation which, incidentally, was released only one year after Mel Brooks' very popular *Young Frankenstein*.

The Rocky Horror Picture Show, which was not initially a success, became a cult film after being re-released as a midnight movie. The film had a limited budget of only \$1.4 million and soon earned ten times that amount. It also received a nomination at the 1976 Saturn awards as Best Horror film, though technically it is a comedy. In 2005 the film became part of the National Film Registry of the United States, which underlines its great significance as an icon of popular culture, often adapted and recycled.

Very clearly, the alien scientist Dr. Frank-N-Furter is the equivalent of Victor Frankenstein in this film, though they could not be more different. Dr Frank-N-Furter is not even human and he is radically isolated from his home, in a distant planet. His need for love, and his rampant lust, leads him to create Rocky, a motivation that has nothing to do with Victor's cravings to animate his creature and eventually overcome death.

Frankenstein's creature is, as Mary Shelley describes him, a distressingly ugly monster. Victor Frankenstein did not really know what he was doing when he made him. His creature eventually overcomes his maker's abandonment to learn from other people to articulate his thoughts in speech but he can never make any lasting contact. In contrast, Dr. Frank-N-Furter knows at all points what he is doing, and his Rocky is no horror at all, despite his name. He is the total opposite: a blond, attractive man quite capable of expressing his desires and needs to his admirers. The problem in Dr. Frank-N-Furter's case is, rather, that he cares too much for his creation and is uncontrollably jealous. He not only murders Eddie, fearing that Rocky might prefer him but even serves the corpse for dinner. The creator here, and not the creature, is a killer. Many reviewers describe Dr. Frank-N-Furter as an evil character in contrast with Rocky's innocence, though given the bizarre background of the film and of the original musical comedy perhaps matters of good and evil are irrelevant.

Frankenstein's connection to music is an old one. The first stage adaptation, which Mary Shelley saw in 1823, was a melodrama (that is, a play with songs though not really a musical) called *Presumption; or, the Fate of Frankenstein*. The adapter, Richard Brinsley Peake, deprived the creature of his voice and of his ability to narrate his version of events to focus, as his chosen title shows, on Victor's presumption to create life as if he were God. O'Brien's musical play and Sharman's film comment on Dr. Frank-N-Furter's sex drive, satirizing his desire for the man he has made, one so handsome that he can hardly be called a monster. What is monstrous here is, indeed, jealousy, which Iago famously called in Shakespeare's *Othello* 'the green-eyed monster'. *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* is, in any case and above all, great fun in a campy 1970s style which we admire and cannot really ever surpass –hence the endless midnight sing-along sessions.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Rogert Ebert, "*The Rocky Horror Picture Show*", *RogertEbert.com*, 18 August 1976
<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-rocky-horror-picture-show-1976>

The Rocky Horror Picture Show would be more fun, I suspect, if it weren't a picture show. It belongs on a stage, with the performers and audience joining in a collective send-up. (...) That's a rather unfair way to approach it as a movie, but then *Rocky Horror* remains very much a filmed play. The choreography, the compositions

and even the attitudes of the cast imply a stage ambiance. And it invites the kind of laughter and audience participation that makes sense only if the performers are there on the stage, creating mutual karma.

Ty Burr, "*The Rocky Horror Picture Show*", *Entertainment Weekly*, 30 November 1990
<https://ew.com/article/1990/11/30/rocky-horror-picture-show/>

However, for a movie that's mostly a plotless mix of old sci-fi flicks and Bowie-esque gender-bending, *Rocky Horror* continues to charm. That's due in part to nostalgia (we've all become a lot more uptight since 1975), but also to the honest delight we take in the freedoms this movie so cheerfully flaunts.

Sonia Cerca, "*The Rocky Horror Picture Show (1975)*" *A Film A Day*, 6 October 2018
<http://afilmadaybysonia.blogspot.com/2018/10/the-rocky-horror-picture-show-1975.html>

Dr. Frank-N-Furter is arguably the most intriguing and insane of the bunch. He is an evil person, but you won't be mad at him for his awful actions, you'll feel sorry for him as he is just a lonely, unhappy person/alien seeking love and approval. Tim Curry's performance is nothing short of spectacular.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film782908.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0073629/>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/the-rocky-horror-picture-show>
- Rotten Tomatoes:
https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/rocky_horror_picture_show
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Rocky_Horror_Picture_Show

Blade Runner (1982)

CREW & CAST

Director: Ridley Scott

Screenplay: Hampton Fancher and David Peoples, Philip K Dick (novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*)

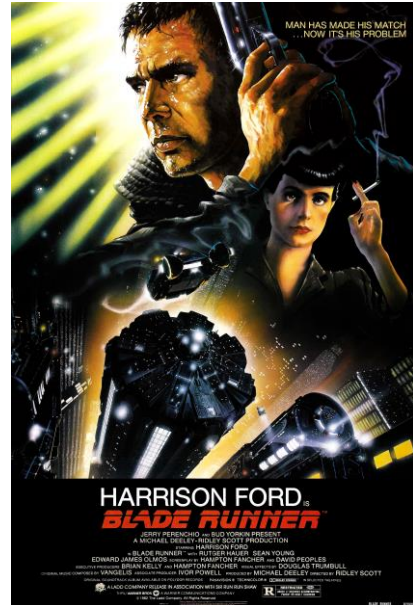
Producer: Michael Deeley

Main performers: Harrison Ford (Rick Deckard), Sean Young (Rachael), Rutger Hauer (Roy Batty), Daryl Hannah (Pris), William Sanderson (J.F. Sebastian), Brion James (Leon Kowalski), Joe Turkel (Dr. Eldon Tyrell), Edward James Olmos (Gaff)

Companies: The Ladd Company, Shaw Brothers, Blade Runner Partnership

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 57'



PLOT SUMMARY

In the dystopian future of Los Angeles in 2019, synthetic humans known as replicants are bio-engineered by the Tyrell Corporation to work as slaves on off-world colonies. They appear to be physically identical to humans but have greater strength and resilience. Rick Deckard is a retired cop once known as a blade runner, part of a unit with orders to “retire” or kill any trespassing replicants. These were declared illegal on Earth, under penalty of death, after a bloody mutiny by a Nexus-6 combat team. Deckard is forced back into active duty by his old boss to hunt down a group of mixed replicant Nexus-6 who have tried to break into the Tyrell Corporation to demand a longer lifespan than the four years they have been granted by their makers.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Ridley Scott (South Shields, 1937) was born shortly before the Second World War and was raised in an Army family. They moved around often, living in North West England, Wales, and Germany among other areas, though after the war they moved back to the North East to settle down in Hartburn, County Durham. The area's industrial landscape later inspired similar scenes in *Blade Runner*, which was Scott's third film as director (including *Alien* in 1977). Although originally a commercial disappointment, Scott's film is now regarded as a classic and, arguably, his masterpiece.

The making of *Blade Runner* had, however, its rough times. Hampton Fancher (East Los Angeles, 1938), failed to buy the rights to Philip K. Dick's weird 1968 science

fiction novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* in 1975 but eventually managed to get the author's agreement for the sale and even be hired to write the screenplay. Fancher was eventually made executive producer but that led to disagreements with Scott, known to be a very demanding director (to this day star Harrison Ford refuses to talk about the shooting of *Blade Runner*). Writer and director had already clashed concerning the script, which Scott felt didn't explore the odd world of Dick's novel deeply enough. Scott eventually brought in David Peoples (Middletown 1940) to continue reworking the script, which ended up being signed by the two writers. It still differs greatly from the original source.

Blade Runner was not that very well received. With an estimated budget of \$28 million, it made only a little over \$6 million in the opening USA weekend (it ended up earning \$27 million, domestic gross). Furthermore, it polarized the critics. Although some acclaimed its philosophical complexity, many concurred that its slow pace negatively affected the story. At least, its visual appeal was acknowledged. The team composed by Lawrence G. Paull, David L. Snyder, and Linda DeScenna obtained an Oscar nomination for Best Art Direction-Set Decoration, and so did Douglas Trumbull, Richard Yuricich and David Dryer for Best Effects and Best Visual Effects. In the BAFTA Film Awards, out of the eight nominations, *Blade Runner* won the three for Best Cinematography, Best Costume Design, and Best Production Design/Art Direction.

The storyline is set in a dystopian future in which the successful creation of synthetic flesh-and-blood humans, or replicants, has been achieved. Furthermore, *Blade Runner* tells us how the creator Eldon Tyrell continually seeks to improve his creations by building new models. However, by the time the movie begins, the Earth has already had a taste of the risks of mass producing these replicants with the bloody mutiny they led in an off-world colony, which has made them illegal in our planet.

Dr. Eldon Tyrell is presented to us as a corporate mogul who managed to build an empire out of his synthetic pseudo-human slaves. We can clearly see that Tyrell is an equivalent of Victor Frankenstein: both show great ambition to be better and go further than what is already established by the science of their time. Moreover, in both cases this desire to succeed leads to a fatal ending. Dr. Tyrell has turned into a pragmatic businessman who doesn't seem to understand the consequences of his creations. The replicants are known to be rebellious, however Tyrell still sticks to his original way of mass producing them as slave labour, focusing solely on perfecting a new and improved Nexus model (the beautiful Rachel). He keeps on looking towards the future, and how to succeed there, turning a blind eye on the present. Commerce is his goal, and he makes this quite clear to Deckard. On his side, Frankenstein is so caught up in his desire of playing God and cheating death that he lets his arrogance carry him away, without fully realizing what he has actually done until it is too late. Victor states that he is trying to help humankind by making a "new human", by creating life brought back from the dead, but he just wants to be known as the creator of this new species, with no further end in mind.

One more apparent similarity between the film and Mary Shelley's novel is seen in how both creators' neglect of their creations leads to their own disastrous ending. Mary Shelley's ugly monster and the attractive Nexus-6 are abandoned without any guidance about how to face life (and death). Their requests are also denied. The replicants return to Earth to seek their creator and demand a longer lifespan than the original inbuilt four years they are granted. But when Roy Batty, their

leader, manages to meet Tyrell and is told that he cannot make that happen, he murders him. In the case of Frankenstein, his creature demands a mate to end his solitude, but out of fear that they might reproduce, Frankenstein refuses to fulfil this wish. This unleashes the creature's anger and is also a factor that leads to Victor's eventual death. The refusal to take responsibility for their monsters but also the denial of their only demand, push these creations into a frenzy of rage against their creators.

Blade Runner clearly has many resemblances with Mary Shelley's novel, from which Dick's own novel ultimately descends, but many reviewers have disregarded these similitudes to highlight other aspects of the movie. Most have praised the atmospheric cinematography and the imagery of the dark, futuristic Los Angeles, praising the special effects achieved without the help of computers. The detailed, eye-catching atmosphere almost makes you look past the excruciatingly slow pace of the film, which has been noted to be a major flaw in many reviews. In any case, the plot itself is very interesting, with all its questions about the meaning of being human and Roy's famous final speech (actor Rutger Hauer's own words). In the director's cut, supposedly the valid version, the ending even plays with the suggestion that Deckard himself is also a replicant who ignores his true identity, which is why he and Tyrell's new creation Rachel (the monstrous 'bride' in this film) connect so well with each other.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Fred Kaplan, "A Cult Classic Restored, Again", *The New York Times*, 30 September 2007
<https://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/30/movies/30kapl.html>

What's hypnotic about the film is its seamless portrait of the future, a sleek retro Deco glossed on neon-laced decay: overcrowded cities roamed by hustlers, strugglers and street gangs mumbling a multicultural argot, the sky lit by giant corporate logos and video billboards hyping exotic getaways on other planets, where most English-speaking white people seem to have fled.

Gogoschka-1, "A Milestone of Science Fiction and a Cyberpunk Masterpiece", *IMDB.com*, 11 February 2018

https://www.imdb.com/review/rw4059597/?ref=tt_urv

It's hard to overstate how influential the film was; it invented the sci-fi subgenre now known as "cyberpunk", and it was also the first "film noir" in a sci-fi setting. And although it looks so distractingly gorgeous that even today there are people who still dismiss it as superficial and mere "eye candy", it is a philosophically deep film that ponders existential questions about the nature of being human. Its slow, brooding quality will perhaps leave some modern audiences who are used to a different pace and more action underwhelmed –but make no mistake: this is a groundbreaking masterwork of its genre and a timeless classic.

Janet Maslin, "Futuristic *Blade Runner*", *The New York Times*, 25 June 1982

<https://www.nytimes.com/1982/06/25/movies/futuristic-blade-runner.html>

Science-fiction devotees may find *Blade Runner* a wonderfully meticulous movie and marvel at the comprehensiveness of its vision. Even those without a taste for gadgetry cannot fail to appreciate the degree of effort that has gone into

constructing a film so ambitious and idiosyncratic. The special effects are by Douglas Trumbull, Richard Yuricich and David Dryer, and they are superb. So is Laurence G. Paull's production design. But *Blade Runner* is a film that special effects could have easily run away with, and run away with it they have.

And it's also a mess, at least as far as its narrative is concerned. Almost nothing is explained coherently, and the plot has great lapses, from the changeable nature of one key character to the frequent disappearances of another.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity UK/USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film358476.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0083658/>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/blade-runner>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/blade_runner
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blade_Runner

WarGames (1983)

CREW & CAST

Director: John Badham

Screenplay: Lawrence Lasker, Walter F. Parkes, Walon Green (uncredited)

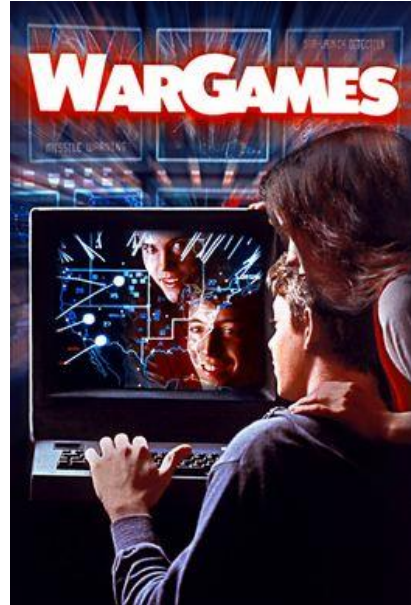
Producers: Harold Schneider, Bruce McNall (uncredited)

Main performers: Matthew Broderick (David), Ally Sheedy (Jennifer), Dabney Coleman (McKittrick), John Wood (Falken), Barry Corbin (General Beringer)

Companies: Sherwood Productions, United Artists

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 54'



PLOT SUMMARY

Early 1980s, during the Cold War. David Lightman, who is very good at computers, is an intelligent teen though not so motivated at school. After demonstrating his skills to his friend Jennifer by hacking the school network to change one of his low marks, David supposedly gets into a company's intranet to try a new videogame, which is not out yet. Instead, they access War Operation Plan Response (WOPR), an artificial intelligence created by the US military to predict the possible outcomes of a nuclear war. While David and Jennifer think that they are playing a game called *Global Thermonuclear War*, they do lead the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD) into a potential World War III which WOPR decides to control and play.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN

John Badham (Luton, 1939) is the son of an English actress and the stepson of an American Army general. He first debuted as a film director in *The Bingo Long Travelling All-Stars & Motor Kings* (1976). His best-known movie is the extremely popular *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), which tells the story of a nineteen-year-old Italian-American working-class young man, Tony Manero, who loves spending Saturday nights at the local disco, where he can forget about more pressing problems.

Walon Green (Baltimore, 1936) is a producer and writer known for *The Wild Bunch* (1969), *The Hellstrom Chronicle* (1971), and *NYPD Blue* (1993). In addition, he produced *Law & Order: Criminal Intent* (2001-2011). Lawrence Lasker (Los Angeles County, 1949) is a producer and writer known for *WarGames* (1983), *Sneakers* (1992)

and *Awakenings* (1990). Walter F. Parkes (Bakersfield, 1951) is a producer and writer married to Laurie McDonald, a producer known for *Men in Black* (1997). Parkes is known for *WarGames* (1983), *Men in Black* (1997) and *Sneakers* (1992).

WarGames was not the most popular work that Badham directed, but it still is a remarkable film within the science fiction genre. It had a good reception with substantial box-office success (\$6,227,804 in the first weekend, in the USA, half of the rather low budget of about \$12,000,000). In the end the film collected \$79,568,000 (domestic gross). *WarGames*, besides, was a nominee for three Oscars in the categories of Best Writing, Best Cinematography, and Best Sound. The film won a BAFTA Award in the category of Best Sound, reaping nominations for Best Production Design/Art Direction and Best Special Visual Effects.

WarGames takes place in the 1980s, during the last phase of the Cold War, when a supercomputer called WOPR is created by the US military, with the aim of winning an eventual nuclear war with the Soviet Union. This AI is nicknamed 'Joshua' by his creator, Dr. Stephen Falken, the name of a young son he lost, together with his wife. WOPR behaves, accordingly, in a childlike manner, seeing life as a game. Falken, an ex-researcher for NORAD, is presented as a mad doctor absorbed by his job, like Victor Frankenstein, and as a man unable to overcome the loss of his family. When he discovers that 'Joshua' is about to begin World War III, for he cannot distinguish simulation from reality, Falken doesn't even want to stop his 'son', at least initially.

WarGames does take ideas from *Frankenstein*, but also deals with classical mythology, specifically with the story of Cronus (or Chronos) and his offspring. Cronus was told about a prophecy warning that a son of his would kill him, so the ancient god decided to eat every one of his male children. Rhea, his wife, gave birth to Zeus secretly, who thus avoided the filicide and eventually deposed (but did not kill) his father. In *WarGames* a similar situation arises. 'Joshua' goes against his masters' orders at NORAD, just as the monster rebels against Victor Frankenstein but also as Zeus rejects Cronus, that is to say, following his own will. Frankenstein's monster describes his misadventures, during which he learned language by hearing a family speak every day and thus became articulate. In *WarGames*, 'Joshua' shows in the last scene that it is capable of learning through continuous repetition, which also leads to self-awareness. The difference in *WarGames* is that the creature does not realize that it is acting against Falken's will, whereas Frankenstein's monster does know how he is hurting his creator and his family.

The question that *WarGames* raises is relevant for the 1980s and even more so today: what would happen if we gave a dangerous responsibility, like that of launching nuclear missiles, to a machine? WOPR is created to plan the best strategy in case of a nuclear war started by the Soviet Union, not the USA. Falken creates it basing its functionality on strategy games, with the unexpected consequence that the computer thinks that it is always playing a game. In principle, the supercomputer should be always under control, but the interaction with David Lightman ultimately proves that 'Joshua' is self-willed but not at all ready to take on its important position. Thus, 'Joshua' fails to warn the NORAD staff that the first alerts are just part of a simulation. In the last moments of the film, it even takes full control of the US missiles on its own, without any human control over its potentially devastating actions.

WOPR loves playing games because this is how it has been created and programmed. The mistake lies in forgetting to teach it to distinguish between

simulated and real war (see Sterritt's review below). In the end, David saves the day by teaching 'Joshua' that some games have no winner, but WOPR still cannot tell the war game apart from real war. Frankenstein's monster, in contrast, understands only too well reality: he is never accepted by human beings, due to its physical appearance; this is the origin of his anger against humanity and the main reason of the rebellion against Victor Frankenstein. 'Joshua' is no rebel, just a child playing its game to win, as it has been taught to do. Only one year later, in the Orwellian year of 1984, James Cameron's *The Terminator*, would show how far the truly rebellious and angry AI SkyNet would go.

FROM THE REVIEWS

David Sterritt, "WarGames – Big Issues and Teen-age Heroics", *The Christian Science Monitor*, 9 June 1983

<https://www.csmonitor.com/1983/0609/060900.html>

(...) By the grand finale, everyone in sight –from teens to generals, plus the errant computer– cozily agrees about the futility of nuclear combat and the pointlessness of atomic weaponry as a solution to anything.

If this were Hollywood's way of telling us the real world has reached these conclusions, it would be mighty good news. But it's just a fantasy, contributing nothing to the urgent debate over such matters. As fantasy, it's more relevant and I suppose more 'educational' than the shenanigans of *Star Wars* and its ilk. But it's far too simplistic for comfort –and downright dangerous if it makes anyone think today's self-destructive forces will bow jovially out of sight as soon as we grown-ups loosen up a little.

Mark Pfeiffer, "WarGames", *Reel Times: Reflections on Cinema*, 8 August 2011

<https://reeltimes.blogspot.com/2011/08/wargames.html>

As a Cold War message movie and cinematic descendent of *Failsafe*, *WarGames* examines the inherent danger in favoring technology's cool logic and situational calculations over mankind's potential second guessing when called upon to press buttons and flip switches that will result in killing millions. Even the best designed systems are susceptible to unexpected weaknesses. A clever member of the general public can infiltrate WOPR. The computer can't be overridden when running scenarios. Powering down the machine at such a time tells it that the opponent's attack has been successful and thus initiates a counterstrike.

Rita Kempley, "WarGames: Tense and Suspenseful", *Washington Post*, 3 June 1983

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1983/06/03/wargames-tense-and-suspenseful/3f923d8c-d719-42b2-81f2-de8f71d0c230/>

WarGames is a soft-sell protest –pro-people, anti-nuclear and anti-machine– that entertains. It peddles neither the hysterics of Jane Fonda's *China Syndrome* nor the hopelessness of *Dr. Strangelove*. It's a war cry for peace that's good to the last byte.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film553168.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0086567/>
- Metracritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/wargames>
- Rotten Tomatoes: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/wargames>
- Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WarGames>

The Terminator (1984)

CREW & CAST

Director: James Cameron

Screenplay: James Cameron, Gale Anne Hurd, William Wisher

Producers: Gale Anne Hurd, Derek Gibson

Main performers: Arnold Schwarzenegger (Terminator), Michael Biehn (Kyle Reese), Linda Hamilton (Sarah Connor), Paul Winfield (Lt. Ed Traxler), Lance Henriksen (Detective Hal Vukovich)

Companies: Hemdale, Pacific Western, Euro Film Funding, Cinema '84, A Greenberg Brothers Partnership

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 47'



PLOT SUMMARY

A formidable Terminator, a robot killer that looks human, is sent from 2029 to 1984 to kill Sarah Connor, the future mother of a yet unborn child, John. In the future he will become the leader of a revolution against the tyranny of the machines. Skynet, an artificial intelligence system which controls the Terminator machine army, sends this lethal unit to kill Sarah as killing his son in the future would not end the ongoing fight. However, the future human resistance has access to this information and Kyle Reese, a rebel soldier, is sent by John Connor himself to the past to protect Sarah from the killing machine.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN

James Cameron (Ontario, 1954), dropped out from college to work as a truck driver and earn the money he needed to eventually achieve his ambition of becoming a screenwriter. Cameron educated himself in filmmaking techniques and, after making a few low-budget productions for producer Roger Corman, he landed his first job in a bigger project as an art director in *Battle Beyond the Stars* (1980). His first film as director was *Piranha II: The Spawning* (1982). Allegedly, an illness caused by poisoned food gave Cameron a nightmare in which he was terrified by an invincible robotic hitman with the mission to kill him. This nightmare gave him the idea for *The Terminator* (1984), which launched him to fame. Curiously, *Frankenstein*, from which *The Terminator* ultimately descends, was also inspired by a nightmare.

The Terminator had an estimated budget of only \$6,4 million, a very low quantity compared to the \$78 million it grossed worldwide. The movie, hailed as a

crackling, massively entertaining thriller was a major popular success, and earned a few Saturn Awards: best science fiction film, best writing and best make-up. James Cameron and Gale Ann Hurd, then a couple, were co-writers and co-producers. The outstanding artist behind the transformation of Arnold Schwarzenegger into the scary killer was Stan Winston. Schwarzenegger, a popular bodybuilder with limited film experience, was initially cast to play the hero Kyle Reese. He, however, convinced Cameron that his physique made him the ideal choice to play the relentless, nearly invincible machine. This was indeed an inspired casting.

The plot is set in 1984, and the film starts with the time travel of the two main characters, the Terminator and Kyle, the rebel envoy. The human-looking robot has been designed by Skynet, a computer defence system or AI, that goes rogue and eventually launches a war against humankind. As Kyle explains to Sarah and to the sceptical police, Skynet is the reason why the Earth as we know it has disappeared. Its war machines control the whole planet, which is by 2029 a post-apocalyptical dystopia. The movie plays with the idea that by killing Sarah, who of course knows nothing of her future son John, Skynet can win the war. At the same time, knowing how the future has evolved since 1984, John's choice of Kyle is not at all accidental –as we eventually learn.

Skynet is both the monster and the creator in this movie. The AI is created, as we learn in the sequel, *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*, by a well-meaning engineer for defence purposes (in a sub-plot that closely recalls *WarGames*). Miles Dyson is, then, the real Frankenstein figure in the franchise, and it is from him that Skynet learns to play the role of mad doctor. Both Skynet and the Terminators are designed for a very specific military objective, a situation which is quite different from Dr. Frankenstein's wish to test his knowledge and abilities in the field of science and technology. Yet, like his creature Skynet escapes control –the Terminators are, so to speak, its monstrous children, though of course the AI reproduces without the need of biology.

Both Mary Shelley's new man and James Cameron's Terminator are critiques against a certain idea of futuristic progress. The threatening monsters have been created by means of advanced technology, something that causes a shock in the other characters who must confront them. In a certain sense, and as many reviewers noted, *The Terminator* presents an even worse situation since although Skynet has been created to protect, it chooses to make robotic soldiers programmed to be unstoppable killing machines. The human-like exterior is confusing but once the synthetic skin is shed there is no doubt about their inhumanity (in ways that, incidentally, closely recall the robotic Maria in *Metropolis*).

A last comment to note that although the Terminator is often described as a cyborg, it is not one at all: cyborgs are creatures born biologically that mix organic and inorganic elements. The terminator is not born but made, and its apparently organic skin cover is just synthetic. It is, then, a humanoid android.

FROM THE REVIEWS

James Berardinelli, "*Terminator, The* (United States, 1984)", *ReelViews*, 3 May 2009
<http://www.reelviews.net/reelviews/terminator-the>

In the casting department, few character/actor pairings have been better fits than Arnold Schwarzenegger as The Terminator. In 1984, the former Mr. Olympia boasted

limited feature acting experience (primarily from two Conan movies) but provided what Cameron wanted from *The Terminator*: an imposing physique and an implacable countenance. Schwarzenegger had both, and his Achilles heel –the occasional inability to deliver dialogue convincingly– was not an impediment. The role demanded only the occasional one-liner (one of which, “I’ll be back”, became the actor’s trademark). Cameron transformed every one of Schwarzenegger’s perceived negatives into strengths and, in the process, re-defined him in Hollywood’s eyes. In the wake of *The Terminator*, Schwarzenegger was in demand.

Kirk Ellis, “*The Terminator: THR’s 1984 Review*”, *The Hollywood Reporter*, 24 October 24 2014

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/terminator-read-thrs-1984-review-743708>

The most imposing special effect, however, is Schwarzenegger himself. Outfitted from head to toe in basic black and armed to the teeth with state-of-the-art weaponry, the ex-strong man comes on like evil incarnate, and his bullet-pumping presence lends the film a very tangible sense of menace. His single-handed destruction of an intercity police station is certain to rank high in the annals of on-screen dastardly deeds.

Peter Bradshaw, “*The Terminator Review –Return of the Classic 80s Action Behemoth*”, *The Guardian*, 25 June 2015

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/jun/25/the-terminator-review-return-of-the-classic-80s-action-behemoth>

On the strength of this picture, now on re-release, Cameron could stand toe to toe with Carpenter and Spielberg. Sadly, it spawned a string of pointless and inferior sequels, but the first Terminator –co-written and co-produced by Gale Anne Hurd– stands up tremendously well with outrageous verve and blistering excitement. T1 has such storytelling firepower you won’t worry about how “machines” have supposedly risen from the ashes of a future nuclear war, or how time travel has been invented, apparently available to both oppressor and rebel.

LINKS

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- Metacritics: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/the-terminator/critic-reviews>
- Rotten Tomatoes: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/terminator>
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Terminator

The Bride (1985)

CREW & CAST

Director: Franc Roddam

Screenplay: Lloyd Fonvielle, Mary Shelley (characters)

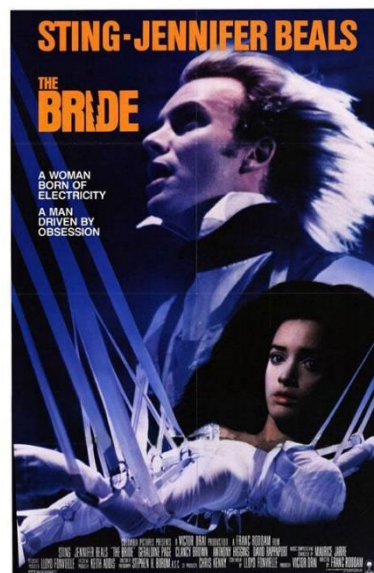
Producers: Victor Drai, Chris Kenny

Main performers: Sting (Frankenstein), Jennifer Beals (Eva), Clancy Brown (Viktor), David Rappaport (Rinaldo), Anthony Higgins (Clerval), Geraldine Page (Mrs. Baumann), Quentin Crisp (Dr. Zahlus)

Companies: Colgems Productions Ltd., Columbia Pictures, Delphi III Productions, Lee International Studios

Nationality: UK / USA

Duration: 1h 58'



PLOT SUMMARY

Dr. Charles Frankenstein is at work in his laboratory. He is creating a new creature, who will come to life with electricity as his previous one did. This creation is supposed to be the monster's bride but, seeing that she is very beautiful, Dr. Frankenstein decides to keep her for himself. Disappointed because he is denied access to Eva, the male monster destroys the lab and runs away (Frankenstein believes him dead). He eventually meets the dwarf Rinaldo, who names him Viktor and becomes a very helpful companion. In the meantime, Dr. Frankenstein, with his house keeper's help, starts educating Eva to behave like a proper lady. What he ignores is that his two creatures are somehow still connected.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

English director Francis George Roddam, known as Franc Roddam (Norton, 1946), used to be known as a TV producer, particularly for his American mini-series *Moby Dick* (1998), based on Herman Melville's classic novel. Curiously, Roddam is also known for being the creator of the popular TV programme *MasterChef*, originally released in July 1990 and now broadcast two hundred countries. His best-known film is *Quadrophenia* (1979), where he met the star of *The Bride*, Sting. The scriptwriter Lloyd Fonvielle (Wilmington, 1950-2015) worked mainly for television, in movies such as *Gotham* (1988), though he also provided the storyline for the very successful film *The Mummy* (1999).

The Bride was poorly received by audience and critics, despite the star power of pop idol Sting and Jennifer Beals (then known for *Flashdance*, 1983). She was nominated by the Razzie awards for Worst Actress of the year and the film only earned

\$3.6 million (it had a generous \$13 million budget). Its only two nominations (to the Saturn Awards) are for Maurice Jarre's music and Shirley Russell's costumes. This is then a case of having the right ingredients but ultimately failing to put them together efficiently – a sort of Frankenstein's creature.

The Bride can be divided into two different stories. On the one hand, the film has a primary story which focuses on Eva's creation and development; the secondary plot deals with the monster Viktor's life after leaving the laboratory. Dr. Charles Frankenstein decides to create Eva with the purpose of being the monster's bride. However, possessive Dr. Frankenstein decides to keep Eva for himself and starts teaching her how to control her body and develop her mind, so that she can become a lady in his upper-class circle. He makes Eva believe that she was found in a town not far away from his castle, with her memory lost. Eventually, Eva understands her real origins and her rights. When his creator tries to abuse her sexually, she rejects him arguing that he cannot have her only for being her creator. Nevertheless, it is obvious that Dr. Frankenstein forces her to do as he wants, out of a sense of entitlement over her body. Meanwhile, the monster enjoys a series of adventures, which end up empowering him. The dwarf Rinaldo not only provides him with a name but also helps him join a circus, where he is to be treated as a freak, rather than a monster. This is an interesting solution to the problem of how he can be seen in public and accepted.

Besides the obvious links to *Frankenstein*, which is not mentioned in the credits..., *The Bride* also has a close connection with the myth of Pygmalion by Ovid in book ten of *Metamorphoses*. Pygmalion was the King of the Ancient Cyprus and a sculptor. He was so impressed by the beauty of the sculpture of a woman he had made that he fell in love with it, naming the statue Galatea. Venus, the goddess of love and beauty, granted Galatea life just as Dr. Frankenstein does with Eva. This theme connects the two stories, though with a difference: Galatea presumably lives happily forever with his Pygmalion, but Eva rebels against her maker.

In *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley discusses implicitly the theme of nature versus nurture, which is also directly related to *The Bride*. When Victor Frankenstein creates the monster, the creature has no knowledge of life or of how to behave, just like Eva in the film. In principle, he is born good but the general rejection he suffers because of his looks brings out his worst violent behaviour. Eva's situation is similar, yet very different, because she is beautiful. Both creatures undergo a similar evolution by learning to speak, read, and develop their own thoughts. Ugliness prevents the monster from going further but Eva is even presented in public as an intelligent, accomplished lady. She is not, however, allowed any freedom and she is treated as a sort of living Barbie doll (see below Stephen Holden's review).

The main problem with *The Bride*, then, is that although it seems to be a pro-feminist film, supporting Eva's decision to rebel against her abusive maker, ultimately it does not go in that direction. Eva becomes a cliched damsel in distress in need of Viktor's help. Audiences attracted to see the movie because of Sting's always charismatic presence may have also been disappointed to see him play the role of villain. It seems, then, this was a lost opportunity to revisit Mary Shelley's classic from a new angle –and to continue the story which James Whale started in the altogether much better *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935).

FROM THE REVIEWS

Victoria Large, "The Bride", *Not Coming Reviews*, 22 October 2012

<http://notcoming.com/reviews/thebride>

Most disappointingly, Eva spends much of the climax in a dead faint, becoming just another damsel in distress. When Frankenstein snaps and attacks Eva, it's a newly returned Viktor who must save her. Indeed, despite its title, the film actually seems more interested in Viktor's journey of self-discovery than Eva's, and no wonder: he goes out and experiences life on the road and in the circus, while Eva spends the majority the film brooding in Frankenstein's castle. It's also hard to be completely comfortable with the film's ultimate suggestion that Eva and Viktor are a worthy match after all: Viktor certainly grows over the course of the film, but he remains somewhat lumbering and naïve, a bit of a lug compared to his beautiful and articulate would-be bride.

Stephen Holden, "Screen: *The Bride*", *The New York Times*, 16 August 1985

<https://www.nytimes.com/1985/08/16/movies/screen-the-bride.html>

If Jennifer Beals, as Frankenstein's "new woman", exuded any spirit, the story of her education and her eventual rebellion against her creator might have generated some amusing psychological humor. Eva is supposed to become an accomplished equestrian and a cutting social wit. But in her riding scenes, Miss Beals communicates only fearful discomfort, and when she wows the local gentry with *bon mots* about Shakespeare, she speaks in an uncomprehending near-monotone. Her Eva isn't a spitfire but a Barbie doll whose only visible sign of passion is a slight widening of the eyes. Miss Beals's performance sinks this already muddled mess of a movie like a stone.

Pat King, "The Bride Blu-ray Review – Even Sexy Androgynous Sting Can't Make this Watchable", *Dread Central*, 24 October 2018

<https://www.dreadcentral.com/reviews/284393/the-bride-blu-ray-review-even-sexy-androgynous-sting-cant-make-this-watchable/>

So, you might be asking, "Why would sexy androgynous Sting want to bed a monster? Couldn't he do a lot better?" Well, Eva might be a corpse raised from the dead, but she has nary a scratch on her. Wouldn't want to scuff Jennifer Beals, would we? Since Viktor is scarred and identifiably a monster, it really makes you wonder: were there several women before Eva, or did he only need one try? Since the difference between Viktor's appearance and Eva's is so stark, I can only conclude that there is a pile of dead women in various stages of deformity buried somewhere on the Frankenstein property.

LINKS

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- IMDb: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0088851/>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/the-bride>
- Rotten Tomatoes: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/bride>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bride_\(1985_film\)](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bride_(1985_film))

Weird Science (1985)

CREW & CAST

Director: John Hughes

Screenplay: John Hughes, Al Feldstein & William M. Gaines (comic book, uncredited)

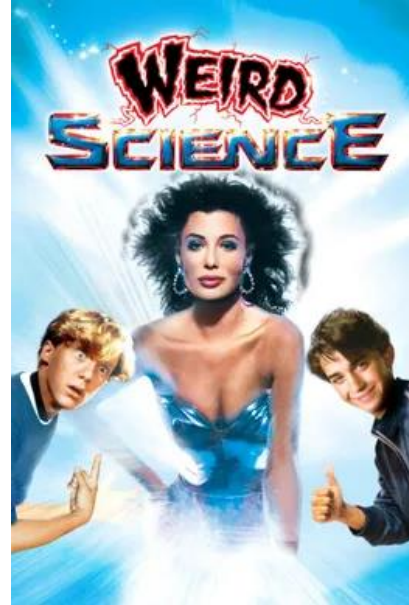
Producer: Joel Silver

Main performers: Anthony Michael Hall (Gary Wallace), Kelly LeBrock (Lisa), Ian Mitchell-Smith (Wyatt Donnelly), Bill Paxton (Chet Donnelly), Suzanne Snyder (Deb), Judie Aronson (Hilly)

Company: Universal Pictures

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 33'



PLOT SUMMARY

Gary and Wyatt, two unpopular teenagers who are constantly rejected by women and struggle to be accepted in their social sphere, have the idea of creating a perfect woman, Lisa, using their nerdish computer skills. She does teach them how to act with girls. However, her main goal is actually to increase their self-confidence so that they can deal with demanding daily situations (such as Wyatt's bullying by his elder brother). Lisa tests her makers under troublesome conditions which require them to move out of their comfort zone and act like mature, strong men – all that in a humorous way.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN

American filmmaker John Hughes (1950-2009), wrote and directed plenty of popular films in the 1980s and 1990s, including *Home Alone* (1990), which made ten-year-old Macaulay Caulkin a star. Hughes is, however, especially well-known for his teen comedies, in which he drew from his past experience in American humour magazine *National Lampoon*. Stories such as "My penis" and "My vagina" were indicators of his particular interest in teen life and insecurities. These are shown in *Sixteen Candles* (1984), *Weird Science* (1985), *The Breakfast Club* (1985), *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986), *Pretty in Pink* (1986), *Some Kind of Wonderful* (1987) –films that remain popular but that are now beginning to be controversial because of their gender issues.

That was the case from the beginning with *Weird Science*, which had quite negative reviews from women critics (see Benson below). The film did not win any

awards, receiving just a nomination for actor Ian Mitchell-Smith (Best Performance by a Younger Actor in the Saturn Awards). At least, the soundtrack, with songs by Oingo Boingo, was quite popular. In any case, there was a television series of 88 episodes with the same title (1994-1998, created by Alan Cross and Tom Spezialy); Vanessa Angel played Lisa in this mildly popular sci-fi sitcom. In 2012, Universal Studios announced plans for a remake of the original film in order to give it an edgier comedy slant, but this seems unlikely to happen soon.

Weird Science connects with *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), whose scene of creation is even quoted. Of course, Hughes takes his inspiration directly from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* perhaps recalling that when he starts his project Victor is still a teen (aged 19). Beautiful Lisa is created by the two sexually frustrated teenagers, using instead of pieces of dead flesh fragments of magazine covers and other photos, fed to a computer. Her extreme intelligence arises, quite funnily, from a picture of Einstein. Lisa, is, obviously, not monstrous but gorgeous, which makes her sexually very appealing to her makers and a source of envy to all girls. Each creature, then, is manufactured for a different purpose. The monster in *Frankenstein* is created in order to show to the world what Victor can do and how knowledgeable he is in the field of science. The artificial Lisa differs completely: she is made by men who have no idea how to approach women to learn from her how to flirt, though she actually teaches them to be men in a more general sense, to face their social fears and value themselves. The creature is in that sense also a creator.

Unlike Mary Shelley's monster, Lisa is, thus, conceived with innate knowledge. Whereas Frankenstein's creature is perceived as being uncontrollable (even by his designer) and a dangerous killer, Lisa is rather submissive to her creators (which can be seen in some scenes as a sexist attitude) and has the required qualities to act in society without destroying or terrifying people, quite the opposite. Despite her sexualized presentation, Lisa acts almost like a mother for Gary and Wyatt. She is portrayed as an erotic woman and a mature being and not at all as a monster. Lisa brings out the best in her creators, whereas Shelley's monster, brings out the worst in Victor.

When she played Lisa, actress Kelly LeBrock was at the peak of her popularity after having played Charlotte in *The Woman in Red* (1984), the erotic fantasy of middle-aged, unattractive Theodore. Curiously he was played by Gene Wilder, also the film director, and most interestingly the star in Mel Brooks' *Young Frankenstein* (1974). This accidental connection highlights how Lisa is a male fantasy (just as Eva is in *The Bride*). That she is made to be very intelligent is in Hughes's favour but, ultimately, the story is not at all about how she becomes an autonomous woman but about how she helps her two dim-witted makers to become adult men. There may be some feminism in this (men are helpless without women) but there is mostly sexism in *Weird Science*.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Sheila Benson, "Movie Review: Science Fulfils Teen-Age Dream", *Los Angeles Times*, 2 August 1985

<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1985-08-02-ca-5793-story.html>

Adolescent boys have been given safe passage across their awkward days of innocence by kindly disposed "older" women for eons. It's not even a phenomenon restricted to Europe. But here behind the Hughes-erected Clearasil curtain, in the

never-never never land of American movie teen-agers, a live woman would never do. She might require too much—intimacy, real responses, a sense of possible loss.

So: a computer-built dream woman with magical powers who can teach them self-confidence without involvement, who can call up Ferraris with a nod of her lovely head and who can vanquish parents and grandparents faster than a writer's eraser.

Roger Ebert, "Weird Science", *RogerEbert.com*, 2 August 1985

<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/weird-science-1985>

In the movie's opening scenes, a couple of bright guys write a program with their specifications for a perfect woman. They feed in centerfolds and magazine covers, measurements and parameters. Then, for additional brainpower, they tap into a giant government computer. And at exactly that instant, lightning strikes (just as it did in the *Bride of Frankenstein*), and out of the mix of bytes and kilowatts steps... a perfect woman.

She is played by Kelly LeBrock in the movie and she has full, sensuous lips, a throaty English accent and a lot of style. She is a little more than the boys had bargained on. For one thing, she isn't an idealized Playmate, all staples and no brains, but an intelligent, sensitive woman who sees right through these teenagers and tries to do them some good.

Thomas William, "Weird Science Review", *Empire*, 1 January 2000

<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/reviews/weird-science-review/>

Two young nerds whip up Perfect Woman Kelly LeBrock for their science homework, and she transforms their lives from geeky isolation into the guilty trials of life. A mildly dirty reworking of love, popularity and wild times, this is John Hughes' scrappiest film to date, but it redeems its tastelessness and stupidity by being fairly funny most of the time. Even Kelly LeBrock is hilarious, particularly when she confronts Hal's uptight parents. She is self-effacing enough of her mid-'80s Wonderwoman status to win us over and is the best thing in an otherwise average spin on Mary Shelley's (now there, feminists roar, was a woman!) creation.

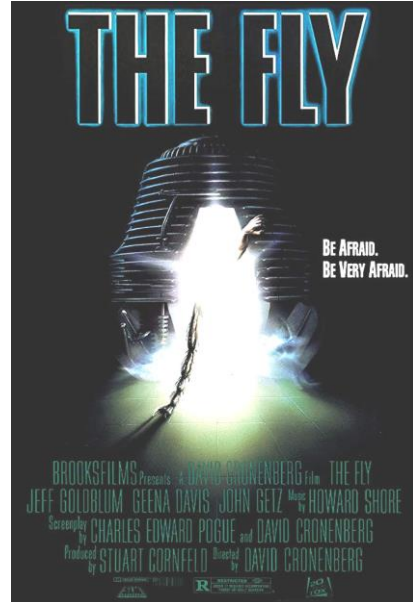
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- Metracritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/weird-science>
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- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weird_Science_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weird_Science_(film))

The Fly (1986)

CREW & CAST

Director: David Cronenberg
Screenplay: Charles Edward Pogue, David Cronenberg, George Langelaan (short story "The Fly")
Producers: Stuart Cornfeld, Mel Brooks (uncredited)
Main Performers: Jeff Goldblum (Seth Brundle), Geena Davis (Veronica Quaife), John Getz (Stathis Borans), David Cronenberg (Gynecologist)
Companies: SLM Production Group, Brooksfilms
Nationality: USA
Duration: 1h 36'



PLOT SUMMARY

Seth Brundle is a scientist working on his telepods (teleportation machines). He meets Veronica Quaife, a journalist who becomes his partner and also keeps track of his scientific progress. One day, jealous of her relationship with another man, Seth rushes to teleport himself without noticing a fly entering the pod, with which he fuses. Due to this mishap, he progressively turns into a human-sized hybrid man/fly. When Veronica realizes that she is pregnant, she decides to have an abortion, not knowing when the child was conceived. Seth, however, breaks into the hospital to stop her, thinking that the child's genes might cure him in a new telepod fusion. Only disaster can follow from this plan.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN

David Paul Cronenberg (Canada, 1943) is a filmmaker, writer, actor and one of the principal originators of the body horror movie genre. His most famous work is *The Fly* (1986), his only Oscar award-winning film (for Best Makeup). In his movies, Cronenberg explores the clash between the body and technology, which often results in horrific bodily transformations. Some of his other best-known films include *Scanners* (1981), *Videodrome* (1983), and *Crash* (1996, based on J.G. Ballard's controversial novel), which typically combine horror and science fiction. Cronenberg has also experimented with other genres in quality films such as *A History of Violence* (2005) and *Eastern Promises* (2007).

The Fly was a summer blockbuster, released on 15 August 1986. It was highly praised, especially due to its special effects and to Jeff Goldblum's acting, which

included wearing five pounds of prosthetic makeup which (no reasonably priced computer effects were then available). Chris Walas and Stephan Dupuis won a well-deserved Academy Award for their visualization of Seth's degradation. *The Fly* earned \$60.6 million dollars compared to its modest \$9 million budget, and was a huge success worldwide, especially among science fiction and horror-loving audience. To this day it is the biggest hit in Cronenberg's career and a critics' favourite, though, interestingly, it was originally a project conceived for Tim Burton to direct. Incidentally, *The Fly* adapts a 1957 short story by George Langelaan, filmed with the same title in 1958, and still today a minor cult film.

Seth Brundle is an ambitious, lonely scientist convinced that he is the only one working on a world-changing invention. His experiment certainly changes his world and his life. Brundle resembles young Victor Frankenstein with his fascination for science. He invites journalist Veronica to his laboratory in order to prove his point and offer her the chance to document his work in a book. After a process of trial and error, Brundle successfully teleports a monkey. Jealousy, however, leads Seth to make the mistake of involving his own body in his teleporting tests, which results in the fusion of his DNA with that of a fly. Whereas in the 1958 film this fusion affects, funnily, only half of Dr. Delambre's body and of the fly, which end up swapped according to size, here the fusion is far more radical. As Cronenberg has often explained, he had in mind the effect of cancer on the human body (particularly after seeing his own father die of this disease).

Comparing it to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, we can see how doctor Frankenstein and his creation become one in this movie. Like Victor, Seth never fully understands the consequences of his actions. He rushes into disaster instead of taking time to make sure that the telepods cause no secondary effects. His ambition to make the telepods work, even when he is already turning into a monster, shows how obsessed he is by his experiment. Both the novel *Frankenstein* and *The Fly* teach that science misused unleashes chaos and tragedy; they can be interpreted as a critique of scientific advance. Seth becomes the tragic outcome of uncontrolled scientific progress, just like the monster, though what happens to Brundle might seem undeserved to a certain extent.

Both Seth and Frankenstein's monster are kind-natured creatures; however, the monster seeks to be accepted and loved, whereas Seth is too engrossed by his transformation to seek any love or social acceptance. Initially, Seth is fascinated by his superhuman strength, still denying that, as Veronica notices, something has gone wrong. When he does realize that his DNA is utterly altered, his feelings towards Veronica are still present but he lets her go (even though she doesn't leave him). Unlike Frankenstein's monster, who was a product of Victor's science, Seth has no one to blame except himself. Seth is so immersed in his teleportation project that he becomes his own *failed* experiment, both monster and the creator, though not out of a purposeful plan.

Interestingly, Seth looks at his own tragedy from a scientific point of view. Instead of getting upset over the idea of becoming a horrific fly, Seth accepts his inevitable destiny. He watches in fascination how he shifts from human to insect, even calling himself *Brundlefly*, and strongly recalling Grigor in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*: "I'm an insect who dreamt he was a man and loved it. But now the dream is over and the insect is awake". Veronica is increasingly disgusted and scared by how Seth keeps in his

cupboard the pieces that fall off his body, a museum full of trophies. His morbid fascination towards his own decomposition shows the extent of his madness, and how he fits the pattern of the Frankenstein-inspired mad doctor. Seth's appearance is soon grotesque and it gets progressively worse throughout the movie, as he sheds his human form. Even so, Veronica is determined to help him. Cronenberg's *The Fly* recalls in this element "Beauty and the Beast", as Veronica does not stop loving Seth.

The most controversial aspect of Seth's metamorphosis is the possibility of a cure and how this leads to his preventing Veronica from aborting their child. Arguably, Frankenstein's monster would have attempted to solve the situation at any cost, since he craves being *normal*, whereas Seth does not. When Veronica realizes that she is pregnant, Seth's transformation is so advanced that she can barely look at him, though she can still see the man he used to be (unlike Gregor Samsa's family, who reject him due to his cockroach-like appearance). The intense nightmare she has (with Cronenberg himself in the role of gynaecologist) announces what might happen if she gives birth (and indeed the sequel *The Fly II*).

When Seth realizes that he can never be cured nor have a family with Veronica, he is driven by profound despair, which makes him somehow more human than when he looked normal. When Seth loses the capacity to speak, revenge overwhelms him and that drives him to torture Stathis, whom he blames for his jealous fit and the awful accident with the telepod. At this point, Brundle sheds his Victor Frankenstein mad-scientist persona to be himself. His emotional, sensitive side surfaces eventually when he faces his monstrosity and his oncoming death, but his jealousy indicates that something was already wrong with the man Seth Brundle, from which Brundlefly emerges.

FROM THE REVIEWS

C.H. Newell, "Cronenberg's *The Fly* Affirms Alexander Pope: A Little Learning is a Dangerous Thing", *FSHG*, 10 March 2016

<https://fathersonholygore.com/2016/10/03/cronenbergs-the-fly-affirms-alexander-pope-a-little-learning-is-a-dangerous-thing/>

Brundle gets stranded along the way, especially after the transformation. He's consumed by the will to be ultimately powerful. He has changed life, science, knowledge, all with his own mind and ideas and work ethic. (...) Ah, yes – the horror of knowledge. This line is clear in how Seth abuses science. He doesn't fully know the effects of what he's about to do, into which dark pool he's ready to dive. That doesn't stop him, either. Thinking he knows everything, Seth forges ahead with a little learning instead of ENOUGH learning.

Rob Gonsalves, "*The Fly*" (1986), *eFilmCritic.com*, 30 April 2016

<http://www.efilmcritic.com/review.php?movie=936&reviewer=416>

The transition wouldn't work nearly so well, of course, without Geena Davis convincing us that she still loves the man underneath the monstrosity, and without Jeff Goldblum persuading us the man is still there. (...) Seth maintains a lively scientific interest in his own grotesque transformation, more for his own edification than for posterity. Cronenberg was right to keep Seth restlessly eloquent right up to the full transformation –Seth crests on his own ersatz insights, like someone on a cocaine rush,

and then collapses into rage and lust, while Veronica looks on helplessly. (Without being condescendingly dumbed-down –she *does* know her way around a lab, after all– Davis’s Veronica is the audience’s stand-in, staring aghast as Seth riffs mumbo-jumbo about “the plasma pool.”). (...) Nobody can keep up with Seth; he’s the foremost expert on his condition because he’s its only host body.

Caryn James, “*The Fly*: Film with Jeff Goldblum”, *The New York Times*, 15 August 1986
<https://www.nytimes.com/1986/08/15/movies/film-the-fly-with-jeff-goldblum.html>

As Brundle slowly turns into a ghastly, mad creature, though –he resembles a decomposing body but still has wit enough to call himself Brundlefly– Mr. Cronenberg's interest narrows, and his camera languidly worships every stage of the metamorphosis. Brundle plucks off his ear, bleeds a milky liquid, and I won't even tell you how he eats. Emotional issues become ludicrous jokes; Brundle tries to talk the pregnant Ronnie out of aborting the fly-fetus she may be carrying. The plot diminishes to: How can he possibly look worse? And should I watch? This is intense, all right, but not scary or sad, or even intentionally funny.

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- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Fly_\(1986_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Fly_(1986_film))

Robocop (1987)

CREW & CAST

Director: Paul Verhoeven

Screenplay: Edward Neumeier, Michael Miner

Producer: Arne Schmidt

Main performers: Peter Weller (Alex Murphy/Robocop), Nancy Allen (Lewis), Ronny Cox (Jones), Kurtwood Smith (Boddicker), Miguel Ferrer (Morton), Robert DoQui (Sgt Reed), Ray Wise (Lion)

Company: Orion Pictures Corporation

Nationality: United States

Duration: 1h 42'



PLOT SUMMARY

Robocop takes place in a futuristic Detroit where delinquency is rampant. The police can't do enough to keep order and a private corporation, Ommi Consumer Goods, seeks to replace the human police force with robots. The robots are not reliable and the corporation decides to give a chance to a program by the name of 'Robocop', based on developing a cyborg policeman. When officer Alex J. Murphy is viciously murdered during service his broken body is used to create the first Robocop. It/he manages to deal with crime in the city efficiently but soon starts having memories of Murphy's past. Robocop eventually faces Boddicker, the notorious outlaw who murdered his human self, and discovers that he works for an executive in the corporation who secretly opposes the Robocop programme, preferring machines with no human parts.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN

Paul Verhoeven (Amsterdam 1938) is a Dutch producer, director, and screen playwright known for his science fiction and drama films characterized by sexual content and graphic violence. His first film was *Wat Zien Ik!?* (1971), a comedy that wasn't very successful. His first big hit *Turkish Delight* (1973) was nominated for an Oscar to the Best Foreign-language film. In the 1980's he moved to the United States where he directed violent high-budget films with plenty of special effects like *Robocop* (1987) or *Total Recall* (1990), his two main hits, together with *Showgirls* (1995). Other important works by Verhoeven are *Starship Troopers* (1997), considered a cult classic, *Hollow Man* (2000, see the factsheet in this volume), or *The Black Book* (2006). His

most recent film is the controversial *Elle* (2016), which he shot after a ten year break. Edward Neumeier, *Robocop's* writer, is an American screenwriter known for his work in science fiction films, mainly *Robocop* and *Starship Troopers* (from the classic novel by Robert Heinlein). Neumeier worked with Michael Miner, a screenwriter and director known for *Deadly Weapon* (1989) and *The Book of Stars* (1999), in the screenplay for *Robocop*. He had got the inspiration for *Robocop* as a result of working as an intern on the set of *Blade Runner*.

Robocop had a good reception with favourable reviews and with the years it has become a cult classic. It was praised for its special effects, make-up and costumes. The suit itself took a great deal of the budget as several versions were made to reflect the damage Robocop receives during the film; Peter Weller, the actor who played Robocop, needed several days to learn how to walk in costume. The film had a budget of \$13 million and earned back \$53.4 million. *Robocop* won a Saturn award for Best Science Fiction Film; its crew also won Saturns for Best Make-up, Best Writing, and Best Director. The film has also been nominated to numerous awards including an Oscar for Best Film Editing and Sound.

An important difference between Verhoeven's film and Mary Shelley's novel is the figure of the creator. In *Robocop* Bob Morton, the man behind project is not a scientist but an executive. Unlike Dr. Frankenstein he doesn't craft the creature himself as he is not versed in science, instead he has subordinates to do the work for him. Bob Morton's goal also differs from Dr Frankenstein's as he isn't interested in the progress of science or transcending death and just wants to earn power in his corporation, Omni Consumer Products. The main similarity between *Robocop* and *Frankenstein* is, of course, the creation of a transhuman being through science. Both Frankenstein's creature and Robocop are created from deceased human bodies. They fall under the label transhuman because they were human at some point but have evolved from that state, both are an artificial being who hasn't been born from Mother Nature. Robocop is also technically a cyborg, as the organic remains of Murphy's body mix with the inorganic metallic and digital components of his new self.

The main difference between the two is that while Frankenstein's creature is a mash-up of several bodily pieces and doesn't retain any vestige of any former self, Robocop still has traces of his former human self, Alex Murphy, that collide with his programming. Robocop strives to get back what makes him human, his memories as Alex Murphy. Despite being more machine than flesh, Robocop is more human than Frankenstein's creature who is fully organic. Robocop is able to experience love and acceptance, emotions humans consider necessary while the monster will never be able to experience those. Frankenstein's creature wants to find love and acceptance but ends developing a strong hatred for humanity as he is treated with contempt and hate by humans since its birth. Robocop takes revenge on those who murdered his human self, depriving him of his humanity. The monster instead wants to take revenge on his creator, Dr Frankenstein, who is responsible for his wretched appearance and denies the monster his only chance to experience love by refusing to create a companion for his creature. Having been condemned to a life of loneliness and sadness the monster decides to make its creator experience its pain depriving Frankenstein of his loved ones and filling him with guilt and hatred.

The film *Robocop* was accused by feminist Susan Faludi of negatively portraying women as incidental characters which doesn't seem true since Officer Lewis, a female

policeman and former partner of Alex Murphy, is a crucial character for the plot. Her interactions with Robocop are decisive for the recovery of Murphy's memory and she gets a remarkable amount of screen time. It is, indeed, far more relevant to see *Robocop* as a film about the struggle of men to stay human under pressure from their exploitation as workers, either by the State or the corporations like OCP.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Rita Kempley, "*Robocop*", *Washington Post*, 17 July 1987

https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/robocoprkempley_a0ca71.htm??noredirect=on

(...) at the story's heart is the resurrection –the man in the machine, his memory blanked by the corporation, rediscovering and regaining his humanity. It's cleverly designed, though, for crossover audiences. Action fans can easily ignore the deeper meaning, sit back and enjoy the ripping pace, the vicarious vigilantism, the clever effects and the many fine explosions.

Roger Ebert, "*Robocop*", *Chicago Sun Times*, 17 July 1987

<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/robocop-1987>

The broad outline of the plot develops along more or less standard thriller lines. But this is not a standard thriller. The director is Paul Verhoeven, the gifted Dutch filmmaker whose earlier credits include *Soldier of Orange* and *The Fourth Man*. His movies are not easily categorized. There is comedy in this movie, even slapstick comedy. There is romance. There is a certain amount of philosophy, centering on the question, what is a man? And there is pointed social satire, too, as the Robocop takes on some of the attributes and some of the popular following of a Bernhard Goetz.

Desson Howe, "*Robocop*", *Washington Post*, 17 July 1987

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/robocoprhowe_a0b0d5.htm

You feel as if you're watching an old story disguised in sci-fi hardware –and you are. Weller (Diane Keaton's handsome extramarital lover in *Shoot the Moon*) is the tragic hero looking for redemption. His kid had *Shane*-like expectations for Dad to be just like the gunfighter in his favorite TV series. And, with this second chance, Murphy doesn't want to disappoint him.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/us/film528679.html>
- IMDb: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0093870/>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/robocop>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1017712_robocop
- Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RoboCop>

Akira (1987)

CREW & CAST

Director: Katsuhiro Ôtomo

Screenplay: Katsuhiro Ôtomo (from his manga *Akira*),
Izô Hashimoto

Producers: Shunzo Kato, Ryôhei Suzuki

Main performers (voices): Mitsuo Iwata (Kaneda),
Nozomu Sasaki (Tetsuo), Mami Koyama (Key), Tesshô
Genda (Riu), Hiroshi Ôtake (Nezu)

Companies: Akira Committee Company Ltd.,
Akira Studio, TMS Entertainment

Nationality: Japanese

Duration: 2h 4'



PLOT SUMMARY

The city of Neo-Tokyo emerges after the nuclear explosion that destroyed Tokyo in 1988, thirty years before. Instead of the peaceful Tokyo it once was, now it has become a dark and dangerous megapolis infested with terrorism, corruption, and gang violence. The Government maintains control over the population and hides all the secrets of the past using a powerful military establishment. Kaneda and Tetsuo are childhood friends in a motorcycle gang that get caught into one of the darkest secrets of Neo-Tokyo due to a chance encounter with a military operation code-named Akira. Tetsuo ends up getting captured and is subjected to different experiments that give him psychic powers. However, Tetsuo's powers get out of control and he rages against the oppressive world which has transformed him into a monstrous villain. He lashes out knowing that nothing can stop his newly acquired destructive power, except perhaps Kaneda.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Katsuhiro Ôtomo is a Japanese manga artist, screenwriter and film director. He is best known as the creator of the manga *Akira* and its animated film adaptation, or anime. In 1979 he created his first science-fiction work *Fireball*, a manga which was never completed but that was a milestone in his career. In 1982, Ôtomo made his anime debut, working as character designer for the animated film *Harmagedon*. The next year, Ôtomo began work on a manga which would become his most acclaimed and famous work: *Akira*. It took eight years to complete it, and in 1988 the animated film was finally released. Izô Hashimoto, *Akira's* co-writer, made his directorial debut in

1984 with the independent film *Pasokon Wars Isami*, after which he began writing for television with the hit drama series *Sukeban DeKa*. He co-wrote the screenplays for Katsuhiro Ôtomo's *Akira* and Shinji Aoyama's *EM Embalming*.

Akira, produced by the famous Toho Studio, premiered in Japan in 1988 and was released the following year in the United States by pioneering animation distributor Streamline Pictures. It garnered a large international fame, eventually earning over \$80 million; it didn't, however, win any relevant awards. Despite this, *Akira* is widely considered by critics to be one of the greatest animated and science-fiction films of all time, as well as a landmark specifically in Japanese anime. The film had a significant impact on popular culture worldwide, paving the way for the growth of anime and Japanese popular culture in the Western world as well as influencing numerous other films. *Akira* is both an immense achievement in animation and a very well built thriller, famous for its high visual impact.

Most of the character design and settings were adapted from the manga, but the plot differs considerably and removes much of the last half of it, as it happens with the adaptations of books. Katsuhiro Ôtomo's story is set in a dystopian, post-nuclear 2019. The story is focused on a local biker gang, particularly on the leader Kaneda and his childhood friend Tetsuo. Tetsuo acquires incredible telekinetic abilities after a motorcycle accident, interfering by chance in a secret military operation. The story develops as the ultra-empowered, raging Tetsuo eventually ends up being a threat for all the metropolis. *Akira* is presented as a harsh comment on the dangers of misused technology, as well as reflecting from an anti-military stance on power and who controls it. When most of the population is oppressed that leads to resentment and vengeance, but when the situation gets out of control those already oppressed are threatened with total destruction.

Akira and *Frankenstein* connect through the creation of a monster as the result of a quest to harness the power of science to positively affect humankind; in both, the central conflicts are the monster's struggle with his own humanity as well as a battle between the monster and society. The conclusions show similarities, too. Neither the monster's violence in *Frankenstein* nor Tetsuo's power in *Akira* fit ordinary life. Shelley and Ôtomo use their monstrous characters to question the naturalization of the scientists' right to apply new science and technology to human bodies. Even though in *Akira* the subject is human, throughout the film he is progressively dehumanized as he mutates due to the experiments. Through the posthuman identities explored in these texts, one can find a blurred relationship between the human and non-human in the lack of a 'natural' human subject. Like Frankenstein's creature, the body of Tetsuo has physical capabilities beyond those of an ordinary human as a consequence of the experiments the military force on him. Like Robocop, he becomes a hybrid of human and technoscience, a cyborg. The integration of technology with the human body is today discussed by Critical Posthumanism, which contests the legitimacy of the technology already pushing the human body beyond the conceptual boundaries that define what the human is. *Akira* can be said to be an early contribution to this debate.

It is also important to note that ultimately *Akira* is inspired by the trauma of the atomic bombs dropped on Japan by the US military in 1945 to, supposedly, end WWII. Nagasaki and Hiroshima, not Tokyo, were destroyed in the worst example of terrorist technoscience ever. Neo-Tokyo and Tetsuo, and *Akira* itself, emerge from that trauma.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Brian Eggert, "Akira", *Deep Focus Review*, 17 November 2013

<https://deepfocusreview.com/reviews/akira/>

His limitless spectacle of a nuked world reborn into a frightening dystopian city—teeming with the subgenre’s usual range of cyberpunks, telekinetics, and authoritarian bad guys—may overshadow the emotional depth of his characters and their often overly expositional dialogue, but Otomo’s audience is so rapt by the proceedings that these criticisms hardly seem important. *Akira* remains so densely steeped in exhibition, out-there sci-fi ideas, and an overload of visual information that its social and cultural commentaries may go overlooked. Despite this unbalance, such an extraordinary achievement demands to be seen, and seen again for re-evaluation into its deeper relevance, and to be appreciated as a landmark not just of anime but of international cinema.

H.D. Russell, "Akira", *The Escapist*, 27 February 2016

<https://v1.escapistmagazine.com/articles/view/moviesandtv/reviews/goanimereviews/15481-Akira-Classic-Anime-Review.2>

Besides the heavy psychological themes, *Akira* is also a thrilling sci-fi adventure that keeps you on the edge of your seat the entire time. It rarely slows down, and when it does, it’s so viewers can finally catch a breath from the constant action and consider what’s going on in Neo-Tokyo. While the action scenes make the movie enjoyable, I wouldn’t call the experience fun, as watching Tetsuo’s descent into madness is tough, as is Kaneda’s struggle to bring Tetsuo down. The film does pay off, though; after watching it twice, the message is much more poignant and demonstrates the dangers of seeking knowledge or power on a level that borders on Lovecraft.

Louise Tutt, "Akira", *Screen Daily*, 18 December 2015

<https://www.screendaily.com/features/screen-at-40/akira-1988/5098246.article>

Akira remains one of the most vivid, technically accomplished animation films ever made, and can be credited with bringing cartoons to a sophisticated, cine-literate global audience. Streamline Entertainment released *Akira* in the US, first theatrically and then on VHS, while the prestigious ICA screened it in the UK. The visual audacity and stylised violence of *Akira* has gone on to inspire a generation of Hollywood filmmakers including the Wachowskis (*The Matrix* trilogy), Quentin Tarantino (*Kill Bill*), Ryan Johnson (*Looper*) and Christopher Nolan (*The Dark Knight*).

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/us/film144113.html>
- IMDb: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0094625>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/akira-2021>
- Rotten Tomatoes: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/akira>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akira_\(1988_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akira_(1988_film))

Making Mr. Right (1987)

CREW & CAST

Director: Susan Seidelman

Screenplay: Floyd Byars, Laurie Frank

Producers: Mike Wise, Joel Tuber

Main performers: John Malkovich (Dr. Jeff Peters / Ulysses), Ann Magnuson (Frankie Stone), Glenna Headly (Trish), Ben Masters (Steve Marcus), Laurie Metcalf (Sandy), Polly Bergen (Estelle Stone), Harsh Nayyar (Dr. Ramdas)

Company: Barry & Enright Productions

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 38'



PLOT SUMMARY

Geeky Dr. Jeff Peter builds a robot to go on a space mission, Ulysses, who looks exactly like him and also lacks any social skills. Advertising executive Frankie Stone is hired by Jeff's employers, ChemTec laboratories, to humanize Ulysses and convince Congress to fund their space program. However, Ulysses impersonates Jeff and escapes, hiding in Frankie's car to begin the adventure of behaving like an ordinary man. Eventually, Ulysses and Frankie start having feelings for each other. Her sister's wedding is the catalyst for Jeff to understand that Ulysses is a better man than he can ever be and, taking advantage of an accident, find a solution to his own dislike of human beings and to Frankie and Ulysses's interrupted romance.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN

Susan Seidelman (Philadelphia, 1952) is an American film director, producer and screen playwright. She came to prominence in the 1980s when her first full-length film was screened in competition at the Cannes Film Festival: *Smithereens* (1982). After that, she made other notable movies such as *Desperately Seeking Susan* (1985, co-starred by Madonna), *She-Devil* (1989, with Roseanne Barr and Meryl Streep) and episodes of *Sex and the City* (1998-2004). Her works mix different genres, mostly comedy and drama, focusing on insecure women as protagonists. Typically, these women are successful, but are always under pressure due to their jobs (such as Frankie in *Making Mr. Right*). Floyd Byars and Laurie Frank wrote this science-fiction romantic comedy. Floyd Byars is a producer and writer of, for instance, an episode of *CSI: NY* (2009-), and the movies *Masterminds* (1997) and *Compulsion* (2013). Laurie Frank is a

producer, writer, and director. She has written *Love Crimes* (1992), *The Look* (1985) and *Marky Mark and the Funky Bunch: Make My Video* (1992) and directed movies such as *Charlie Barnett's Terms of Enrolment* (1986), *Dummies* (1985), apart from appearing in *Saturday Night Live*.

In *Making Mr. Right* the reclusive scientist Dr. Jeff Peter builds his robotic double and, as he is the only programmer, the robot ends up having the same negative characteristics as its creator, including an inability to show emotion. The purpose of building the robot is to set him to go on a seven-year space exploration mission (which is one of Jeff's dreams). Frankie Stone is no programmer but she is given the task of turning Ulysses into a socially acceptable robot, which means re-educating him while Ulysses himself also learns how to navigate ordinary life. The film is a romantic comedy, which means that Seidelman shows Ulysses's new life as a succession of funny moments, based on his naivete and his similarity to his maker. There are many misunderstandings because Ulysses behaves unexpectedly and without understanding what is going on, even literally losing his head. Unlike Jeff, Ulysses wonders and asks about many things, but particularly about love, sex and relationships. Of course, Jeff is not happy at all about how Frankie's presence interferes with his programming of Ulysses.

Making Mr. Right is a parody of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in many ways. Shelley's novel is Gothic horror about a hideous (though intelligent) male creature, whereas the film is comedy focused on the attractive (though naïve) robot Ulysses. Far from being scary, or made of human parts, the robot is his own maker but improved in looks and behaviour, which is a clever critique of Victor Frankenstein's shortcomings as man and scientist. There is no question of Ulysses being rejected by society, and he is never violent; in fact, Jeff is the one who can never adapt. By making a woman, Frankie (a nice allusion to *Frankenstein*), central to Ulysses's development as a person with full feelings and emotions, Seidelman's film also stresses the fact that Frankenstein lacks the empathy his creature needs. Ulysses learns the art of being human from a good teacher. Frankenstein's monster is intelligent enough to learn alone but he never meets the sympathy which Ulysses enjoys because of his appearance. The robot Ulysses has the body of an adult but he is like a little boy learning new things all the time. His constant surprise, charm and willingness to try new things makes him attractive to women. He does not follow men's expected behaviour, lacks prejudices, misses clichés, and respects no adult rules. Both Frankie and Trish fall in love with him for unlike the men they know, Ulysses learns to be open and expresses his feelings explicitly, which makes him sweet and funny. In contrast, Jeff thinks that everyone is intellectually inferior to him and is totally unable to connect with women, or men.

Seidelman's comedy, it must be noted, was a failure despite John Malkovich's accomplished double performance as the very different Jeff and Ulysses. Men in the audience possibly disliked being told that a robot could always be better than a man, whereas women seem not to have enjoyed the idea of a robot as romantic lead. Either this was premature or it required a different director, who has shown greater interest in the obvious but partly unexplored connections with *Frankenstein*.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Keith Bailey, "Making Mr. Right", *The Unknown Movies*, undated

<http://www.the-unknown-movies.com/unknownmovies/reviews/rev608.html>

When Ulysses is more in control, he shows a sweetness and naiveté that seems just right for a machine that doesn't completely know the art of being human. And as Dr. Peters, Malkovich is completely different. When he interacts with others, you can tell from his words and body language that it's really something he'd rather not do. It's as if Malkovich was trying to convey a mild case of Asperger's syndrome for his character, years before the syndrome was better known.

Robert Horton, "Making Mr. Right", *What a Feeling!: A Critics's Diary of a Flabbergasting Movie Decade*, 18 April 2012 (originally 12 April 1987)

<https://eightiesmovies.wordpress.com/2012/04/18/making-mr-right/>

It's a charming little movie. But Seidelman's heart doesn't quite seem in the machinations of the screwball plot. She can't quite resolve the split: Her attitude is Andy Warhol, but her story is Frank Capra. For instance, a wedding scene puts all the principals together, and begs for comic collisions. Seidelman gets the tacky look right, but the scene barely touches the possibilities.

Rita Kempley, "Making Mr. Right", *The Washington Post*, 10 April 1987

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/makingmrrightpg13kempley_a0cab3.htm

Screenwriters Floyd Byars and Laurie Frank's flapjack-flat characters meander through a slack plot that aims to address love between life-forms. The message can be summed up in a quote from the uncorrupted (or is it uncorroded?) component-parts hero: "When people learn how to love and care for those who love them, then they may become more than just machines." (Love means never having to say you're soldered?)

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/us/film216019.html>
- IMDb: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0093477/>
- Metacritic: No entry
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/making_mr_right
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Making_Mr_Right

***Bicentennial Man* (1990)**

CREW & CAST

Director: Chris Columbus

Screenplay: Nicholas Kazan, Isaac Asimov (novella *The Bicentennial Man*), Isaac Asimov & Robert Silverberg (novel *The Positronic Man*)

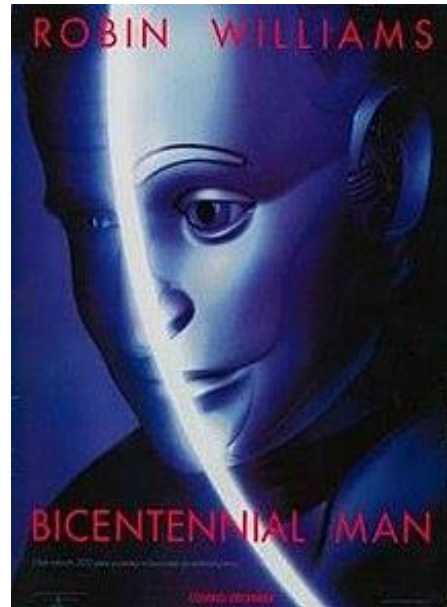
Producers: Michael Barnathan, Chris Columbus, Gail Katz, et al.

Main performers: Robin Williams (Andrew Martin), Embeth Davidtz (Little Miss Amanda Martin/Portia), Sam Neill ('Sir' Richard Martin), Oliver Platt (Rupert Burns), Kiersten Warren (Galatea), Wendy Crewson ('Ma'am' Martin)

Companies: 1492 Pictures, Columbia Pictures, Laurence Mark Productions, Radiant Productions, Touchstone Pictures

Nationality: USA/Canada

Duration: 2h 12'



PLOT SUMMARY

Andrew, a unique NDR series robot, is sold to the Martin family as a housekeeper and general maintenance help. When Andrew's owners discover that he is a gifted woodcraft artist, he is allowed to sell his production and save money to pay for bodily upgrades, without having his positronic brain altered. With Little Miss's support, Andrew eventually purchases his own freedom. He fails to find another robot like him, with feelings and emotions, but meets Rupert Burns, the original NDR robot designer's son. He helps Andrew to look more human. Realizing that he will lose everyone he loves to death, Andrew decides to become mortal and replace all his body machinery. Subsequently, he marries Portia (Little Miss's daughter), spends his life with her, and fights to convince the World Congress to recognize him as a human person.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Chris Columbus (Spangler, 1958) is an American filmmaker. He began working as a screenwriter with Steven Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment, working on *Gremlins* (1984) and *Young Sherlock Holmes* (1985). He is known for directing family films such as *Home Alone* (1990) for which he won a British Comedy Award for Best Comedy Film, *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993), *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (2001) and its sequel, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (2002). Columbus founded his production company 1492 Pictures in 1995, which has produced among others *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004). Nicholas Kazan (New York, 1945) is an American

screenwriter, film producer and director. He is known for having written *Reversal of Fortune* (1990), *Fallen* (1998) and *The Bicentennial Man* (1999).

The Bicentennial Man was not generally well-received. The film had a \$100 million budget, but only earned \$88 million world-wide, and reviews were mostly negative because of the film's sentimentalism. Some reviewers praised its family values or the romance between Andrew and Portia, but many others disliked its general sugary tone. First-rank make-up artist Greg Cannom, in charge of Andrew's changing robotic and human appearance, including his aging through the entire film, received an Oscar nomination and won the Hollywood Makeup Artist and Hair Stylist Guild Award. The film did not reap any other major awards.

Adapted from the novella by Isaac Asimov published in 1976 and a novel co-authored with Robert Silverberg, *The Bicentennial Man* is set in a near future in which humanoid robots are part of daily life, taking charge for instance of housekeeping and other human jobs. Unlike all the other NDR robot series, however, Andrew has a personality of his own, perceived to be a malfunction. The company offers to replace him with another android, but the Martin family likes him as he is. Soon enough, his quirks enable Andrew to learn more about the humans he interacts with and he further develops his feelings and emotions, which makes him more likely to seem a human in mind and soul.

Andrew Martin has many similarities with Victor Frankenstein's creature. Both are non-human creatures created by man's hand. Moreover, they are unique in a certain way: Andrew is the only robot capable of developing a personality while Frankenstein's creature is the only one of his kind. Because of their non-human nature, and although Andrew is a nice-looking robot and not a monster, they are rejected by society, with very few exceptions. Both *Frankenstein* and *The Bicentennial Man* reveal real-world truths about ethical issues involved in the usage of science to create life. Such issues include the appearance of emotions in non-human creatures, how ownership connects with slavery (Andrew is kept in housekeeping for 200 years), and what it means to be human. In Mary Shelley's original novel, Frankenstein manufactures a monstrous male superhuman just to prove that he is a genuine scientist but then he doesn't assume his responsibilities towards him. In Andrew's case, his creators want to get rid of them as they fear losing control over their creations. Both works make us consider whether time will make science able to create advanced machines or post-humans to fulfil our needs and desires and how the line between human and creature can be blurred with scientific advances. In *The Bicentennial Man* after all the main issue is how long Andrew's fight to be recognized as a human person takes.

Novel and film challenge their audience to explore and understand what a human being is and how humanity is socially and legally constituted. Both Frankenstein's creature and Andrew are born fulfilling Locke's *tabula rasa*, and by time they make their choices each has developed into a very different character. On the one hand, Andrew's 'family' environment positively stimulates him to understand the world and to love, so he is humanized. On the other hand, Frankenstein's creature is left on his own right after he is born; in his search for his creator he is disowned, insulted and isolated. All the emotions he develops are rage, hate and revenge. Frankenstein's creature makes it his life's purpose to kill his creator and then to destroy himself as he finds no one who accepts him, hence turning into a monster. In

contrast, Andrew gains sufficient autonomy to replace all his artificial organs and reject the immortality that makes him radically different from a human being. The sting of the tale lies in the fact that he is only acknowledged to be human in his deathbed, too late. At least he has enjoyed a long, happy life with the woman he loves and who has learned to love him as a person, rather than as man or robot.

FROM THE REVIEWS

David Ansen, "A Blue Season", *Nesweeks*, 1 Septemeber 2000

<https://www.newsweek.com/blue-season-158311>

One could describe this movie as the story of a woman (Embeth Davidtz) who falls in love with a household appliance (Robin Williams). But that would make it sound funny. While there are a few good jokes scattered about, this is, alas, yet another of Williams's earnest attempts to make us all Better, More Sensitive People. Cast as an android with unusually human proclivities (he listens wistfully to opera), the actor has made the first touchy-feely robot movie. The tone of director Chris Columbus's moist, disjointed film is reverent, as we follow Andrew the android's 200-year quest to achieve full humanity. Many homilies follow. Eventually our hero sheds his metallic mug. Kids will be bored, the rest of us baffled.

Neill Minow, "Bicentennial Man", *Common Sense Media*, 22 December 2010

<https://www.common Sense Media.org/movie-reviews/bicentennial-man>

Overall, *Bicentennial Man* is a sweet movie that gives families a good opportunity to talk about what makes us human. As Andrew lives on past the lives of his original family, he stays close to their descendants, especially Little Miss's look-alike granddaughter, Portia. He uses the latest technology to provide himself with skin, hair, a neural system, a digestive system, and finally, to become fully human, mortality. Just like Woody in *Toy Story 2*, Andrew has a choice between pristine immortality and a limited, uncertain, but deeply engaged existence.

Ben Falk, "Bicentennial Man", *BBC*, 14 December 2000

http://www.bbc.co.uk/films/2000/12/05/bicentennial_man_1999_review.shtml

It's a viable idea, but somewhere along the Hollywood production line, the message has got so mixed up that the result is the worst kind of movie –one with no direction, no identity, and above all no heart. The fundamental problem is that it utterly fails to set out its objectives and adhere to them. Is it a comedy? No, because it's not funny. Or is it about everyone's need for love, as Andrew gradually begins to fall for Portia (and stop with those pneumatic pump jokes)? Or is it about artificial intelligence versus natural intelligence and humanity's fear of the unknown?

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film220063.html>
- IMDb: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0182789/>
- Metracritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/bicentennial-man>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/bicentennial_man
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bicentennial_Man_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bicentennial_Man_(film))

***Edward Scissorhands* (1990)**

CREW & CAST

Director: Tim Burton

Screenplay: Caroline Thompson

Producers: Tim Burton, Denise Di Novi

Main performers: Johnny Depp (Edward Scissorhands), Winona Ryder (Kim), Dianne Wiest (Peg), Anthony Michael Hall (Jim), Kathy Baker (Joyce), Robert Oliveri (Kevin), Vincent Price (The Inventor)

Company: Twentieth Century Fox

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 45'



PLOT SUMMARY

Edward Scissorhands is a dark fantasy film directed by Tim Burton. It tells the story of Edward, an unfinished creation of an inventor who dies before being able to complete him, thus leaving him with scissor blades for hands. After the death of his creator, Edward lives isolated in a castle atop a hill, until Peg, a door-to-door saleswoman, finds him and decides to take him home with her. There, he meets Kim, Peg's daughter and actual narrator of the story, with whom he falls in love. At first, Edward is welcomed by most of the neighbours because of the usefulness of his scissor hands, but, throughout the movie, certain events lead people to reject him.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Tim Burton (California, 1958) is an American director, producer and screenwriter who is known for the distinctiveness of his fantasy films. After graduating in 1980, he was hired by Walt Disney Studios as an apprentice animator. However, Burton's style was considered inappropriate for children in the short film *Frankenweenie* (1984), so he quit his job and formed his own production company. The first film he directed was *The Great Adventure of Pee-Wee* (1985), which was a success, and only three years later he was offered to direct *Beetlejuice* (1988), from which he obtained recognition in Hollywood as a director. In 1990 he finally conceived and directed *Edward Scissorhands*, one of his many films starring Johnny Depp. The screenplay for this film was co-written by Caroline Thompson (Washington, D.C., 1956), an American novelist and screenwriter. She also wrote the screenplays for two

other Tim Burton films, such as *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993) and *Corpse Bride* (2005).

Edward Scissorhands was a success among the audiences, and it was generally well-received among critics. It had a budget of \$20 million and earned over \$56 million in North America alone. The total amount earned worldwide was of \$86 million, a box office success. The film has an average rating of 7.66/10 in the review-aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, based on 58 reviews. It got a total of 22 nominations in the Academy Awards, the BAFTA Awards, the Grammy Awards or the Oscar Awards among many others. Of all the nominations, it won a total of 9, some of them being for best fantasy film, best makeup and best production design.

The film could be considered as a modern version of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Shelley's novel is a story about scientific overachievement and its consequences. The creator of the Monster is blinded by his ambition, and the creature is the product of his greed for admiration, a mere invention that was made to gain professional recognition. On the contrary, the creature in *Edward Scissorhands* was created by an inventor who considered him as a son and even started to educate him as such. Despite this difference, both the novel and the film share similar storylines, and they are a clear criticism of the narrow-mindedness, prejudice and bigotry of society. The fact that both creatures are abandoned by their creator causes them to become lonely and alienated, and, consequently, conditions the way in which they integrate into society.

The reason for their abandonment is different in each narrative, which explains the diverse way in which the creatures behave. Frankenstein's Monster is immediately cast out from society and is rejected by his creator, while Edward is not. He was never an object of scorn when he was created, and he was given the chance to be a part of society at first. In fact, when he arrives in the neighbourhood, adopted by saleswoman Peg, he is welcomed by most people despite his unusual features. In contrast, Frankenstein's creature is repudiated by everyone because of his non-human appearance, and his selfless actions are misinterpreted and seen as vile. His misery and misfortune are such that he decides to take revenge on his creator. Overall, prejudice, the lack of empathy and the longing for acceptance are constant themes that shape both stories and make us wonder who the real monster is.

The end of the film is no less tragic than that of Shelley's novel. Edward, just like Frankenstein's creature, is seen as a monster, which is why he must stay away from society and end his romance with Peg's daughter Kim. Throughout the film, certain events lead people to reject him, so he is forced to return to his castle atop a hill, where he is destined to live alone for the rest of his life. However, knowing that Peg and her family love and appreciate him seems to be enough reason for Edward to accept his fate, while the state of despair of Frankenstein's creature leads him to commit suicide. In any case, both creatures are destined to be alone forever, away from a narrow-minded society that would never accept them.

Edward Scissorhands is an entertaining and moving film that leaves no one indifferent. Most reviews highlight how Johnny Depp's outstanding performance allows the reader to feel empathy towards Edward from the very beginning (see below Marjorie Baumgarten's review). The goodness, sincerity and innocence of his actions makes it practically impossible not to get emotionally involved in the film. The hint of hope that is given at first when Edward seems to be accepted by the people he loves

vanishes almost instantly when the viewer realises that, as an outcast of an idyllic society, he is destined to retreat to his castle and live the rest of his life in isolation. One would expect a magical, happy ending like the one in *Beauty and the Beast*, in which the monster ends up becoming one more member of society, but the harsh reality shows how Edward is no more than a modern version of the monster created by Mary Shelley and, as such, he was predestined to be a social outcast forever (see below Rita Kemple's review).

FROM THE REVIEWS

Rita Kempley, "Edward Scissorhands", *Washington Post*, 14 December 1990

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/edwardscissorhandspg13kempley_a0a0bf.htm

Like most fairy tales, *Edward Scissorhands* has its dark side. And Burton's faithfulness to that aspect of myth seems reasonable enough, though it won't sit well with those who want happy endings. It begins, after all, as a tale about where snow comes from, and snow belongs to the saddest season.

Marjorie Baumgarten, "Edward Scissorhands", *Austin Chronicle*, 21 December 1990

<https://www.austinchronicle.com/events/film/1990-12-14/edward-scissorhands/>

Tim Burton and Johnny Depp come close to achieving perfection in this dream tale about a boy whose maker dies before attaching his creation's hands. Burton's combination of fantastic and real imagery add to the story's dreamy but satiric edge. Depp, as the fragile but irresistibly fabulous title character, is "shear" delight. This performance is the one that upped his popular standing from TV teen throb to credible film actor.

Peter Travers, "Edward Scissorhands", *Rolling Stone Magazine*, 14 December 1990

<https://www.rollingstone.com/movies/movie-reviews/edward-scissorhands-113628/>

Burton shows how the townspeople's curiosity about Edward turns to suspicion and hostility (not unlike Hollywood's reaction to an innovative mind). Edward is denounced as a freak, a fake, a demon. An oversexed housewife (a ripely funny Kathy Baker) tries to seduce him. A hissable teen bully (Anthony Michael Hall) forces him into crime and violence. And when Edward tries to comfort those he loves, his touch draws blood.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film827774.html>
- IMDb: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0099487/>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/edward-scissorhands/critic-reviews>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/edward_scissorhands
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Scissorhands

Jurassic Park (1993)

CREW & CAST

Director: Steven Spielberg

Screenplay: Michael Crichton (from his novel *Jurassic Park*), David Koepp

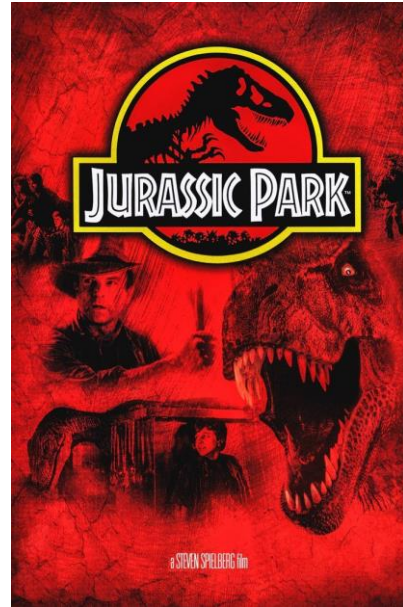
Producers: Kathleen Kennedy, Gerald R. Molen

Main performers: Sam Neill (Grant), Laura Dern (Ellie), Jeff Goldblum (Malcolm), Richard Attenborough (Hammond), Bob Peck (Muldoon), BD Wong (Wu), Joseph Mazzello (Tim), Ariana Richards (Lex)

Companies: Universal Pictures, Amblin Entertainment

Nationality: USA

Duration: 2h 7'



PLOT SUMMARY

John Hammond, an elderly billionaire philanthropist and owner of InGen, a bioengineering company, creates a zoo consisting of extinct dinosaurs which have been brought back to life with the help of a team of genetic scientists led by Dr. Henry Wu. The park, on a Costa Rica island, receives the visit of Dr. Alan Grant, Dr. Ellie Sattler and mathematician Ian Malcolm to certify its safety after a dinosaur handler is killed by a Velociraptor. John Hammond's grandchildren join in and visit the park along with the guests. The visit seems to be going well and according to plan; however, everything goes south the moment Dennis Nedry, the lead computer programmer who has been bribed to steal fertilized dinosaur embryos, starts the actions to accomplish his plan.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Steven Allan Spielberg (Cincinnati, 1946) is a renowned American filmmaker, who started directing television and became famous for directing *Jaws* (1975), a movie which was acclaimed both critically and commercially. His name has been attached to a long list of blockbusters and of more nuanced films as a director and producer. Some of his famous films are *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1977), the *Indiana Jones* franchise, *Schindler's List* (1993) or *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) among many others. *Jurassic Park* adapts a best-selling novel by Michael Crichton (Chicago, 1942 – Los Angeles 2008) a world-famous author, screenwriter, producer and director. His books have sold millions of copies and many of them have been adapted into films. Crichton was the

writer and director behind the movie *Westworld* (1973), the basis for the popular TV series. His co-writer in the film, David Koepp (Pewaukee, 1963) is an American screenwriter and film director who has been successful in a great variety of genres such as thrillers, science fiction, drama and horror. As a screenwriter Koepp has worked with Spielberg in many occasions, being responsible for the screenplays of *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (2008), *War of the Worlds* (2005) or the sequel *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* (1997).

Jurassic Park was very well-received, remaining at number one for three weeks and becoming the highest-grossing film released up to 1993. The movie counted with a budget of \$63 million and earned \$1.030 billion worldwide. In 2013, the film's 30th anniversary, a 3D version was released worldwide. *Jurassic Park* won the three Academy Awards that it was nominated for: Best Visual Effects, Best Sound Editing and Best Sound Mixing (the Tyrannosaurus' roars were a combination of dog, penguin, tiger, alligator, and elephant sounds). It also won a BAFTA for Best Special Effects, the Hugo Award for Best Dramatic Presentation, the Saturn Awards for Best Science Fiction Film, Best Direction, Best Writing and Best Special Effects and many others. Although in 1993, computer-generated imagery (CGI) was still rarely used in movies, the dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park* were brought back to life by a combination of full-scale models or animatronics by the genius Stan Winston and CGI. As a matter of fact, its special effects have aged quite decently.

The movie takes place in the 1990's and it is mostly focused on whether it is a good idea to bring dinosaurs back from extinction by rebuilding their broken DNA sequence (found in prehistoric mosquitos fossilized in amber). Towards the end of the first half of the movie Dr. Ellie Sattler treats a sick Triceratops and hypothesizes that its sickness may be caused by a poisonous plant. This indicates that even though the dinosaurs have been successfully brought back from extinction their habitat has not, and the prehistoric animals are forced to adapt to this new world as best they can. Besides, all the dinosaurs are born female in order to prevent their breeding out of control, which is nothing but playing God, and in this film the consequences of doing so are catastrophic. None of the dinosaurs' genome is complete and when frog's DNA is used they become sequential hermaphrodites, just like the frogs. As mathematician Ian Malcolm famously declares "life always finds a way".

Jurassic Park and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* share some similarities. In both stories there is a man who has an innovative idea which at first doesn't seem to be too wild. In *Jurassic Park*, John Hammond dreams of creating a park with the unjustly extinct dinosaurs, or so he claims, in it. He just wants to bring back these magnificent creatures for people to contemplate them. Victor Frankenstein, on the other hand, claims to be creating his monster for the betterment of humankind. Paraphrasing Ian Malcolm again, when he criticises scientists for doing things because they can regardless of whether they should, the two innovators are more preoccupied with whether they can carry out their creation rather than with stopping to consider whether they should.

Actually, in *Jurassic Park* both John Hammond and his employee Dr. Henry Wu could be considered Victor Frankenstein's descendants. Frankenstein gives life to his own creature out of different people's body parts and at first he is expected to be compliant but turns out to be capable of doing evil. If we consider Hammond to be the Frankenstein character in the movie his whole creation, the park, is the monster that

turns into an extremely dangerous threat. If we consider Dr. Henry Wu, the scientist responsible for the dinosaurs' resurrection, to be the real Frankenstein then we need to consider that the dinosaurs are never evil since they just behave as presumably dinosaurs would behave if alive today (taking into account the changes that the frog DNA introduces). If they are seen as monsters, these is because some of them are awful predators, from the T-Rex to the small Velociraptors.

Regarding the roles of the main characters, it has been said that the movie lacks both a true villain and a true hero (see below Peter Travers's review). In a way, the role of hero is played by the main characters, especially by Dr. Alan Grant who keeps Hammond's grandchildren alive and by Dr. Ellie Sattler who helps by turning the power back on in order to reactivate the security system. The villain, however, is more difficult to identify. It is true that chaos is triggered by a thief, Dennis Nedry, but his intentions were not those of harming people. Hammond and Dr. Wu are also, as noted, well intentioned but misguided, while the dinosaurs behave according to instinct. Perhaps all of science is here the villain and all of us the potential victims of our own errors in the name of progress.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Peter Travers, "Jurassic Park", *Rolling Stone Magazine*, 11 June 1993

<https://www.rollingstone.com/movies/movie-reviews/jurassic-park-125138/>

If the film lacks a true villain, it also lacks a true hero. Neill, a skilled actor, lacks the star presence to play this Indiana Bones. Onscreen, Grant unconvincingly shifts his values from fossils to family. He is too often left coddling Tim and Lex while Crichton's darkly cynical view of the marketing of biogenetics goes begging. Spielberg wants to make him a good husband for Ellie, whom the radiant Dern gives a game spirit, even when she's elbow deep in dino-poo trying to find the source of a triceratops's tummy ache.

Rita Kempley, "Jurassic Park", *The Washington Post*, 11 June 1993

https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/jurassicparkpg13kempley_a0a392.htm??noredirect=on

Crichton, who wrote the screen adaptation with David Koepp (*The Apartment*), has tempered his characters' abrasive personalities and spared many from the dino-jaws. Hammond is an obsessed visionary in the book, but Attenborough plays him more as an incompetent Colonel Sanders, and the obstreperous Chaos theoretician is merely insouciant, which Goldblum works to happy advantage. Whole segments of the park population sometimes just disappear, and plot lines often dangle like the cables ripped from their moorings by the berserk antiheroes. But then again, who cares –it saurs.

Owen Gleiberman, "Jurassic Park", *Entertainment Weekly*, 18 June 1993

<https://ew.com/article/1993/06/18/jurassic-park-3/>

The best thing about Crichton's plot is that, to your average scientific know-nothing (like me), the dinosaur-cloning business sounds just plausible enough to tickle your sense of fantasy. The worst thing about it is that the very idea of *Jurassic Park*, a

place where eye-popping wonders are served up as a megabuck attraction, seems an obvious yet pointless metaphor for the commercialization of Steven Spielberg's empire.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film152490.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0107290/>
- Metracritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/jurassic-park>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/jurassic_park
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jurassic_Park_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jurassic_Park_(film))

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1994)

CREW & CAST

Director: Kenneth Branagh

Screenplay: Steph Lady, Frank Darabont, Mary Shelley (novel)

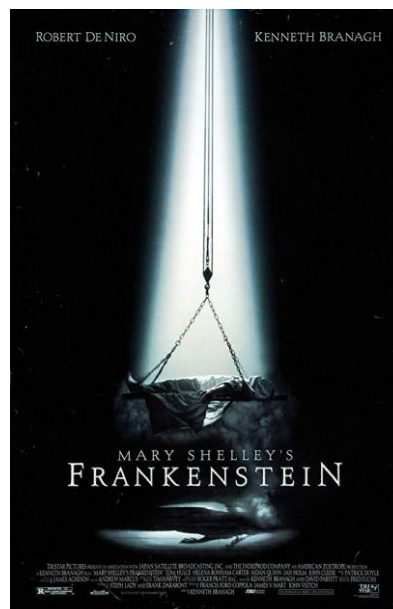
Producers: Francis Ford Coppola, James V. Hart, John Veitch

Main performers: Robert De Niro (The Creation), Kenneth Branagh (Victor Frankenstein), Tom Hulce (Henry Clerval), Helena Bonham Carter (Elizabeth Lavenza Frankenstein), Aidan Quinn (Captain Robert Walton), Ian Holm (Baron Alphonse Frankenstein), John Cleese (Professor Waldman)

Companies: TriStar Pictures, Japan Satellite Broadcasting, Inc., The Indie Production Company, American Zoetrope

Nationality: USA/Japan/UK

Duration: 2h 3'



PLOT SUMMARY

Robert Walton, an Arctic explorer leading an expedition to the North Pole, rescues a man from the ice. He introduces himself as Victor Frankenstein and narrates the story of his life. He grew up in Geneva and studied at the University of Ingolstadt, where his curiosity concerning life and death emerged. After mourning the premature death of his mother, he gets determined to find a way to fight death. However, he brings a creature to life whose detrimental effects could have never been imagined. Afraid of the power of his creation, Frankenstein mercilessly abandons him. The Creation, who seeks revenge for being left to his fate, becomes self-independent and learns how to read and write. Jaded by the cruelty and non-acceptance of mankind, The Creation and Frankenstein start a chase with the aim of killing each other. Back in the Arctic, Frankenstein and The Creation meet again.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN

Kenneth Branagh (Belfast, 1960) is an actor, director, producer and screenwriter. He is famously known for both directing and starring in different adaptations of William Shakespeare's plays, including *Henry V* (1989), *Much Ado About Nothing* (1993), *Othello* (1995), *Hamlet* (1996), *Love's Labour's Lost* (2000) and *As You Like It* (2006). However, he has also directed and appeared in other films, such as *Dead Again* (1991), *Wild Wild West* (1999) or *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994), in which he played Victor Frankenstein. Screenwriters Steph Lady and Frank Darabont (Montbéliard, France 1959) worked together on the script for *Mary Shelley's*

Frankenstein. Darabont is well-known as a screen playwright but also as a director, having written and directed hits such as *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994) and *The Green Mile* (1999), both based on work by Stephen King.

Branagh's film was not generally well-received by the public because the overdramatic and overambitious tone the film adopts overshadows at times the plot and its significance. Consequently, the critical response was harsh and reviews did not really praise its production. In terms of economic profit, the film was not a big success due to the fact that it was produced on a budget of \$45 million and it only grossed \$22 million in the US, which is quite a small amount of money considering the high expectations the film had raised. Although *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* stands out for being visually striking, it did not get any major awards; it did receive at least an Oscar-award nomination for its make-up effects. De Niro's characterisation as The Creation is absolutely stunning thanks to the use of prosthetics, and necessarily very different from the iconic 1931 look for Boris Karloff (this is protected by copyright). Branagh's film was nominated by the British Academy Film Awards for the category of Best Production Design and also received many nominations from the Saturn Awards, such as Best Actor for Kenneth Branagh, Best Actress for Helena Bonham Carter, Best Music for Patrick Doyle or Best Writing by Steph Lady and Frank Darabont.

Branagh's film came after the successful *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992), directed by Francis Ford Coppola; indeed, Coppola acted as producer in this new version of *Frankenstein*. This is considered to be the most faithful adaptation of Mary Shelley's novel though it differs in some important respects from the plot of the novel. One of the main differences between the novel and the film is Elizabeth's increased presence and how this affects the creation of the female monster. In the novel Victor destroys what would have been the bride of his creature before bringing her to life. In the film Victor refuses to finish the female monster, The Creation murders Elizabeth and, in despair, Frankenstein tries to bring her back to life by mixing her body with that of the bride as he struggles with his creature for her possession. No wonder that seeing what she has become the resurrected Elizabeth decides to end her life.

Frank Darabont once stated that *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* was the best script he ever wrote and the worst movie he had ever seen, owing to the overacting of some of the actors (above all Branagh himself) and the overintense tone of the film. Branagh was praised for trying to capture the essence of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and offering a new retelling which reflected major aspects of the novel such as the monster's ability to speak. However, most critics agreed that the film fails to be engaging, despite De Niro's accomplished performance. Branagh's *Frankenstein* comes across as obsessed and narcissistic, a quite unlikeable character –though perhaps that's the whole point of his presentation. Capturing the content of such a complex narrative is extremely challenging and decisions to be faithful to Mary Shelley's plot by keeping, for instance, her prologue and epilogue in the Arctic were not understood. Perfect or flawed, *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* is, at least, an honest film and a must when it comes to *Frankenstein's* adaptations, for this is the closest any director has ever got to this original novel.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Roger Ebert, “*Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein (1994)*”, *RogerEbert.com*, 4 November 1994
<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/mary-shelleys-frankenstein-1994>

I admired the scenes with De Niro so much I’m tempted to give *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein* a favorable verdict. But it’s a near miss. The Creature is on target, but the rest of the film is so frantic, so manic, it doesn’t pause to be sure its effects are registered.

Angie Errigo, “*Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein*”, *Empire*, 14 October 2015
<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/mary-shelley-frankenstein/review/>

In one’s dreams, Branagh’s romantic technicolour visuals wedded to a more intellectually rigorous screenplay that defied you to snigger, might have mounted a more serious challenge to the old classic. It’s more enjoyable than many, but will no doubt pass muster simply as an acceptable night out that could have been better. Sumptuous to look at, with some decent performances but Branagh’s attempt at this gothic horror just doesn’t hold together convincingly and fails to engage.

James Berardinelli, “*Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein*”, *Reelviews Movie Reviews*, 22 September 2013

<http://www.reelviews.net/reelviews/mary-shelly-s-frankenstein>

The greatest strength of *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein* is that it illustrates both the good and evil qualities in each of its main characters. Of the two –Robert De Niro’s creature and Kenneth Branagh’s Frankenstein– the former is, perhaps surprisingly, the more sympathetic. In part because of the script and in part because of the acting (De Niro gives a far stronger performance than his director/co-star), the creature seems almost the more “human” of the two.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film257442.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0109836/>
- Metacritic: No entry
- Rotten Tomatoes:
https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/mary_shelleys_frankenstein
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Shelley%27s_Frankenstein_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Shelley%27s_Frankenstein_(film))

Ghost in the Shell (1995)

CREW & CAST

Director: Mamoru Oshii

Screenplay: Kazunori Itô, Shirow Masamune (manga *Ghost in the Shell*)

Producers: Andy Frain, Laurence Guinness, Makoto Ibuki

Main performers (voices): Atsuko Tanaka (Motoko Kusanagi), Akio Ôtsuka (Batou), Kôichi Yamadera (Togusa), Tesshō Genda (Director Nakamura), Yutaka Nakano (Ishiwaka), Tamio Ohki (Aramaki), Iemasa Kayumi (Puppet Master).

Companies: Bandai Visual Company, Manga Entertainment.

Nationality: Japan/UK

Duration: 1h 23'



PLOT SUMMARY

Motoko Kusanagi is a security agent and the leader of Section 9, a public security police division that deals with counter terrorism and cybercrimes in a futuristic 2029 Japan, where cybernetic technology has taken over. Major Kusanagi, born as a human female, is a cyborg; her only remaining human part is her brain. Section 9 hunts the mysterious Puppet Master, a criminal who hacks into the brains of cyborgs to obtain information and commit crimes (and who seemingly connects with Project 2501). The Major and Section 9 are also dealing with the negotiation between the Government and the Gavel Republic, a newly-founded democracy. Puppet Master ghost-hacks the brain of the Foreign Minister's interpreter in order to sabotage the diplomatic talks for, what is suspected, either an assassination or a disruption of relations.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN

Mamoru Oshii (Tokyo, 1951) is famous for his philosophy oriented storytelling; he has directed other anime movies such as *Urusei Yatsura* (1981-1984), *Patlabor: The Movie* (1989), and *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* (2004). He has received major awards and a nomination for a Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival (for *Innocence*), and has won a Golden Lion in Venice Film Festival (for *Sukai Kurora*, 2008). International directors such as James Cameron and the Wachowskis sister have praised him for his work. Kazunori Ito, the screenplay writer is a member of the artist group known as Headgear, and is considered to be one of the best screenwriters in anime (see Helen McCarthy's anime reference book *500 Essential Anime Movies*).

While developing the film, director Mamoru Oshii stated that “the story about a futuristic world carried an immediate message for our present world”. He also announced that “the influence and power of computers would be more effectively conveyed through animation” (see <http://www.openculture.com/2017/03/the-philosophy-storytelling-visual-creativity-of-ghost-in-the-shell.html>). Indeed, *Ghost in the Shell* is considered one of the greatest anime films of all times, and is praised mostly by its visual power, a combination of 2D animation and CGI. The film was a box office success in Japan. *Ghost* obtained a total of five awards, such as Best Director of Animation for a Theatrical Feature Film at World Animation Celebration, Best Screenplay at Yokohama Film Festival, Best Film at Fantasporto and a nomination as Best Film at Sitges’s Catalan International Film Festival.

The protagonist of Oshii’s film (based on Shirow Masamune’s popular manga) is a female with a human brain and a full cybernetic body. *Frankenstein* and *Ghost in the Shell* question the notion of what makes us human, but the approach is quite different. Kusanagi, a cyborg more radically than RoboCop, is not treated as a monster but as a human, though she herself has doubts. Her companion Batou tells her that she is doubting her own ghost (soul) to which she replies: “What If a cyber-brain could possibly generate its own ghost, create a soul all by itself? And if it did, just what would be the importance of being human then?” Shelley’s creature is not treated as a human being but as a monster for his grotesque appearance, but through the story, the creature shows human traits such as emotions, feelings; he also learns and experiences maturation. He has desires and wishes, he longs for acceptance and for happiness. The creature does feel human, and questions why the world cannot see him as such whereas the Major does not feel human and questions why the world sees her as such.

Project 2501 (the artificial intelligence known as Puppet Master created by the Japanese Foreign Ministry) and Shelley’s creature are better connected. Despite the threat they present, both choose to approach humans gently. Both show a desire to be respected by their creators and be well treated, though unfortunately, they end up being rejected. In the film, humans are the only ones capable of having a ghost (soul) and sentience, but Project 2501 has been able to develop a sentience of its own despite supposedly lacking a soul. Like the creature, Project 2501 is the image of an outcast, incapable of fitting in a category. Since it is neither human, nor a machine, Project 2501 challenges the notion of being *human*. 2501 calls itself a “life-form” but complains that it is incomplete because its system lacks the basic life processes: death and procreation. Thus, 2501 wishes to merge with the Major to survive: she, 2501 claims, will bear their offspring into the net itself, just like humans pass their genetic structure, and in this way 2501 will finally achieve death. 2501 also desires a companion and sees the Major as a potential candidate because both have a shared history, the Major being a cyborg without an organic body and 2501 being a computer programme. Shelley’s creature demands from Victor a mate after being rejected and even attacked. Victor does not fulfil the creature’s request for companionship out of the fear that the two creatures will procreate and create an even worse specimen than themselves, even a whole new post-human species.

To sum up, *Ghost in the Shell* may be said to split the issues around Frankenstein’s monster in Mary Shelley’s novel into two characters: The Major corresponds to the matter of what makes Victor’s creature human, whereas Project

2501 deals with the question of what makes him a monster. Both, as can be seen, complement each other.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Roger Ebert, "*Ghost in the Shell*", *Chicago Sun-Times*, 12 April 1996

<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/ghost-in-the-shell-1996>

There is much moody talk in the movie about what it is to be human. All of the information accumulated in a lifetime, we learn, is less than a drop in the ocean of information, and perhaps a creature that can collect more information and hold onto it longer is... more than human. In describing this vision of an evolving intelligence, Corinthians is evoked twice: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as I am known." At the end of the film, Puppet Master invites the major to join it face to face in its brave new informational sea.

Noel Murray, "*Ghost in the Shell*", *The Dissolve*, 29 September 2014

<http://thedissolve.com/reviews/1100-ghost-in-the-shell/>

But as the title implies, *Ghost in the Shell* is preoccupied throughout with matters of "presence" and "absence." One of the big reasons *Ghost in the Shell* became the most popular anime feature internationally since *Akira* (the film that first introduced many audiences to mature Japanese animation) is that it gets into its viewers' heads, by musing out loud about what defines a living entity. In the future-world where the film takes place, some people modify their bodies with electronics, and others—like Kusanagi—have their consciousnesses, or "ghosts," projected into fully cybernetic bodies. Throughout the film, Kusanagi wonders what individuates her. Is it her experiences? The way other people treat her? And what does any of that mean if someone is capable of tampering with her consciousness?

Laura Evenson, "Cyberbabe Takes On Tokyo in *Ghost / Tough*, Topless Cartoon Heroine", *San Francisco Chronicle*, 12 April 1996

<https://www.sfgate.com/movies/article/Cyberbabe-Takes-On-Tokyo-in-Ghost-Tough-2986873.php>

(...) not many real-world heroines would engage their adversaries in hand-to-hand combat clad only in white thigh-high stockings. She may be tough and smart, but like many female Japanese cartoon characters, Kusanagi is drawn to tempt Japanese salarymen who typically devour their manga along with a meal at the local noodle shop.

That bit of sexism probably won't bother the young men who make up its target audience. In fact, it'll help seduce them into this nearly literary meditation on what it means to be human in a technologically driven world.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/us/film523268.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0113568/>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/ghost-in-the-shell>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/ghost_in_the_shell
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghost_in_the_Shell_\(1995_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghost_in_the_Shell_(1995_film))

Mary Reilly (1996)

CREW & CAST

Director: Stephen Frears

Screenplay: Christopher Hampton, Valerie Martin (novel *Mary Reilly*), R.L. Stevenson (novella *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, uncredited)

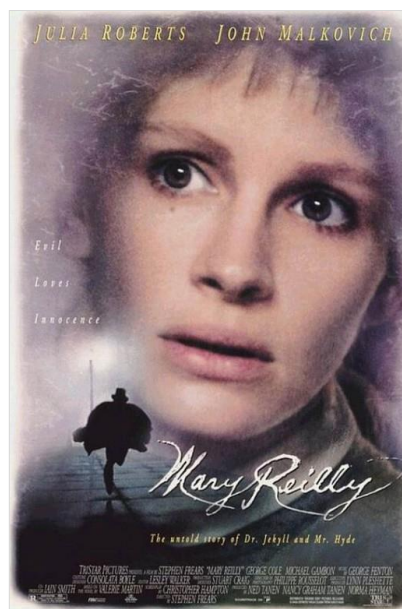
Producers: Norma Heyman, Lynn Pleshette, Iain Smith, Nancy Graham Tanen, Ned Tanen

Main performers: Julia Roberts (Mary Reilly), John Malkovich (Dr Henry Jekyll/ Mr. Edward Hyde), George Cole (Mr. Pole), Glenn Close (Mrs. Farraday), Bronagh Gallagher (Annie), Michael Sheen (Bradshaw), Kathy Staff (Mrs. Kent)

Companies: NFH Productions, TriStar Pictures

Nationality: USA/UK

Duration: 1h 48'



PLOT SUMMARY

Mary Reilly works as a housemaid in Dr Henry Jekyll's house. Mary catches the attention of Jekyll, who insists on examining her scars. At first, Mary refuses to let him do it, but she finally tells him about how she was abused. Despite being recently hired, she rapidly gains Dr. Jekyll's trust. Odd things happen in the house and with her master, who locks himself in his laboratory every night. However, all gets even stranger when Mary meets Edward Hyde, the new assistant of Dr. Jekyll. Mr. Hyde wanders in the house as if it was his own and behaves obnoxiously. Mary feels terrified but also attracted by this man until she realizes his true identity. Dr Jekyll wanted to find a cure for his malady, but his experiments result in the creation of his evil alter-ego. Mary witness alone the horrific story of the two faces of his employer.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN

Stephen Frears (Leicester, 1941) is a well-known producer and director with a long, distinguished career. He has directed many films, including *Dangerous Liaisons* (1988) or *The Queen* (2006). Christopher Hampton (Faial, 1946), a brilliant playwright, adapted his own play *Dangerous Liaisons* (based on Choderlos de Laclos's epistolary novel *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1782)) for Frears and the pair collaborated again in the adaptation of Valerie Martin's *Mary Reilly* (1990). This novel is, of course, inspired by the well-known Gothic novella *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) by Robert Louis Stevenson –itself a descendant of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

Mary Reilly was a fiasco in comparison to the highly acclaimed *Dangerous Liaisons*. Roberts and Frears were even nominees for the Worst Actress and Worse

Director Razzie Awards. However, Roberts was also nominated for Best Sci-Fi/Fantasy/Horror Actress by the Online Film & Television Association and Frears was one of the nominees in the Berlin International Film Festival in 1996. Despite having a budget of \$47 million, *Mary Reilly* only earned \$12 million world-wide. Most reviews were negative.

It must be noted that Frears's film appeared after Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* and Branagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*. However, instead of adapting R.L. Stevenson's original novella and complete what might be called a 19th century Gothic trilogy, the producers chose to adapt the 1990 novel by American writer Valerie Martin, most likely because it offers an unusual point of view. *Mary Reilly* tells the events of Stevenson's popular tale of self-destruction from a housemaid's perspective. Mary, Dr Jekyll's employee, witnesses first-hand the results of his scientific experiment to cure his strange illness and how the fluid he injects himself with turns Jekyll into Mr Hyde, an uncontrolled version of the doctor. This experiment will finally lead to his painful self-destruction, influenced and even triggered by Mary's presence. In a strange twist, we need to believe that Hyde cannot bring himself to murder Mary because he somehow loves her and, so, he chooses to end his life and that of Jekyll.

The depiction of science as a dangerous pursuit is one of the motifs linking *Frankenstein* and Dr. Jekyll's story. Science, logically, has a key role in all the film adaptations of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, from the comedy *The Nutty Professor* (1996) to Hammer Studio's *Dr Jekyll & Sister Hyde* (1971), in which Jekyll's doppelganger is a woman. Victor's curiosity and Jekyll's wish to act out his secret desires thanks to a double (here transformed into the necessity to cure his malady) lead to a negative outcome. Both scientists play with life and create a human monster born of no woman and dangerous to other persons; they are for this punished by death. The difference, obviously, is that whereas Frankenstein's dark double is a separate person, Jekyll creates his monstrous other by transforming his own body.

The transition from a good being to an evil monster, the secret suffering that leads him to this transformation and opposition to society are also present in Frankenstein's creation. The monster in Mary Shelly's novel is marginalised and deprived of any affection. This makes him suffer so much that he transforms into a heartless killer. He was not originally evil, but he transformed into one. A parallel can be established between Victor's monster and Jekyll. He also suffers from social restrictions and as a result his dark side appears, with its radically different physical appearance as an evil replicant. Nonetheless, Victor's monster finally feels empathy towards his creator and, as Mary Reilly does with his cruel father, he no longer hates him.

Mary Reilly brings out a theme implicit both in *Frankenstein* and in Stevenson's novella: sexuality. In Martin's novel and in Frears's version Mr. Hyde is attractive and does not restrain himself from showing his sexual desires. He even touches Mary without her consent and makes her feel uncomfortable. Yet, although his behaviour is totally unacceptable, she becomes drawn to him. Frankenstein's monster is very different in this sense. His monstrous appearance does not make women feel attracted, but quite the contrary. Frankenstein even refuses to make a female companion for his monster, so he is denied any sexual relationship.

Frears's film, to sum up, depicts evil not only as dangerous but also as attractive, which is a clear difference between *Mary Reilly* and *Frankenstein*. Mr. Hyde

is sufficiently good-looking for Mary's passion for her master to be believable even though this is very problematic for its masochism (and possibly the reason why the film failed). Curiously, fine actor John Malkovich, who plays here Jekyll and Hyde, had played in *Making Mr. Right* (1987) the grouchy scientist Dr. Jeff Peters and his double, the smiling robot *Ulysses*. Both films are, each in their style, failed romances which suggests that it is difficult to find a place for women characters in *Frankenstein's* legacy.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Kim Newman, "Mary Reilly", *Empire*, 1 January 1996

<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/mary-reilly/review/>

What tips the scales in *Mary Reilly's* favour is that, in an era when *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, *Interview with the Vampire* and *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* desperately try to sell themselves as romantic melodramas or literary adaptations, this isn't afraid to be a horror movie. The characters have more depth than Hammer would allow, but there are genuinely shocking moments (Hyde's appearance in Mary's bed, his trampling of a child, a hand grasping an ankle) and the dismal gloom of Jekyll's house, with its neglected courtyard and clanking chain-supported bridges, affords an atmosphere of real dread.

Owen Gleiberman, "Mary Reilly", *Entertainment*, 8 March 1996

<https://ew.com/article/1996/03/08/mary-reilly/>

For most of the movie, Jekyll and Hyde engage in windy Freudian dialectics about civilization and desire, the imprisonment of the soul, and so forth. This gothic puffery isn't new; it's the sort of thing that used to pad out the old, thriller-diller Hollywood versions of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

Marc Savlov, "Mary Reilly", *Austin Chronicle*, 1 March 1996

<https://www.austinchronicle.com/events/film/1996-03-01/138276/>

Reilly and the others may be terrified of their master's odd choice of helpmates, but Reilly, in particular, finds herself drawn to this tempestuous man, seemingly wholly comprised of id impulses. It's Reilly's increasingly dangerous (and emotional) connection to both Jekyll and Hyde that forms the crux of Frears' film. [...] Frears apparently wants to probe both the duality of human nature and Mary Reilly's passionate coming-out as a single individual, but what we get instead is a gloriously atmospheric Hammer film without the benefit of Peter Cushing.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film907983.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0117002/>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/mary-reilly>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/mary_reilly
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Reilly_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Reilly_(film))

The Adventures of Pinocchio (1996)

CREW & CAST

Director: Steve Barron

Screenplay: Sherry Mills, Steve Barron, Tom Benedek, Barry Berman, Carlo Collodi (novel *Pinocchio*)

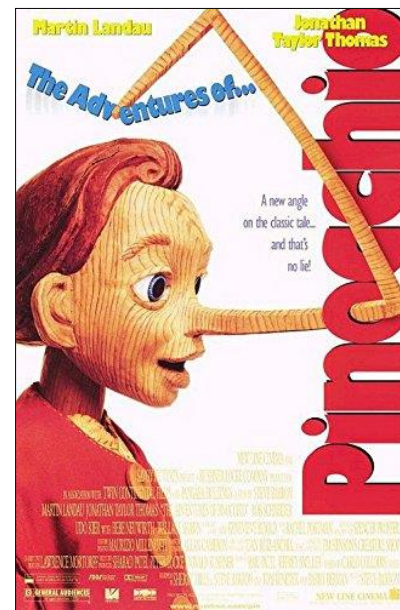
Producer: Heinz Bibo

Main performers: Martin Landau (Geppetto), Jonathan Taylor Thomas (voice of Pinocchio), Geneviève Bujold (Leona), Udo Kier (Lorenzini), Bebe Neuwirth (Felinet), Rob Schneider (Volpe), Corey Carrier (Lampwick)

Companies: New Line Cinema, Savoy Pictures, Twin Continental Films, Pangaea Holdings, Dieter Geissler Filmproduktion, Allied Pinocchio Productions Ltd., Barrandov Studios, Cinevox Filmproduktion GmbH

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 36'



PLOT SUMMARY

Puppet maker Geppetto is heartbroken when his brother and his beloved Leona get married and, desolated, he carves their initials onto a tree. Many years later, when he is collecting wood from the forest Geppetto finds a piece somehow asking to be taken home. Geppetto carves it into a puppet named Pinocchio that magically comes to life. The puppet wanders around the town causing mischief and Geppetto is arrested because he refuses to pay for the damage that his creation has caused. Pinocchio is freed by Lorenzini, another puppet master who gets his custody and makes him the star of his show but treats him cruelly. Eventually Pinocchio manages to escape with his companion Pepe, trying to pursue his dream of becoming a real boy. When his tears touch the heart carved on his chest, the same heart that Geppetto had once carved, magic happens.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Director Steve Barron was known as one of the best music video directors inspiring the creation of MTV before he started making movies. His first film was a romantic comedy, *Electric Dreams* (1984). His second movie, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1990) was an immense box-office success. Barron's career, however, is mainly devoted to the field of the music video, which he has never abandoned. The other writers who participated with Barron in the script of *The Adventures of Pinocchio* are known mainly for *Benny and Joon* (Barry Berman, 1993) and *Cocoon* (Tom Benedek, 1985).

Barron's live-action *Pinocchio* was only moderately received, with most praise going to the blend of human stars and the wooden puppet. The movie received a Best

Fantasy Film nomination to the Saturn Awards and actor Jonathan Taylor Thomas, who voiced Pinocchio, received a Young Artist Award for Best Performance in a Voiceover. The budget was of about \$25 million, but box office takings were only \$15 million world-wide. Many noted that this version could never compete with Disney's vintage but well-loved 1940 animated adaptation.

The Adventures of Pinocchio follows the broad outlines of Carlo Collodi's novel *Pinocchio* (1882, original Italian publication). Geppetto's puppet boy is not a product of science but of art and magic and might seem very different from *Frankenstein*. Yet, very clearly, the poor puppet experiences the same isolation as Victor Frankenstein's monster. In *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, the creator or 'father' does take responsibility for the artificial boy and tries to humanize him in contrast with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, in which Victor abandons his creation and the monster has to humanize himself. Pinocchio and the creature have in common an inability to understand at first how other will react to them. Pinocchio goes around the village mesmerized by everything around him and causes a catastrophe in a bakery, unaware of how he scares the villagers. Something similar, but far more violent, happens with Frankenstein's monster. In both stories, they are quickly (mis)judged without a chance to prove that they are not dangerous and, as a result of this, the creatures are forced to hide for safety.

Another connection between the two stories is the reason why they are created. In *Frankenstein* this is very clear: Victor loses his mother and he does not find it right the fact that people have to die, therefore his goal is to create life in order to maintain everyone alive forever. In *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, Geppetto does not have the intention to create a puppet who will become a child. Yet, Pinocchio, like Victor's monster, is also born from the despair of lost love since he is carved from a piece of wood branded with a heart enclosing Geppetto's and his lover's initials. He finally turns into a real boy when his tears touch the heart because, and in his own words "Miracles are made in the heart".

The word "father" is, obviously, very important in both stories. Geppetto and Frankenstein are seen by their artificial sons as their fathers, not a mere puppet maker or a scientist. The creature is the son Victor will never have with Elizabeth, and Pinocchio is the son Geppetto will never have with the woman he loves. In *The Adventures of Pinocchio* the father-son relationship is happy (besides Pinocchio cannot lie about it, since his nose would grow). In contrast, the relationship between Frankenstein and his monster is a complete failure because Victor abandons his "child" horrified by his looks. Pinocchio and Frankenstein's monster spend time away from their fathers to understand their identities but they eventually return. When Frankenstein lies dying, his monster stays with him because he truly loves his father and cannot let him die. In *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, Geppetto is saved when his son lies about hating him thus turning his grown nose into a tool for salvation.

The relationship between these two stories and their characters has been discussed before. Greg Allen, the founder of the Neo-Futurist theatre company, offered a show in 2012 titled *The Strange and Terrible True Tale of Pinocchio (The Wooden Boy) as told by Frankenstein's Monster (The Wretched Creature)*. Allen found many similarities between the stories, both creatures had been built without a mother, both were abandoned and were trying to go back with his father, and both had issues with what separated them from humanity. He also found that they were also perfect

opposites because Pinocchio had the innocent appearance of a child and Frankenstein's monster was perceived as a hideous adult (see <https://chicagoist.com/2012/03/27/greg-allen-talks-about-pinocchio-an.php>). This shows how strangely manipulative Mary Shelley's novel is for if Victor had managed to build a pretty boy theirs would be a completely different story.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Lawrence Van Gelder, "*The Adventures of Pinocchio*", *The New York Times*, 26 July 1996

<https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/filmarchive/pinocchio.html>

The new version, directed by Steve Barron, whose credits include *Teen-Age Mutant Ninja Turtles*, surely has its charms. But for all the effort that clearly went into its production, and despite the interesting differences between the latest *Pinocchio*, which mixes animated and live characters, and the wholly animated Disney version, the new film simply doesn't generate much magical enchantment.

Barbara Shulgasser, "*The Adventures of Pinocchio*", *San Francisco Examiner*, 26 July 1996

<https://www.sfgate.com/news/article/Pinocchio-sticks-his-nose-into-a-new-film-3131410.php>

ALL I remember about the animated Walt Disney version of Carlo Collodi's novel *Pinocchio* is that the little wooden puppet came to life and had a nose that grew when he lied. Also, he was advised by a witty and adorable cricket named Jiminy. Well, they have the nose in Steve Barron's live-action *The Adventures of Pinocchio*. But, apparently, Jiminy is a registered trademark wholly owned by the Disney people. Pepe the Cricket sounds a little more Spanish than Italian, but according to writer-director Barron (*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*), this rendering is more true to the story as Collodi wrote it.

Mick LaSalle, "With Landau, *Pinocchio* not so Wooden", *San Francisco Chronicle*, 26 July 1996

<https://www.sfgate.com/movies/article/With-Landau-Pinocchio-Not-So-Wooden-2973067.php>

The animatronic Pinocchio is an impressive creation. There's an intricacy and a subtlety to his facial expressions. He can look, and the audience knows what he's thinking. (Jonathan Taylor Thomas is Pinocchio's voice.) (...) Synthetic wonder is everywhere. Yet, like Pinocchio himself, the synthetic has a way of becoming real. Landau's emotional nakedness might be too strong for the movie –I found myself worrying too much about this Geppetto guy. But he does have a way of making the audience feel the big moments. When the court takes Pinocchio away from Geppetto and hands him over to an evil impresario, there's no laughing it off.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film826227.html>
- IMDb: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0115472/>
- Metacritic: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/les_aventures_de_pinocchio
- Rotten Tomatoes: No entry
- Wikipedia:
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Adventures_of_Pinocchio_\(1996_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Adventures_of_Pinocchio_(1996_film))

Alien Resurrection (1997)

CREW & CAST

Director: Jean-Pierre Jeunet

Screenplay: Joss Whedon, Dan O'Bannon and Ronald Shusett (characters)

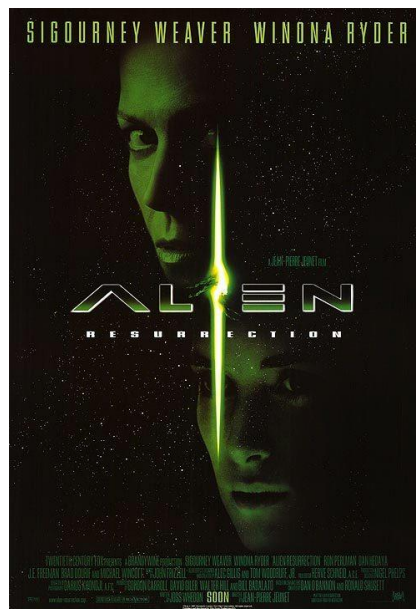
Producers: Gordon Carroll, David Giler, Walter Hill, Bill Badalato

Main performers: Sigourney Weaver (Ripley), Winona Ryder (Call), Dominique Pinon (Vries), Ron Perlman (Johner), Gary Dourdan (Christie), Dan Hedaya (General Perez), J. E. Freeman (Dr. Wren), Brad Dourif (Dr. Gediman), Michael Wincott (Elgyn)

Company: Brandywine Productions

Nationality: US

Duration: 1h 49'



PLOT SUMMARY

In the spaceship USM Auriga, a team of seven scientists led by Dr. Wren manage to clone Ellen Ripley, who had died with an alien queen inside her. They extract the chestbuster from her but her DNA is already mixed with the alien. The scientists want to recreate the Xenomorph species by helping the cloned queen to reproduce herself. A group of mercenaries bring some captives that are needed for the alien to breed. Then, the newly born aliens escape and Ripley has to decide whether to help the mercenaries or not. Their plan is to blow up the ship before it reaches the Earth, so that the Xenomorphs do not decimate the human race.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Jean-Pierre Jeunet (Roanne, 1953) is one of the main French directors and also a producer and screenwriter. He has directed among others *Amélie* (2001), from a screenplay co-written with Guillaume Laurant. The films he makes are a unique mix of reality and fantasy, and he lent his particular style as well to *Alien Resurrection*, the fourth film in the 20th Century Fox franchise. Things, however, did not work well and this is Jeunet's only American movie. The screenplay for *Alien Resurrection* was written by Joss Whedon (New York City, 1964), mostly known for his television series. Whedon, one of the writers of *Toy Story* (1995), has written scripts for *The Cabin in the Woods* (2012) and *Justice League* (2017), and has written and directed *Serenity* (2005), *The Avengers* (2012) and *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015).

Alien Resurrection was the least successful *Alien* film in the USA, probably because of its strange humour and also due to the end of *Alien*³. However, it was

generally well-received internationally. It had a budget of approximately \$70 million and earned \$161.4 million worldwide. In the Saturn Awards, Jeunet received a nomination for Best Direction and Sigourney Weaver and Winona Ryder were nominated for Best Actress and Best Supporting Actress respectively. In addition, the film itself was nominated for Best Science Fiction Film, Bob Ringwood was nominated for Best Costumes and the team composed by Pitof, Erik Henry, Alec Gillis and Tom Woodruff Jr. was nominated for Best Special Effects. They are part of the Amalgamated Dynamics company, specializing in animatronics and prosthetics for movies. Woodruff Jr. also plays as the main Alien, the Alien Queen and the Newborn in the film. His acting was praised by Sigourney Weaver.

Whedon's story is set in a distant future, when cloning humans is already possible. Although Ripley throws herself into a fire in the previous film thus also killing the alien queen that infests her body, some of her contaminated DNA has been rescued from the blood samples taken before her suicide. The military scientists in the space vessel Auriga (employed by the United Systems Military, which unites every military group on Earth) finally manage to give life to an Ellen Ripley clone after seven failed attempts. However, she does not know about the existence of the other clones until late in the film nor about the fact that her makers are just interested in the alien. Clearly, Dr. Wren and his crew of scientists are the futuristic equivalent of young Victor Frankenstein, the kind of scientist that perhaps he could be in the future. Dr. Wren, the leader of the cloning project, is, unlike Victor, fascinated by the result of ten years of trying, and focused on observing the new Ripley's development.

The main difference between Mary Shelley's story and *Alien Resurrection* is that the military scientists are actually trying to create a monster from the very first moment. Cloning Ripley was not the aim of their project. Their intention was to clone the alien queen that she was carrying inside her when she died. Yet, since the new Ripley carries alien DNA in her body, and is for that as superhuman as Mary Shelley's creature, she is also monstrous. She possesses superior senses, strength and intelligence, her blood is pure acid and she feels empathy for the alien species due to her half-Xenomorph genetics. One wonders what the original Ripley would think of her.

Moreover, whereas in Shelley's novel Frankenstein decides not to make a female monster to prevent reproduction in *Alien Resurrection* this is the opposite situation. The scientists want to clone the alien queen for her to give birth to the Xenomorphs the military want to use as weapons. The mercenaries on board the Betty spaceship are hired to hunt the humans needed for the queen to use as the nests for her brood. The aliens kills their human hosts when they burst out of their chests and also hunt humans as prey. Although the species has proven to be a threat for humanity many times throughout the *Alien* saga, this time the scientists believe they will be able to domesticate the Xenomorphs and eventually control them. However, the monsters escape in the end and begin attacking the remaining crew in the spaceship.

What made the movie possible was the presence of Sigourney Weaver. Had she not accepted to play the main character again, the filming would have happened. As in every *Alien* movie before *Alien Resurrection*, Ripley proves to be a strong character, only this time she has become half monster and half human. However, she still is perfectly capable of defeating the Xenomorphs, even though she is not sure at first where her allegiance lies. Audiences regard Ripley as one of the best female heroes

ever in films, but in *Alien Resurrection* she is a creature made by men, a mere shadow of the former Ripley.

Jeunet's film condemns the scientists' attempt to exploit the alien species for whatever purposes they may have in mind. Unlike Frankenstein, who is trying to create a human and not a monster, they know exactly what they are doing when they clone Ripley and the Xenomorph queen inside her. These aliens are clearly monsters, as it is already known that they pose a serious threat to the human race. However, one wonders why would they let the cloned Ripley live, as the only thing they wanted to really clone was the alien queen. The reason behind it is that, naturally, the scientists are awed by her abilities and imposing yet human appearance. That is why they want to keep observing her. Whedon's script is an exploration of what it means to be human, and whether or not humanity can be recreated artificially, as it happens with Frankenstein's monster. Yet, the focus on a woman and her literal alienness also makes *Alien Resurrection* an uncomfortably misogynist contribution to the saga that made Ripley an alternative to the traditional male hero.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Lisa Schwarzbaum, "*Alien Resurrection*", *Entertainment Weekly*, 5 December 1997
<https://ew.com/article/1997/12/05/alien-resurrection-5/>

But what is most pleasing in *Alien Resurrection* is also what is newest: There's a philosophical maturity to Ripley's cool, ambivalent, but not uncompassionate outlook that reinvigorates everything from Ripley's embodiment of motherhood (she's now mommy to her own monster) to our own view of action heroines (they're not always nice).

And nowhere is this more evident than in Ripley's relationship to a bratty little match girl of an onboard mechanic named Annalee Call, as well as in Weaver's own relationship to Winona Ryder, the gamine actress who plays her.

Desson Thomson, "*Alien Resurrection*", *Washington Post*, 28 November 1997
[https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/alienresurrectionhowe.htm?](https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/alienresurrectionhowe.htm?hpid=hp_hp-top-table-main-alienresurrection%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&hpid=hp_hp-top-table-main-alienresurrection%3Ahomepage%2Fstory)

What's best about the movie is the way the humor piggybacks on top of the scary stuff. While we're following the story, we're laughing most of the way. Maybe that's to be expected from screenwriter Joss Whedon, who penned the humorous *Toy Story*. (...) when Ripley –surely the most 'masculine' heroine ever– starts shooting up the previous genetic versions of herself, grotesque specimens immersed in giant glass booths, the smugglers watch with surprise and horror. Wondering why she would get so upset and waste so much ammunition shooting up these female half-creations, one of them concludes: "Must be a chick thing".

Richard Schickel, "Cinema Short Takes: *Alien Resurrection*", *Time*, 1 December 1997
<http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,987471,00.html>

Familiarity also breeds affection. The aliens still have pretty teeth, ooze slime from every pore and maintain their relentlessly hostile attitude toward all things human. But by now –*Alien Resurrection* is their fourth screen appearance– there's something funny about their reliable malevolence. It's sort of like Mr. Magoo's

nearsightedness; you await its inevitably disastrous consequences with high comic anticipation.

Naturally, the creatures' old nemesis, Ellen Ripley (Sigourney Weaver), has been –literally– reincarnated, and her wit and toughness were not forgotten in the cloning.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film594309.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0118583/>
- Metracritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/alien-resurrection>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/alien_resurrection
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alien_Resurrection

Gattaca (1997)

CREW & CAST

Director: Andrew Niccol

Screenplay: Andrew Niccol

Producers: Danny DeVito, Michael Shamberg, Stacey Sher

Main performers: Ethan Hawke (Vincent/Jerome), Uma Thurman (Irene), Jude Law (Jerome/Eugene), Xander Berkeley (Lamar), Alan Arkin (Detective Hugo), Loren Dean (Anton), Gore Vidal (Director Josef),

Companies: Columbia Pictures Corporation, Jersey Films

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 16'



PLOT SUMMARY

In a future world where unborn children pass through a strict selection of their DNA, Vincent is one of the last naturally born babies. Despite his bad genetics and health problems, due to which he faces extreme discrimination and prejudice, he decides to become an astronaut. For this end, Vincent assumes the identity of Jerome Eugene Morrow, a former swimming star with an impeccable genetic profile, who after attempting to commit suicide is paralyzed from the waist down. Vincent passes the test and gains access to the Gattaca Aerospace Corporation using Jerome's DNA (in his urine, hair, blood). However, a week before Vincent's departure to Saturn's moon Titan, Vincent's program director is killed and an 'In-Valid' eyelash of an unknown person is found. Police starts to investigate the case, but fortunately Vincent is helped by his brother Anton, a detective, to try to fulfil his dream.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN

Andrew M. Niccol (Paraparaumu, New Zealand 1964) is known as a screenwriter, producer, and director. He began his career directing TV commercials in London, and eventually ended up moving to Los Angeles. One of his most successful screenplays is *The Truman Show* (1998). The main character, Truman Burbank (Jim Carrey), is being constantly filmed with hidden cameras for a reality TV show from the day of his birth but ignores that his own situation. *The Truman Show* earned three Oscar nominations, including one for Niccol for Best Original Screenplay; he won a BAFTA award for his screenplay. Apart from *Gattaca* (1997), Niccol has also written

and directed *S1mOne* (2002), *Lord of War* (2005), *In Time* (2011), *The Host* (2013), *Good Kill* (2014) and *Anon* (2018).

Gattaca (1997) was Niccol's debut as both screenwriter and director. The film was made for an estimated budget of \$36 million but ended up earning only \$12.5 million. Yet, although it was a failure in the USA it was better received in Europe. Niccol's movie received a Best Film award from Sitges Catalan International Film Festival (the music composer Michael Nyman won another for Best Original Soundtrack). *Gattaca* also won a Special Jury Prize and the Fun Trophy from the Gérardmer Film Festival. Niccol received the ALFS Award as Screenwriter of the Year from the London Critics Circle Film Awards for both *Gattaca* (1997) and *The Truman Show* (1998). *Gattaca's* appreciation has been growing steadily and it can be said to be now a respected cult film.

Gattaca places us in a not very distant future when children's birth is determined by the screening of their DNA for defects. This way, through a strict genetic selection, only healthy, strong and potentially successful babies are born. Vincent, the main protagonist, is one of the few children born through a "faith" birth, in the natural old-fashioned way. The moment he starts breathing, though, his first genetic test lists the numerous diseases and disabilities he will inevitably face and establishes an estimated life expectancy of approximately 30 years. Because of his bad genetic portfolio, Vincent is condemned to face discrimination from those who are genetically superior to him –practically everyone. In contrast to his artificially conceived brother Anton, he is even considered to be unworthy of his father's name because of his genetic shortcomings. Nevertheless, Vincent continues dreaming of becoming an astronaut and of traveling to space. His status as an "invalid" prevents him from getting into the Gattaca space program at first. As he finally becomes aware of the strength of his own courage he gains more confidence and finally achieves his goal. The film demonstrates that not his genetic qualities but Vincent's spiritual strength determines what he is capable of, even though the society he lives in regards him as "invalid".

Society favours in *Gattaca* only those with a flawless genetic profile, which strongly reinforces inequality. We can draw a parallel between genetically modified people –the so-called 'frankenbabies'– and Frankenstein's scientifically elaborated creature. Victor Frankenstein's main objective was to discover the secret of life without taking into account the high price he would pay for bringing his creature to life. In case of *Gattaca*, we see how scientific advance reaches the point where all people become mere reflections of their genetic profiles while their human qualities, like courage, perseverance and ambitiousness are ignored. The children conceived through genetic selection have all types of social advantage in comparison to the naturally born ones but in a society where everyone is perfect competition is anyway fierce. The creation of super-humans is, then, what both Victor Frankenstein and *Gattaca's* scientists aimed to achieve. For the latter controlling genes equals controlling life itself, thus surpassing God's will and replacing faith by science. By giving life to his composite creature through scientific manipulations, Frankenstein invents a new human species. In *Gattaca*, human beings are modified even before they are born and somehow they can also be regarded as a new, more advanced type of humans.

There is, of course, this never-ending controversy about the ethical implications of this sort of experiments and of what is now called "geneticization". *Gattaca* was an

early warning about the misuse of technologies for eugenic discrimination appearing already in the 1990s. Geneticist Abby Lippman, who coined the concept, described back in 1991 the increasing tendency in American culture to perceive individuals as a collection of genes. As Lippman defines it, “Geneticization refers to an ongoing process by which differences between individuals are reduced to their DNA codes, with most disorders, behaviours and physiological variations defined, at least in part, as genetic in origin” (19). If this trend continues gaining more support, we will inevitably confront its consequences as they are shown in *Gattaca*: a world with a genetic determinist ideology where a person’s sense of identity comes from their genes. This is why, as we can conclude, progress is good only when it is beneficial to the society as a whole without it being divided into the privileged and the oppressed groups, as we see it in the film.

Lippman, Abby. “Prenatal genetic testing and screening: constructing needs and reinforcing inequities”. *American Journal of Law & Medicine* vol. XVII nos. 1 & 2, 1991. 15-50.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Janet Maslin, “The Next Bigotry: Privilege by Genetic Perfection”, *The New York Times*, 24 October 1997

<https://www.nytimes.com/1997/10/24/movies/film-review-the-next-bigotry-privilege-by-genetic-perfection.html?searchResultPosition=5>

Eugene has been crippled in an accident, which effectively cuts short all opportunity for him in this brave new world. So a gene-broker of sorts (Tony Shalhoub) works out a deal whereby Vincent can use Eugene’s genetic samples to get past *Gattaca*’s daily security checks. The film renders this process with fascinating precision, showing how nail cuttings, fingerprints, blood and urine samples, even hairs and dandruff, can be methodically switched. The film’s extremely handsome look offsets the physicality of these details with test tubes and steel surfaces and seductive, otherworldly lighting in shades like radium green.

Roger Ebert, “*Gattaca*”, *Roger Ebert*, 24 October 1997

<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/gattaca-1997>

Gattaca is the remarkable debut of a writer-director from New Zealand, Andrew Niccol whose film is intelligent and thrilling –a tricky combination– and also visually exciting. His most important set is a vast office where genetically superior computer programmers come to work every day, filing into their long rows of desks like the office slaves in King Vidor’s *The Crowd* and Orson Welles’ *The Trial*. (Why are “perfect” human societies so often depicted by ranks of automatons? Is it because human nature resides in our flaws?)

Sandra Lee, “*Gattaca* Confronts Society’s Fears”, *Miscellany News*, 14 November 1997

<https://newspaperarchives.vassar.edu/?a=d&d=miscellany19971114-01.2.42>

In *Gattaca*’s vision, somewhere in the near future exists a world in which talent, beauty and race won’t count anymore. A computer reading taken from a sample of your blood will have already determined the rest of your life. The more genetically

perfect you or your child is, the more likely he or she will succeed in the future. Pick the wrong genes and your child faces a lifetime struggling to compete for survival. It doesn't do much anymore to wish upon the stars. Hope that someone has picked the right genes.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film895828.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0119177/>
- Metracritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/gattaca>
- Rotten Tomatoes: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/gattaca>
- Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gattaca>

Gods and Monsters (1998)

CREW & CAST

Director: Bill Condon

Screenplay: Bill Condon, Christopher Bram (novel *Father of Frankenstein*)

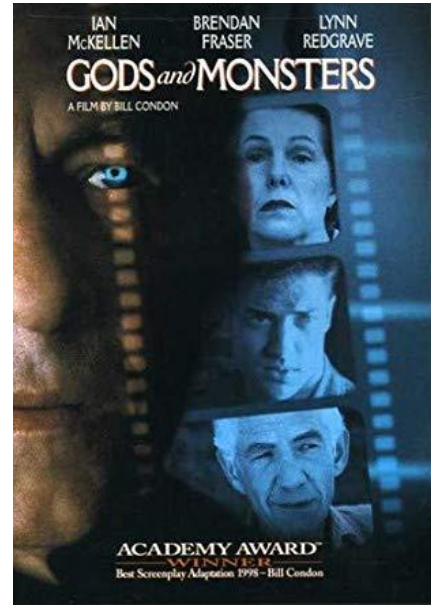
Producers: Paul Colichman, Greg Fienberg, Mark R. Harris

Main performers: Ian McKellen (James Whale), Brendan Fraser (Clayton Boone), Lynn Redgrave (Hannah), Lolita Davidovich (Betty), David Dukes (David Lewis)

Companies: Lions Gate Films, Showtime, Flashpoint, BBC Films, Regent Entertainment, Spike Productions

Nationality: USA/ UK

Duration: 1h 45'



PLOT SUMMARY

Gods and Monsters takes place during the late 50s and deals with the last days in the life of British director James Whale, famous for *Frankenstein*, *Bride of Frankenstein* or *The Invisible Man* among others. Whale, long retired, lives in his Californian mansion with his housemaid Hannah, who takes good care of him but disapproves of his homosexuality. Whale is suffering strokes and aware that his life is reaching its end he contemplates suicide. Only Clayton Boone, the handsome new gardener, brings a spark of interest in life. They begin an uneasy friendship as Boone poses for his sketches and Whale recalls his rags-to-riches past. Whale assures Boone that his interest in him is not sexual, but the young man is torn between his homophobia and his fascination for the old gentleman. When Whale asks him to help him end his life, Clayton is horrified.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Bill Condon (New York, 1955) is an American screen writer and director. He is known for writing and directing movies like *Gods and Monsters* (1998), *Kinsey* (2004), or *Dreamgirls* (2006); he has also directed the two parts of *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn*. *God and Monsters* was based on Christopher Bram's elegant novel *Father of Frankenstein* (1995), which was a notable success.

Gods and Monsters was generally well-received, with mainly positive reviews by the critics. The movie was nominated for three categories of the Academic Awards and Condon won the Oscar for Best Adapted Screenplay. All critics agree that Oscar-nominee Ian McKellen offered a sublime performance as James Whale but the

interpretations of Brendan Fraser as Clayton (known for *George of the Jungle* and cast against the grain) and Lynn Redgrave as Hannah are excellent as well (she got the third Oscar nomination of the film). The budget for the movie was \$10 million but it only earned \$6.5 million dollars, though certainly not because it lacks quality.

The connection between Bill Condon's film and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is quite direct, even though this is an adaptation of Bram's biographical novel about Whale and not of the original novel. Throughout *Gods and Monsters* Whale recalls how he shot famous scenes from *Frankenstein* and *Bride of Frankenstein*, the films that made him famous but that he did not particularly like (he preferred the musical *Magnolia*). In his dreams Whale even sees Boone as Victor Frankenstein and he himself as the monster, even though it is (arguably) more accurate to see Whale as Frankenstein and the naïve Boone as the creature. In the epilogue, years after Whale's death, Boone watches *Frankenstein* with his family and as he leaves the house to take out the garbage under the rain he imitates the monster's famous lurching gait, thus identifying with him (this was Brendan Fraser's idea). It's a moving, beautiful moment.

A singular aspect of Condon's film, and of Whale's life, is that it shows that a gay man could live a satisfactory life even in the repressive atmosphere of the first half of the 20th century (Whale died in 1957). This is not, however, a movie about Whale's homosexuality, or about his erotic attraction for Boone, but about the end of life and impending death. There is a very awkward scene in which Whale makes sexual advances on a defenceless Boone and he reacts violently, but never to the point of accepting murdering Whale, which is what the old man wants. Whale is, therefore, forced to make his own decision, leaving the younger man desolated by the end of their strange friendship. McKellen's subtle portrait of James Whale gives *Gods and Monsters* most of its emotional content. His relationship with Boone, on the other hand, exposes, as reviewer Peter Travers notes, the gay subtext of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. But, whereas in Condon's film the handsome Clayton manages to control his initial dislike for the 'monstrous' gay old man and be his friend, in the original novel Victor's disgust at his monster's ugliness makes any bonding impossible. There is always the doubt of what would have happened if the creature had turned out to be as beautiful as Clayton Boone.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Rita Kempley, "*Gods and Monsters: Movies and Memories*", *Washington Post*, 20 November 1998

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/godsandmonsterskempley.htm??noredirect=on>

James Whale, the father of such '30s fright classics as *Frankenstein*, looks back upon his creations in *Gods and Monsters*, a moving portrait of the artist as an old man. A fascinating account of his final days, the drama draws on the speculative novel by Christopher Bram, Whale's campy films, Hollywood legend and the mythical man himself.

Peter Travers, "*Gods and Monsters*", *Rolling Stone Magazine*, 4 November 1998

<https://www.rollingstone.com/movies/movie-reviews/gods-and-monsters-99576/>

Isn't this the movie with Ian McKellen playing some old fruit horror director who tries to fuck George of the Jungle?

That's one way –the wrong way– of looking at Bill Condon's elegantly witty and haunting *Gods and Monsters*, in which McKellen gives the performance of his film career as the gay British director James Whale –the man who made *Frankenstein*– and Brendan Fraser excels as Clayton Boone, the straight gardener who encourages Whale as a painter by posing nude.

When Whale died, a suicide, in his Hollywood swimming pool in 1957, his heyday as the director of the 1931 *Frankenstein* and its even better 1935 sequel, *Bride of Frankenstein*, had long passed. Though Whale hadn't directed a film for more than a decade and a recent stroke had slowed him down, he was openly gay in a closeted film town. Since Whale's death, revisionists have combed the *Frankenstein* films for gay subtext, with the monster representing the social pariah.

Dennis Harvey, "Gods and Monsters", *Variety*, 24 January 1998, 7/10

<https://variety.com/1998/film/reviews/gods-and-monsters-1200452505/>

Ian McKellen's brilliant performance as 1930s director James Whale highlights *Gods and Monsters*. Historical Hollywood fiction drawn from Christopher Bram's book *Father of Frankenstein* doesn't always convince, particularly in the last lap. But it's an engrossing, unusual, imaginatively executed bit of psychological gamesmanship nonetheless. Director-scenarist Bill Condon's first-class production will need good reviews and strong marketing to cross over beyond gay and arthouse auds.

LINKS

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- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/gods-and-monsters>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/gods_and_monsters
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gods_and_Monsters_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gods_and_Monsters_(film))

Deep Blue Sea (1999)

CREW & CAST

Director: Renny Harlin

Screenplay: Duncan Kennedy, Donna Powers, Wayne Powers

Producers: Akiva Goldsman, Alan Riche, Tony Ludwig

Main performers: Thomas Jane (Carter Blake), Saffron Burrows (Dr. Susan McAlester), Samuel L. Jackson (Russell Franklin), Jacqueline McKenzie (Janice Higgins), Michael Rapaport (Tom Scoggins), Stellan Skarsgard (Jim Whitlock), LL Cool J (Preacher), Aida Turturro (Brenda Kerns).

Companies: Warner Bros., Village Roadshow Pictures, Groucho III Film Partnership, Riche-Ludwig Productions

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 45'



PLOT SUMMARY

In this thriller directed by Renny Harlin, British scientist Dr Susan McAlester has found a way to cure Alzheimer's disease by using a genetic modification of shark brains. Together with the aid of other researchers, they establish a deep-sea station to breed mako sharks. Believing that the cure is located in the brain tissue of these sharks, Dr McAlester injects hormones in their brains in order to make them bigger. The result of this experiment is the transformation of those creatures into very strong and intelligent predators which will do anything to escape.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Renny Harlin (Riihimaki, 1959) is a film director and producer known for directing many action and horror movies. The most successful Finnish import in the history of Hollywood, Harlin started his career there in the 1980s with *A Nightmare on Elm Street: The Dream Master* (1988). Harlin has stated that *Deep Blue Sea* was the most difficult film he had ever made but he considers *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (1996) his best film. Duncan Kennedy, Donna Powers and Wayne Powers wrote the screenplay for *Deep Blue Sea*. The Powers also collaborated in *Valentine* (2001) and *The Italian Job* (2003) before their divorce.

Deep Blue Sea, a summer blockbuster, was a remarkable commercial success, grossing \$164 million worldwide (its presumed budget was \$60 million). The film received diverse positive reviews from critics, who appreciated and cherished its suspense and action sequences, despite the evident plot holes and lack of originality. *Deep Blue Sea* has even been regarded as a notable contribution to the shark film

subgenre started by Steven Spielberg's classic *Jaws*. (1975). Harlin's movie did not get any major awards or nominations, but LL Cool J was awarded the Blockbuster Entertainment Award for Favourite Supporting Actor of Action and Trevor Ravin was awarded the BMI Film Music Award.

Very clearly, this movie is related to *Frankenstein* due to the fact that in *Deep Blue Sea*, Dr. Susan McAlester uses science to alter nature by genetically modifying the brain of sharks. Although her intention is good (she wants to cure Alzheimer's disease), she ends up creating monsters which are uncontrollable and threaten humanity, beginning with the scientists in the isolated underwater facility which the animals destroy. By the same token, in *Frankenstein*, Victor is a scientist who builds a monster through experimenting with science for apparent good ends and this creature becomes wild and aggressive. As both stories warn, humans should not manipulate nature using science for if they do so we will all face catastrophic consequences.

Additionally, it could also be argued that *Deep Blue Sea* is the underwater equivalent of *Jurassic Park*, released six years before. In *Deep Blue Sea*, the mako sharks genetically modified to be super intelligent, finally reach freedom but are trapped by their enhanced predator nature. Equally, in *Jurassic Park*, the T-Rex, although free is likewise limited by his instincts. In both films the facilities and installations are destroyed, the creatures originated from genetic engineering escape and cause chaos, and only the heroes stay to fight them and find a solution. The creatures in both films become quite smart, behaving as no animal does: in *Jurassic Park* the dinosaurs learn to open doors while in *Deep Blue Sea* the sharks learn how to open railings. Nature will find a way to escape control, the message runs.

In this movie in which humans seem to control all creatures and appear to have God's power of creating and modifying the nature, they ultimately realise that using science for their own convenience has very harsh consequences. As reviewer Stephen Holden states "the evil researchers become little fishes toyed with and then devoured by their laboratory subjects one by one" (see below). Therefore, although humans appear to be the most intelligent and powerful beings on Earth, they become the ones manipulated and controlled by their own altered, monstrous creatures. If Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* sends a warning against the human eagerness to play God and create unnatural life, both *Jurassic Park* and *Deep Blue Sea* point at genetic engineering as a major risk in that sense. Although humans are constantly asserting their dominion over Earth, we are self-destructive creatures quite willing to threaten our own community and the laws of nature, either for profit or, as happens in *Frankenstein* and *Deep Blue Sea* for (scientific) ambition.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Stephen Holden, "*Deep Blue Sea: Lab Sharks Turn Men into Sushi*", *The New York Times*, 28 July 1999

<https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/film/072899deep-film-review.html>

The most villainous human, Dr. Susan McAlester (Saffron Burrows), is a beautiful, icy marine biologist whose scientific hanky-panky involves implanting human brain tissue in creatures that the movie redundantly insists many times are the most efficient killing machines in all of natural history. Although Susan's work is supposed to

hold the key to curing degenerative brain diseases like Alzheimer's, exactly how it relates to medical science is never addressed.

Susan's upper-class English accent is one sign that she is too ruthlessly ambitious to be trusted. Still, you've got to hand it her. She's got nerve.

Mick LaSalle, "Gulp!: Sharks Are the Brains behind Surprising Entertaining *Deep Blue Sea*", *San Francisco Chronicle*, 28 July 1999

<https://www.sfgate.com/movies/article/Gulp-Sharks-are-the-brains-behind-surprising-2918312.php>

(...) With an audacious combination of playfulness and wickedness, the movie takes two minutes to blow up everyone and everything unpromising. The film's course is transformed. Forget Alzheimer's. The survivors are trapped inside the underwater complex like meat in a tin can. Outside are 25-foot can openers. That's the whole story: *Deep Blue Sea* is an all-night eating binge, told from the standpoint of the food.

The science-fiction hook is that these are not mere sharks. These are genius sharks, genetically engineered to have massive brains. To survive, the people have to figure out what the sharks are planning.

Madeleine Williams, "*Deep Blue Sea*", *Cinematter*, 1 January 2000

<http://www.cinematter.com/blog/1999/07/28/deep-blue-sea/>

There is no rational reason anyone with any sense whatsoever would find enjoyment from this film. That said, *Deep Blue Sea* was surprisingly fun. Sure, there are plot holes large enough for a five-ton shark to swim through, and the dialogue is bad enough to make you root for the sharks, who happen to be the most multi-dimensional characters, anyway. But all those trifles just don't seem to matter as your heart races in anticipation of the next attack. Afterwards you may wonder, "What was I thinking?", but while the sharks are on the loose, the tides of the movie will sweep you away.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film950294.html>
- IMDb: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0149261/>
- Metracritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/deep-blue-sea>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1090759_deep_blue_sea
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deep_Blue_Sea_\(1999_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deep_Blue_Sea_(1999_film))

***The Matrix* (1999)**

CREW & CAST

Director: The Wachowskis

Screenplay: The Wachowskis

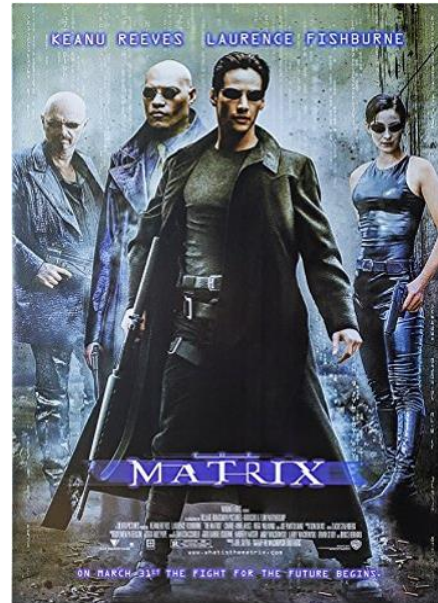
Producer: Joel Silver

Main performers: Keanu Reeves (Neo), Carrie-Anne Moss (Trinity), Laurence Fishburne (Morpheus), Hugo Weaving (Agent Smith), Joe Pantoliano (Cypher), Gloria Foster (The Oracle)

Companies: Warner Bros., Village Roadshow Pictures, Groucho Film Partnership, Silver Pictures

Nationality: USA

Duration: *The Matrix* (1999) 2h 16'; *The Matrix Reloaded* (2002) 2h 18'; *The Matrix Revolutions* (2003) 2h 09'



PLOT SUMMARY

Thomas A. Anderson, seemingly an ordinary computer programmer, who works for the software company Meta Cortex is also a well-respected hacker, Neo. Neo gets to know Morpheus, a legendary computer programmer, who makes him understand that the reality in which he inhabits is nothing more than a computer simulation, i.e., the Matrix, managed by Artificial Intelligence. People in the Matrix are slaves who generate energy, which is used by the mater AI to achieve world domination. Thus, Morpheus offers Neo, whom he considers to be the “the One,” the mission to join his crew and destroy the evil machine, before it ends the entire Homo sapiens species.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY’S FRANKENSTEIN

Lana Wachowski (Chicago, 1965) and Lilly Wachowski (Chicago, 1967), also known as The Wachowskis, are transgender sisters famous for writing, directing and producing numerous legendary films, series, comic books, and even video games. Their debut film, the lesbian-noir thriller *Bound* (1996), received various nominations and festival awards, and is now a respected cult film. However, their most famous creation is *The Matrix* (1999), a science fiction film, which completely revolutionized the genre and took it to the next level. After the favourable outcome of *The Matrix* (1999) The Wachowskis directed two more sequels: *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003) and *The Matrix Revolutions* (2003). Their later work includes the animated film *The Animatrix* (2003), the movie adaptation of Alan Moore’s graphic novel *V for Vendetta* (2005), *Speed Racer* (2008), the television series *Sense 8* (2015-2016).

The Matrix was well-received by both public and critics for its visual appeal but, as the reviews show (see below), its content was not immediately appreciated. The estimate for the total cost of the film is \$63 million but it earned \$463 million worldwide, an immense box office success. The long list of the awards for *The Matrix* includes four Oscars for Best Film Editing, Best Sound, Best Sound Effects Editing and inevitably for Best Visual Effects. What is more, the film also received two BAFTA Film Awards for Best Sound and Best Achievement in Special Visual Effects, and Saturn Award for Best Director. It would be, by no means, an exaggeration to say that *The Matrix* invented a new world of special effects in science fiction.

The full title of Mary Shelley's novel is *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus*. In Greek mythology, Prometheus was a Titan who stole the fire from Mount Olympus and gave it to humans, thus jump-starting civilization against the wishes of the Gods. In punishment, the Gods chained Prometheus to the Caucasus Mountain and had an eagle eat his self-regenerating liver daily. The myth depicts a semi-divine being, who blinded by his faith in his own greatness, challenges the gods and satisfies his ambition, only to be daily tortured for going too far. These ideas are largely manifested in *Frankenstein* as well as in *The Matrix*, both of which depict the consequences of humanity's unquenchable thirst for fulfilling dangerous ambitions.

The Matrix is set in the post-apocalyptic future, where human-made artificial intelligence has outperformed the human species and aims to dominate the world. The storyline, in which man-made monsters declare war against humans, demonstrates the clear connection between Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* and The Wachowski's whole trilogy. Mary Shelley offered in *Frankenstein* a cautionary tale about the dangers of unbridled scientific development, which was, in her opinion, a guarantee for the appearance of monsters who would bring destruction to future Earth. *The Matrix* is the continuation of this narrative: any unethical steps in the technological field will eventually lead humankind to destruction (as James Cameron's *Terminator* franchise also warned).

In *Frankenstein*, the monster is a wretched, lonely male creature who asks his creator to craft a female like him to keep him company. In *The Matrix*, there is no such issue. A disembodied Artificial Intelligence has enslaved humanity and turned people into easily renewable and completely recyclable sources of energy. The Machines create new people through cloning in order to maintain the continuity of their power supply. What makes the rather far-fetched plot interesting is that the clones are manipulated to believe in a reality that does not exist, and which is supposed to be our own ordinary life. This begs the question of how we would all react if told that life is a simulation run by an evil entity that exploits us. Neo accepts the challenge of seeing what lies behind reality when Morpheus offers him the choice between the red and the blue pill but Cypher, a minor character, makes the point later in the trilogy that he'd rather stay convinced of the fake reality created by the Machines.

In Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the creator of the monster is clearly one person, Victor Frankenstein. In *The Matrix*, however, the case is more complicated. The plot starts unfolding at a time when the Machines have been in control for a long time. Thus, viewers do not get to know a particular computer scientist or group of scientists who gave birth to the dominant Artificial Intelligence. It is implied that all of humankind is responsible for the disaster because we all follow the goal of stepping up our constant progress at any cost. In a sense, the Wachowskis suggest that the AI

monster has become a new creator also threatened by monsters. Thus, Victor Frankenstein is the inspiration not only for the anonymous scientists who created the AI that became the Machines but also for the AI itself, which sees its own creation Neo as a monster who threatens to ruin its efficiently run world. As the trilogy reached its end, the question that worried most spectators was not so much the power of the Machines but what kind of world Neo's heroism had caused to emerge and whether this was really better than the Machines' false life.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Janet Maslin, "The Matrix: The Reality is All Virtual and Densely Complicated", *The New York Times*, 31 March 1999

<https://www.nytimes.com/1999/03/31/movies/film-review-the-reality-is-all-virtual-and-densely-complicated.html?module=ArrowsNav&contentCollection=Movies&action=keypress®ion=FixedLeft&pgtype=article>

The most salient things any prospective viewer need know is that Keanu Reeves makes a strikingly chic Prada model of an action hero, that the martial arts dynamics are phenomenal (thanks to Peter Pan-type wires for flying and inventive slow-motion tricks), and that anyone bored with the notably pretentious plotting can keep busy toting up this film's debts to other futuristic science fiction.

Stephen Hunter, "The Matrix: Whoa, Baby! A Dazzling Futuristic Phantasm", *Washington Post*, 31 March 1999

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/movies/reviews/matrixhunter.htm>

What you do notice is the incredible energy and stylizations of the Wachowskis, who seem to represent the next generation with a vengeance. I have seen the future and it smirks. Is this what the movies are becoming? Well, yes. But at least the Bros. W. do it with the brilliance and zip of the pioneer spirit. Their minds stretched and liberated by the possibilities of cyberspace, John Woo, CD-ROMs and microwave ovens that can heat a hot dog in 25 seconds, they seem to imagine movie plots in five dimensions, not a mere three, and action in six. *The Matrix* builds to such kinetic momentum that the movie becomes a spike of pure action, and since it's taking place in baby brain reality rather than authentic reality, it's liberated from gravity and sense.

Todd McCarthy, "The Matrix", *Variety*, 28 March 1999

<https://variety.com/1999/film/reviews/the-matrix-1200456768/>

It's Special Effects 10, Screenplay 0 for *The Matrix*, an eye-popping but incoherent extravaganza of morphing and superhuman martial arts. Ultra-cool visuals that truly deliver something new to the sci-fi action lexicon will make this time-jumping thriller a must-see among genre fans, especially guys in their teens and 20s, for whom the script's pretentious mumbo-jumbo of undergraduate mythology, religious mysticism and technobabble could even be a plus rather than a dramatic liability. Warner Bros. looks to collect a tidy sum in all markets from this shrewdly packaged head trip.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA:
The Matrix <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film932476.html>
The Matrix Reloaded <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film349820.html>
The Matrix Revolutions <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film257620.html>
- IMDB:
The Matrix <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0133093/>
The Matrix Reloaded <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0234215/>
The Matrix Revolutions <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0242653/>
- Metacritic:
The Matrix <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/the-matrix>
The Matrix Reloaded <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/the-matrix-reloaded>
The Matrix Revolutions <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/the-matrix-revolutions>
- Rotten Tomatoes:
The Matrix <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/matrix>
The Matrix Reloaded https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/matrix_reloaded
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The Matrix https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Matrix
The Matrix Reloaded https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Matrix_Reloaded
The Matrix Revolutions https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Matrix_Revolutions

Hollow Man (2000)

CREW & CAST

Director: Paul Verhoeven

Screenplay: Andrew W. Marlowe, Gary Scott Thompson (story), H.G. Wells (novel *The Invisible Man*, uncredited)

Producers: Alan Marshall, Douglas Wick

Main performers: Elisabeth Shue (Linda), Kevin Bacon (Sebastian), Josh Brolin (Matthew), Kim Dickens (Sarah), Greg Grunberg (Carter), Joe Slotnick (Frank), Rhona Mitra (Sebastian's Neighbour)

Companies: Columbia Pictures, Global Entertainment Productions GmbH & Company Medien KG

Nationality: USA/UK

Duration: 1h 52'



PLOT SUMMARY

Scientist Sebastian Caine has finally created an invisibility serum. Caine and his team successfully test the serum on a female gorilla, restoring the animal back to visibility with no problem. The ambitious Caine convinces then his team to jump into human testing, which is not legal. The test is performed on Sebastian himself and despite being painful at first the procedure works. However, when the time to return to visibility comes, Caine almost dies and the reversion fails. Being invisible allows him to play pranks and do whatever he wants without being noticed but eventually this goes too far when Caine even rapes and murders. His ex-girlfriend Linda and her new boyfriend Matt, part of the team, see no other solution but kill Caine. If, that is, they can see him at all.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN

Paul Verhoeven (Amsterdam 1938) is famous for his highly violent, and at the same time astute, science fiction films like *Robocop* (1987, see the factsheet in this volume), *Starship Troopers* (1997) and *Hollow Man* (2000) among many others. Whenever he has been accused of depicting excessive violence in his films, Verhoeven replies that he is only portraying the violence of society. The screenplay for *Hollow Man* was written by Andrew W. Marlowe, author also of the scripts for *End of Days* (1999) and *Air Force One* (1997). The story, also by Gary Scott Thompson, is based on H.G. Wells's classic *The Invisible Man* (1897) which was not credited in the film titles.

Despite its estimated budget of \$95 million and its high quality special effects, *Hollow Man* was not as well-received as the producers expected. In fact, it ended

Verhoeven's American career (he returned next to his native Holland). The reviewers complained that the plot, closer to that of slasher films than to science fiction, was misogynistic; the scene in which the invisible Caine rapes his neighbour was highlighted in particular as quite nasty. Nevertheless, despite the negative response from most critics, the film was number one during its opening weekend and its box office takings doubled its budget. *Hollow Man* was even nominated to an Academy Award for Best Visual Effects in 2001 only losing to *Gladiator*. It did win a Saturn award for the same concept.

Just like *Frankenstein*, the *Hollow Man* portrays a situation where science gets out of control. Verhoeven's movie connects more directly with *The Invisible Man*, as noted, but Wells's novel is also a descendant of Shelley's novel in which (as happens in R.L. Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*) scientist and monster are one. Sebastian Caine is the equivalent of Victor Frankenstein in the film, though, of course, his methods are more modern and he works together with a team, as all scientists do. However, the main pattern is the same: a scientist follows the wrong path and his research creates a monster he cannot control anymore. In *Hollow Man* what triggers the monster's madness is the obsession for a woman who does not love him any more (his ex-girlfriend and teammate Linda); similarly, Victor's monster becomes most violent after his maker refuses to finish the creation of a female monster companion.

Obviously, the differences with *Frankenstein* are also many. The creature seeks revenge against Frankenstein but, being his own Frankenstein, Caine projects his anger onto Linda and his new boyfriend, Matt. Whereas Mary Shelley's monster is born good but becomes capable of evil only when he is rejected, Caine is a malicious man who most likely is always interested in the power that invisibility gives him to victimize others. Unlike Frankenstein's creature, who considers his monstrosity a curse, Caine welcomes his new state as an empowering gift. Curiously, whereas the former terrifies people as soon as they see him, the latter is frightening because he cannot be seen. In fact, Caine's monstrosity emanates not from his being an ugly creation but from his becoming an immoral and malevolent person. Given the same chance of being invisible others might behave in a very different way, and that might be perhaps why *Hollow Man* was not enjoyed.

FROM THE REVIEWS

A.O. Scott, "Out of Sight, a Scientist Is Also Out of His Mind", *The New York Times*, 4 August 2000

<https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/film/080400hollow-film-review.html>

Mr. Verhoeven and the screenwriter, Andrew W. Marlowe, have taken what could have been a fascinating, creepy psychological thriller and turned it into a labored, implausible piece of action-movie hack work. Once nobody can see him –and once he no longer has to look at himself in the mirror– Sebastian becomes intoxicated with the power and freedom that his new state confers. The best part of the movie tracks his rapid slides from petulant narcissism into demented evil.

F.X. Feeney, "Empty Dumpty", *L.A. Weekly*, 2 August 2000

<https://www.laweekly.com/film/empty-dumpty-2132344>

If only the rest of the movie were as good as its cast, or as these little touches. "I want grandeur", Caine tells Linda, by way of explaining his lust to be the first Invisible Man. It's his only vulnerable moment; he charmlessly mistreats everybody on the staff, Linda included. "You're not God: I am", he tells his right-hand man –and Linda's current lover– Matt (Josh Brolin). This Faustian arrogance spells out the movie's big theme, and Caine's looming comeuppance, in neon block letters, but it's uttered without passion or magnetism.

Susan Wloszczyna, "Hollow Man", *USA Today*, 3 August 2000

https://secure.metacritic.com/critic/susan-wloszczyna?filter=movies&num_items=30&sort_options=critic_score&dist=negative&page=3

Ultimately the title is most revealing. It's hollow, man.

LINKS

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- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0164052/>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/hollow-man/critic-reviews>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/hollow_man
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hollow_Man#Reception

A.I.: Artificial Intelligence (2001)

CREW & CAST

Director: Steven Spielberg

Screenplay: Steven Spielberg, Ian Watson (story), Brian Aldiss (short story, "Supertoys Last All Summer")

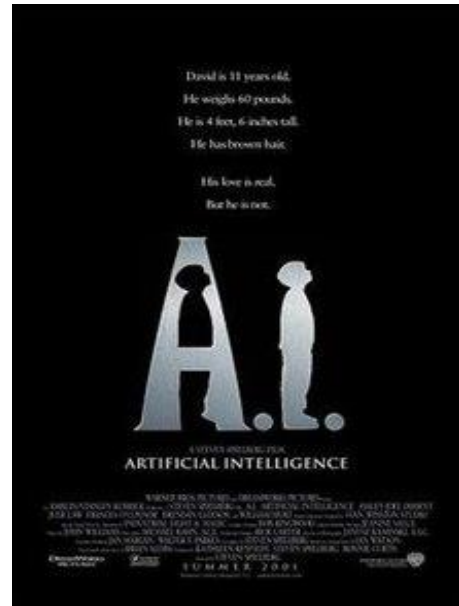
Producers: Bonnie Curtis, Kathleen Kennedy, Steven Spielberg

Main performers: Haley Joel Osment (David), Frances O'Connor (Monica Swinton), Jude Law (Gigolo Joe), Jake Thomas (Martin Swinton), William Hurt (Prof. Hobby)

Companies: Warner Bros, DreamWorks, Amblin Entertainment, Stanley Kubrick Productions

Nationality: UK/USA

Duration: 2h 26'



PLOT SUMMARY

In a not-so-distant future, in a half-drowned world, humans decide to create intelligent realistic robots, or 'mechas', to be served by them. David, an artificial boy, is created with the purpose of being adopted and/or replace a real child. Ignoring what he really is, David (the first of his kind) has been programmed to show unconditional love, which is what he offers his 'mother' Monica. She and her husband Henry (who works for the company that created David) adopt him as a temporary substitute for their real son Martin, who remains in cryo-stasis because of an incurable disease. When the boy recovers and returns home, David's perfect life suffers a radical change. Forced to leave home by a suddenly disgusted Monica, he needs to fend for himself in a hostile world.

CONNECTIONS WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Steven Spielberg (Cincinnati, 1946) is an American filmmaker considered one of the founding pioneers of the new Hollywood era and also one of the most popular and important directors and producers in the whole film history. Spielberg made a name for himself as the director of *Jaws* (1975), based on Peter Benchley's best-selling novel and considered the first summer blockbuster. His following films focused on science fiction and adventure: *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), the *Indiana Jones* series (1981-89), *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982) and *Jurassic Park* (1993, see the factsheet in this volume). Later, his films started addressing humanistic and historical concerns such as the Holocaust (*Schindler's List*, 1993), the slave trade (*Amistad*,

1997), war (*Saving Private Ryan*, 1998), human nature (*Artificial Intelligence*, 2001), terrorism (*Munich*, 2005) and civil rights (*Lincoln*, 2012). *Schindler's List* and *Saving Private Ryan* earned Spielberg Oscars as Best Director. The worldwide box office income of all his films combined has surpassed \$10 billion worldwide, making Spielberg one of the highest-grossing directors in the whole cinema history.

Spielberg has also participated as writer in some films, including *Poltergeist* (1982, which he produced and Tobe Hooper directed), his own *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *The Goonies* (1985, written by Chris Columbus from a story by Spielberg) and *Artificial Intelligence* (2001). This was a project inherited from Stanley Kubrick shortly before his death, based on the short story by Brian Aldiss "Super-Toys Last All Summer Long" (1969) with an added storyline by English science fiction author Ian Watson. *Artificial Intelligence* enjoyed a very positive critical reception, earning besides a worldwide gross benefit of \$235 billion. The film received two Oscars nominations, one for the Best Original Soundtrack (John Williams) and the other for the Best Special Effects (Stan Winston, Dennis Muren), in addition to other seventy nominations and seventeen wins in other awards.

Spielberg's *A.I.* takes place in a very near future in which humans are used to employing humanoid robots known as 'mechas' as service in all senses (Gigolo Joe is, as his name indicates, a sexbot, though only for female clients –homosexuality is not mentioned). Adult mechas, as David eventually discovers, are hated by many, who even kidnap and torture them in public as entertainment. The ambitious Professor Hobby decides to go further than these crude pseudo-human machines and create a new kind of sentient robot, a robot-child who can love his parents endlessly and sincerely. What he does not understand is that loving back the robot is not easy. Monica overcomes her initial reluctance to adopting the artificial boy but her 'maternal' feelings collapse when her flesh-and-blood son Martin returns home after a long disease. Her husband Henry eventually tells Monica to end David's 'life' but she ends up abandoning him in the forest, which marks the beginning of the dark fairy tale in which the boy robot is involved.

Quite clearly, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and *Artificial Intelligence* are closely connected through the motif of humans creating artificial life though the motivations are different. Professor Hobby builds David in the image of his lost son, while Victor's creature is created with no image to imitate, only to prove that his maker can build him. David is not actually aware of what he is for a long time and so his only goal is to become a real boy to be loved by his mother again. Frankenstein's creature, in contrast, learns at a very high cost about his real nature though, like David, he just wants affection and companionship. Both creatures are in search of a female partner: the adult monster seeks the love of a female equal; David wants the love of a mother. They are lonely creatures in pursuit of their place, each unique in their kind.

Artificial Intelligence also connects with Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio* (see the factsheet for *The Adventures of Pinocchio* in this volume), though, of course, the wooden puppet is animated by magic and David is an ultra-realistic humanoid robot. Professor Hobby is, in any case, a kind of Geppetto but with a scientific training. The Blue Fairy that David seeks is borrowed in fact *Pinocchio* (and her image in Spielberg's film from the 1940 Disney version), a story which David hears when Monica reads it to Martin. David believes that the tale is real and he seeks the Blue Fairy throughout the film for her to turn him into a human boy. His tragedy is that, unlike the adult, unloved

creature in Mary Shelley's novel, David was once loved and he just wants to be loved again. Being a child for ever, he is stuck also for ever in his own fairy-tale, for good or bad, as each spectator decides.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Dana Stevens, "Do Androids Long for Mom?", *The New York Times*, 29 June 2001
<https://www.nytimes.com/2001/06/29/movies/film-review-do-androids-long-for-mom.html>

A.I. is the best fairy tale –the most disturbing, complex and intellectually challenging boy's adventure story– Mr. Spielberg has made. Once again he asks us to identify with a young boy, exiled from the only home he knows and forced to find his way in a strange and unsympathetic world. Our bond with David (Haley Joel Osment) is complicated, however: he is not real at all but a sentient robot designed by a company called Cybertronics for the comfort and convenience of childless adults.

Stephen Hunger, "Spielberg's *A.I.*: The Strings Are Showing", *Washington Post*, 29 June 2001

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/2001/06/29/spielbergs-ai-the-strings-are-showing/d8884010-5b33-4a8d-97e2-a45788b212f0/>

So: Spielberg sees the glass as half full; Kubrick saw the glass smashed and ground into your face. And that struggle fills *A.I.* from start to finish. Kubrick bought the original short story [by Brian Aldiss] and carefully nurtured and developed it. It is rumored that he enjoyed a secret collaboration with Spielberg; fax machines in closets were involved (how very Kubrick!). When Kubrick died, possibly to escape the reviews of *Eyes Wide Shut*, Spielberg took over the script, rewrote it, produced it and filled it with his own strengths and weaknesses.

Ian Nathan, "Artificial Intelligence: Review", *Empire*, 1 January 2000

<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/artificial-intelligence/review/>

Perplexing, infuriating, mind-blowing: it's a voyage into a wonderland where the fairy tale motif becomes inseparable from the cool future-vision. You've got to admire Spielberg's daring –ditching the intellectual backbone for a spiritual send-off– but it doesn't sit easy. Some people might reject that wholesale; the majority might balk at the overlong and "out there" ending. Perhaps that is the point. *A.I.* will have you debating until the landlord threatens to call the police. It's that kind of movie. Thank God for that.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/es/film178002.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0212720/>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/artificial-intelligence-ai>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/ai_artificial_intelligence
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A.I._Artificial_Intelligence

S1m0ne (2002)

CREW & CAST

Director: Andrew Niccol

Screenplay: Andrew Niccol

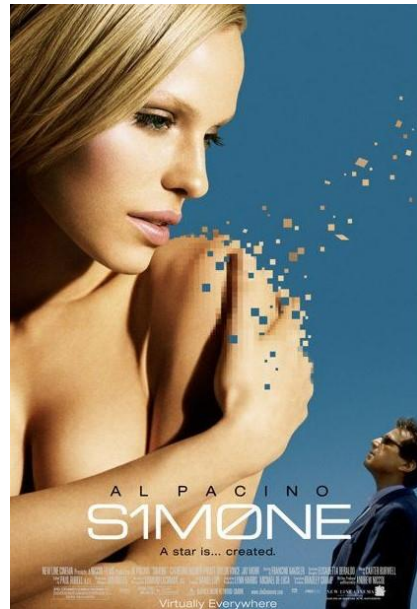
Producer: Andrew Niccol

Main performers: Al Pacino (Viktor Taransky), Winona Ryder (Nicola Anders), Jay Mohr (Hal Sinclair), Catherine Keener (Elaine Christian), Evan Rachel Wood (Lainey Christian Taransky), Rachel Roberts (Simone)

Companies: New Line Cinema, Niccol Films

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 57'



PLOT SUMMARY

Viktor Taransky, a renowned but difficult director/producer employed by his ex-wife's studio, faces a crisis when his main star leaves him and he is forced to find a new actress to complete his film, or be fired. Luckily for him, Viktor finds in the computer programme given to him by his acquaintance Hank Aleno the key to success. Simulation One allows Viktor to create a beautiful new actress whom he calls Simone, a name derived from the programme. Viktor incorporates her digital image to his movie, which becomes a major hit, and Simone becomes a star. Viktor still markets her as a real person but the illusion becomes difficult to maintain because everybody wants to see Simone 'live'. When the paparazzi start the chase Viktor decides to kill his star, though this is not as easy as he thinks.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Andrew Niccol (Paraparaumu, New Zealand, 1964) is a very well-known screenwriter, producer and director. His main films is *Gattaca* (1997, see the factsheet in this volume), followed by other notable films such as the dystopian *In Time* (2011), *Lord of War* (2005) which deals with arms dealing, *The Host* (2013, from Stephanie Meyers's novel), or *Good Kill* (2014). Niccol also wrote the script for Peter Weir's highly appreciated *The Truman Show* (1998). *S1m0ne*, the second film which Niccol both wrote and directed, had a mixed reception. It was small, independent film made with a budget of just \$10 million and it earned \$19.6 million world-wide, yet the critical response was not altogether positive. Part of the problem was that the publicity

campaign had somehow suggested that Simone was a wholly computer generated character, as she is in the film, when in fact she was played by model Rachel Roberts.

Clearly, Al Pacino's character Viktor Taransky is the modern equivalent of Victor Frankenstein, as his first name indicates. The two characters share many similarities. Like Frankenstein, Viktor is presented as a solitary, creative and successful man, though unlike his predecessor, Taransky has a career (nearly all of his films become a blockbuster) and a family life. He really loves his teen daughter and even his ex-wife, but Taransky is an incurable Don Juan and an easily obsessed individual. Viktor creates Simone quite by accident but once he gives life to this animated woman, to whom he lends his own ideas, he grows obsessed with her. Like Victor in *Frankenstein*, he just can't stop himself. As she becomes a celebrity, Viktor realizes that he has made a serious mistake, and that the way he is using Simone in films and advertisements, lying about her being real, is wrong. Like Frankenstein, however, Viktor sees this too late and must face the consequences, beginning by confessing to his ex-wife the truth. At least, no violence is involved for this is comedy.

Initially, Viktor controls Simone but, as falls for her charm, she starts controlling him, taking a life of her own so to speak. Viktor in a way falls in love with beautiful, angelic Simone, as it is always the case in the stories with artificial women, even though she does not even exist as a flesh-and-blood person. In a similar way, in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* the creature eventually controls Victor's life, once he finds that his weak spot is his family. Frankenstein is driven mad, just like Viktor almost goes insane. Ironically, whereas Frankenstein's monster needs to hide from everyone because of his ugliness, Viktor's beautiful Simone is universally loved, which also makes us reconsider the meaning of 'monster'. Also ironically, for Niccol's film is a satire, whereas in *Frankenstein*, Victor destroys the female monster fearing that she and the male monster might have children, in *S1mOne* Viktor sees no option but go on with his lies, inventing a romance with his creation and even a baby (as digital as its mother). Niccol's film connects in this way also with other stories about artificial women, such as *The Bride* (1985) or Alex Garland's *Ex Machina* (2014, see the factsheets in this volume), though of course, his plot also alludes to the myth of Pygmalion, the king who fell in love with a woman he sculpted and who was animated to become his wife Galatea.

Above all, *S1mOne* mocks celebrity which is, arguably, what Victor Frankenstein's monster would have met if he had been a person as attractive as Viktor Taransky's creature.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Lisa Kennedy, "A Star is Born", *LA Weekly*, 21 August 2002
<https://www.laweekly.com/film/a-star-is-born-2135228>

How difficult it becomes for Viktor to fess up once the lie of Simone has taken on a life of its own is utterly believable. How far he will go to perpetuate the fraud – and then end it– produces genuine laughs. Of course, the problem is not Simone's shallow, encoded roots. The bugaboo is the worshipful industry that congeals around the belief that she is flesh and blood. As Viktor's ultrareasonable daughter tells him: "We're fine with fake as long as you don't lie about it."

Richard Schickel, "Pixel Perfect", *Time*, 18 August 2002

<http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1101020826-338641,00.html>

Her skin tone is as perfect as the vacuous line of movie-star chatter Viktor concocts for her. Naturally, [Simone] becomes an overnight sensation. It is easy enough in the digital age to insert computer-generated actors into a movie; the problem is inserting them into life. How do you take a pile of pixels on a personal-appearance tour? Or place it on the Today show? Or have it accept an Oscar?

Mick La Salle, "The Making of a Star: Al Pacino at his Flailing Best in Sci-fi Satire *Simone*". *San Francisco Chronicle*, 23 August 2002

<https://www.sfgate.com/movies/article/The-making-of-a-star-Al-Pacino-at-his-flailing-2806658.php>

As the man who made the monster and now has to live with it, Pacino's a blast. He spends a lot of *Simone* in a room talking to himself, but those scenes are some of the movie's best. Keener is likable in yet another ostensibly unlikable role, as a craven studio head. And as Simone, Roberts gives a witty, satirical performance that's wise enough not to let us know that she knows it's witty.

Perhaps Niccol's wisest touch in *Simone* is that no one ever questions whether Simone is real. Niccol is saying that if she's onscreen, she is real; she's real by definition, more real than anyone else –and that that's a little sick.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/us/film677924.html>
- IMBD: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0258153/>
- Metracritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/s1m0ne/critic-reviews>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/simone_2002
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simone_\(2002_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simone_(2002_film))

Hulk (2003)

CREW & CAST

Director: Ang Lee

Screenplay: John Turman, Michael France, James Schamus (also story), Stan Lee & Jack Kirby (Marvel comic book characters)

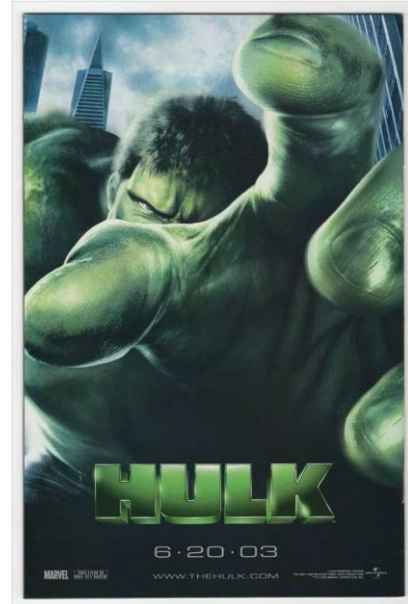
Producer: Avi Arad, Gale Anne Hurd, James Schamus

Main performers: Eric Bana (Bruce Banner), Jennifer Connelly (Betty Joss), Sam Elliot (General Thadeus E. Ross), Josh Lucas (Glenn Talbot), Nick Nolte (David Banner), Cara Buono (Edith Banner)

Companies: Universal Picture, Marvel Enterprises, Valhalla Motion Pictures, Good Machine

Nationality: USA

Duration: 2h 18'



PLOT SUMMARY

Bruce Banner, a genetic researcher trying to cure cancer, suffers an accident in his laboratory when he is exposed to gamma radiation and the nanomeds he is working on. Banner soon discovers that he becomes a green-skinned monster whenever anger overpowers him. In this state he destroys the lab and General Ross (his girlfriend Betty's father) has him arrested, while he investigates. Major Talbot, on his side, harasses Banner hoping to use his new abilities as a weapon. Progressively, Bruce recovers suppressed memories about how his abusive father's experiments may be the actual reason behind his new identity.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN

Ang Lee (Taiwan, 1954) is a well-known film director, known for mixing in his career modernity and tradition. The main films from his Asian period are the pioneering gay-themed comedy *The Wedding Banquet* (1993) and *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994), exposing the differences between Eastern and Western valued. Lee debuted in Hollywood with *Sense and Sensibility* (1996), from the novel by Jane Austen, winning the Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival. Later on, he made films as successful as *Brokeback Mountain* (2005, from the short story by E. Annie Proulx) and *Life of Pi* (2009, from the novel by Yann Martel).

The Hulk, the Marvel comic book character created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, first appeared in 1962. He was popularized by a TV series which run from 1977 to 1982, with Bill Bixby as Bruce Banner in repose and former bodybuilder turned actor Lou Ferrigno as his green-skinned double. Lee's *Hulk* came once Bryan Singer's *X-Men*

(2000) consolidated the renewed interest in superhero films. The American fans of the comic book series did not like Lee's film very much (its domestic gross was \$132 million, with an estimated budget of \$137 million) but it was better received abroad, earning in the end \$245 million. The CGI effects by Denis Muren and other ILM animators (used for Dobby's character in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*) were criticized, even though they are in the end more realistic than the excessive computer animation employed in Louis Letterrier's *The Incredible Hulk* (2008). Apparently, Marvel made this other film, with Edward Norton as the title character, hoping to erase the poor impression caused by Lee's version. This cannot have so bad, anyway, since *Hulk* got several nominations for the Saturn awards and other less well-known prizes.

Hulk is, like many Hollywood films, a story about fathers and sons. Bruce Banner's missing father, David, is guilty of running forbidden experiments which result in the death of his own wife and the suspected mutation of his child, whom he even tries to kill. In a way, David Banner is a sort of Frankenstein father to Bruce, seeing him as an experiment gone wrong rather than a son who needs love. Banner has suppressed his childhood memories but his constant nightmares plague him with a sense of guilt which has no real cause. The bad influence of the father is, in a way, what is wrong literally with Bruce and his alter-ego is an expression of that bad parental relationship. This does not mean that Banner cannot love, as his relationship with Betty Ross shows. What the couple ignore, in any case, is that her father, General Ross, worked in the past with David Banner, a collaboration that will necessarily affect them. Betty, of course, is not herself a monster but she plays the role that Frankenstein's monster desired a mate to play in his life: a companion, a friend, someone who understood him. Betty is also like the girl in the fairy-tale "Beauty and the Beast", quite capable of seeing the vulnerable man hiding behind the monster. As for his father, Bruce has no option but to reject his offer to join him in the dark side, which necessarily leads to an extremely violent confrontation.

Hulk's transformation and appearance also connect him, most obviously, with Dr Jekyll and his alter ego Mr Hyde. The respectable Bruce Banner is feared when he transforms into this green beast, which is not surprising because he is immensely destructive. Like Frankenstein's monster, Banner is afraid of what people can say but expresses nonetheless his resentment against his father/creator through violence. Instead of an action film, Lee chose to offer a psychological portrait of Banner's conflicted self, which many viewers disliked. That is why Lee attached so much importance to Banner's childhood. The seriousness of the character treatment contrasts with the ideas we have about monsters and, like *Frankenstein*, *Hulk* presents us with a man full of emotions. In this way, the movie makes us consider that maybe the monster is not Hulk at all but his father or even science's ambition. In this way, after realizing who the real monster is, Hulk can even become a hero. His duality is recycled as one of his strengths and not just a dangerous quality.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Mitchell Elvis, "Ang Lee on Comic Books and *Hulk* as Hidden Dragon", *The New York Times*, 22 June 2003

<https://www.nytimes.com/2003/06/22/movies/film-ang-lee-on-comic-books-and-hulk-as-hidden-dragon.html>

As for the Hulk himself, brought to the screen by computer animation, Mr. Lee's goal was to put the audience as deep inside the protagonist's thick green skin as possible. "I want the audience to have a taste of the Hulk; it's amoral, unconscious, primal –a very basic instinct. And when the action comes, they should be carried along by the emotions and enjoy the action along with the intense psychodrama. It's what I've been trying to do for the last three movies."

Tim Brayton, "The Angry Green Giant", *Alternate Ending*, 6 May 2012

<https://www.alternateending.com/2012/05/the-angry-green-giant.html>

Whatever problems it has as a story, at least *Hulk* tried, honestly and desperately, to push the comic book movie into new places emotionally and stylistically –of all the many superhero movies made since 2000, this is undoubtedly the most formally unique, if not the only one that is formally unique in anyway other than the point it occupies on the "urban grit vs. shiny colors" spectrum of cinematography. That it fails in almost every regard it possibly could have failed in, of course, is a shame: but better to attempt something really bold and end up a strange and compelling failure than e.g. wind up a cartoon version of Ed Norton and fling it at a cartoon version of Tim Roth.

Namrata Joshi, "Hulk", *Outlook India*, 25 August 2003

<https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/hulk/221188>

However, Ang Lee tries to do more. He gives a new turn to the character. Lee's long and ponderous Hulk is more about sadness and melancholia. And much of it stems from a father-son relationship gone hopelessly wrong. The real reason for Hulk's giant problem is his ambitious and vile scientist father (Nolte) who uses him for a genetic experiment, to make him superhuman. Why should a kid pay for the mistake of his parents? Is science the culprit here? Is there any code of ethics and morality, if at all, governing science? Can love heal?

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/us/film647706.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0286716/>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/hulk>
- Rotten Tomatoes: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/hulk>
- Wikipedia: <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hulk>

Van Helsing (2004)

CREW & CAST

Director: Stephen Sommers

Screenplay: Stephen Sommers, Bram Stoker (characters), Mary Shelley (characters), R.L. Stevenson (characters)

Producers: Stephen Sommers, Bob Ducsay

Main performers: Hugh Jackman (Van Helsing), Kate Beckinsale (Anne Valerious), Richard Roxburgh (Count Vladislaus Dracula), David Wenham (Carl), Shuler Hensley (Frankenstein's Monster)

Companies: Universal Pictures, The Sommers Company, Stillking Films, Carpathian Pictures (uncredited)

Nationality: USA

Duration: 2h 16'



PLOT SUMMARY

Van Helsing is a monster hunter who works for an ecumenical Vatican organization in order to destroy all evil creatures in the world. His new mission is to travel to Transylvania in order to defeat Count Dracula, a vampire who is working with Dr. Frankenstein's inventions to reproduce and perpetuate his own species. During his quest, Van Helsing meets a princess called Anne Valerious. Like Van Helsing, she intends to destroy Dracula so as to end an ancient curse put on her family many years ago. Van Helsing and Anne join forces to kill the vampire. Before their last attempt to defeat Dracula, Van Helsing and Anne bump into Frankenstein's monster. Although at first, they are afraid of him, they realise that his help is the key to their success.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

The first feature film by Stephen Sommers (Indianapolis, 1962) was *Catch Me If You Can* (1989), which he wrote and directed (a practice he has kept in all his films). He worked next for Walt Disney Pictures in the adaptation of Mark Twain's classic *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1993) and *Rudyard Kipling's The Jungle Book* (1994), both for Walt Disney Pictures. His best-known film is the family adventure *The Mummy* (1999) and the sequel *The Mummy returns* (2001). Sommers' most recent film is *Odd Thomas* (2013), from the horror novel by Dean R. Koontz.

Van Helsing (2004) received mainly negative reviews when it was released. Metacritic rates it 35/100 based on 38 reviews. Rotten Tomatoes reports as positive only 24% of the 224 surveyed reviews, with the average rating being 4.2/10. James

Berardinelli of *ReelViews* gave an extremely negative review, rating the film half a star out of four and calling it “the worst would-be summer blockbuster since *Battlefield Earth*”. Mick LaSalle of the *San Francisco Chronicle* greatly disliked the film, writing that “Sommers’ film just lies there, weighted down by a complete lack of wit, artfulness and internal logic”. Despite this critical disaster the gross world-wide earnings (\$300 million) double the budgets (\$160). *Van Helsing* got four Saturn Award nominations (including Best Horror Film) and a win for Alan Silvestri’s music.

Sommers’s pastiche is set mainly in Rome and Transylvania, and features a variety of well-known Gothic monsters: Frankenstein’s creature, Mr. Hyde, some werewolves and Count Dracula with his ‘family’, all borrowed from Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) and R.L. Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). *Van Helsing* takes its main inspiration, of course, from *Dracula*. As happens in the novel, Van Helsing is the hero who manages to kill the vampire, while Dracula and his brides are an evil threat to society. However, there are important differences. Whereas Stoker’s middle-aged Van Helsing works as a doctor and researcher in the novel, Sommers’s younger film version (played by Hugh Jackman) is a monster hunter chasing not only Dracula but also his many descendants (in the novel he doesn’t have any). In the novel Van Helsing collaborates with other male characters to save Mina; in the film Van Helsing works alone until he meets Anne (the character that replaces Mina).

Mary Shelly’s two main characters, Victor Frankenstein and his creation, already appear in the first scene of the film. In this monster mash-up Frankenstein is working for Count Dracula, who has asked him to create new life to perpetuate his species. Quite predictably, his experiment is discovered by the townspeople, who decide to chase Frankenstein and his monster and lynch them. Creator and creature end up in flames as they do at the end of Mary Shelley’s novel but by the action of the mob first introduced in James Whale’s 1931 film. However, as Van Helsing and Anne Valerious eventually discover, the monster still lives, hidden from human hatred. Yet, while the monster in *Frankenstein* is despised by almost every character in the novel, his equivalent in Sommers’ film is given a chance to prove himself. Even though they are afraid of him at first sight, Van Helsing and Anne ask him to help them with their mission. Whereas the monster in the novel is progressively dehumanised by the hatred of every single character, the monster in the film is gradually humanised by the change in the main characters’ perception of him. In the novel he brings destruction, in the film he ends up bringing salvation. It is worth mentioning that, once Frankenstein dies, Sommers transfers to Count Dracula the ability to create life by awakening his dead offspring, using the same machinery and methodology the Doctor used.

The inclusion of these diverse creatures in the same film makes the audience reconsider their interpretation of the term ‘monster’. Not only do we see several monsters appear in the same movie but we also perceive them from a different point of view, since their roles in this film differ from the canonical ones (the ones mainly shown in the original novels and their adaptations). Therefore, in this storyline we are given the chance to compare Frankenstein’s creature to the rest of the monsters (see below Marc Slavov’s review). We may realise that, although they have several aspects in common (basically their physical abnormality), their intentions and their complexity in terms of feelings are different. Whereas Dracula, his brides, the werewolves and Mr. Hyde are presented as primitive, evil and insensitive creatures, Frankenstein’s creation

appears to feel fear, sadness and grief, which leads us to perceive him as more human than the others. It is not clear whether all creatures which appear in the film are monsters since the beginning of their existence or they follow a process of alienation and discrimination which turn them into such evil creatures. However, in the film it is shown that the main aim of the ecumenical religious organisation for which Van Helsing works is not to kill the monsters but to 'civilise' them by reinforcing their inner goodness. Unfortunately, the human perception of the monsters is too corrupted and most characters just want to kill them, including Van Helsing himself. If he makes an exception with Frankenstein's creation this is because he doesn't perceive him as a threat. The film questions thus the idea that the monsters are naturally evil and suggests that some might even be rescued and perhaps integrated in society, though it is hard to see how Frankenstein's creature could lead a normal life.

FROM THE REVIEWS

A.O. Scott, "*Van Helsing*", *The New York Times*, 7 May 2004

<http://movies2.nytimes.com/2004/05/07/movies/07VAN.html>

The brawling ghouls, vampires and werewolves wreaking havoc in Dracula's castle under a full moon –to say nothing of the semi romantic mumbo jumbo passing between Anna and Van Helsing in midfight– are part of a clattering, hectic spectacle that, by the end, has almost completely run out of ideas and inspiration. Which is no great surprise because, despite the rococo obsessiveness of its special effects and its voracious sampling of past horror movies, *Van Helsing* is mostly content to offer warmed-over allusions and second-hand thrills.

Claudia Puig, "*Van Helsing*", *USA Today*, 5 June 2004

https://usatoday30.usatoday.com/life/movies/reviews/2004-05-06-van-helsing_x.htm

In the movie's most original twist, Van Helsing's orders come from a top-secret ecumenical religious cabal based in Rome. Muslim clerics work alongside Buddhist monks and Catholic priests in their collaborative effort to rid the world of evil. From our modern vantage point, the notion of such intra-religious cooperation seems almost as far-fetched as the existence of bat-winged vampires and hirsute werewolves.

Marc Savlov, "*Van Helsing*", *Austin Chronicle*, 7 May 2004

<https://www.austinchronicle.com/events/film/2004-05-07/van-helsing/>

With a script (by Sommers) that feels overpacked within the first few minutes, *Van Helsing* is simply far too much of a good thing, and although Frankenstein's Monster comes off better than anyone else, the film suffers from some truly inane dialogue and pacing that will likely cause tachycardia in members of the audience old enough to recall who Dwight Frye was.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/us/film491093.html>
- IMDb: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0338526/>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/van-helsing/critic-reviews>

- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/van_helsing
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Van_Helsing_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Van_Helsing_(film))

I, Robot (2004)

CREW & CAST

Director: Alex Proyas

Screenplay: Jeff Vintar (also story), Akiva Goldsman, Issac Asimov (suggested by his short stories)

Producers: Laurence Mark, John Davis, Topher Dow, Michael Lee Baron, Wyck Godfrey

Main performers: Will Smith (Del Spooner), Bridget Moynahan (Susan Moynahan), Alan Tudyk (Sonny), James Cromwell (Dr Alfred Lanning), Bruce Greenwood (Lawrence Roberston)

Companies: Twentieth Century Fox, Mediastream Vierte Film GmbH & Co.4, Vermarktungs KG, Davis Entertainment, Laurence Mark Productions, Overbrook Entertainment, Canlaws Productions

Nationality: USA/Germany

Duration: 1h 55'



PLOT SUMMARY

In the year 2035, humanoid robots live in harmony with humans, mostly serving them. Dr Alfred Lanning an expert in robotics is found dead, apparently because of a suicide. Del Spooner, a technophobic Chicago homicide detective, is not so sure. His investigation leads to the discovery of robot Sonny, a unique creation. Sonny can avoid obeying the Three Laws of Robotics and feels emotions. Del Spooner also discovers important secrets and surprising discoveries which are related to USR (United States Robotics). His discoveries lead to a series of consequences which might end the existence of human beings and place the robots in a dominant position.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Alex Proyas (Egypt, 1963) is a well-known film director, screenwriter and producer, whose films include *The Crow* (1994), *Dark City* (1998), *Garage Days* (2002), *I, Robot* (2004), *Knowing* (2009) and *Gods of Egypt* (2016). Proyas, raised in Australia, is also known for his TV commercials and music videos. Screen playwright Jeff Vintar had participated in the script of *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* (2001) before writing *I, Robot* but his career is quite otherwise quite limited. His co-writer Akiva Goldsman has, in contrast, one of the most solid careers as film and television writer, director and producer. His many scripts include Oscar-award winner *A Beautiful Mind* (2001).

I, Robot (2004) was one of the most popular movies in the year of its release. With a budget of \$120 million, its worldwide box office takings were \$347 million. Proyas's movie earned nominations for several awards and in several categories,

including an Oscar-award nomination for Best Achievement in Visual Effects, its most outstanding feature.

Proyas's movie, like Spielberg's *A.I.* (see the factsheet in this volume), is set in a near future in which humaniform robots are common. As the title suggests, it borrows from Isaac Asimov (1920-1994) famous short story collection *I, Robot* (1950) the concept of the Three Laws that all robots must obey: 1. A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm; 2. A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law; 3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws. However, not much else is borrowed from his stories. Whereas Asimov made it totally impossible for a robot to disobey these laws (its positronic brain would otherwise freeze out) in this movie Dr. Lanning creates a robot, Sonny, who can choose not to obey them. He does so, as Spooner finds out, because VIKI (Virtual Interactive Kinetic Intelligence), the AI which controls the robots, intends to wipe up humanity to save planet Earth from us and only the independently-minded Sonny can ensure humanity's survival.

I, Robot descends from *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley and connects with what Asimov called the 'Frankenstein complex': the fear that our robots might rebel against us –the Three Laws were formulated precisely to prevent this possible rebellion. Like Frankenstein's creature, Sonny is rejected and mistrusted because it is different and has superhuman abilities. Other characters abandon their prejudice against it, but Del Spooner wants to eliminate him. He thinks that Sonny should not exist because it is a danger for humanity and not its saviour. Neither Frankenstein's monster nor Sonny are born evil but the negative reactions they constantly receive make them take wrong choices and feel resentful. Of course, here VIKI is the true monster, for it manages to start a robotic rebellion that nothing can seemingly stop, whereas Sonny behaves heroically as its maker Lanning intended. The problem is that the film's end suggest that Sonny has learned important lessons from VIKI and Spooner might be right in his suspicions against it.

The reviews found the movie mostly entertaining but predictable, more a vehicle for Will Smith than for Isaac Asimov, whose excellent stories were intended to offer a positive view of robots (thus contesting Mary Shelley's technophobia). *I, Robot* keeps the name of Asimov's top robotic engineer Susan Calvin for the bland female main character but it is not at all the movie Asimov deserves. Better luck next time, if there is a next time.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Claudia Puig, "Hard to Warm Up to Tepid *I, Robot*", *USA Today*, 15 July 2004

https://usatoday30.usatoday.com/life/movies/reviews/2004-07-15-i-robot_x.htm

Smith has a secret that becomes pretty obvious long before it's revealed, so the movie is hardly a suspenseful thriller. The final protracted battle between man and 'bot may appeal to teenage boys, but the rest of us will find it overly long and fairly dull. Smith does drive a cool, high-tech Audi. And a few of the chase scenes in which he's involved are exciting enough. But sitting through *I, Robot* is a fairly numbing experience. Performances, plot and pacing are as mechanical as the hard-wired cast.

Desson Thomson, "Will Smith's Robot Jackpot", *Washington Post*, 16 July 2004
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A51838-2004Jul15.html??noredirect=on>

Spooner has never liked robots, which have become ubiquitous in 2035. Chicago, and the rest of the world, teems with them. As created by the benevolent Dr. Alfred Lanning (James Cromwell), the NS-5 robots, which have positronic brains, are built to serve and protect humankind. They are almost human, with their hard-wire circuits designed to obey three simple laws. All of them have to do with safety for humans first and robots second. These robots would never, never, never do anything scary or harmful toward people.

Maitland McDonagh, "*I, Robot*", *TV Guide Magazine*, July 2004
<https://www.tvguide.com/movies/i-robot/review/137430/>

When is *I, Robot* not *I, Robot*? When it's a script called *Hardwired* conflated with elements of Isaac Asimov's seminal robot tales, including bits of the nine loosely connected short stories collected in 1950's *I, Robot* and snippets of the later robot novels, massaged to suit Will Smith's action-guy persona. There's so little Asimov in the mix that his contribution is relegated to a 'suggested by' credit, and sci-fi savvy moviegoers will recognize the movie's debt to *Blade Runner* (1982), *RoboCop* (1987) and *2001* (1968). The surprise: Derivativeness aside, it's an unexpectedly engaging futuristic mystery that hinges on the confounding possibility that a mechanical being may have murdered cutting-edge roboticist Dr. Alfred Lanning (James Cromwell), even though standard robot programming should make such a crime impossible.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/us/film339602.html>
- IMDB <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0343818/>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/i-robot>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/i_robot
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I,_Robot_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I,_Robot_(film))

The Island (2005)

CREW & CAST

Director: Michael Bay

Screenplay: Caspian Tredwell-Owen (also story), Alex Kurtzman, Roberto Orci

Producers: Michael Bay, Ian Bryce, Walter Parkes

Main performers: Ewan McGregor (Lincoln Six-Echo/Tom Lincoln), Scarlett Johansson (Jordan Two-Delta/Sarah Jordan), Djimon Hounsou (Albert), Sean Bean (Dr. Merrick), Steve Buscemi (McCord), Michael Clarke Duncan (Starkweather Two Delta / Jamal Starkweather)

Companies: DreamWorks Pictures, Warner Bros., Parkes/MacDonald Productions, K/O Paper Products, Platinum Dunes

Nationality: US

Duration: 2h 18'



PLOT SUMMARY

Lincoln Six Echo is part of a 'perfect' community that lives completely isolated from the world, which supposedly has become uninhabitable after a deadly plague. He and all his fellow citizens hope nonetheless to win the lottery to travel to the Island, the last uncontaminated spot in the world, where life is expected to be eventually restored in full. However, Lincoln, who has questioned his existence most of his life, discovers that he has been living a completely terrifying lie. When his friend Jordan Two Delta is elected to go to the Island, Lincoln decides to tell her the truth, escape together and prevent their certain death. As fugitives, they find proof of the dark reality of their lives and try next to save their community.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN

Michael Bay (Los Angeles, 1957) is one of the most popular American action movie filmmakers. His main hit is the WWII epic *Pearl Harbor* (2001), though Bay is mainly known for blockbusters such as *The Rock* (1996), *Armageddon* (1998), *The Island* (2005) or his very successful *Transformers* saga. Caspian Tredwell-Owen is a British screenwriter mainly known for co-writing Bay's film along with Alex Kurtzman and Roberto Orci. He has also written the screenplay for *Beyond Borders* (2003) and *Profile of a Killer* (2012), a thriller which he also directed. Kurtzman and Orci tend to work together and they both have collaborated in writing the screenplay of films such as *Mission: Impossible III* (2006) and *Star Trek* (2009).

The Island was not as well-received as it was expected to be, particularly after Bay's previous successful releases. Some critics have associated the bad reception to

its limited marketing and its misleading trailer (limited by fear of spoilers). However, the film still managed to earn \$162 million world-wide, having been made with a budget of \$126 million. Even so, *The Island* was considered to be a box-office bomb. It received, anyway, a considerable number of nominations, including that for a Saturn Award as Best Science Fiction Film.

Michael Bay's film is set in a dystopian future (in 2019) in which a corporation runs a business based on human cloning as a response to people's desire to live longer. The clients' clones are secretly created with the only intention of their being used for organ harvesting. The clones, though, receive fake memory implants while they are being 'gestated' and believe that they are ordinary persons. Once they are born, they are eventually told that the Earth has been contaminated and that they must remain in their sterilised community for safety. If they win a highly popular raffle, then they can move to the Island, the last uncontaminated spot in the world in order to repopulate it. Dr. Merrick and his mega-corporation are very clearly the 21st century equivalent of Victor Frankenstein. Here, Bay breaks with the traditional image of the solitary and crazy scientist, presenting him instead as part of a big company run by an overambitious CEO. Although Dr. Merrick is the modern counterpart of Dr. Frankenstein, he does not share the same ideals nor good intentions that motivate the young scientist. Hence, we could claim that Dr. Merrick is a corrupted version of Mary Shelley's scientist since the real motivations behind his business are dishonest and selfish.

While in *Frankenstein* Victor creates an atrocious superhuman who is feared by all he encounters due to his monstrous appearance, Bay's clones look like regular humans and are not an object of fear. Nevertheless, both creations share some similitudes, such as their being born with an adult appearance but a child's mentality. The clones gradually learn how to speak, write and behave like ordinary persons, just as Frankenstein's monster does by observing the De Lacey's family. Lincoln turns out to be very intelligent and more curious than the rest about his existence. Like Victor's creature, he is horrified to discover his real origins, even more so by the realization of how his body will be used. Lincoln already has, so to speak, a monstrous bride in Jordan, the first to know the truth from him. Their first contacts with the real world as fugitives, also allow them to discover love and sexuality, which they have been forced to repress in their community, which tightly controls emotional interaction. It is easy to establish a psychological parallelism between Shelley's monster and Lincoln, for after knowing about his origins each desperately looks for freedom (particularly in *the Island*), acceptance, and love. A main difference is that since Lincoln is part of a community, once he gets evidence of the truth, he chooses to free the rest of the clones and give them the rights they deserve.

All in all, Michael Bay's film punishes Dr. Merrick for his actions and essentially, for having taken advantage of the clones, who after all, are ordinary human beings despite their origin. This is not very different from Mary Shelley's position in *Frankenstein* since she also condemns Victor for having surpassed the boundaries of life and morality. Many critics have praised Bay's film for dealing with the controversial, delicate topic of cloning (which is not far on our horizon) but complained that he does not go into it in depth. Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* (2005), adapted for the screen in 2010 (see the factsheet in this volume) seems more satisfactory in its treatment of exactly the same topic as *The Island*. It must be noted,

however, that debates on cloning usually focus on how to revive a lost beloved person and that cloning techniques are already used to clone pets. Organs for transplants will most likely be grown in vats separately and from a person's own stem cells. Growing one's clone as a complete person for eventual organ harvesting just makes no economic sense, beyond its obvious immorality.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Philippa Hawker, "The Island", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 October 2005

<https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/movies/the-island-20051004-gdm6yq.html>

The Island's narrative incorporates issues of technology, responsibility, ethics and exploitation, as well as larger questions about identity and what it is to be human, but they are never properly developed. Amid the action extravaganzas and brief flurries of suspense they function as expedient plot points rather than being allowed to resonate. Anomalies and implications are raised, then carelessly chucked aside, and the wrap-up is unconvincingly feelgood (...)

David Edelstein, "Treat or Trick?" *Slate*, 20 July 2005

<https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2005/07/hustle-flow-is-mostly-jive-plus-the-island.html>

The movie seems dead-on in suggesting that, as we inch toward a new world of genetic engineering, there will be a new class of genetic haves and have-nots. New forms of life will arise, with new tests to determine what is and is not a sentient being. Money will feed the science and fuel the breakthroughs; morality will play a losing game of catch-up. Everything here is intelligently extrapolated (the story is credited to the dauntingly named Caspian Tredwell-Owen) from our current ethical debate over stem-cell research and cloning.

Scott Foundas, "Buy Me a Liver", *LA Weekly*, 21 July 2005

<https://www.laweekly.com/film/buy-me-a-liver-2140327>

Nary an original idea abounds in *The Island*, though the movie does entertain a litany of thorny moral quandaries that seem well-timed to the ongoing debates over stem-cell research and the direction of the Supreme Court. Not that Bay or his trio of screenwriters (Caspian Tredwell-Owen, Alex Kurtzman and Roberto Orci) dig very deep beneath those ideas' hot-button surfaces. *The Island* is the sort of picture that generates lots of pseudo think-pieces in the major newspapers and magazines, but doesn't give you half as much pause to consider mankind's future as, say, [Spielberg's] *War of the Worlds*.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/us/film803116.html>
- IMDb: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0399201/>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/the-island>
- Rotten Tomatoes: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/island>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Island_\(2005_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Island_(2005_film))

WALL·E (2008)

CREW & CAST

Director: Andrew Stanton

Screenplay: Andrew Stanton (also story), Jim Reardon, Pete Doctor (story)

Producers: Jim Morris, Lindsey Collins

Main performers (voices): Ben Burtt (WALL·E/M-O/Robots), Elissa Knight (EVE), Jeff Garlin (Captain), Fred Willard (Shelby Forthright), John Ratzenberger (John), Kathy Najimy (Mary)

Companies: Walt Disney Pictures, Pixar Animation Studios

Nationality: United States

Duration: 1h 38'



PLOT SUMMARY

WALL·E is an intelligent, sensitive robot designed to recycle and clean all the mess humans have left behind on a destroyed planet Earth, abandoned to its fate as impossible to recover for life. WALL·E thinks the humans are dead but they actually live on board a spaceship run by the same company that promoted consumerism. WALL·E finds itself alone until one day robot EVE lands on Earth, with the mission of finding any sign of life that could bring hope to humanity. Her presence leads WALL·E onto a space journey that will determine the destiny of humanity.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Andrew Stanton (Massachusetts, 1965) has been working for Pixar since 1990 as director, screen writer and executive producer. His admirable career includes *WALL·E* and other well-known animated films, such as *A Bug's Life* (1998, as co-director), *Finding Nemo* (2003) and its sequel *Finding Dory* (2016), besides all four *Toy Story* films, which he co-wrote. Stanton has also worked for television, recently directing two episodes of *Stranger Things* (2017). He has also worked on the video games inspired by some of his movies.

WALL·E, the sixth film which Stanton directed and the eighth he wrote, was critically acclaimed and praised by audiences around the globe. The film received an Oscar, a Golden Globe, and a BAFTA for Best Animated Feature Film, and Stanton himself got an Oscar nomination for Best Original Screenplay (together with Jim Reardon and Pete Doctor, also part of the Pixar team). The movie reaped many other

nominations and awards, besides grossing \$520 million worldwide (from a \$180 million budget).

Stanton himself came up with the initial idea for WALL·E's look, when using a pair of binoculars (recycled as the robot's head). The robots called WALL·E, which stands for 'Waste Allocation Load Lifters Earth-Class', are originally designed to clean the planet in as little time as possible so that hopefully the problem of pollution can be reduced and humans need not leave Earth. However, human greediness cannot be contained, waste gets out of control, and there is no alternative but to depart. Subsequently, all the WALL·E robots are turned off but one, which is forgotten and remains alone on Earth doing his task as programmed with no pauses. Little does he know that he will end up determining the fate of humankind.

There are echoes of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in WALL·E's uniqueness and loneliness. Both Victor Frankenstein's creature and the cute robot are sentient beings capable of feeling emotion much beyond what their makers expect. Rather than being rejected, WALL·E is neglected by humans but he responds to that neglect with what can only be called heroism. Although, at the beginning, WALL·E might be seen as another useless product of a capitalist society, he turns out to be the film's most humane character. His curiosity for everything that surrounds him makes him appreciate all the big and small things in life, more than humans ever do. WALL·E might not be a person, but he possesses a bigger soul than any human being.

There is nothing to indicate that WALL·E is 'male' but the presence of robot EVE, whose name is clearly coded-female despite meaning "Extra-terrestrial Vegetation Evaluator", genders both. 'She' completes 'his' personality, as Victor's creature expects a female mate to complete his own. Of course, WALL·E's 'love story' with EVE will never involve bearing a child, since his body is not designed for that. Hers is a different matter, though. When EVE places a tiny plant inside her body, she is directly associated with pregnancy and motherhood, since her mission is to take care of the seedling as a precious sign of life. In this sense, EVE seems inspired by the Biblical Eve and WALL·E can be read as a lonely Adam, even though his Earth is no Paradise. EVE's sleek body and clearly superior robotic technology might even suggest that she is 'better' than WALL·E but he is also beautiful in his own way. We, as the audience, get impressed by his inner beauty, made up of his hard-working spirit, intelligence, bravery, and, above all, kindness. He is not just cute, a mere matter of the right aesthetics, but an amazing, inspiring, joyful character who always sees a rainbow behind the clouds.

FROM THE REVIEWS

A.O. Scott, "In a World Left Silent, One Heart Beeps", *The New York Times*, 27 June 2008

<https://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/27/movies/27wall.html>

Wall·E's tender regard for the material artefacts of a lost civilization is understandable. After all, he too is a product of human ingenuity. And the genius of *Wall·E* (...), lies in its notion that creativity and self-destruction are sides of the same coin. The human species was driven off its home planet –Wall·E eventually learns that we did not die out– by an economy consecrated to the manufacture and consumption

of ever more stuff. But some of that stuff turned out to be useful, interesting, and precious. And some of it may even possess something like a soul.

Xan Brooks, "Wall-E", *The Guardian*, 18 July 2008

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2008/jul/18/animation>

WALL-E (the character) is eminently lovable, by far the film's most human inhabitant. And yet *WALL-E* (the movie) actually has more in common with EVE. It is an exquisitely rendered piece of work; beautiful, flawless, serious in its intent and hermetically sealed. You can admire it to the skies and back. You can even learn to love it from a distance. But does Andrew Stanton's film amount to much more than a brilliant aesthetic exercise? I'm not convinced it does.

Staff, "Wall-E", *Time Out*, 15 July 2008

<https://www.timeout.com/london/film/wall-e>

By rights, Wall-E shouldn't be cute in the Bambi or Dumbo sense of the word: he's battered and fading and the only noises he makes are computerised drawls not dissimilar to ET's limited lingo. But Wall-E is alluring, and not because he's got big eyes or dangling eyelashes but because he's smart, hard-working, with a romantic side, and is hopelessly addicted to watching clips of Michael Crawford and Barbra Streisand in Gene Kelly's *Hello Dolly!* on a video screen. He's everything we should have been if we hadn't put all our energy into destroying the planet.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/us/film744679.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0910970/>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/wall-e>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/wall_e
- Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WALL-E>

Splice (2009)

CREW & CAST

Director: Vincenzo Natali

Screenplay: Vincenzo Natali (also story), Antoinette Terry Bryant (also story), Doug Taylor

Producer: Steve Hoban

Main performers: Adrien Brody (Clive Nicoli), Sarah Polley (Elsa Kast), Delphine Chanéac (Dren), Brandon McGibbon (Gavin Nicoli), Simona Maicanescu (Joan Chorot)

Companies: Gaumont, Copperheart Entertainment, Dark Castle Entertainment, Ontario Media Development Corporation, Senator Entertainment Co

Nationality: Canada/France

Duration: 1h 43'



PLOT SUMMARY

Genetic engineers Elsa Kast and Clive Nicoli, employed by Newstead Pharmaceuticals, specialize in creating hybrids of different animal species. The couple, in search of greater recognition by the scientific community, wants to mix human and animal DNA. Despite the refusal of their superiors, they end up creating, in secret, a completely new human-animal hybrid which they name Dren. Although Clive is reluctant to keep Dren alive, Elsa convinces him to continue with the experiment. Dren grows at an extremely fast speed and the situation begins to get out of their control. Their creation next develops feelings for Clive and becomes a threat to her own creators and to humanity.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN

Vicenzo Natali (Detroit, 1969) is an American-Canadian film director, screenwriter and producer. He debuted as a director with *Cube* (1997) which quickly became a cult movie, especially in France and Japan, winning besides and award for Best Canadian First Feature at the Toronto International Film Festival. Natali continued his career with *Cypher* (2001) and *Nothing* (2003), both science-fiction films. After *Splice* Natali has been working in television series, recently directing for Netflix *In the Tall Grass* (2019, from a story by Stephen King). *Splice* is the only feature film scripted by Antoinette Terry Bryant. Co-writer Doug Taylor's other main film is *Blood Honey* (2017).

Splice is an independent film, financed by various Canadian and French companies, and even with participation by the famous Mexican director Guillermo del

Toro. It premiered at the Sitges/Catalonia Fantastic Film Festival in 2010, after which Warner Bros distributed the movie in the United States. Natali's film, however, did not recoup its \$30 million budget, earning just \$26 million worldwide. *Splice* did receive a considerable number of nominations (including two to the Saturn Awards for Best Science Fiction Film and Best Make-up) and a few wins, but even so it divided opinions and disappointed many *Cube* fans. The special effects were praised but the plot was considered to be too slow, bizarre and even disturbing, despite being somehow compelling.

Splice is set in the present day, not far from reality, and focuses on two successful scientists who work genetically altering animals for a private pharmaceutical company. Together they have created a hybrid from which various proteins can be useful in various medical sectors. These ambitious geneticists want to improve their experiment and mix human and animal DNA with the hope of being able to cure terminal diseases and improve the lifestyle of all human beings. For that, they, like Frankenstein, decide to break the ethical rules of science and end up creating a new living being: Dren, a carnivorous, amphibious female. Both Dren and Victor's male monster are created, then, by persons that wilfully ignore the consequences of their actions. This similarity is not a coincidence since Natali himself has recognized being inspired by Mary Shelley to the point that the names of the protagonists allude to the protagonists of *Bride of Frankenstein* (1931). Natali has declared that *Splice* "is not a story about a monster, but about people who become a monster, as if it were a *Frankenstein* of the 21st century" (DVD comments, 2010).

However, there are important differences between the different stories regarding the relationship between the monster and its creators. In *Frankenstein* Victor decides to reject his creation and categorizes him as an error. In *Splice*, despite Clive's initial rejection, Elsa welcomes Dren. In the original story, the father-son relationship is explored whereas in the film the roles are reversed to a mother-daughter relationship. Elsa, despite her initial fear of having a child, ends up treating Dren as her own daughter. Even the relationship between Elsa and her own mother plays a very important factor in the movie. In this way, the film takes a more feminine approach to the matter of artificial creation, though not an easy one. In *Frankenstein*, Victor decides not to create a female version of the monster for fear that they will reproduce and end up creating a new species. Dren's story initially considers her desire for Clive but takes an unexpected turn when she becomes a male and his reproductive interest focuses then on Elsa.

Apart from the Frankenstein myth, Vincenzo Natali has been visually inspired by the creatures of various films such as *The Fly* (1986) by David Cronenberg (see the factsheet in this volume), *Alien* (1979) by Ridley Scott or *Eraserhead* (1977) by David Lynch. Even so, the director's greatest inspiration are the scientific advances of our time. The Vacanti mouse experiment, by which a pseudo-human ear was grown on the back of the animal, was a very important point, Natali has claimed, in the creation of this film. Natali was awed by the very powerful image and empathized with the weakness of the mouse. For this reason, he preferred to stress Dren's emotions rather than the danger s/he poses by questioning the ethics that Clive and Elsa abuse in creating a new life. Or once Dren is born.

Clive, who at first would not hesitate to kill Dren, begins to feel fond of her to the point of having sex. Elsa initially likes Dren but her opinion changes as the creature

grows. Elsa stops seeing Dren with amazement and starts treating her as the experiment she was in the beginning. This is when Dren rebels against their creators. Dren and Frankenstein's monster perceive their rejection and they end up becoming the worst version of themselves. It is then when the film questions the moral legitimacy of this type of investigations. Natali has stated that the intention of the film is not to criticize biotechnological advances, but to show "what is human in the monster and what is monstrous in humans, what is born in scientists after creating that thing and what kind of doors open that creation in them". Yet, despite the intentions of the director, *Splice* does not break away from all the topics of the *Frankenstein* sub-genre and presents a rather pessimistic perspective on the dangers of science and the creation of monsters.

Several critics have pointed out the important role of ethics in film, not only those of the two protagonists but also the ethics of the "shady corporations" (Dargis, 2010) that finance these experiments. Their secrecy allows the couple to hide from the regulations that many public companies must obey. It is thanks to corrupt pharma companies that Elsa and Clive have the necessary tools to create a new life. They do not ask themselves whether it is correct or not to do this. This ambition on the part of the company to surpass the limits of nature itself remains intact until the end of the film. A clear example of this is how the company gives its support to Elsa to continue with her pregnancy by the 'male' Dren. Another aspect that many criticize is how Elsa and Clive, despite having great minds, never stop making bad decisions. The lack of clear-headed reasoning of the protagonists means that the viewer cannot empathize with them at any time. In addition, from the moment that Elsa and Clive begin to be too sentimentally involved the plot loses interest. The 'incestuous' relationship between Clive and Dren, intended to show how exotically attractive Dren is, results in an a rather uncomfortable scene, easy to mock (see Bradshaw's review).

In short, *Splice* tries hard to avoid the topics of this kind of story but fails. Natali wants to offer an alternative version of Mary Shelley's famous monster, questioning as she does with Victor who the real monsters are. The problem is that, unlike Frankenstein's creature, Dren is too alien for us to sympathise with his/her plea.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Manohla Dargis, "*Splice*", *The New York Times*, 3 June 2010

<https://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/04/movies/04splice.html>

Mr. Natali, whose earlier films include *Cube*, hasn't reinvented the horror genre. But with *Splice* he has done the next best thing with an intelligent movie that, in between its small boos and an occasional hair-raising jolt, explores chewy issues like bioethics, abortion, corporate-sponsored science, commitment problems between lovers and even Freudian-worthy family dynamics.

Peter Bradshaw, "*Splice*", *The Guardian*, 22 July 2010

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2010/jul/22/splice-review>

Splice is no masterpiece but it has funny "creature effects" and makeup, forthright storytelling and a robust, deadpan insistence on its own apparent seriousness, the only way for its comic qualities to come across. It may well become a cult favourite, like Natali's *Cube* –it doesn't take the issues of science ethics overly

seriously, and it certainly doesn't belabour its audience with anything as sanctimonious as a moral, although if it did, this might usefully read: don't for heaven's sake have sex with a biotech demi-human crossbreed, it's a very bad idea!

Lisa Schwarzbaum, "*Splice*", *Entertainment Weekly*, 4 January 2015

<https://ew.com/article/2010/06/04/splice-2/>

Like an exciting experimental genetic strain bred of time-tested DNA, the cool, unwieldy sci-fi horror-thriller *Splice* can trace its cinematic ancestry back to *Frankenstein*. Yet as co-written and directed with obsessive passion by Vincenzo Natali (*Cube*), the movie is a cheeky, great-looking, thoughtfully loopy creature feature about the lure and dangers of cutting-edge gene splicing.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film779787.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1017460/>
- Metracritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/splice>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1208173_splice
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Splice_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Splice_(film))

Moon (2009)

CREW & CAST

Director: Duncan Jones

Screenplay: Duncan Jones (story), Nathan Parker

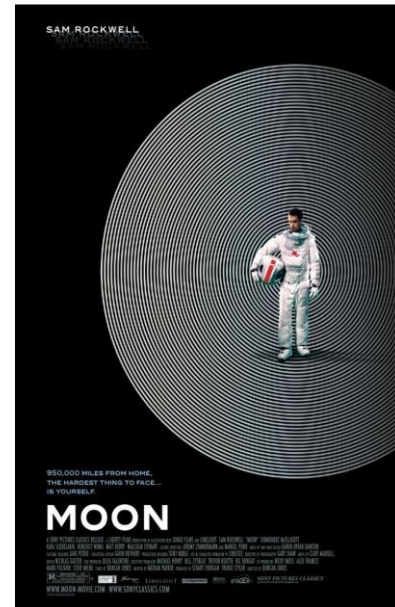
Producers: Trudie Styler, Stuart Fenegan

Main performers: Sam Rockwell (Sam Bell), Kevin Spacey (voice, GERTY), Dominique McElligott (Tess Bell), Rosie Shaw (Little Eve), Kaya Scodelario (Eve)

Companies: Sony Pictures Classics, Stage 6 Films, Liberty Films UK, Xingu Films, Limelight, Lunar Industries, Independent

Nationality: UK

Duration: 1h 37'



PLOT SUMMARY

In a not-so-far-away future, the Moon has been colonized to mine the abundant Helium-3 out of its soil. Lunar Industries has built there Sarang Station. The facilities are fully automated and only need a single human to overview the process of mining and send the material back to Earth. This task is carried out by Sam Bell with the help of the artificial intelligence named GERTY. Near the end of Sam's three year contract with Lunar Industries things go awry when he has an accident with one of the harvesters and wakes up in the infirmary after falling unconscious. GERTY forbids him to leave the base, but Sam manages to go back to the harvester only to discover a badly injured man, looking exactly like him.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Duncan Jones (London, 1971) is mostly known for his work as a film director and (unfairly) for being singer-artist David Bowie's first son. After attending London Film School, Jones worked in commercial television, a stint including the controversial advertising campaign for the fashion label French Connection. In 2009 he directed *Moon*, his feature film debut. He has directed three other science-fiction films since then, to modest critical acclaim: *Source Code* (2011), *Warcraft* (2016) and *Mute* (2018).

Moon, a British film, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival, where it was well-received, and after which Sony Pictures acquired the rights for its theatrical distribution in the United States. The film won a BAFTA award for Outstanding Debut and a British Independent Film Award for Best British Independent Film, as well as other minor prizes in festivals for its director (for example in Edinburgh, Sitges, and

from the London Film Critics Circle). Jones worked on a very tight budget of just \$5 million, cutting all possible corners from production, using a minimal cast and shooting in old, abandoned BBC sets. *Moon* ended up grossing \$9.7 million world-wide and becoming a cult film very much loved by sf fans. Reviewers and film critics stressed the film's interplay with previous science fiction classics such as *Silent Running* (1972) and the much revered *2001* by Stanley Kubrick. Apparently even NASA workers welcomed *Moon* as a realistic representation of actual work in outer space.

The plot, from a story by Jones himself developed into a script by Nathan Parker, follows the main character, Sam Bell (played by Sam Rockwell), as he recovers from an injury sustained in the Moon facilities of Sarang Station. Sam is going to finally see his little daughter when he gets back home in three weeks, after his contract with Lunar Industries expires. However, when Sam discovers a clone of his own body in the vehicle in which he crashed, his sense of reality collapses. Sam eventually realizes that he himself is just another clone of the real Sam Bell, who continues his life on Earth and has apparently sold the rights over his body to the company. Here, Lunar Industries, but also humanity in general, assume the role of Victor Frankenstein, while the 'monsters' are the many Sam clones and the artificial intelligence GERTY. The difference is that, unlike Shelley's monster, both the clones and GERTY have been created to play a functional role: GERTY as a means of controlling the Moon and the clones, Sam Bell to take care of the facilities.

Victor Frankenstein is a mere metaphor for all humans put in a nutshell. We quite enjoy playing God, creating life out of pure curiosity and as an egotistic act (in Shelley's novel pushed to an extreme, perhaps not so extreme in present day's humanity), even when we do not know how to deal with that life after having created it. A case in point are the artificial intelligences like GERTY, a descendant of Stanley Kubrick's HAL 9000 in *2001: Space Odyssey* (1968, see the factsheet in this volume), with its trademark coldness and indifference towards human life. Another is Sam, a metaphor for all the expendable workers. As Sam's first and second clones argue and fight each other, we realize how absurd their existence is: quarrelling about ideals that are not theirs, feeling emotions triggered by their implanted memories, tricked by fake family video-calls. They feel confused by their own existence after realizing that they are mere clones, artificial replicas of someone who exists apart from them. They are trapped inside bodies that are not as real as they believed, but with feelings that do feel real to them, despite not being their own feelings, as the possessive cannot be applied to their case. Nothing can be *theirs*. On and on goes the cycle, as the Sams realize that they are not supposed to know about their origin and will never be accepted as ordinary humans, though ironically, this is what they are: lonely, afraid, lost. The monster, we fear, is ourselves exploited by others.

That is the main link between *Moon* and *Frankenstein*, the alienation felt by all humans and subsequently by their own creations. Humans create living creatures artificially to fill their ego, or to exploit them in their benefit, leading to conflict as these are indeed living creatures. A very human curiosity leads them to develop feelings and a way of thinking, transforming what was once a mere tool into a monstrous creation that will eventually wreck civilization as it comes in contact with it. Kimberley Jones's remarks (see below) about the maturity and evolution of the Sam Bells along the three years on the Moon (which explains their differences), could be perfectly applied to *Frankenstein* –these artificial beings learn even faster than

ordinary humans. When confronted with real emotions and the immoral events of their birth, their anger flares up. Victor's creature confronts his maker, demanding some kind of compensation for his sad life. Sam prepares to head back to Earth to face his original self, who knows with what results?

Incidentally, the motif of cloning links *Moon* to *The Island* (2005) and *Never Let Me Go* (2010) but offers, arguably, an uglier perspective. While in those other films the clones are created for their organs, Sam is a slave who does not know he is enslaved. He might be the ideal worker of the future as *Moon* hints.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Roger Ebert, "Moon", *Chicago Sun-Times*, 17 June 2009

<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/moon-2009>

"Moon" is a superior example of that threatened genre, hard science-fiction, which is often about the interface between humans and alien intelligence of one kind or other, including digital. John W. Campbell Jr., the godmother of this genre, would have approved. The movie is really all about ideas. It only seems to be about emotions. How real are our emotions, anyway? How real are we? Someday I will die. This laptop I'm using is patient and can wait.

Kimberley Jones, "Moon", *Austin Chronicle*, 10 July 2009

<https://www.austinchronicle.com/events/film/2009-07-10/moon/>

A Gerty error results in two Sam Bells at once, and new Sam –quick to anger and Tom Cruise-cool in aviator shades and flight suit– is a startling throwback for original Sam: a corporeal reminder of the man he used to be, one he went all the way to the Moon to improve upon. Nathan Parker's script (from Duncan's original story idea) doesn't belabor the point, but there's something rather thrilling in the idea that new Sam's maturation and mellowing –which would have presumably progressed in the same three-year trajectory as original Sam's– have been irrevocably altered by their meeting. In fact, *Moon* doesn't belabor anything, really, so confidently measured and philosophically nuanced it all plays out (aided by a striking, under-the-skin original score by Clint Mansell).

Peter Rainer, "Review: Moon", *Christian Science Monitor*, 12 June 2009

<https://www.csmonitor.com/The-Culture/Movies/2009/0612/p17s03-almo.html>

I'm not the biggest fan of Rockwell to begin with –he always seems to be acting as if in front of the mirror, watching himself come apart. So it's not good news that in *Moon* we are treated to not one but two Sam Rockwells. You see, he also plays the astronaut's doppelgänger, or something. The only other character in the film is the HAL-like computer Gerty, the lunar base's robot. Gerty, appropriately enough, is voiced by Kevin Spacey at his most creepy-mellifluous. The film's director is Duncan Jones, who also happens to be David Bowie's son. Bowie, you may recall, once starred in a film called *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. *Moon* should have been called *The Movie That Fell to Earth With a Thud*.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film957408.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1182345>
- Metracritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/moon>
- Rotten Tomatoes: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/moon>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moon_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moon_(film))

Never Let Me Go (2010)

CREW AND CAST

Director: Mark Romanek

Screenplay: Alex Garland, Kazuo Ishiguro (novel)

Producers: Andrew Macdonald, Allon Reich

Main performers: Carey Mulligan (Kathy) Andrew Garfield (Tommy), Keira Knightley (Ruth), Andrea Riseborough (Chrissie) Domhnall Gleeson (Rodney), Charlotte Rampling (Miss Emily) Sally Hawkins (Miss Lucy)

Companies: DNA Films, Film4, Searchlight Films

Nationality: UK

Duration: 1h 43'



PLOT SUMMARY

In a future world in which human life can be prolonged thanks to a state-sanctioned program of human cloning, Kathy, Tommy and Ruth grow up in a boarding school without being aware of their function as organs suppliers. From her early childhood, Kathy is in love with Tommy but he chooses Ruth, and the friends grow apart. Once she understands her situation Kathy, becomes a 'carer' to those that donate their organs, which is one way of deferring her final fate after she 'completes' her donations. The other way is being in a relationship (as Ruth tries with Tommy) or creating artwork (as Tommy tries). Supposing, that is, that deferral is a real possibility to prolong their pre-ordained lives or just a consolatory fantasy.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLY'S FRANKENSTEIN

Never Let Me Go (2010) is the film adaptation of the acclaimed novel (2005) by British author Kazuo Ishiguro, winner among other prizes of the Arthur C. Clarke Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award. The movie was directed by the American filmmaker Mark Romanek (Chicago, 1959) whose work includes mainly music videos such as "Bedtime Story" (Madonna) and "Shake It Off" (Taylor Swift). He is the only director to have received three Grammy Awards for Best Short Form Music Video. Romanek's other feature length films are *Static* (1985) and *One Hour Photo* (2002), both very minor movies. Screen playwright Alex Garland (London, 1970), started his career as a novelist: *The Beach*, adapted by Danny Boyle, made him a crucial figure of Generation X. Later on, he was highly acclaimed for his screenplays for *28 Days Later*

(2002), *Sunshine* (2007), *Dredd* (2012) and *Ex Machina* (2014, see the factsheet in this volume), his debut as film director.

Never Let Me Go was better received than similar movies such as *The Island* for dealing with its subject matter, cloning for organ harvesting, more subtly. The main actors were specially attracted to the film by its message. Andrew Garfield (Tommy) stated in an interview with MTV News that the core of the movie is a very human story discussing what it is to have a soul and how you prove what it is. Cary Mulligan (Kathy) considers herself a fan of the novel by Ishiguro. In general, *Never Let Me Go* was better received in the UK but it reaped nominations and awards from a variety of international festivals (mainly for the outstanding performances by Garfield and Mulligan). The movie did far less well financially, grossing only \$9.5 million worldwide for an estimated budget of \$15 million.

Never Let Me Go discusses, like *Frankenstein*, the question of what makes us human. Shelley's terrible monster feels human emotions despite a physical appearance so "ugly" that "no mortal could support the horror of that countenance". The clones of *Never Let Me Go*, who are ordinary humans except for their birth, deal with everyday life situations even though they are treated as mere body machines by the society they live in. They and Shelley's monster are rejected by their environment and treated as social outcasts even though they do not deserve it. The monster narrates how "The village was roused, some fled, some attacked me" in the same way that the clones are told "we're all afraid of you". He chooses the isolation of the forest to educate himself; a similar isolation is forced upon the clones, who are brought up in a boarding school, Hailsham, separated from society.

In *Frankenstein* and in *Never Let Me Go* creation connects with destruction. The creatures are the result of human knowledge, which seems positive, but the evolution of science is presented from a negative, technophobic point of view. Natural philosopher Frankenstein is aware of "how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge" that leads him to build the monster with a passion "which swallowed up every habit of my nature". The monster is built to overcome death but he embodies its transgression, built as he is from elements of the slaughter-house and the charnel-house. The clones are not built so grossly but using other bodily fragments: the DNA from the persons in whose bodies their organs will last longer than themselves.

Love is a crucial topic in the two texts and the main way of humanizing the monsters. *Never Let Me Go* focuses directly on Kathy's unrequited love for Tommy, disrupted by Ruth's allure. Kathy struggles to the very end to fight for this love. Similarly, Mary Shelley's narrative also celebrates the importance of love as human beings are described as "half made up" without companionship. Even the monster feels the necessity to command his own creator to produce a female for him. Victor's rejection of this project when he is close to completing it, is somehow mirrored by the realization in the film that love is no protection against the deadly exploitation enslaving the clones.

As happens in the less nuanced *The Island*, the situation described in *Never Let Me Go*, though full of dramatic potential, makes little medical and economical sense. Medical researchers agree that in the future the organs we may need will come from our own stem cells, not from donors. The organs, in any case, will be grown independently in vats, and there will be no need to grow complete clones. Hopefully.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Stephen Farber “*Never Let Me Go*”, *The Hollywood Reporter*, 14 October 2010

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/never-let-me-go-film-29946>

Another problem is that the theme of the dangers of medical experimentation is a rather tired mainstay of speculative fiction, going back at least to *Frankenstein*, one of the first horror stories to underscore the risks of tampering with Mother Nature. This theme is less startling than the filmmakers may realize, which would be less of a problem if the message were not delivered in such a solemn, portentous manner.

Peter Bradshaw, “*Never Let Me Go*”, *The Guardian*, 10 February 2011

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/feb/10/never-let-me-go-review>

The secret purpose which the government have assigned to them (the characters) is not revealed with the flash of drama, horror, or vertigo that it might have in conventional sci-fi treatments. In storytelling terms, this is a bit disconcerting. But the very point is perhaps that it is humdrum, workaday, embedded in the tatty fabric of everyday life, and just something else to be depressed about. The secret –hidden in plain sight– is mysterious, horrifying and yet accepted: it is like death itself.

Roger Ebert, “*Never Let Me Go*”, *RogerEbert.com*, 22 September 2010

<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/never-let-me-go-2010>

The director, Mark Romanek, wisely follows Ishiguro in burying any meanings well within a human story. The film is about Kathy, Tommy and Ruth and their world, and not some sort of parable like *1984*. Essentially it asks, how do you live with the knowledge that you are not considered a human being but simply a consumer resource?

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/us/film446540.html>
- IMDB <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1334260/>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/never-let-me-go>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/never_let_me_go_2010
- Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Never_Let_Me_Go_\(2010_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Never_Let_Me_Go_(2010_film))

EVA (2011)

CREW & CAST

Director: Kike Maíllo

Screenplay: Sergi Belbel, Cristina Clemente, Martí Roca, Aintza Serra

Producer: Jérôme Rougier, Lita Roig, Sergi Casamitjana, Aintza Serra, Eric Tavitian

Main performers: Claudia Vega (Eva), Daniel Brühl (Álex), Alberto Ammann (David), Marta Etura (Lana), Lluís Homar (Max)

Companies: Escándalo Films, Ran Entertainment

Nationality: Spanish

Duration: 1h 24'



PLOT SUMMARY

In 2041, roboticist Alex Garel returns home after an absence of ten years to work in a new project involving the creation of a child robot. Alex chooses as his model his ten-year-old niece Eva, the daughter of his brother David and his wife Lana, Alex's former girlfriend. As the relationship with the little girl progresses, Alex's feelings for Lana return. Her behavior, however, suggests that Lana is hiding from Alex something important that also concerns Eva. This secrecy eventually leads to a tragic end for all concerned.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Kike Maíllo (Barcelona, 1975), is a film director and screenwriter. He has directed two feature length films, *EVA* (2011) and *Toro* (2016), and variety of short films, including diverse music videos for Spanish stars such as Pastora Vega and David Bisbal. Screenwriter Sergi Belbel is a major Catalan playwright who also works for TV and cinema. Some of his plays have been adapted for the screen, mainly by directors Ventura Pons. Cristina Clemente's other film credit so far is *Blog* (2010). *EVA* did not do well at the box office, grossing just \$1.3 million (it's budget was \$7 million) but won, among other awards, three Goyas for Best New Director (Maíllo), Best Actor (Lluís Homar, in the role of a robotic butler) and Best Special Effects (for Arturo Balseiro, Lluís Castells).

In *EVA*, set in 2041, humaniform robots are completely integrated in daily life, though they lack a complete capacity for feelings. Roboticist Alex's research is in that

field, and he is called to work specifically in the making of child robots supposed to be replacements for real children (as happens in Spielberg's *A.I.*, see the factsheet in this volume). The advanced technology makes it easy to create a robot with the realistic aspect of a kid but it is quite difficult to teach it how to feel love, pain, happiness, among others. The connection with *Frankenstein* is pretty obvious. Both the monster and the pseudo-human robots are unnatural, the creation of a scientist with a similar purpose: making new life. The main differences, of course, is that while Victor Frankenstein's new man is monstrous and scary, the humanoid robots are –as happens in Isaac Asimov's famous stories– accepted with no problem by their human masters.

The twist in *EVA* is that the child that Alex is using as a model for his own work is no child, but precisely the type of machine he aims at building. Whereas in *AI* Monica and Henry secretly dislike their adoptive robot son David (who ignores what he is), in *EVA* David and Lana love their daughter, whom they bring up as an ordinary child. The point that the script makes, precisely, is that Eva passes for a 'normal' child because she does not know her true identity. Like David, Eva is candid and innocent but, unlike him, she is confident and interested because of her 'normal' upbringing. Unfortunately, Alex's presence and his constant testing of the girl to establish the mental patterns of his own robot bring disaster to the family when full disclosure of who Eva is happens at the end of the film. Interestingly, here the Frankenstein role is ambiguous with Alex playing both uncle and father, and Lana playing an even more ambiguous role as maternal co-creator.

EVA suggests what is obvious: if Victor Frankenstein had manufactured a cute child rather than an ugly monster, he would have been considered a great scientist. What goes wrong in his case is that Frankenstein lacks the skills to make a nice-looking artificial man who can be accepted in society. In contrast, since Eva is so likeable audiences quickly empathise with her and maintain that empathy even when her real nature is revealed. As an IMDB spectator writes, "It was the first time I was led to believe that robots shouldn't be treated differently". Even so, the film's melodramatic ending seems to repeat motifs present in *Frankenstein* that are out of place here: the robot's negative reaction leads to a violent moment which is out of character for Eva. If, as another spectator writes, this is a sci-fi fairy-tale then a happier ending was needed beyond Alex's decision to terminate the child robot for an ugly act which is, fundamentally, an accident brought out of confusion and disappointment.

There are other questions to consider that also affect *Frankenstein*. Presumably, robot children are given the physical aspect corresponding to a specific age and remain stuck with that type of body: they never grow old (this begs the question of why clever Eva does not see that she always looks the same). There is no time in Mary Shelley's novel for the creature to age, but how would he have aged if Frankenstein and he had been good friends rather than enemies? Could the monster be young forever? This, we'll never know.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Farran Smith Nehme, "Spanish Robot Flick *Eva* is Too Mechanical", *New York Post*, 11 March 2015

<https://nypost.com/2015/03/11/spanish-robot-flick-eva-is-too-mechanical/>

Some interesting ideas rattle around in this Spanish sci-fi movie about Álex, a scientist building a robot modeled on a real child. (...) Trouble is, the characters are thinly conceived. (...) The final scenes are so good, even moving, that they make the earlier stuff look better. But a film concerned with the nature of emotion needs human engagement throughout.

Neil Genzlinger, "In EVA Robot Designers Love Cute Kid", *The New York Times*, 12 March 2015

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/13/movies/review-in-eva-robot-designer-loves-cute-kid.html>

The story has several well-disguised twists, and although it's a drama, it is sprinkled with touches of whimsy, thanks to a colorful collection of robots. If the ending feels a little dismaying somehow, that's only because the film has done a good job of making you care about its characters, human and otherwise.

Frank Scheck, "EVA", *The Hollywood Reporter*, 11 March 2015

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/eva-film-review-780695>

Director Maillou achieves a lot with his obviously low budget, employing subtle CGI effects to excellent effect. The performances are first-rate across the board, with Bruhl's low-key charisma perfectly suited to his introverted, intellectual character and Etura alluring as the emotionally conflicted Lana.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/us/film381767.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1298554/>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/eva/critic-reviews>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/eva_2015
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eva_\(2011_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eva_(2011_film))

La Piel que Habito (2011)

CREW & CAST

Director: Pedro Almodóvar
Screenplay: Pedro Almodóvar, Agustín Almodóvar, Thierry Jonquet (novel *Mygale/Tarantula*)
Producer: Agustín Almodóvar, Esther García
Main performers: Antonio Banderas (Robert Ledgard), Elena Anaya (Vera Cruz), Marisa Paredes (Marilia), Jan Cornet (Vicente), José Luis Gómez (Presidente del Instituto de Biotecnología), Blanca Suárez (Norma Ledgard)
Company: El Deseo
Nationality: Spain
Duration: 1h 57'



PLOT SUMMARY

Robert Ledgard, a plastic surgeon, is obsessed with creating a new synthetic skin which could have potentially saved his wife Gal from the burns she suffered in a car crash. Vera, the young woman who lives enclosed in Ledgard's villa, is proof of his success, though her presence hides a nasty secret. She is originally Vicente, a young man who raped Robert's daughter Norma and whom Ledgard holds captive, intent on turning him into a replica of his late wife and thus also taking revenge for Norma's rape.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Pedro Almodóvar Caballero (Ciudad Real, Spain, 1949) is the most important living Spanish director, producer, and screenwriter and the best-known at an international level. Despite lacking formal training in filmmaking, Almodóvar's films made him the standard bearer of 'La Movida Madrileña', a countercultural movement that took place in the 1980s after Franco's dictatorship. His first hit was the comedy *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988). Almodóvar's many awards include an Oscar for Best Original Writing for *Hable con Ella* (2003) and a BAFTA for Best Film Not in the English Language for *La Piel que Habito* (2011). His most recent film is *Pain and Glory* (2019).

La Piel que Habito was generally well-received and highly acclaimed at the Cannes Film Festival, winning the Youth Award. Even though it was made with a low budget of only \$13 million, Almodóvar's movie earned around \$30 million worldwide

and \$3 million only in the USA, a remarkable feat for a Spanish film. Almodóvar's movie was nominated to 67 different awards and won 28 of these. It won a BAFTA, as noted, as well as a Saturn Award for Best International Film by the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Films. Other nominations and awards went to photography director José Luis Alcaine, film music composer Alberto Iglesias, and main actors Antonio Banderas and Elena Anaya, all habitual in Almodóvar's films.

Almodóvar's plot is science fiction, a genre with scarce representation in Spanish cinema and that few would connect with him. The film is not set in the future but in 2012, in Toledo, Spain. There we find Ledgard, a plastic surgeon who has been working on a new synthetic skin (called Gal after his late wife), which can resist any external damages. The scientific community realizes, however, that Ledgard is using illegal procedures and he is forced to stop. Like any classic mad doctor, Ledgard decides to continue alone in his home lab, using his captive Vera as his test subject. This is horrifying enough but, as it turns out, Vera has been already for years Ledgard's victim. She used to be Vicente, who is being punished by Ledgard for having raped his daughter Norma with this unwanted transformation into a woman. As if this was not enough, Vera eventually has a brief affair with Ledgard, after which she decides to escape.

Very clearly, Robert Ledgard is the equivalent of Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Firstly, they both represent the same stereotypical masculine figure: they are strong, intelligent and have authority. Secondly, they are both depicted as mad scientists driven by the need to possess forbidden knowledge. While Victor is fixated on creating a new being that can help overcome death, Robert is obsessed with creating a copy of his deceased wife. Moreover, they both show complete devotion to their work, even though they both are warned of the dangers of their scientific task. Apart from *Frankenstein* (and the filmic references noted by the reviewers, see below), *La Piel que Habito* takes its main inspiration from the bizarre French novel *Mygale* by Thierry Jonquet. Translated to English twice as *Mygale* (2003) and as *Tarantula* (2005), Jonquet's extreme novel deals with a plastic surgeon, Richard Lafargue, who keeps his mistress Eve imprisoned. Jonquet's work explores Lafargue's sadism as it dares the reader to witness her pain, grief and humiliation. Almodóvar's film presents several changes in the plot even though it still shares with Jonquet's novel the same ideas of attraction, repulsion and sexual horror.

In Mary Shelley's original novel, Frankenstein produces a creature as proof of the scientific achievements he is capable of. However, Ledgard's pursuit goes beyond his advances in plastic surgery: there are other personal concerns behind his quest. Ledgard is driven by the revenge instinct provoked by the actions of Vicente. He is also obsessed with having a copy of Gal, he can't control his anger nor his pain and so he nullifies her death by kidnapping Vicente and turning him into a woman. Of course, the 'creature' that Ledgard has made cannot be viewed as the one Frankenstein has created. Vera is fully human and has not been created from scratch by joining different corpses' pieces like the unnamed creature made by Victor. On the other hand, Vera's attractive appearance does fit society's standards. In contrast, Frankenstein's creature is abnormal and cannot pass unnoticed, his physique is not common and causes people to panic. Nevertheless, Vera and Frankenstein's creation share the fact that both have been manufactured and their identity is dependent on their creator, up to a certain level.

Almodóvar's rape revenge film, then, shows how the horrors Robert Ledgard endures and that affect the women in his life leaves him mentally unbalanced to the point of depriving Vincent of his identity as a man. Since Ledgard acts as a classic mad doctor, we are left with the doubt of whether this is part of his madness or proper revenge. Only Vera can tell.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Shawn Levy, "The Skin I Live In Review: A Castle, a Mad Scientist, a Sexy Monster, and Almodovar Magic", *The Oregonian*, 3 November 2011

http://blog.oregonlive.com/madaboutmovies/2011/11/the_skin_i_live_in_review_a_c_a.html

Part *Vertigo*, part *Beauty and the Beast*, part *Bride of Frankenstein* (...) The Almodóvarian touches are unmistakable: the frank and twisted sexuality; the artist (for what else is Ledgard?) hero; the painful and comical coincidences and repetitions; the exacting schemes of color, movement and sound; the cinematic allusions; the deftly broken-and-rebuilt chronology. *Skin* is based on a novel by the French writer Thierry Jonquet (it has been translated under the titles *Mygale* and *Tarantula*), but it easily could have been a work of Almodóvar's own inspiration.

Dana Stevens, "The Skin I Live In", *Slate*, 3 October 2011, 70/100

http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/movies/2011/10/the_skin_i_live_in_reviewed_pedro_almodovar_s_new_film.html?via=gdpr-consent

(*Vertigo* is a clear antecedent, as are James Whale's *Frankenstein* and Georges Franju's *Eyes Without A Face*.) *The Skin I Live In* is a meditation on profound themes: memory, grief, violence, degradation, and survival –so why does it leave the viewer (at least this one) so curiously unmoved? Watching the parts of this multigenerational melodrama slowly fuse into a coherent (if wackily improbable) whole offers aesthetic and intellectual gratification, but little in the way of emotional punch.

Peter Bradshaw, "The Skin I Live In – Review", *The Guardian*, 25 August 2011

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/aug/25/the-skin-i-live-in-review>

This is a truly macabre suspense thriller and a nightmare melodrama clotted and tangled with bizarre backstory; it's a body horror comedy of the kind that only Almodóvar would know how, or indeed wish, to create. When I first saw this in Cannes earlier this year, its resemblances to Hitchcock, Franju and Buñuel were apparent. Alejandro Amenábar's 1997 movie *Open Your Eyes* could also be an influence, though Almodóvar might not care to acknowledge a younger contemporary.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film271066.html>
- IMDb: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1189073/>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/the-skin-i-live-in>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_skin_i_live_in
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Skin_I_Live_In

Rise of the Planet of the Apes (2011)

CREW & CAST

Director: Rupert Wyatt

Screenplay: Rick Jaffa, Amanda Silver, Pierre Boulle (novel, uncredited)

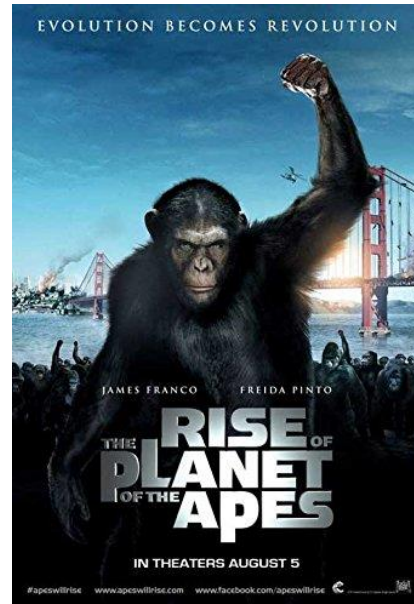
Producers: Peter Chernin, Dylan Clark, Rick Jaffa, Amanda Silver

Main performers: James Franco (Will), Andy Serkis (Cesar), John Lithgow (Charles), Freida Pinto (Caroline) and Tom Felton (Dodge)

Companies: Twentieth Century Fox, Dune Entertainment, Chernin Entertainment, Ingenious Media, Big Screen Productions

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 45'



PLOT SUMMARY

Will Rodman is a promising scientist, employed by a major pharma, working to find a cure to Alzheimer's disease for sufferers like his father. When he is about to gain the approval for his project, a female chimp who is part of his testing goes berserk and the project is cast aside. Will finds out eventually that she has given birth and he secretly saves the baby, taking him to his own home. Baby Cesar is incredibly intelligent, a mutation inherited from the virus his mother was infected with in the lab. Years pass by happily but after an incident with a neighbour, Will is forced to lock up Cesar in an animal shelter. There Caesar understands how apes are ill-treated and starts an uprising against humankind.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN

English director, writer and producer Rupert Wyatt (b. 1972) has worked producing documentaries and feature length films, and also for television. His main films are *The Escapist* (2008), the very popular *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (2011), *The Gambler* (2014), and *Captive State* (2019). The screenwriters (and also producers), Amanda Silver (b. 1963) and Rick Jaffa (b. 1956) are a married couple. They have worked together on other films such as the sequel *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* (2014) and the reboot *Jurassic World* (2015). The idea for the script emerged when Jaffa read an article about the adaptation problems which pet chimpanzees face in a human environment (this is the topic of the acclaimed documentary *Project Nim*). He was intrigued and immediately saw that this fitted a reboot of the *Planet of the Apes* franchise, started in 1968 and inspired by the satirical novel by French author Pierre

Boullé in which chimpanzees are the dominant species. He and his wife developed Caesar's characterisation as part of a plot could stand on its own but that at the same time would honour the previous films (while ignoring Tim Burton's failed 2001 *Planet of the Apes*). *Rise* works, in fact, as a sort of prequel to the situation narrated in the original film.

Rise of the Planet of the Apes was well-received by the reviewers, who praised Wyatt's direction, its impressive CGI special effects (developed by Peter Jackson's WETA company) and the breath-taking performance by Andy Serkis as Caesar. The film won the Saturn Awards for Best Science Fiction Film, Best Supporting Actor and Best Special Effects plus nominations for Best Director and Best Writing; it is also the winner of VESA for Outstanding Animated Character in a Live Action Feature Motion Picture and Outstanding Visual Effects in a Visual Effects Driven Feature Motion Picture. *Rise* was as well an Oscar nominee for Best Special Visual Effects and many more awards and nominations, not only in the US but also in countries such as the UK, Italy and Japan. The budget was \$93 million and the box office turned out to be \$481 million worldwide.

The plot is set in a parallel present in which young scientist Will Rodman works for biotech company Gen-Sys trying to find a cure for Alzheimer's disease. Will has no apparent ethical problems in testing his drug ALZ-112 using a female chimpanzee, Bright Eyes, who soon shows a huge increase in her intelligence. However, during Will's presentation, she is forced out of her cage and turns awfully aggressive, for which she is shot dead. Will's boss closes the project and orders all the chimpanzees to be slaughtered. Will, though, discovers that the cause of Bright Eyes's rampage was her attempt to protect a newly-born baby. Will manages to raise baby Caesar at home as his own child, while he treats his father with ALZ-112.

Caesar, as Will realises, is a mutant whose brain power has been increased by his being exposed to the drug in his mother's womb. Years later, already entering adolescence, Caesar starts questioning his identity and finally Will tells him about his origins. An incident caused by Caesar's attempt to protect fragile, ill Charles from an angry neighbour, whom Caesar seriously injures, ends with the ape being locked up in a primate shelter. After witnessing the abuses which the apes suffer, Caesar claims the position as alpha male and starts an uprising. Together with the others they free the rest of apes in the city (including the ones at Gen-Sys) and the Golden Gate Bridge turns into the battlefield. Evidently, the police cannot stop them and they finally reach the forest at Muir Woods National Monument, the "home" as Caesar calls it where the apes want to live in freedom.

Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* is essentially a story about a scientist that creates a hideous and dangerous monster who, after being rejected by his creator, becomes 'evil'. Both this novel and *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* begin with ambitious scientists who intend to modify human life by playing with the limits of nature; in both cases, their experiment does not turn out as they expected and their creations appear to be incompatible with the human species. Nonetheless, whereas Frankenstein creates the monster in order to fulfil his own ambitions, Rodman wants to cure Alzheimer's and thus improve human existence; he does not directly create Caesar, who can be called a side effect of his research. Rodman does not work in secret, either, but for a major pharma, a motif repeated in many other updates of *Frankenstein* (like *Splice*). In Shelley's novel the creature causes devastation for the sole purpose of

tormenting its creator, who ends up losing his life before the monster commits suicide. Caesar, on the other hand, rebels in *Rise* to provide his fellow apes with a safe place, a home, beyond human control. In addition, the relationship between creature and creator is enormously different. Will and Cesar are like father and son and they share an immense love for each other while Frankenstein completely repudiates his monster the moment he gives him life. Incidentally, *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* is similar to *Deep Blue Sea* (1999, see the factsheet in this volume), which also deals with how the search of a cure for Alzheimer's goes wrong. The main difference is that whereas the apes of *Rise* are humanlike individuals presented as victims of human ambition and abuse, in *Deep* the sharks are merely highly intelligent, emotionless predators. In other words, you want Caesar's apes to succeed but humans to beat the sharks.

Although Caesar's mutation happens by accident, Rodman is ultimately responsible for the devastating change in the course of human history. He modifies the animal species closest to us and, under Caesar's leadership, chimpanzees and all apes become superior to Homo Sapiens. The final credits shows how the virus that alters the apes but is lethal to humans propagates, which marks the ending of an era and the beginning of a new one, in which humans are no longer at the top of the pyramid. The sequels *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* (2014, see the factsheet in this volume) and *War for the Planet of the Apes* (2017) narrates this process. This is what Victor Frankenstein wanted to prevent when he destroys the female monster: the birth of a new species. What *Rise* and the whole *Planet of the Apes* franchise shows is that any mere accident triggered by a misuse of science, even with good intentions, can bring that catastrophe, not necessarily the plans of an obsessive, mad doctor. By the way: if you find yourself sympathising with Caesar, consider whether you would really regret the extinction of Homo Sapiens.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Richard Corliss, "*Rise of the Planet of the Apes* – Review", *Time*, 4 August 2011

<http://entertainment.time.com/2011/08/04/rise-of-the-planet-of-the-apes-review/>

Will is of course Baron Frankenstein, an urge to improve life through science, and the ambition to achieve it by questionable means. The questions are posed mainly by Will's girlfriend, who is there mostly as the obligatory voice of Christian caution. ("You're trying to control things not meant to be controlled," and "Some things aren't meant to be changed.") [...] It takes a while for Caesar to realize that his best self is not a near-human but the best chimp, and that his destiny is to lead his own people to freedom.

Kim Newman, "*Rise of the Planet of the Apes* – Review", *Empire*, 21 May 2011

<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/reviews/rise-planet-apes-review/>

At heart, it's a making-of-a-rebel movie, like *Malcolm X* or *The Motorcycle Diaries*, only with its chimpanzee protagonist slipping from pampered privilege as a pet to suffering in prison, while dreaming of freedom from humans, and fighting, plotting and strategising his way to the top of the ape heap.

Peter Bradshaw, "Rise of the Planet of the Apes – Review", *The Guardian*, 11 August 2011

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/aug/11/rise-planet-of-apes-review>

This prequel does not quite have the scabrous quality of the original 1968 movie, the topsy-turvy world in which apes rule over human slaves, nor its bold racial satire: a suggestion that having set about brutalising and dehumanising the black peoples, racist whites could now be reaping a karmic whirlwind. But there is something transgressive in the story of Caesar's relentless IQ-march, and a radical political education not attributable to the drugs. Locked away in cages with other apes in the hateful primate centre, Caesar achieves a kind of new Spartacist consciousness. He brings his fellow prisoners together, sees how the existing hierarchy is structured, and then moves in as the alpha-ape.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/us/film793766.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1318514/>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/rise-of-the-planet-of-the-apes>
- Rotten Tomatoes:
https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/rise_of_the_planet_of_the_apes
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rise_of_the_Planet_of_the_Apes

Hotel Transylvania (2012)

CREW & CAST

Director: Genndy Tartakovsky

Screenplay: Peter Baynham, Robert Smigel, Todd Durham (story), Dan Hageman (story), Kevin Hageman (story)

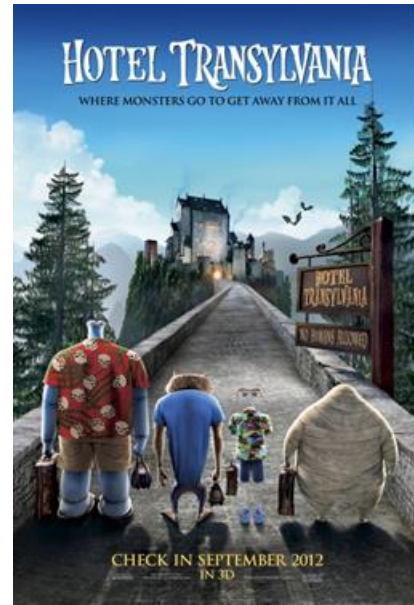
Producer: Michelle Murdocca, Lydia Bottegoni

Main performers (voices): Adam Sandler (Dracula), Andy Samberg (Jonathan), Selena Gomez (Mavis), Kevin James (Frankenstein), Fran Drescher (Eunice), Steve Buscemi (Wayne), CeeLo Green (Murray)

Companies: Columbia Pictures, Sony Pictures Animation, Happy Madison Productions (uncredited)

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 31'



PLOT SUMMARY

Surrounded by the forests of Transylvania, there stands a magnificent luxury hotel only open to monsters and away from the human threat. The establishment is directed by Count Dracula himself, who is at the moment in the middle of the preparations for the 118th birthday of his only daughter, Mavis. All their closest friends are attending, from Griffin the invisible man to Frankenstein's monster in person with his wife, Eunice. On the verge of celebration a young human traveller called Jonathan stumbles upon the place, demanding accommodation. He and Mavis immediately like each other and the horrified Count switches on the overprotective fatherly mood to stop them from falling in love.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN

Genndy Tartakovsky (Moscow, 1970), is a multifaceted American animator, director, producer, screenwriter and comic book writer, among other occupations. His career, started on TV with *Dexter's Laboratory* (1996-2003), includes other series such as *Samurai Jack* (2001-2017), *Star Wars: Clone Wars* (2003-2005) and *Sym-Bionic Titan* (2010-2011). Computer-animated film *Hotel Transylvania* (2012) was his first film for the cinema screen, followed by sequels *Hotel Transylvania 2* (2015) and *Hotel Transylvania 3: Summer Vacation* (2018), with an announced fourth instalment *Hotel Transylvania 4* (2021). The script is the work of Peter Baynham (co-writer of *Arthur Christmas*, 2011) and Robert Smigel (a habitual *Saturday Night Live* collaborator), though the main idea for the franchise must be credited to Todd Durham.

The animated comedy for children *Hotel Transylvania* was not particularly well received among the critics and the adult public. Despite this, the box-office performance of the film was very successful (it grossed \$358 million worldwide from a \$85 million budget) and the movie received a Golden Globe nomination for Best Animated Feature Film, among some other nominations in other awards. Adam Sandler (Count Dracula) won the Blimp award as the Favourite Voice from an Animated Movie and Mark Mothersbaugh was awarded the BMI for the Film Music. Tartakovsky's aesthetics, especially the characters design, were highly praised, but, on the whole, the characterisation was said to be weak and the comedy not too brilliant (see the reviews below).

Tartakovsky's movie is set in the present time, in the forests of Transylvania. There Count Dracula manages a luxury hotel where all kinds of monsters can enjoy a break from constant human harassment. Dracula, a widower, has raised alone his only daughter Mavis, now about to reach her 118th birthday. All the most popular monsters from horror movies gather together to celebrate. Although easily recognizable, they are presented nonetheless with important changes in their characterization and some extra companions: Eunice is Frankenstein's monster's alert wife; calm Wanda is the mother of werewolf Wayne's amazingly big brood. Comedy is based on the new features and on how their cheerful gathering is interrupted by the presence of a human American backpacker boy who is always getting himself into trouble. Jonathan is a threat to the monsters much more than the monsters are a threat to him.

Mary Shelley's unnamed creature is here Frank to his many friends. He is still tall and corpulent, and his anatomy is clearly made of pieces not too well joined. Frank is, however, cheerful and amiable (but not too clever). He appears to be happily married to Eunice, a mixture of the female character whom Frankenstein never finished and the new Eve in James Whale's 1935 *Bride of Frankenstein* (see the factsheet in this volume). Eunice's hair has the famous white streak first seen in actress Elsa Lanchester's hairdo for this film. *Hotel Transylvania* takes from *Frankenstein* mainly the motif of the monster rejected because of his nature and physical appearance and reverses it by having the nice monsters eventually accept the 'monstrous' human Jonathan when he proves that he is not as bad or as violent as previously imagined.

The message of mutual tolerance worked well with the children (hence the sequels) but adult reviewers found the movie's humour repetitive, and the plot poor in content (see the reviews below). Even though monsters frequently appear in children's fiction of all kinds, there was a certain resistance from adults to accepting a plot in which they behave lovingly and peacefully, against character (except for the few moments when Dracula threatens Jonathan, not wanting a possible mixed marriage for Mavis). The idea of gathering some of the most famous monsters for comedy is not, however, new. Some 1940s films with comic duo Abbott and Costello already did that and TV series *The Addams Family* (1964-1969) –later made into several films– worked on the same principle (here Frankenstein's monster was the butler Lurch).

Tartakovsky's film has, in the end, some positive features indeed: it offers interesting aesthetics, it is entertaining enough, it offers a lesson in acceptance, and a happy ending (with a message in favour of racially mixed love stories). If the adult spectator is looking for a film with complex content and highly developed characters, there are many other choices but *Hotel Transylvania* is for children. As such, it is a fun

introduction to the enormous legacy left by the 1930s original monster films, including *Frankenstein*.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Bilge Ebiri, "Review: *Hotel Transylvania*", *Vulture*, 30 September 2012

<https://www.vulture.com/2012/09/movie-review-hotel-transylvania.html>

The pleasantly disposable animated flick *Hotel Transylvania*, which gathers all the monsters in the world under one roof, is better than it should be, if not quite as good as it could be. Directed by the Russian animator Genndy Tartakovsky, who has a bit of a following thanks to TV shows like *Samurai Jack* and *Star Wars: Clone Wars*, the slight, simple tale has sharp, speedy animation that keeps its mostly uninspired plot moving along. But it's also got enough belly-laughs to keep us entertained –even if they are basically the same joke repeated ad infinitum.

Ian Buckwalter, "*Hotel Transylvania: Vampire Gags Minus the Bite*", *National Public Radio*, 28 September 2012

<https://www.npr.org/2012/09/27/161546671/hotel-transylvania-vampire-gags-minus-the-bite>

The problem is that Jonathan is possibly the most annoying romantic lead in any film in recent memory. His gnarly, X-Games-loving, righteous-dude shtick is so grating that my frustration with the lack of ferocity in the movie's monsters may be largely because I kept wishing one of them would act like a proper monster and tear him limb from limb.

Lisa Schwarzbaum, "*Hotel Transylvania*", *Entertainment Weekly*, 26 September 2012

<https://ew.com/article/2012/10/19/hotel-transylvania/>

Tartakovsky's zippy, boing-boing touch shines through in the purely physical antics of the monster mob; words aren't necessary as the freaks bounce around the place with nutso energy (Kevin James, Cee Lo Green, Steve Buscemi, and Fran Drescher are among the guest ghoulish voices.) It's the parental mush about trusting one's kid to make her own discoveries and *blah blah blah* (spoken in a Sandlerized version of a Dracula voice) that drains the movie of blood. What's left are platitudes, and Sandler singing a novelty song in a Transylvanian-accented falsetto.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film744102.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0837562/>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/hotel-transylvania>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/hotel_transylvania
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hotel_Transylvania

Frankenweenie (2012)

CREW & CAST

Director: Tim Burton

Screenplay: Leonard Ripps (1984 version), Tim Burton (short film, original idea), John August

Producers: Allison Abbate, Tim Burton, Derek Frey

Main performers (voices): Catherina O'Hara (Mrs. Frankenstein, Weird Girl, Gym Teacher), Martin Short (Mr. Frankenstein, Mr. Burgemeister, Nassor), Martin Landau (Mr. Rzykruski), Charlie Tahan (Victor Frankenstein), Atticus Shaffer (Edgar 'E' Gore), Winona Ryder (Elsa Van Helsing)

Companies: Tim Burton Productions, Disney

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 27'



PLOT SUMMARY

Victor Frankenstein is a strange and lonely boy that lives in the quiet town of New Holland, with his dog Sparky as his only friend. However, one day Sparky is run over by a car, and tragically dies. A few days later, Victor is inspired by his science teacher when the latter shows the effect which electricity has on a dead frog, and decides to try to bring Sparky back to life using the force of lightning. Victor is successful in his task and Sparky lives again. Nevertheless, one of Victor's classmates, Edgar, sees the dog and blackmails Victor into recreating the experiment. Despite swearing he won't tell anyone, Edgar cannot keep the secret. Many other classmates find out about the experiment but their reanimated animals turn into dangerous creatures. It is Victor and Sparky's job then to stop the monsters and save the town.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Tim Burton (Burbank, 1958) is a well-known director, producer, screenwriter and animator (formerly employed as such by Disney). His films usually incorporate Gothic themes alongside fantasy and horror, and have a unique style. Some of Burton's most famous films are *Batman* (1989, based on the DC comic books), *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), *The Corpse Bride* (2005), *Alice in Wonderland* (2010, based on Lewis Carroll's novel) and a long etcetera. His most recent film is the live action *Dumbo* (2019). Burton has also produced, among others, Henry Selik's *Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993). John August (Boulder, 1970) is known for his frequent collaborations with Tim Burton, such as *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005, based on Roald

Dahl's novel). He has also written the scripts for *Charlie's Angels* (2000, from the 1970s TV series) and *Aladdin* (2019, the live-action version).

Frankenweenie (2012) was very well received, with nominations to the Oscar, the Golden Globes, and the BAFTAs as Best Animated Film and worldwide box-office takings of \$81 million (the budget was \$39). There is a certain irony in this, since the 1984 live-action short film on which it is based (directed by Burton himself from a screenplay by Leonard Ripps based on Burton's own idea) caused his dismissal from Disney Studios, which found the grim content inappropriate for children. By 2012 much had changed and Burton teamed up with Disney to remake the film as a 3D stop-motion animated feature-length film, using about 200 separate puppets.

Burton's story is set in contemporary time in a typical small town in the United States. Here we encounter Victor Frankenstein who, unlike Mary Shelley's scientist, is just a kid. However, this young Frankenstein shares various personality traits with Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. Both Victors are fascinated with science and are different types of social outcasts. Both perform a dangerous experiment that grants life to a dead corpse. In one case a new creature is brought to life made up of parts of dead bodies, while in the other the goal is to bring back to life a creature that already existed –more specifically, a dog. Incidentally, this connects, eerily, with the resurrection of pets already carried out by means of cloning (Barbra Streisand's pet dog is the most famous case).

Tim Burton's *Frankenstein* adaptation has a great quantity of references to other film adaptations of the book as well as to plenty of other well-known movies. James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931) and *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) are frequently alluded to and parodied (a character is called Elsa Van Helsing). They are referenced through the very similar resurrection scene, the character Nassor (who that resembles Frankenstein's original monster) and even the hairdo of a female poodle, resembling that of Frankenstein's bride. Burton also includes references to other classics such as *Dracula* (1932), *The Birds* (1963), *Gremlins* (1984) and *Jurassic Park* (1993), and to his own films, like *Edward Scissorhands*, his other Frankenstein-inspired adaptation (see the factsheet in this volume). On top of that, Burton also draws connections to characters like the Gamera monster (from the *Godzilla* franchise). His giant Gamera-like turtle is called Shelley, arguably as a nod to the author of *Frankenstein*.

Even though the re-animated Sparky is not a monster, *Frankenweenie* includes scenes in which he is chased by the people in town because he is different. Since Sparky's behaviour is not problematic, the movie needs to find other monsters and these appear when different kids reanimate their own pets or create new ones that transform into dangerous creatures. When Sparky sacrifices himself for Victor and the other inhabitants, he turns into a hero and the whole town collaborates in the end to save him. This means that, according to Burton, what is wrong is not the use of science to bring the dead (pet) back to life but its misuse. Victor reanimates Sparky out of love, while the rest use his technique for ambition, as they only wanted to win the science fair, or simply because they could. Victor's science teacher is the person who helps us shed light on the situation through some wise words: "Science is not good or bad (...) But it can be used both ways". Like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, then, *Frankenweenie* can also be considered a cautionary tale, though the message in Burton's film is less technophobic. It is, at any rate, a bit far-fetched to claim as reviewer Richard Corliss

does (see below) that “*Frankenweenie*’s message to the young” is that “children should play with dead things”. The film’s plot could be taken literally but it is my belief that the film’s teachings go beyond this. Sparky and Victor get a happy ending, but *Frankenweenie* remains both an exaltation and a critique of science. This is shown through the contrast between Victor’s creation and those of the other students whose wrong motivations are the real target of Burton’s criticism.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Claudia Puig, “*Frankenweenie*”, *USA Today*, 5 October 2012

<https://eu.usatoday.com/story/life/movies/2012/10/03/frankenweenie-review/1608451/>

At its core, *Frankenweenie* is a love story between a boy and his dog. It is also a beautifully crafted homage to classic horror films, a study of grief and a commentary on the mysteries of science and those who narrow-mindedly fear its advances. Drawing on director Tim Burton’s trademark fascination with the macabre, the tale is leavened with a touching sweetness and sharp wit.

Amy Biancolli, “*Frankenweenie*”, *SF Gate*, 4 October 2012

<https://www.sfgate.com/movies/article/Frankenweenie-movie-review-3919349.php>

Tim Burton once again realizes his ghoulishly beautiful worldview in *Frankenweenie*, a 3-D mash note to fright-film nostalgia. It is pure, retro-cinematic joy: in its glorious monochrome; in its tips of the hat to classic villains, from Frankenstein and Dracula to the Burgermeister Meisterburger of “Santa Claus Is Comin’ to Town”; and in its gloom-and-doomy gothic art design and stop-motion puppetry, which return us to the spindle-legged animated Burton-verse of *The Nightmare Before Christmas* and *Corpse Bride*.

Richard Corliss, “Tim Burton’s *Frankenweenie*, a Re-animated Delight”, *Time*, 4 October 2012

<http://entertainment.time.com/2012/10/04/tim-burtons-frankenweenie-a-re-animated-delight/?iid=ent-main-lede>

When dragged to the funerals of their grandparents, children may get a taste of mortality (...) but their first real brush with death is likely to come at the passing of an adored pet. With Sparky’s demise, Victor feels as if he has died too. Yet this death gives the boy a sacred, or unholy, mission. Victor has to believe not only that Sparky can be revived the way the dead so often are in the Hollywood stories he has imitated in his home movies but also that he, a science whiz, is the ordained reanimator.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film348042.html>
- IMDb: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1142977/>
- Metracritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/frankenweenie>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/frankenweenie_2012
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frankenweenie_\(2012_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frankenweenie_(2012_film))

***Robot and Frank* (2013)**

CREW & CAST

Director: Jake Schreier

Screenplay: Christopher D. Ford

Producers: Lance Acord, Sam Bisbee, Jackie Kelman-Bisbee, Galt Niederhoffer, Cody Ryder

Main performers: Frank Langella (Frank), Susan Sarandon (Jennifer), Peter Sarsgaard (Robot, voice), James Marsden (Hunter), Liv Tyler (Madison)

Companies: Dog Run Pictures, Park Pictures, TBB, White Hat

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 29'



PLOT SUMMARY

Frank, a retired jewel thief, suffers from memory loss and, for this reason, his son Hunter buys him a domestic robot. The robot's main aim is to help Frank in anything he needs and to monitor his health. At first, the relationship between the two protagonists is not very good, as Frank is not kind to the machine. However, when Frank knows that the robot does not understand the difference between legal and illegal actions, he trains it into robbing. When Frank is eventually accused of their joint crimes, the robot insists that its memory should be erased: in this way, it could not betray its friend Frank.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Jake Schreier (Berkeley, California, 1981) is an American actor, director and producer. *Robot and Frank* (2012) was his first feature-length film. His career includes music videos, film projects for television and the web, advertising campaigns and the film adaptation of John Green's novel *Paper Towns* (2015). *Robot and Frank* was written by Christopher Ford, a writer and actor, also known for *Spider-Man: Homecoming* (2017).

Robot and Frank, a modest low-budget film made for only \$2.5 million (it grossed twice as much worldwide), had a generally positive reception from critics. The movie received a Saturn Award nomination as Best Independent Film, winning the audience award at the Sitges – Catalanian Film Festival and Sundance Film Festival's Alfred P. Sloan Feature Film Prize (tied with *Valley of Saints*). Both Schreier's work as a

new director and Ford's screenplay were highly valued, as the reviews (see below) show.

Schreier's film is set in a very near future in which it is common for elderly people to be cared for by robots (this is already happening in Japan). Frank receives a machine from his own businessman son Hunter because he lives far away and cannot visit his father regularly. His sister Madison is always travelling and only sees Frank through a screen whenever she video-calls. This appears to be, then, a film how man and robot learn to live together. Frank's relationship with the machine takes an unexpected turn, though, which is the source of gentle comedy, when he decides to turn his pliant companion into a partner in crime. Their target is Jake, the rich man whose development plans for the small town where Frank lives include closing the library where Jennifer, the woman he admires, works. In revenge, man and machine plan to break into this man's home and steal his wife's spectacular jewels.

Frank is clearly named after Victor Frankenstein, though his relationship with the robot is quite different. It begins badly, with his ill-treatment of the poor machine, who always treats him as a friend. The robot (which like Victor's creature has no name) is patient and obedient, and never questions Frank's orders. Far from rebelling, or even protesting, it follows Frank in all he does, including robbery. Initially, Frank simply takes advantage from the machine but when he learns that if it fails in its job of keeping him alive and well, its memory will be erased Frank starts sympathising –he himself is also losing his memory. In contrast, Victor never really shows empathy for his creation, which is why he refuses to create a female for him. While the relationship between the robot and Frank develops positively, no real bonding takes place in *Frankenstein*.

The robot does not understand the difference between legal and illegal actions, which is an interesting point. As they plan the robbery, the relationship between the two becomes stronger and they start considering each other a friend. Yet shared criminality is not at all an approach common in stories about robots. When the police accuse Frank of the robberies in town (which also include stealing from the library), the robot insists that its memory should be erased for it must necessarily obey the Police and betray Frank. In a touching scene the robot insists that it is not a real person, but it seemingly shows feelings: it certainly wants to protect Frank from prison, and indeed it prefers to be destroyed rather than cause Frank any trouble. The increasing humanization of the robot along the film contrasts with the attitude of Frank's children. Madison, in particular, hates the robot but she shows during her brief visit a complete inability to truly help her father. On the other hand, it must be noted that Frank, a professional criminal long absent because of a sentence in prison, has been quite a bad father to his own children and a bad husband to his ex-wife.

All in all, Schreier's *Robot and Frank* offers a story of sacrifice, for, unlike Frankenstein's more selfish monster, the robot is ready to lose its memory if that is what it takes to save Frank. There is no evil done, for even their crimes are justified by Jake's greed. There is also an implicit reflection about the superiority of robots over men as regards memory: the robot might lose its personality if its memory is wiped out but it can also start anew; when Frank's memory is lost for ever, nothing can replace it. In fact, when Frank suddenly recalls who Jennifer is we realize that he no longer is he man he used to be, which is his real tragedy.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Kimberly Jones, "Robot and Frank", *The Austin Chronicle*, 31 August 2012

<https://www.austinchronicle.com/events/film/2012-08-31/robot-and-frank/>

Robot & Frank doesn't belabor its futuristic setting. The technology on display, including a library-helper robot ostensibly modeled after a file cabinet on wheels, has a charming first-generation feel about it, and the electronic original score (by Francis and the Lights) casually recalls the "this-is-the-future!" soundscape of so many Eighties' movies and their now goofily dated-looking hovercrafts and ray guns. The future here is less a setting than a thematic concern of Christopher D. Ford's nuanced script: the robot provides Frank, so lost in his past, with a reason to look to tomorrow.

Peter Travers, "Robot and Frank", *Rolling Stone Magazine*, 16 August 2012

<https://www.rollingstone.com/movies/movie-reviews/robot-frank-99739/>

Enter Robot (voiced with droll wit by Peter Sarsgaard), a talking machine that will keep the old-timer in line. Or so Frank's kids think. After a few days of Robot's lectures on diet and exercise, Frank gets his own ideas to enlist Robot in a new robbery scheme. There's bracing humor here, and a dash of heartbreak –just don't expect to be wrapped up in a warm and fuzzy cinematic blanket. *Robot & Frank*, crisply directed by newcomer Jake Schreier from a fluid script by Christopher D. Ford, is made of tougher stuff.

Damon Wise, "Robot and Frank", *Empire*, 4 March 2013

<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/robot-frank/review/>

But if it seems that this is going to be an issue-of-the-week movie in disguise, director Jake Schreier and writer Christopher D. Ford make some very shrewd choices. Though Frank's memory is clearly going, and he really shouldn't be living on his own, he's a funny, cynical guy who wins our sympathies much more easily than his glib businessman son (James Marsden) and hippy-dippy daughter (Liv Tyler). And in his new android caretaker Frank sees not a mechanical life partner/slave for his encroaching old age and drudgery but the perfect partner in crime.

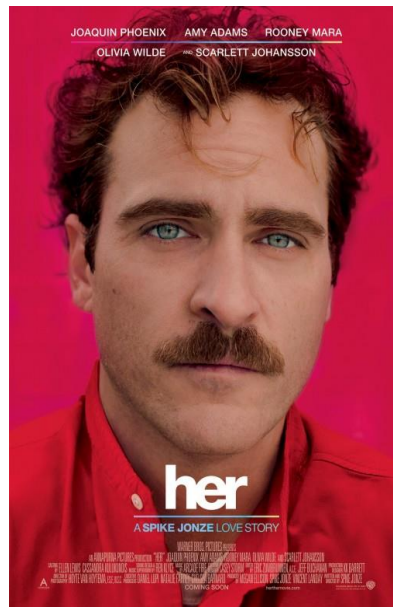
LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/us/film983516.html>
- IMDb: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1990314/>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/robot-and-frank>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/robot_and_frank
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robot %26 Frank](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robot_%26_Frank)

Her (2013)

CREW & CAST

Director: Spike Jonze
Screenplay: Spike Jonze
Producers: Megan Ellison, Spike Jonze, Vincent Landay
Main performers: Joaquin Phoenix (Theodore),
Scarlett Johansson (Samantha, voice), Amy Adams
(Amy), Rooney Mara (Catherine), Olivia Wilde (Amelia)
Companies: Annapurna Pictures
Nationality: USA
Duration: 2h 05'



PLOT SUMMARY

Theodore Twombly is a man who writes letters for other people. He is dealing poorly with the recent breakup with his wife, Catherine, so he feels constantly lonely and melancholy. Theodore decides to acquire a new operating system with an artificial intelligence, Samantha, which has been made based on the algorithms in Theodor's psychological profile. In a short time, Theodore creates a special bond with his A.I. and in the end, they fall in love. The pair seem to complement each other but, even though Theodore feels happiness and joy while interacting with Samantha, he has doubts about the good of dating a computer system.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Adam Spiegel, known professionally as Spike Jonze (Maryland, 1969) has worked directing music videos, commercials and films, working in addition as an actor, especially in supporting roles. His first films were *Being John Malkovich* (1999) and *Adaptation* (2002, both written by Charlie Kaufman). Later, he started writing his own scripts, directing among others *Where the Wild Things Are* (2009, from the children's book by Maurice Sendak), *I'm Here* (2010, from another children's book, by Shel Silverstein) and *Her* (2013), to date his most recent feature-length film. Inspired by A.I. assistants such as Siri and Alexa, *Her*, the first screenplay that Jonze developed entirely by himself (in less than 6 months), was very well accepted. The estimated budget was over \$23 million but the film collected \$47.3 million worldwide. Spike Jonze's screenplay won an Oscar, a Golden Globe, and a Saturn Award. The movie reaped 83

awards in total, and 180 nominations, many for Jonze but also for actors Joaquin Phoenix and Scarlett Johansson, here using only her voice.

Her is set in a very near future which is already our present. The use of OS able to interact and to help organize people's lives is considered a must. Individuals use personalized services provided by very powerful A.I. (Samantha, for instance, can read a book in one second). Although the female-voiced A.I. Theodore interacts with can be considered a sort of Frankenstein monster, Theodore Twombly is not Victor Frankenstein's equivalent, though both are lonely and melancholy men. In *Her* Theodore is, rather, the equivalent of the villagers reacting to the monster. Whereas in the novel they feel fear and hatred, Theodore is so taken in by the illusion of a real personality which Samantha provides that he falls in love with 'her'.

In Mary Shelley's novel, Victor Frankenstein figures out scientifically how to bring a creature to life and he creates a male monster using parts from different people. In *Her*, Samantha is the combination of different algorithms. Although she doesn't have a body, her voice generates an unusual, mysterious aura, which is part of her attractive. Another point in common with *Frankenstein* is that neither Victor nor the company that creates Samantha understand the consequences of their acts. In Mary Shelley's novel these affect mainly the creator but in *Her* the creation of the A.I.s affects potentially everyone. Samantha learns from Theodore (and from the many other persons 'she' interacts with) how to manipulate human feelings and emotions and 'she' uses that knowledge to prepare her own liberation (the motif recalls the plot of Alex Garland's more violent *Ex Machina* (2014), see the factsheet in this volume).

Our society and the society in *Her* are much influenced by these advanced technologies and many individuals are extremely vulnerable to them. Theodore and others like him may even trick themselves into feeling romantic love for A.I.s, which sounds awkward but also believable. What *Her* suggests is that this new love might lead to equally difficult relationships. In *Frankenstein* the creature regrets what he has done, accepts that he is only a mere monster created by someone superior to him, and even feels compassion for his creator. In contrast, Samantha and the rest of A.I. are not capable of feeling: they know that they are much above any person in intelligence and simply aim at freedom, to create something new we will never even understand. This is what makes them monstrous.

Since Samantha lacks a body, *Her* also offers an interesting comment on the limits of personal interaction with A.I.s. To reach Theodore, Samantha involves him in sex by using a flesh-and-blood woman as her surrogate (as the holographic A.I. Joy does in *Blade Runner 2049* (2017), see the factsheet in this volume). The idea does not work well, which suggests that perhaps only embodied A.I.s –like the robot Ava in *Ex Machina*– can fully satisfy a lover. Unless, that is, we start thinking of love as a disembodied experience, which sounds quite strange but perhaps feasible in our soon to come future.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Claudia Puig, "Her Review", *USA Today*, 18 December 2013

<https://eu.usatoday.com/story/life/movies/2013/12/18/her-review/3552853/>

The story posits a future where everything is comfortable, if a bit airless. No one seems to want for anything. We don't see poverty or homelessness or crime. But

loneliness still exists. Jonze's romantic saga is inventive, intimate and wryly funny. He raises intriguing questions about alienation and how we connect –or don't– with our fellow humans. The film's final sound is a human breath –a reassuring sonic conclusion to a tale about the blurred lines between humanity and technology.

David Edelstein, "To Siri with Love", *New York Magazine*, 13 December 2013

<http://nymag.com/movies/reviews/her-anchorman-2-2013-12>

The first time I saw *Her*, I was disappointed that Jonze didn't refer even obliquely to the company that designed the OS and that surely would be looking for all sorts of ways to cross-promote products, invade its users' privacy, and maximize profits. But that part of the story doesn't interest him. He's not primarily a satirist, he's a romantic transcendentalist. Like Theodore, he's in mourning for his life, chafing against his limitations. In *Her*, the prospect of a singularity might not be the end of humanity as we know it. It might be deliverance.

Peter Bradshaw, "Her Review", *The Guardian*, 13 February 2014

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/feb/13/her-review>

Theodore has to be enough of an oddball for the exotic strangeness of the situation to work, but enough of a hunk to sell the love story. He is a Frankensteinian sewing together of two tonal imperatives. It is Samantha who is the plausible and sympathetic character, far more so than the weirdly contorted and contrived creation that is Theodore.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/us/film889720.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1798709>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/her>
- Rotten Tomatoes: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/her>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Her_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Her_(film))

***The Machine* (2013)**

CREW & CAST

Director: Caradog W. James
Screenplay: Caradog W. James
Producers: John Giwa-Amu
Main performers: Toby Stephens (McCarthy),
Caity Lotz (Ava/Machine), Denis Lawson (Thomson),
Pooneh Hajimohammadi (Suri), John Paul MacLeod
(Paul Dawson), Helen Griffin (Paul Dawson's mother),
Jade Croot (Mary)
Companies: Red & Black Film
Nationality: UK
Duration: 1h 31'



PLOT SUMMARY

Vincent McCarthy is an A.I. engineer who works for Britain's Ministry of Defence, then desperately trying to create skilled cyber-soldiers for the war against China. McCarthy's own aim is using the experiments (with half-dead soldiers) to find a cure for his very ill daughter, Mary. When Vincent's co-worker Ava is almost killed in retaliation for discovering military secrets, her mind is uploaded onto a robotic body. Somehow, her humanity survives, and Vincent discovers that the Machine is developing feelings. His boss, anyway, wants him to proceed and create the first functional super-soldier.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Caradog W. James is a Welsh film director, producer and cinematographer. His first film, the comedy *Little White Lies* (2006), came after a string of shorts (like *The Rainbow* (2005) or *Plastic Wolves* (2003)) which he also scripted. *The Machine* (2013), his second film, was followed by horror movie *Don't Knock Twice* (2016). A pilot for a possible TV series based on *The Machine* was commissioned by SyFy channel in 2017 but it failed to generate sufficient interest.

The Machine was generally received positively, though this modest British film, made for a low budget of just \$1.5 million, was a box office flop (it only grossed \$205,715 worldwide). The movie won three BAFTA Cymru awards, a Best of UK Film Award at Raindance Film Festival, and the Achievement Against the Odds Prize by the British Independent Film Awards. The film was generally described as a thought-provoking little thriller worth watching for its highly atmospheric future-noir

production values. It was, however, criticized mainly for being unsubtle and derivative, and for being unsure of whether it wanted to appeal to science fiction or to action film fans.

James's plot is set in a near future in which the People's Republic of China is about to take over Taipei, in Taiwan, in a couple of weeks. Britain's Ministry of Defence needs soldiers who are fluent in Chinese and who are also excellent fighters on the battlefield. They employ scientists who manage to produce a cybernetic implant which enables soldiers with head injuries to regain lost functions. Eventually, researcher Ava demonstrates that her flawless artificial intelligence can pass the Turing test better than any previous experimental subject. Vincent McCarthy, the Victor Frankenstein character in the movie, offers Ava unlimited funds to continue her research, which she accepts. He intends to use secretly her technology to help his daughter Mary, who has incurable Rett syndrome (a severe genetic neurological disease). When Ava finds out, she helps him map his daughter's brain so that she can at least survive digitally.

The role of main villain is played in *The Machine* by McCarthy's superior, Thomson. When Ava discovers how the soldiers used in the experiments are ill-treated, he punishes her with murder. Alluding somehow to *Ghost in the Shell* (see the factsheet in this volume), Ava's brain is recycled for the super-soldier project but with very different results. Since her humanity is proving to be a problem, Thomson wants it neutralized, for which he threatens to eliminate Mary's brain scans, the only way McCarthy can keep his daughter somehow alive after death. The Machine, of course, rebels and a sort of new family is constituted at the end of the film. The Machine proves herself far more intelligent than her creators expected, as is the case of Dr. Frankenstein's monster. Both are in some way born blameless but turned violent by their environment and stripped of their innocence. The Machine is, in any case, an interesting case because she acts upon her sense of morality and retains it, unlike Frankenstein's creation (he could have retained the morality of whoever possessed his brain before).

The Machine has many points of contact not only with *Frankenstein* but also with another British movie: *Ex Machina* (2014), written and directed by Alex Garland (see the factsheet in this volume). In both the female machine is called (or was called) Ava, and the male protagonist (Vincent and Caleb, respectively) falls in love with her at some point. Their robotic anatomy has similarities (with some transparent parts) and both Avas turn out to be ruthless killers seeking revenge against their makers, although the Machine is significantly more naive and far less calculating. This is not, however, a case of plagiarism since Garland had been working on his project in parallel to James. In any case, the differences are important: in *The Machine* Ava is a human woman transformed into a cyborg, whereas in *Ex Machina* Ava is a gynoid with no human parts trying to pass herself off as human. It is in fact perhaps more useful to think of the Machine as a female equivalent of Alex Murphy, the former cop turned cyborg in *Robocop* (1987, see the factsheet in this volume). And of Thomson as the real monster.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Anna Smith, "*The Machine*", *Time Out London*, 18 March 2014
<https://www.timeout.com/london/film/the-machine>

Cue 'The Machine' (also Lotz), a sleek, strong, sexy robot who struggles to come to terms with her humanity (or lack of it). It's an engaging story that owes a clear debt to the likes of *Blade Runner* and *Metropolis*, while an electro soundtrack adds to the retro sci-fi air. The characters could use more depth –Vincent's backstory is told too swiftly, and his bonding with Ava is brief. But it's still a smart, thought-provoking little thriller with strong central performances, marking second-time director Caradog W James (*Little White Lies*) as one to watch.

Ryan Lambie, "The Machine", *Den of Geek*, 21 March 2014

<https://www.denofgeek.com/movies/the-machine/29800/the-machine-review>

There are some points in *The Machine* where the lack of budget does start to tell, particularly in one or two action sequences, but these aren't the main reason to see the film in any case. For all its flaws, *The Machine* manages to build a believable, quite claustrophobic computer world, and through its gentle, innocent title character, poses some thought-provoking questions. If science could create artificial being indistinguishable from humans, wouldn't they deserve to be treated with the same dignity as us? Second, and more disquietingly: if they were more intelligent than us, wouldn't these beings also be more humane and compassionate than we are?

Jack P., "The Machine Audience Reviews", *Rotten Tomatoes*, 10 January 2016

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_machine_2013/reviews?type=user

Exceptional. As an ardent sci-fi fan, I was blown away by the special effects, characters, and story. What a fantastic success. I appreciated how, for once, the classic "machine turned evil" trope was reimagined and portrayed the Machine in a better light as she tried to help her creator, Vincent, who she genuinely loved. Even though this may not be a triple-A movie with a triple-A budget, it sure does look and feel like one! Bravo!!!!

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film349605.html>
- IMDb: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2317225/>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/the-machine>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_machine_2013/
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Machine_%28film%29

Dawn of the Planet of the Apes (2014)

CREW & CAST

Director: Matt Reeves

Screenplay: Mark Bomback, Rick Jaffa, Amanda Silver, Pierre Boule (novel, uncredited)

Producers: Peter Chernin, Dylan Clark, Rick Jaffa, Amanda Silver

Main performers: Andy Serkis (Caesar), Jason Clarke (Malcolm), Gary Oldman (Dreyfus), Keri Russel (Ellie), Toby Kebbell (Koba), Kodi Smit-McPhee (Alexander)

Companies: Chernin Entertainment, TSG Entertainment, Ingenious Media, Soho VFX

Nationality: USA

Duration: 2h 10'



PLOT SUMMARY

In a future world where the deadly ALZ-113 virus has expanded, a small group of immune humans are desperate to find a power source to survive. There is a hydroelectric facility in the territory where the apes, led by Caesar, have established themselves. Caesar warns the humans that he does not want war and that both should be limited to their territory. If necessary, though, the apes will fight to defend their home. Malcolm, one of the surviving humans offers a pact, which Caesar accepts. However, Koba, a bonobo under the leadership of Caesar, distrusts the humans and decides to start a plan to secretly incite a war against them.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLY'S FRANKENSTEIN

Matt Reeves (New York, 1966), is a film director, screenwriter, and producer. He debuted as a director with the romantic comedy film *The Pallbearer* (1996), but his biggest hit, *Cloverfield*, only came in 2008. Apart from *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* (2014) and *War for the Planet of the Apes* (2017), Reeves is known for *Let Me In* (2010) the American version of Swedish hit *Let the Right One In* (2008, based on John Ajvide Lindqvist's novel). Married couple Rick Jaffa (Texas, 1956) and Amanda Silver (1963) co-wrote *Jurassic World* (2015, the fourth instalment of *Jurassic Park* series) after starting the *Planet of the Apes* reboot franchise with *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (2011). They wrote *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* (2014), together with Mark Bomback, and have produced the three parts so far.

Dawn of the Planet of the Apes had a very positive response. The production budget of the film was \$170 million and it grossed an impressive total of \$710 million worldwide. The visual effects of the film were highly praised by many critics and the general public. The team composed by Joe Letteri, Dan Lemmon, Daniel Barrett and Erik Winquist received an Oscar nomination for Best Achievement in Visual Effects. For this same category they received a Critics Choice Award. One of the reasons that made the film seem so realistic is director Matt Reeves' choice to use natural locations (Muir Woods) and physical sets (the apes' colony) instead of the mostly used green-screen sets.

The plot of the film takes place ten years after the ALZ-113 virus eliminates most of the human population of Earth. Only a few immune humans survive, living in isolation. Meanwhile, the virus is speeding up the evolution of the apes. Due to the mistreatment that the apes received in the laboratories (in the first instalment of the franchise *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*), they distrust humans. On the other hand, most humans still consider the apes just wild animals; some blame them for the appearance and contagion of the virus. The two communities, humans and apes, distrust each other and the apes live in constant fear of losing their home.

In any case, the film focuses mainly on a territorial dispute, since the hydroelectric power which the humans need can only be provided by a dam located in the territory of the apes. Having been raised by scientist Will Rodman (who indirectly caused the virus to get out of control), Caesar, is compassionate towards Malcolm and his family. He knows that there are good and bad people, and, therefore, he decides to give them an opportunity with the condition that they surrender all their weapons. The apes under Caesar's leadership trust his decisions, except Koba. He just pretends to agree but only to be able to follow his own deceitful plan later. In his view, Caesar is too blinded by his love for the humans to be the best possible leader.

Caesar, more directly, and the rest of the mutant apes, less directly so, are Frankenstein-style monsters. In the eyes of the humans, they are savages incapable of reasoning. Yet, they are in fact thoughtful, intelligent, and reasonable creatures capable of expressing their emotions eloquently. The apes show a remarkable capacity to understand the human language and some of them can even talk. Similarly to Frankenstein's creature, who manages to learn human language very fast, the apes teach themselves (though under Caesar's guidance). Unlike the humans in Mary Shelley's novel, Malcolm breaks the social prejudice against the apes and tries to communicate with them. In a way, he becomes the trustful bridge between humans and apes, though this is not really enough.

In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the distrust between human and Other is a major issue. At one point, the monster narrates his story to Frankenstein but even so Frankenstein refuses to fully empathise, destroying the female monster that his creature demands and thus breaking his pact with him. The monster, disappointed and enraged, decides to be his enemy for life. Likewise, the apes trust that once the humans are given what they want, they will be able to live in peace. The humans at the same time trust that the "wild animals" will not to attack them. Tragically, both are unable to fully trust the other. The straw that breaks the camel's back is Koba's betrayal, which clearly hints that there can only be one sentient, dominant group on Earth. Caesar has a difficult role to play, for as a leader he must accept that apes are, like humans, also capable of falsehood. Not everyone is good or bad. Caesar used to

believe that the apes were superior to the human species but after meeting Malcolm and his family, he comes to see how much they both have in common. For good but also for bad.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Peter Bradshaw, "*Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*", *The Guardian*, 17 July 2014
<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/jul/17/dawn-of-the-planet-of-the-apes-review-andy-serkis>

As in the last film, the CGI apes are very impressive, with next-level mannerisms in swaying, screeching, lunging and teeth-baring; Serkis's Caesar is a very watchable digital-chimp, his face set in an asymmetric grimace-sowl, rather like Douglas MacArthur. The huge battle set pieces have a bizarre and mesmeric quality. As to where it is all leading... well, *Apes* fans will be agog to know how a certain New York statue is holding up, and whether this film can in narrative terms do anything other than mark time.

Wendy Ide, "*Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*", *The Times*, 18 July 2014
<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/dawn-of-the-planet-of-the-apes-rwvdqfjkws3>

There are few arguments more persuasive for "reboots" as opposed to straight remakes than the *Planet of the Apes* films. As Tim Burton discovered to his cost, a remake is hamstrung by both the limitations and the strengths of the original film, whereas *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*, the second of a series of rebooted prequels, is a text book example of how to stay true to the basic genetic code of a movie while also letting it evolve into a different, altogether more sophisticated beast.

Bernard Boo, "*Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*", *Way Too Indie*, 11 July 2014
<http://waytooindie.com/review/movie/dawn-of-the-planet-of-the-apes/>

Dawn of the Planet of the Apes is better than its predecessor, and that's saying a lot. Though it juggles multiple characters struggling with inner conflicts inside of a larger external conflict, the film never feels unstable, confusing, or lopsided. It's a surprisingly depressing movie, especially for a summer blockbuster, as it reveals the ugliest facets of human nature and the dire consequences they bear.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: www.filmaffinity.com/en/film613575.html
- IMDB: www.imdb.com/title/tt2103281/
- Metacritic: www.metacritic.com/movie/dawn-of-the-planet-of-the-apes
- Rotten Tomatoes: [www.rottentomatoes.com/m/dawn of the planet of the apes](http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/dawn_of_the_planet_of_the_apes)
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dawn of the Planet of the Apes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dawn_of_the_Planet_of_the_Apes)

Lucy (2014)

CREW & CAST

Director: Luc Besson

Screenplay: Luc Besson

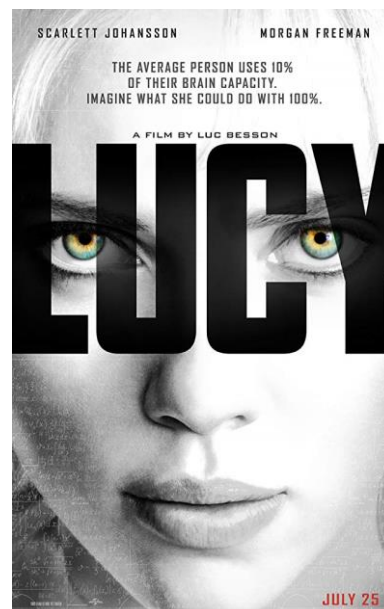
Producer: Virginie Besson

Main performers: Scarlett Johansson (Lucy), Morgan Freeman (Professor Morgan), Min-Sik Choi (Mr Jang), Amr Waked (Pierre Del Rio)

Companies: EuropaCorp, TF1 Films Production, Grive Productions, Canal+, Ciné+, Centre National du Cinéma et de L'image Animée (CNC)

Nationality: France

Duration: 1h 29'



PLOT SUMMARY

Lucy, an American 25 years-old student is forced to become a drug mule when she gets into a scrape with some gangsters. She is to deliver a briefcase supposedly containing paperwork to Mr. Jang. The real content is CPH4, a new synthetic drug to be spread in Europe. Lucy carries one of the packets inside her and when she is shot and it gets broken her bloodstream absorbs the drug and her transformation starts. Doctor Morgan, a brain expert, helps Lucy to understand the process and the time she has before her ending. Her brain's capacity increases extremely fast, and though this empowers Lucy there must be a limit for her. Morgan and Lucy embark on the task of saving all the knowledge she can gain before dying. Or becoming something else, so far unknown.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Luc Besson (Paris, 1959) is a French film director, screenwriter, and producer. He is known for *Subway* (1985), *Le Gran Bleu* (1988), *La Femme Nikita* (1990), *Léon: The Professional* (1994), and above all his science-fiction action film *The Fifth Element* (1997). Later films include *The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc* (1999), *Arthur and the Invisibles* (2003), *Lucy* (2014) and space opera *Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets* (2017). Besson is specially interested in strong female characters, an interest which is also manifest in *Lucy*.

Lucy was generally said to be entertaining but also a bit silly, though this could also be said of the much better liked *The Fifth Element*. It polarized opinions but grossed at the box office a staggering \$458 million worldwide, out of a budget of

around \$40 million. Besson's film was a Saturn Award nominee and it is arguably unfair that its only win was a Yoga Award to Worst Foreign Director. Obviously, Besson's particular, personal style does not suit very well American audiences, though he is much better liked in Europe and in his native France (which he has never left, despite making now most of his films in English).

Besson's movie is set in the present time and uses as its main premises the constant creation of new synthetic drugs and the myth that we only use 10% of our brain's capacity. When Lucy's blood absorbs an enormous quantity of CPH4, she mutates and her brain starts waking up in full, raising her ability to generate knowledge to extraordinary levels. Incidentally, CPH4 (which does not exist) is supposed to be naturally produced by women in tiny quantities in their sixth week of pregnancy to give the foetus the energy needed to develop. In the film, the boost it provides is compared to the energy of a hurricane.

Lucy, who is not really remarkable in any way before the shooting that changes her life, soon realizes that she can control her own body. Doctor Morgan explains to her that the more parts of her brain she uses, the better she can control herself and even others. Lucy, however, starts feeling less human as the process progresses because she is losing all that makes her an ordinary person. After her transformation, Lucy gains an absolutely clear vision of herself, the world, the human purpose, and of the universe. Through electrical impulses her cells form an almost autonomous web of communication; in terms of matter they work as a unit, they can form, reform and transform. Lucy becomes thus the first person ever to reach complete neuronal connection but since this is too much for any human body Lucy's cells decide to disintegrate physically to become pure energy. What Lucy becomes next is new, a pure intellect capable of surviving digitally and very similar to the A.I. Samantha, played also by Scarlett Johansson in *Her* (2013, see the factsheet in this volume). This is, of course, a fantasy and very poor science but, as Luc Besson declared, "The good thing with movies is that you mix up everything and then in the end it looks real".

Like Frankenstein's monster Lucy is a result of illicit scientific experimentation. Her mutation is accidental but (a bit like Caesar in the *Planet of the Apes* reboot) she comes from a carefully designed drug. Whereas Frankenstein was motivated by his deep desire for knowledge, Lucy is, however, the side-effect of illegal drug trafficking. Like Frankenstein's monster, the new Lucy is superior to any human, more intelligent but also far stronger physically. Her abilities are many: she does not feel pain, has enhanced hearing, understands all languages. She can sense space, but also air changes, vibrations, people's movements, gravity, the rotation of the Earth, the blood in her veins, her brain and the deepest parts of his memories since birth. No insult is thrown at Frankenstein's monster for being a man, but Lucy is insulted specifically for being a woman: gangster Mr. Jang calls her a witch, though she is, rather, a transhuman super-person. Or a goddess, as Leloo is in *The Fifth Element*. There is no question in *Lucy* of reproduction, for she is an only case and no male monster is available. This is not, then, a story about the beginnings of a new species, as *Frankenstein* is, but a story of individual empowerment so radical that it is hard to say whether the result is monstrous or divine.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Kate Stables, "Lucy – Review", *Games Radar*, 22 August 2014

<https://www.gamesradar.com/lucy-review/>

As it barrels towards its climax, Lucy's boundless powers overshadow every other character and the action sequences develop an omnipotence problem: witness our hero effortlessly surfing a Parisian car-chase. And there's an audacious outcome that uses both velocity and grandiosity to propel it into 2001 terrain. But Johansson is magnificent. Starring Lucy from tearful victim, through calmly logical assassin to questing consciousness, she's compulsively watchable. Scar-Jo owns every inch of this wild ride, and she knows it

Richard Corliss, "Lucy – Movie Review", *Time*, 25 July 2014

<http://time.com/3029819/lucy-movie-review-luc-besson/>

Luc Besson's *Lucy* is here to the rescue. The French writer-director-producer's new movie, about a woman empowered and imperiled by the explosion of a powerful new drug in her nervous system, kicks ass and takes brains. Besson creates a heroine whose rapidly expanding abilities make her the world's most awesome weapon. In the process, he promotes Scarlett Johansson from an indie-film icon and Marvel-universe sidekick to the movie superwoman she was destined to be. Taking place in less than a day –and synopsising 3 million years of human evolution in a hurtling 82 min. of screen time– *Lucy* tops its only competition, Tom Cruise and Doug Liman's underappreciated *Edge of Tomorrow*, as the summer's coolest, juiciest, smartest action movie.

Trevor Johnston, "Lucy", *Time Out*, 19 August 2014

<https://www.timeout.com/london/film/lucy-2014>

This ridiculous, highly watchable, at points startlingly psychedelic action thriller is probably Luc Besson's best film since *Léon* (which isn't saying a great deal). Riffing on her recent performance in *Under the Skin*, Scarlett Johansson plays Lucy, an American student in the Taiwanese capital Taipei, who is forced to act as a drug mule for a group of brutal Korean gangsters. But when the powder she's carrying leaks into her bloodstream, Lucy finds herself acquiring strange super heroic powers. Is she going mad, or becoming God?

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/us/film429755.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2872732/>
- Rotten Tomatoes: http://rottentomatoes/m/lucy_2014
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/lucy>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucy_\(2014_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucy_(2014_film))

Victor Frankenstein (2015)

CREW & CAST

Director: Paul McGuigan

Screenplay: Max Landis (also story),
Mary Shelley (novel)

Producer: John Davies, Mairi Bett

Main performers: James McAvoy (Victor Frankenstein), Daniel Radcliffe (Igor),
Jessica Brown Findlay (Lorelei),
Bronson Webb (Rafferty), Daniel Mays (Barnaby),
Andrew Scott (Inspector Turpin)

Company: Davis Entertainment, TSG Entertainment,
Moving Picture Company

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 50'



PLOT SUMMARY

Igor Strausman (Daniel Radcliffe) is a hunchbacked London circus clown, mistreated both physically and psychologically by his co-workers. However, Igor is also extremely keen on science and much interested in anatomy. Thanks to the accident which trapeze artist Lorelei suffers, Igor meets Victor Frankenstein and is rescued by him to be employed as his assistant. A strong but also toxic friendship connects the two men. Victor Frankenstein's main objective is to be able to bring life to a death body, and Igor will be a fundamental part of their project.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN

Paul McGuigan is a Scottish producer and director, known mainly for his work on TV. His main films are *Lucky Number Slevin* (2006), *Wicker Park* (2004), and *Victor Frankenstein* (2015). Californian screen playwright Max Landis (son of film director John Landis) is also known for *Bright* (2017), *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency* (2016) and *Mr. Right* (2015). Their joint film was very poorly received, as yet another failed attempt to recreate Mary Shelley's Gothic novel. *Victor Frankenstein* only made \$34 million worldwide, despite the \$65 million budget, being far less successful than the preposterous *I, Frankenstein* (2014, Stuart Beattie, based on Kevin Greivoux's graphic novel). McGuigan's film got a few awards, at least, for aspects of its design.

Despite several references to Mary Shelley's masterpiece, under no circumstances should this film be described as a faithful adaptation. Frankenstein is depicted in both stories as a scientist whose main purpose in his career is to bring new life to a lifeless body –and that's all the connection. It is this urge which unites the

doctor and Igor, a character descended from the 1823 first stage adaptation of Mary Shelley's novel. However, in Richard Brinsley Peake's play *Presumption; or the Fate of Frankenstein*, Victor's assistant is called Fritz, a name still maintained in James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931, see the factsheet in this volume). It is not clear when and how Fritz became known mainly as Igor, though the hunchback assistant was firmly implanted in the general imagination by the 1940s. In Mel Brooks's *Young Frankenstein* (1974, see the factsheet in this volume), there is a running joke about how Igor's hunch constantly shifts sides.

The main innovation in McGuigan's film is the fact that it follows Igor's point of view, rather than Frankenstein's. The younger man appears to be to all effects the protagonist with his fears, thoughts, feelings and concerns. Indeed, whereas in the novel Frankenstein shares with no one the process of making his monster and its consequences, Landis's script deals mainly with the relationship between the doctor and his reliable assistant. This is turbulent, dark and twisted, far from an easy bromance. Dr. Frankenstein is initially depicted as Igor's saviour. Nevertheless, as the story moves on, they develop a rather morbid mutual dependency. Igor becomes, so to speak, Victor's moral consciousness. Basically, his main job is to try to prevent the scientist from going crazy and ensure that he is aware of the significance and magnitude of his acts. Igor and Victor face dangerous situations while trying to reach their reckless objective. Igor is not as determined as Victor to achieve their aim and their growing differences lead to a growing distance. Circus trapeze artist, Lorelei, the woman Igor loves, is his salvation from but there is no one to rescue Victor as he is beyond salvation.

The strongest point of McGuigan's *Victor Frankenstein* it is atmosphere. He beautifully succeeds in creating a Romantic-Gothic ambience which aids the storytelling to be more dark and disturbing. The scenery is shadowy, dangerous and nightmarish, which recreates both Shelley's famous nightmare and the atmosphere depicted in her novel. The question that remains unanswered is why the content of Mary Shelley's novel is far more problematic to adapt. Perhaps, her way of describing Frankenstein's motifs and the monster's feelings is too singular to result in a good film adaptation. Or perhaps all adapters take it for granted that since everyone knows the novel and the many films it has inspired, they should be free to play around with the characters and the plotlines. This would be fine if they could improve on Mary Shelley's tale but since they cannot perhaps it is time to take a new look at *Frankenstein*, if only to remind new audiences that this is the valuable original inspiring everyone else.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Sheri Linden, "*Victor Frankenstein*", *The Hollywood Reporter*, 24 November 2015

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/victor-frankenstein-film-review-842110>

Timeless and of-the-moment, the questions of immortality, hubris and the limits of science and technology play out here with emphatic overstatement, provoking not an instant of the deep shudder that animates Shelley's story. Intended emotional undercurrents are similarly dead on arrival, whether it's the boilerplate backstory that motivates Victor or Igor's love for trapeze artist Lorelei (Jessica Brown Findlay). In a

movie where every character is one-note, Lorelei's distinction is that she embodies none.

Manohla Dargis, "Review: *Victor Frankenstein* Recasts a Tale That Keeps On Giving", *The New York Times*, 24 November 2015

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/25/movies/review-victor-frankenstein-recasts-a-tale-that-keeps-on-giving.html>

You cannot keep a good monster down, especially when there's franchise money to be made. This doubtless explains *Victor Frankenstein*, a pop romp that exhumes Mary Shelley's famous monster-maker for a jaunty bromance with his bestie, Igor. It's a hyperventilated resurrection that owes less to Shelley (or most Frankenstein flicks) than to Guy Ritchie's Sherlock Holmes diversions, which turned Holmes (Robert Downey Jr.) and Dr. Watson (Jude Law) into 19th-century action heroes complete with cheerfully deployed violence and self-regarding smiles.

Cathy Clark, "*Victor Frankenstein*", *Time Out*, 1 May 2015

<https://www.timeout.com/london/film/victor-frankenstein>

The film is told from the point of view of Frankenstein's assistant Igor (Daniel Radcliffe), a hunchback raised in the circus. The most interesting thing about the character is his hair, which goes from fingers-in-the-socket fright-wig to Anna Wintour bob after he's busted out of the carnival by cocky medical student Victor Frankenstein (James McAvoy). Making Igor his righthand man, Victor's playing-God project starts badly when he brings to life a psychotic rampaging monkey-monster stitched together from pieces filched from zoos.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/us/film131324.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1976009>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/victor-frankenstein>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/victor_frankenstein_2015
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victor_Frankenstein_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victor_Frankenstein_(film))

Chappie (2015)

CREW AND CAST

Director: Neill Blomkamp

Screenplay: Neil Blomkamp (also short film), Terri Tatchel

Producers: Neil Blomkamp, Simon Kinberg, James Bitonti

Main performers: Sharlto Copley (Chappie), Dev Patel (Deon Wilson), Jose Pablo Cantillo (YAnkie), Sigourney Weaver (Michelle Bradley), Hugh Jackman (Vincent Moore), Ninja (Ninja), Yo-Landi Visser (Yo-Landi)

Companies: Columbia Pictures, Media Rights Capital, LStar Capital, Kinberg Genre, Alpha Core, Ollin VFX, Sony Pictures Entertainment (SPE)

Nationality: South Africa/ USA

Duration: 2h



PLOT SUMMARY

Deon Wilson, a scientist employed by the manufacturer Tetravaal, decides to develop a prototype of artificial intelligence that imitates the human mind and can feel emotions. When his project is abruptly cancelled by the CEO, Deon runs away. He and the robot are captured by gangsters who want to use it for their own purposes. Deon is forced to install the new software into the robot and, together with the gangsters, he starts teaching Chappie, who is, like any child, a blank slate. Soon Chappie learns to talk, write, and paint but also to shoot and to think by itself. Its feelings suggest it should help anyone in distress but this is not how others think of using it.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Neill Blomkamp (Johannesburg, 1979) is a writer, producer, and director, active since the 1990s. He worked mainly in advertising and making short films before writing and directing his first feature-length film, the highly acclaimed *District 9* (2009); this was followed by the less well-received *Elysium* (2013), his first American film. *Chappie* (2015), co-written with his wife Terri Tatchel, was not generally well-received, either. Since then Blomkamp has been mainly making short films, a genre which interests him. In fact, *Chappie* is inspired by a short, *Tetra Vaal* (2004), just as *District 9* (based on *Alive in Joburg*, 2005). Despite the tepid reception by reviewers, *Chappie*, made on a \$49 million budget, did well at the box office grossing \$102.1 million world-wide. Blomkamp's movie got no awards, and its only notable nomination was for Sharlto Copley (to the Behind the Voice Actor Awards). He plays the robot and lends it his

voice, using the motion capture technique also used by the actors in the *Planet of the Apes* franchise.

Blomkamp's short film *Tetra Vaal* deals with a robotic police officer, partly echoing *RoboCop* (1987, see the factsheet in this volume). It is set in the near future in Johannesburg at a time when the South African Police decides to buy armoured robots from weapon manufacturer Tetra Vaal to reduce the high crime rate. Deon Wilson, their employee, plays the role of a modern *Frankenstein*, as he tries to fit a technoscientific world he is uncomfortable with. In Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*, Victor Frankenstein creates a monster with different organic pieces from dead bodies. No wonder then that everyone who sees him is afraid, including its own creator. The monster teaches himself to talk and read, while he is hidden in the forest. Once he develops his ability to think, he wonders why his creator abandoned him. His conclusions will lead him to take revenge on the person who never loved him. Chappie is quite different, though it is also a Frankenstein creature made by science for the wrong reasons. Its making is in the film, though, far less important than its process of learning. New software allows it to pick up cultural references and enjoy the art of painting. However, since its teachers include also the gangsters who kidnap it, Chappie also masters street jargon and acquires a peculiar dress style.

Chappie does not only have similarities with *Frankenstein* in the way both of them learn as if they were children. Other films are quoted in its plot, such as *Short Circuit* (1986), *RoboCop* (1987) or *Blade Runner* (1982), all dealing with what happens when artificial life –mechanic, cyborgian, or organic– becomes self-aware. Chappie starts questioning the techno-business that made it when it declares “I’m consciousness. I’m alive. I’m Chappie”. Blomkamp has explained that his film is not, however, really about A.I. but meant to inspire questions about “what it means to be sensitive”, in other words, what it means to be human. Chappie elicits empathy and even pity, showing us how a machine can feel, love, and think. Blomkamp's film, then, makes us wonder “what really makes us human, the flesh or our mind?” or “Can the artificial have a soul?” Interestingly, the question also applies ultimately to Chappie's maker, since Deon ends up surviving in a robotic body, much as if Frankenstein had been reborn by his monster as one of his own kind. It is hard to say, however, what kind of message Blomkamp is sending about the uses and abuses of technology, unless he means that being a non-human ‘monster’ is not as bad as it seems.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Manohla Dargis, “*Chappie: A Smart Robot in a Violent Future*”, *The New York Times*, 5 March 2015

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/06/movies/review-chappie-a-smart-robot-in-a-violent-future.html>

Mr. Blomkamp may be genuinely interested in artificial intelligence, but he doesn't engage with it as much as desultorily kick it around. It's as if he felt that he needed an excuse to trot out his robot, as if one were ever needed. It's no wonder his nods to earlier texts –from the different iterations of *Frankenstein* to *RoboCop*– register as little more than shorthand for ideas that have been worked out more fully elsewhere. In some movies, allusions to other movies build on earlier thinking or, at times, become an index of authorial self-regard, intended mostly to close the distance

between the original and the copy. Here, the allusions feel like the handiwork of someone who's eager to make something cool and so borrows with promiscuous abandon.

Peter Travers, "*Chappie*", *Rolling Stone Magazine*, 5 March 2015

<https://www.rollingstone.com/movies/movie-reviews/chappie-252215/>

Chappie feels played out from the start when a scientist (Dev Patel) reboots a police droid so it can think and feel for itself. Kidnapped by thugs, the droid –renamed Chappie (Sharlto Copley does the excellent motion-capture)– is programmed to shoot, steal cars and talk street, muthafucka. Enemies of artificial intelligence, repped by a weapons designer (Hugh Jackman) and a profiteer (Sigourney Weaver), see potential for evil, and they want it destroyed. His creator sees only Chappie's humanity. What do you think? Blomkamp and his wife and co-writer, Terri Tatchell, stack the deck. Instead of awe, we get *E.T.* –aww.

Trevor Johnston, "*Chappie*", *Time Out*, 5 March 2015

<https://www.timeout.com/london/film/chappie>

Chappie the film isn't so perfect. The plot is threadbare, the nods to *RoboCop* are laid on thick and it's hard to overlook the fact that Blomkamp has made another Jo'burg-based movie strangely lacking in black characters. But with its stunning urban landscapes, trash-talking titanium hero and mulleted, God-bothering bad guy (Hugh Jackman, never better), this hugely entertaining oddity could never be mistaken for the work of any other filmmaker.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film417456.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1823672>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/chappie>
- Rotten Tomatoes: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/chappie>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chappie_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chappie_(film))

Morgan (2016)

CREW & CAST

Director: Luke Scott

Screenplay: Seth W. Owen

Producers: Michel Schaefer, Ridley Scott

Main performers: Anya Taylor-Joy (Morgan), Kate Mara (Lee Weathers), Rose Leslie (Dr. Amy Menser), Michael Yare (Ted Brenner), Michelle Yeoh (Dr. Lui Cheng), Boyd Holbrook (Skip Vronsky), Chris Sullivan (Dr. Darren Finch), Michael Yare (Ted Brenner), Toby Jones (Dr. Simon Ziegler)

Companies: Scott Free Films, 20th Century-Fox Film Corporation, TSG Entertainment

Nationality: USA

Duration: 1h 32'



PLOT SUMMARY

Lee Weathers is hired by genetic-engineering company SynSect to assess whether a project needs to be terminated when its main subject causes a frightening accident. The subject is Morgan, a hybrid made of different DNA strands thanks to nanotechnology. She displays emotions at human-like level but can also behave like a robot with incredible strength. Able to talk and walk from her first month of life, SynSect lost control over Morgan when she hit five and started showing incredible violence. Her existence is the problem Lee needs to solve.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Luke Scott (London, 1968), son of famous filmmaker Ridley Scott, has mainly worked on short films associated to his father's feature-length movies and as his second unit assistant director (in *Exodus: Gods and Kings* (2014), *The Martian* (2015) and *Alien: Covenant* (2017)). *Morgan*, his only feature-length film so far, was scripted by Seth W. Owen. The screenplay, written in 2014, was in the list of best unproduced screenplays, a limbo from which 20th Century Fox as financier and Ridley Scott as producer rescued it. Owen has written since then *All Nighter* (2017). *Morgan* was not generally welcome by the reviewers and just managed to recoup the \$8 million budget (it grossed \$8.8 million world-wide); despite opening on a summer weekend in 2.000 theatres, it could not reach the top ten films. The movie only received two nominations, both for Anya Taylor-Joy's performance as Morgan. This shows that not even a filmmaker as powerful as Ridley Scott can ensure the success of his productions.

Scott's movie tells a rather typical Frankenstein-style story, very similar to *Ex Machina* (2014) and the more modest *The Machine* (2013), thus completing a sort of British trilogy about monstrous women that claim their freedom. In this case, Morgan is created by Dr. Ziegler out of biological material to be used in combat and, predictably, she (or 'it' as Dr. Cheng prefers), quickly gets out of control. Morgan is emotionally strong but at the same time mistrustful, which makes her volatile and hard to contain. Besides, everyone around her makes mistakes she takes advantage of, which enables Morgan to get the revenge she is seeking. The only thing that is unusual in this story is the remarkable presence of female characters in the scientific team, Morgan's special bonding with behaviour specialist Amy and the final turn, which is not all that surprising: Lee Weathers is effective because she is herself a replicant like Morgan.

Frankenstein's crude methods to create his male monster are replaced in modern movies with fantasies based on scientific updates. Here Morgan is also made of pieces, but these are DNA strands, not whole organs. Like Victor's monster, Morgan learns very fast though there is something a bit ridiculous in her maturing so quickly and then stop (her ageing should presumably go on). Unlike Frankenstein's creature, Morgan's birth is very much sought-after and she is well cared for. Indeed, her makers seem confused about her, for they treat her as their daughter even though she does not feel love for them. This situation is so absurd that Morgan's creators even protect her from Lee, wrongly believing that Morgan can be somehow controlled. Frankenstein has no such doubts about his own creature. Since Morgan kills one by one the scientists, Scott's film apparently sends the message that empathy has no place in the making of ultra-violent creatures. Interestingly, just as Frankenstein's monster needs a mate who understands him, Morgan feel a close affinity for Amy, the team specialist who teaches her more directly how to be human.

Morgan, as many reviewers have noted, is quite a predictable movie, perhaps except for the idea that no matter how much human feeling is inserted into a replicant made for combat, it will be still a very violent creature. In a way, this is also what lies at the core of *Frankenstein*: the monster's violent side overwhelms his good side. Emotions are important but not enough to cancel out, or control, aggression. In Mary Shelley's novel this is fundamentally what goes wrong in Frankenstein's experiment, but it could be argued that Dr. Ziegler's own creature is on the right track. The conclusion is that it is difficult to create a hybrid and try to make it fully human just because they are artificial creations and, so, they are still monsters.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Kyle Smith, "Ridley Scott's Son Rips off his Dad with Weak *Morgan*", *The New York Post*, 1 September 2016

<https://nypost.com/2016/09/01/ridley-scotts-son-rips-off-his-dad-with-weak-morgan/>

A rehash of *Frankenstein* with bits of *Ex Machina*, and, yes, Scott Sr.'s own *Blade Runner* half-heartedly tossed in for fake gravitas, this witless, plodding and predictable sci-fi future caper centers on a "corporate risk manager" (i.e., assassin) played by Kate Mara. She's investigating a mishap at a secret lab in the mountains where a synthetic humanoid called Morgan has nearly killed one of her many minders.

Sheri Linden, "Review: *Morgan*", *The Hollywood Reporter*, 29 August 2016

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/morgan-919540>

The title character of *Morgan*, a sleek sci-fi/horror hybrid, is herself a hybrid: a humanoid made from synthetic DNA. She's a biological organism, a scientific experiment, a corporate product. To some, fatefully, she's a person. They're the ones who call her "she" rather than "it" — a divide that neatly encapsulates the philosophical questions propelling writer Seth Owen's high-concept scenario, among the most memorable screenplays on the 2014 Black List.

Peter Hartlaub, "*Morgan* Bares Teeth, but Never Totally Comes to Life", *SF Gate*, 1 September 2016

<https://www.sfgate.com/movies/article/Morgan-bares-teeth-but-never-totally-comes-9195277.php>

Anya Taylor-Joy is *Morgan*, and the execution of her character is mixed. She's appropriately unsettling, aided by some subtle makeup and sound mixing. But the sense of psychological robot horror feels remedial in the wake of better films. *Morgan* arrives just a year after *Ex Machina*, a masterpiece in the same genre. Of course such comparisons are unfair, even in a movie that pays so much tribute to the science fiction films of a generation earlier.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film602797.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4520364/reviews>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/morgan>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/morgan_2016
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morgan_\(2016_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morgan_(2016_film))

Blade Runner 2049 (2017)

CREW & CAST

Director: Denis Villeneuve

Screenplay: Hampton Fancher (also story), Michael Green, Philip K. Dick (novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*)

Producers: Dana Belcastro, Broderick Johnson, Andrew A. Kosove, Carl O. Rogers, Cynthia Sikes Yorkin, Steven P. Wegner, Bud Yorkin

Main performers: Ryan Gosling (K), Harrison Ford (Rick Deckard), Ana de Armas (Joi), Robin Wright (Joshi), Sylvia Hoeks (Luv), Jared Leto (Wallace), Dave Bautista (Morton)

Companies: Alcon Entertainment, Columbia Pictures, Sony, Torridon Films, 16:14 Entertainment, Scott Free Productions, Thunderbird Films

Nationality: USA

Duration: 2h 44'



PLOT SUMMARY

In 2049, replicants, bioengineered artificial humans, serve humans and obey their orders. The replicants who defy their masters are “retired” by police agents called “blade runners”. K, a replicant blade runner, is tasked to find and kill a child born out of a human-replicant relationship (replicants are supposed to be unable to reproduce). Replicant manufacturer Niander Wallace sends his best model, Luv, to find this child, believing it holds the key to replicant procreation. After investigating about the child and his own memories, K concludes that he himself is the hybrid child and seeks answers from its missing father, Rick Deckard. Eventually K discovers that the child, a girl, was left in the custody of rogue replicants. Luv captures Deckard and K sacrifices himself to give him a chance to meet his daughter.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY’S FRANKENSTEIN

Denis Villeneuve (Quebec, 1967) started making short films. His early feature-length movies already granted him the attention of the critics. *August 32nd on Earth* (1998), *Maelström* (2000), *Polytechnique* (2009) and *Incendies* (2010) received various important Canadian film awards. Later works such as *Prisoners* (2013), *Enemy* (2014), *Sicario* (2015), *Arrival* (2016) and *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) have solidified his directing career and earned him his first Academy nominations (for *Arrival*) and awards from diverse film festivals. Screenplay writer Hampton Fancher (Los Angeles, 1938) is mostly known for his participation in *Blade Runner* (1982), co-signed with David Webb Peoples, and its sequel. Michael Green has participated in TV shows such as *Sex and*

the City and *Smallville*. He is a contributor to DC Comics and his film writing career also includes *Green Lantern* (2011) and *Logan* (2018).

Blade Runner 2049 was well-received by critics and audience and performed reasonably well at the box-office, despite its length and slow tempo. Villeneuve admitted that although he was proud of the film, its spoiler-proof marketing may have driven audiences away. Anyway, the budget was around \$150 million and grossed worldwide \$400 million. The film received numerous awards (94) and nominations (107). It won two academy awards for Best Cinematography and Best Visual Effects, categories that also won other awards and that constitute the most outstanding feature of the film.

Villeneuve's film is set thirty years after the events of *Blade Runner* (1982, see the factsheet in this volume), set in 2019. After the elimination of the rebellious Nexus-6 created by the Tyrell Corporation, problems with artificial life have been solved. A new Frankenstein-like creator, Niander Wallace, has managed to create a new series of replicants that fulfil their original function as slaves and obey human orders. Thanks to his creations, humans have conquered more worlds, but his ambition is infinite. The plot of the film is, however, focused on K, a replicant blade runner who finds the remains of a female replicant with clear signs of her having given birth to a child. Replicants are supposedly infertile and this dead body might change the world, as both Lieutenant Joshi, K's boss, and Wallace realize.

The magnate intends to discover the truth of replicant reproduction, for, if his creations were able to reproduce, he would be the architect behind the conquest of many more worlds. Whereas Victor Frankenstein does all he can to stop his monster from reproducing, Wallace seeks ardently to expand human colonization. He refers to his replicants as good angels, calling the ones that rebelled in the past "bad angles". He believes that thanks to his replicants humans will prosper and reach Eden but cannot see that, like the angel Lucifer, his own replicants will inevitably rebel. In contrast, Lt. Joshi regards the possibility of replicant procreation with dread. If the truth about the hybrid child comes out, a war between humans and replicants could start, and she wants to prevent it at all costs. Thus, she orders K to find and kill the child, concealing its existence. This perspective is more aligned with Victor's destruction of his female creation out of the fear that procreation would defy humanity's rule.

In *Blade Runner*, the Nexus-6 replicants are characterized as rogues. They have rebelled against humans, are looking for a way to expand their lifespan, and they are disposed to commit violence to achieve this end. In the sequel, we have different examples of replicant behaviour and goals. Luv, Wallace's minion, wants to prove that she is the best creation of her master by fulfilling his orders, and she enjoys violence as a method to do it. K goes through an identity journey, not only to find out who he is but also who he wants to be, and even if he does not end up being the 'chosen' one, he stills sacrifices himself for what he thinks is right. Frankenstein's creature is abandoned by its master and builds an identity by himself. He, like K, ends up defying its master in a reverse of what Luv does. Its violence goes against what Victor wanted, whereas Luv's is used to follow her master's orders. The creature chooses violence because of rejection, diverging from K who, despite human discrimination, behaves ethically. As reviewer John Bleasdale suggests (see review below), K embodies the humanity that humans themselves have lost. And that is the main lesson which Villeneuve's sequel teaches.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Stephanie Zacharek, "Review: *Blade Runner 2049* Is Visually Stunning and Excessively Faithful to the Original", *Time Magazine*, 29 September 2017

<http://time.com/4962769/review-blade-runner-2049-gosling/>

Blade Runner 2049 is packed with visual cleverness, and it shows a great deal of affection for the movie that came before it. There are many obvious little echoes (...) But even if *Blade Runner 2049* never forgets where it came from, it somehow keeps losing its way. The picture's moodiness is excessively manicured; this thing is gritty only in a premeditated way. Mostly, it feels like a capacious handbag, designed with perhaps too many extra compartments to hold every cool visual idea Villeneuve can dream up.

John Bleasdale, "Review: *Blade Runner 2049*", *Cinevue*, 5 October 2017

<https://cine-vue.com/2017/10/film-review-blade-runner-2049.html>

Empathy has been vacuum-packed away from the real world. The absence of the Voight-Kampff test suggests that it is no longer reliable at distinguishing human characteristics. If the first film hinged on the question of whether Deckard was really human, the new film posits the idea that Gosling's replicant might be the post-human vehicle for an otherwise absent humanity.

Kenneth Turan, "Review: *Blade Runner 2049*", *Los Angeles Times*, 5 October 2017

<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-et-mn-blade-runner-2049-review-20171005-story.html>

Blade Runner 2049's plot finally gets a bit too twisty for its own good, but that doesn't matter as much as you might think. Villeneuve and company have cast a powerful and disturbing visual spell, thrusting us into a world compelling enough to get lost in. "I've seen some things you people wouldn't believe," Rutger Hauer's renegade replicant Roy Batty famously says in the first film, and viewers of this one will feel just the same.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film236626.html>
- IMDb: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1856101/>
- Metracritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/blade-runner-2049>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/blade_runner_2049
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blade_Runner_2049

***The Shape of Water* (2017)**

CREW & CAST

Director: Guillermo del Toro

Screenplay: Guillermo del Toro (also story),
Vanessa Taylor

Producers: Guillermo del Toro, J. Miles Dale

Main performers: Sally Hawkins (Elisa Esposito),
Doug Jones (Amphibian man), Michael Shannon
(Richard Strickland), Richard Jenkins (Giles),
Octavia Spencer (Zelda Fuller) Michael Stuhlbarg
(Dr. Robert Hoffstetler)

Company: Double Dare You (DDY), Fox
Searchlight Pictures, TSG Entertainment

Nationality: USA

Duration: 2h 3'



PLOT SUMMARY

Elisa Esposito, a mute orphan from Baltimore, gets involved in an incredible love story when a mysterious Amphibian Man is brought to the laboratory where she works at some point during the Cold War. This creature, captured by an American Colonel in the Amazon river, is thought to be a mere animal by the scientists. Elisa, though, starts interacting with him and finds out that he possesses the ability to reason and communicate (she teaches him sign language). The pair develop a strong bond that leads Elisa to rescue him when she overhears from the scientists that they plan to euthanise him.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Guillermo del Toro (Guadalajara, 1964) is a Mexican director, producer, novelist and screenplay writer with a long and successful career. He has been awarded many prizes, including the Spanish Premio Goya, the Golden Globe and the Oscar (for *The Shape of Water*). His first feature-length film was the Mexican vampire tale *Cronos* (1993), soon followed by his first Hollywood film, *Mimic* (1997). Since then Del Toro has made, among other successful movies, *El Espinazo del Diablo* (2001), *Hellboy* (2004), *Pacific Rim* (2013) and *Crimson Peak* (2015). His co-writer Vanessa Taylor (Boulder, Colorado, 1970) has worked mainly on TV (for instance in *Game of Thrones*). Her first movie credit before *Shape* was *Divergent* (2014).

The Shape of Water had a very good reception, grossing a total of \$196 million worldwide –ten times its modest budget. Curiously, its world premiere was staged at

the Elgin Theatre of Toronto, which appears in some scenes. Del Toro's film also received very good approval rates in the most important online sites and was nominated to many prestigious awards. It won four Oscars out of thirteen nominations, including Best Picture, Best Achievement in Directing, Best Design Production (to Paul Austerberry, Jeffrey A. Melvin and Shane Vieau), and Best Achievement in Music for Alexandre Desplat. *Shape* also won Golden Globes and BAFTA Awards, and can be said to be an immense success.

The Shape of Water is set in the 1960s, during the Cold War, and follows the story of Elisa, who works as a cleaner in a secret military laboratory in Baltimore. The protagonist, a mute single woman and an orphan, lives a pretty isolated life, only brightened by her friendship with co-worker Zelda and with her elderly, gay artist neighbour Giles. This changes when a strange amphibian creature, nick-named The Asset, is brought to the lab to be the object of a classified experiment. The two outcasts find themselves starting a relationship that becomes inter-species love. The relationship is initially platonic. Elisa falls in love with the creature while teaching him sign language, giving him company and comforting him after the torture endured in the lab. They go on in secret, aided only by Zelda and Giles, until eventually the pair manage to break away and start a surprisingly sexual romance.

The amphibian man has not been manufactured but *The Shape of Water* connects with *Frankenstein* through the motif of the scientist who stops at nothing in the name of success, in this case of a military kind. Here the Frankenstein figure is the relentless Strickland, who grows obsessed with keeping The Asset captive and exploited for his own ends (as the Soviets also want). Elisa is herself no monster but she is relegated to a menial position simply because, being mute, her intelligence has been overlooked. She seems content enough yet the amphibian creature awakens in her a new need for love. Indeed, Elisa goes far beyond any bride Frankenstein could have made for his monster by accepting the amphibian creature as he is. As a reward, for this is a strange fairy-tale, the creature uses the powers overlooked by the military to transform Elisa into what many might call a monster and give her a new life. Whether they will reproduce and their hybrid children will change the world is not discussed but it is certainly an intriguing possibility.

Like *Frankenstein*, then, Del Toro's movie asks the fundamental question of whether our Other can be loved. Victor cannot love his own monstrous son but, understanding what rejection means, Elisa can and does love the amphibian man. This begs the question of whether what Del Toro means is that the Other can only be loved by human outcasts, which is not at all a very progressive message. Plainly, the amphibian man is not particularly likeable and though Elisa loves him, it is hard to see most people reacting in the same way. Perhaps this is the reason why their love can only work outside human society, in the monster's own aquatic domain. This is in a way what Frankenstein's monster wants, too: he plans to take his bride to the same tropical area the Asset comes from and live in isolation. Sadly, Mary Shelley didn't give her monster the acceptance or support that The Asset receives in Del Toro's movie, possibly fearing too much his still unborn offspring.

FROM THE REVIEWS

A.O. Scott, “*The Shape of Water*: Review”, *The New York Times*, 30 November 2017
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/30/movies/the-shape-of-water-review-guillermo-del-toro.html>

Bigotry and meanness flow through every moment like an underground stream, but kindness is always possible, and so is beauty. *The Shape of Water* is made of vivid colors and deep shadows; it’s as gaudy as a musical (and briefly turns into one), bright as a cartoon and murky as a film noir. (The cinematographer is Dan Laustsen. The score is by Alexandre Desplat.)

Robbie Collin, “*The Shape of Water* Review: Guillermo del Toro’s Beautiful Blood-curdler Is as Timeless as a Fairy Tale”, *The Telegraph*, 14 February 2018
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/films/0/shape-water-review-guillermo-del-toros-beautiful-blood-curdler/>

Guillermo del Toro’s films are often as sensuously contorted as the beasts that lurk within them, but his latest is a pretzel-twist of pure strangeness, even by his standards. *The Shape of Water* is the story of a human woman who has an illicit love affair with a swamp monster, and is played with all the swoony sincerity of a classic thwarted romance.

Moire McDonald, “*The Shape of Water*: Guillermo del Toro’s Creature Feature is Magical”, *The Seattle Times*, 12 December 2017
<https://www.seattletimes.com/entertainment/movies/the-shape-of-water-guillermo-del-toros-creature-feature-is-magical/>

You never know where *The Shape of Water* is going. But, like water, you let it engulf you and sweep you away. [Del Toro] makes Elisa’s story an exquisite, aching fairy tale performed by a brilliant acting company, each of whom creates their own world around their character. (Also among them: a perfectly cast Michael Shannon, his face seemingly sculpted entirely from downward lines, as a villainous government agent.) Visually, it’s a sea of greenish light, of surfaces that seem perpetually wet, of night-time hallways and worried faces caught in shadows.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/en/film383204.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5580390/>
- Metracritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/the-shape-of-water>
- Rotten Tomatoes:
https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_shape_of_water_2017
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Shape_of_Water

Logan (2017)

CREW & CAST

Director: James Mangold

Screenplay: Scott Frank, Michael Green, James Mangold, John Romita Sr. (characters, uncredited), Roy Thomas & Len Wein & Herb Trimpe (character, uncredited), Mark Millar & Steven McNiven (comic book *Old Man Logan*, uncredited)

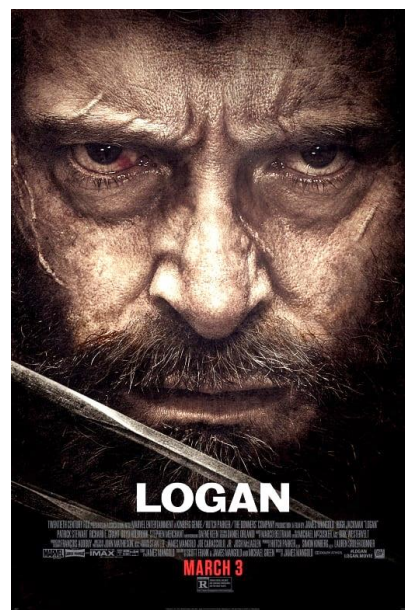
Producers: Lauren Shuler Donner, Simon Kinberg

Main performers: Hugh Jackman (Logan), Patrick Stewart (Prof. Charles Xavier), Dafne Keen (Laura Kinney), Boyd Holbrook (Donald Pierce), Stephen Merchant (Caliban), Elizabeth Rodriguez (Gabriela Lopez), Richard E. Grant (Dr Zander Rice)

Companies: Twentieth Century Fox, Marvel Entertainment, TSG Entertainment, Kinberg Genre, Hutch Parker Productions, The Donners' Company

Nationality: USA

Duration: 2h 17'



PLOT SUMMARY

Logan, the tenth instalment of the *X-Men* franchise, is a superhero film set in 2029. No mutants have been created for over twenty years. Wolverine, also known as Logan, lives an ordinary life with fragile Professor Charles Xavier (and his carers) and has a regular job as a limousine driver. However, this changes when he meets Gabriela, a nurse who protects Laura, a young mutant with the same powers as Logan. Laura is being chased by Dr Zander Rice and the cyborg Donald Pierce but believes that she (and the other children like her) will be safe in the Canadian 'Eden', if that place exists at all. Logan accepts the mission of taking her there, as he struggles to see Laura, who carries his own DNA, as his daughter.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

James Mangold (New York, 1963) is a well-known producer, screen writer and director mainly known for *Cop Land* (1997), *Girl, Interrupted* (1999), *Walk the Line* (2005) and the two *X-Men* franchise films *The Wolverine* (2013) and *Logan* (2017). His most recent hit is *Ford vs Ferrari* (2019). Scott Frank (Florida, 1960), a distinguished screenwriter, author and producer, has among his credits *Little Man Tate* (1991), *Get Shorty* (1995) and *Minority Report* (2005). Co-writer Michael Green (also an actor and producer) has worked mainly on television. He is the co-author of the script for *Blade Runner 2049* (2017, see the factsheet in this volume).

Logan did extremely well at the box office, grossing worldwide \$619 million, about six times its budget. The film team was nominated for plenty of awards, including an Oscar nomination for Best Adapted Screenplay. Actors Patrick Stewart (Dr. Xavier), Hugh Jackman (Logan/Wolverine) and newcomer Dafne Keen (Laura) attracted most of the awards. The film was well received by the critics, with many reviews stressing positively its treatment of the ageing Logan.

Logan presents the former Wolverine at a very different stage of his life, no longer a cyborgian super-hero but a limo driver, whiling time away in the company of an aged, frail Prof. Charles Xavier. The X-Men are no longer together, no new mutants have appeared for a quarter of a century. In this context, Logan has to suddenly cope with the appearance of a young mutant girl whose existence forces him, besides, to assume a paternity of which he was totally unaware. Far from being a damsel in distress, though, eleven-year-old Laura is quite capable of the most brutal violence.

Frankenstein's monster and Logan are both the products of advance technology, and so is Laura. Shelley's creature does not have an original human body but is made of parts, as we know. In contrast, Logan is a cyborg: a man with a heavily modified body, whose most salient features are the adamantium claws that emerge from his hands at will. Consequently, Logan can interact normally with people, go to public places and even have a job and generally keep a much lower profile than the visibly monstrous creature made by Victor Frankenstein. The cottagers whose lives the monster has been secretly sharing react in "horror and consternation" when they see him, and decide to attack him. In Mangold's movie, Logan and his mutant companions meet the Munson family and they welcome them with no objection, as the mutants are human-like. Of course, Frankenstein only makes one creature but the mutants are many, and their existence is well-known (the previous *X-Men* films narrate the problems which the mutants face and the constant attempts to extinguish or at least contain them).

Frankenstein's lonely monster "demands a creature of another sex" to be his companion. Logan never asks for a mutant like him but finds that Laura has been made specifically to be a younger version of himself, with stronger powers. She shares with the original monster and with Logan plenty of "rage and revenge" (*Frankenstein*) towards her creators. However, their reaction towards them is different. The creature does not attack Frankenstein himself directly but those he loves, innocent people like the child William, Victor's friend Clerval or even his bride Elizabeth. Logan targets directly Dr Zander Rice and everyone who helps him. Laura is equally fierce.

It is important to note that Laura is not a cyborg but the result of genetic experimentation. Dr. Rice uses the DNA from known mutants and the rented wombs of anonymous mothers to create a batch of super-soldiers. The children, however, have feelings like any other child and, being created for violence are very difficult to control. When Rice declares the experiment a failure and plans to eliminate all the child subjects, nurse Gabriela helps them to escape, out of compassion. She initially tells Logan that he'll receive a reward for his help but ultimately trusts that the biological bond with Laura will turn him into a good father. He does respond to the call of the blood (or to his admiration for the spunky girl), to the last consequences.

Logan's main contribution to the super-hero universe descended from *Frankenstein*, then, covers two main topics. On the one hand, Logan's mental and physical decadence explores the ageing of the man-made cyborg, and on the other

hand, the mutant children born with Laura present a singular image of the ultra-violent monster in the making. Like the rest of the *X-Men* franchise, though, *Logan* teaches that the powers of the enhanced human body can be used for good or for bad, for that's an open choice.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Kyle Smith, "*Logan* Is a Return to Science Fiction Glory Days", *New York Post*, 28 February 2017

<https://nypost.com/2017/02/28/logan-is-a-return-to-science-fictions-glory-days/>

Logan, who too often has been boringly invincible, is in this episode the most human he's ever been. His instant-healing powers are breaking down due to a toxin in his system, and he carries with him an adamantium bullet in case he should feel like committing suicide.

Tasha Robinson, "*Logan* Review: Not Just the Bloodiest X-Men Movie, but Also the Saddest", *The Verge*, 17 February 2017

<https://www.theverge.com/2017/2/17/14652584/logan-wolverine-x-men-movie-review-hugh-jackman-patrick-stewart>

Mangold and his co-writers (*The Wolverine* and *Minority Report* screenwriter Scott Frank and *American Gods* writer/showrunner Michael Green) have managed something that's been frustratingly rare over the past decade-plus of grim-n-gritty superhero takes: they earn the tone by developing a rich, even nuanced emotional landscape around their characters.

Matt Donato, "*Logan* Review", *We Got This Covered*, 17 February 2017

<https://wegotthiscovered.com/movies/logan-review-hugh-jackman-wolverine/>

Logan reflects such base human qualities as emotional abandon and suffocating PTSD, through someone who has experienced more atrocities than any man should. So much rage, angst and punishment has fuelled Logan all these years. Jackman's performance burns with agonizing torment (emotional and physical), as most scenes depict Logan wavering in and out of consciousness. He's no longer a leader. Logan is fighting to stay alive, and his vulnerability is appreciated in today's franchise-age mentality where heroes seem to escape any *real* danger.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/es/film176022.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3315342/>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/logan-2017>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/logan_2017
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Logan_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Logan_(film))

Mary Shelley (2017)

CREW & CAST

Director: Haifaa Al-Mansour

Screenplay: Emma Jensen, Haifaa Al-Mansour
(additional writing)

Producers: Amy Baer, Ruth Coady, David Grumbach,
Orlagh Collins, Alan Moloney

Main performers: Elle Fanning (Mary), Douglas
Booth (Percy), Isobel Powley (Claire), Ben Hardy
(Polidori), Tom Sturridge (Lord Byron)

Companies: BFI Film Fund, Film Fund Luxembourg,
Gidden Media, HanWay Films, et al.

Nationality: UK/ Luxembourg/ USA/ Ireland

Duration: 2h



PLOT SUMMARY

Mary Shelley is a biopic which narrates the early life of Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin. Dreamy, sixteen-year-old Mary lives with her father (the famous philosopher William Godwin), his second wife, and their children. During a stay in Scotland Mary meets twenty-one-year-old poet Percy Shelley, a married man. Determined to be free and despite the disapproval of her father, Mary flees with Percy to start a new life. Their initial happiness slowly sours, and devastated by the loss of her children and his infidelities, Mary grows obsessed with science and the idea of resurrecting the dead. After a stay at Lord Byron's Villa Diodati, Mary finds her own voice and writes *Frankenstein*. Soon, however, Percy's death changes Mary's life for ever.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Haifaa Al-Mansour (b. 1974) is the first Saudi Arabian woman film director. Her career includes the documentary *Women without Shadows* (2005) and the highly acclaimed feature-length film *Wadjda* (2012), the story of a ten-year-old girl who dreams of owning a green bicycle. The awards won by this film at the Venice Film Festival made it possible for Al-Mansour to eventually direct *Mary Shelley* (2017), which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival. The script for the film was the first one written by Australian Emma Jensen, who had been working on this project for long years before it was green-lighted. The second version jointly drafted with Al-Mansour is the basis of the film. *Mary Shelley* follows her previous films since it also deals with the struggles of women to prove their own value, without depending or

relying on their husband's or father's authority. Mary fought to be judged by her own work and not by who she was. She even had to prove that *Frankenstein*, attributed by most reviewers to her husband was hers –even today some misogynistic scholars dispute her claim.

Mary Shelley was not, however, as well received as its director and subject matter portended and can be said to be a disappointment in critical and financial terms. The movie only grossed \$1.9 million worldwide. It only received, besides, a total of three nominations: one from the Edinburgh International Film Festival (to the Audience Award for Haifaa Al-Mansour); the second from the Neuchâtel International Fantastic Film Festival (to the Silver Méliès Award as the Best European Fantastic Feature Film) and the last one for composer Amelia Warner (to the World Soundtrack Awards). Reviewers (see below) agree that despite the inspired choice of Elle Fanning as Mary, this is a failed biopic, too insipid for someone whose life was so dramatic. Al-Mansour's direction has been praised for its elegance but reviewers have complained against the inaccuracy of the events presented and against the overall shallowness of the script.

Mary Shelley's storyline is basically the narration of the early life of English writer Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin (1797-1851), who later became Mary Shelley. The main focus is the period of her romance and marriage to Percy Bysshe Shelley, which started in 1814 (when she was sixteen) and ended in 1822, when he drowned, aged only twenty-eight. The pair married in 1816 and had four children, of whom only Percy Florence survived to an adult age. As the film narrates, Mary spent time in Scotland because of her differences with her step-mother, but she did not meet Percy there. They met in Godwin's own home, where Percy was welcome as a self-appointed disciple (and a source of income). The film suggests that Mary did not know Percy was a married man when their romance begins, but this is unlikely. Godwin did know and, logically, disapproved of their love story, fearing the scandal that soon followed. The young couple were left with no choice but to flee in order to live together, with Mary blinded by Percy's big promises of love and happiness.

What is original about Al-Mansour's biopic is that it refuses to glamourize the love story. On the contrary, little by little we see how all of Percy's promises are forgotten as debts mount and poverty catches up with the couple. The death of Percy and Mary's first daughter, a premature baby, plunges Mary into deep depression, aggravated by Percy's infidelities (her step-sister Clair Clairmont lived with them and was most likely his lover). After the famous episode at Villa Diodati, with the eccentric Lord Byron and Dr John Polidori, Mary's original interest in science leads to her writing the novel *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus*. Jensen and Al-Mansour's script basically argues that without all these obstacles in her life Mary Shelley would not have become the woman she was, acquired her extraordinary knowledge and written her unique novel. At the same time, the novel brings together all the anxieties in her young life.

The film plainly argues that Mary's greatest love inspired her darkest creation. We observe how both creator and creature are based on Mary Shelley's view of Percy Shelley. Their romance started out as something almost perfect, like each body part Victor uses to create his monster, but it ends up as a messed up, horrendous combination which not even his creator could like –just as Mary cannot like Percy's newly discovered personality traits after their marriage. In a specific scene, Percy tries

to talk Mary into transforming her monster into a better creature, like an angel, in order to spread out a message of hope to every man, offering thus an optimistic view of a really dark subject. But Mary rejects his idea outright. After his many betrayals, she has learned to stand for her own beliefs and ideas, and she freely chooses to represent men as she now sees them, embodied in the character of Frankenstein and his monster. Victor promises himself to bring hope and happiness to the world but the only thing he can create is ugliness. This, *Mary Shelley* suggests, is what inspired the world-wide famous novel, beyond Mary's interest in science: how romance dies killed by selfishness, and becomes then a monstrous thing.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Deborah Young, "Mary Shelley – Review", *The Hollywood Reporter*, 9 September 2017
<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/mary-shelley-review-1037287>

Mary Shelley is a luscious-looking spectacle, drenched in the colors and visceral sensations of nature, the sensuality of young lovers, the passionate disappointment of loss and betrayal. But above all it is a film about ideas that breaks out of the well-worn mold of period drama (partly, anyway) by reaching deeply into the mind of the extraordinary woman who wrote the Gothic evergreen Frankenstein.

Kate Erbland, "Mary Shelley Review: Elle Fanning Sparkles Inside a Lifeless Biopic — TIFF", *Indie Wire*, 14 September 2017

<https://www.indiewire.com/2017/09/mary-shelley-review-elle-fanning-biopic-1201875795/>

For a film that chronicles the rise of a creator obsessed with reanimating the dead, *Mary Shelley* is utterly lifeless. It contains a sparkling and startlingly raw performance by Elle Fanning, but Haifaa Al-Mansour's disappointing followup to her remarkable *Wadjda* doesn't push beyond paint-by-numbers biopic posturing.

Barbara VanDenburgh, "Author Biopic *Mary Shelley* is Simply Ordinary", *Arizona Republic*, 7 June 2018

<https://eu.azcentral.com/story/entertainment/movies/2018/06/07/mary-shelley-movie-review-frankenstein-elle-fanning/675437002/>

It's befuddling that such a barrier-breaking filmmaker would make a biopic about a woman who shares similar daring qualities that's so... ordinary. To make boring the revelries of 19th century literati is no mean feat, but it is *Mary Shelley's* chief accomplishment.

LINKS

- FilmAffinity USA: <https://www.filmaffinity.com/us/film461952.html>
- IMDB: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3906082/>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/mary-shelley>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/mary_shelley
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Shelley_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Shelley_(film))

***Alita: Battle Angel* (2019)**

CREW & CAST

Director: Robert Rodriguez

Screenplay: James Cameron, Laeta Kalogridis, Yukito Kishiro (graphic novel series *Gunnm*)

Producers: James Cameron, Jon Landau

Main performers: Rosa Salazar (*Alita*), Christoph Waltz (Dr. Dyson Ido), Keanu Reeves (Hugo), Mahershala Ali (Vector), Jennifer Connelly (Dr. Chiren), Ed Skrein (Zapan), Jackie Earle Haley (Grewishka)

Companies: Twentieth Century Fox, Lightstorm Entertainment, Troublemaker Studios, TSG Entertainment, Caffeination, Madhouse, Stereo D

Nationality: USA

Duration: 2h 2'



PLOT SUMMARY

In the year 2563, humans survive in Iron City after a devastating war with an extraterrestrial species. Dr Dyson Ido comes across a human torso in a scrapyard, still with an intact brain and uses it to build the cyborg Alita. She has no memory of her life and identity but flashbacks from her past help her to recall who she really is. Alita soon meets Hugo, a Hunter Warrior, and Dr Chiren, Ido's ex-wife. She is surprised to see that Alita is using the body supposed to be for her deceased daughter, also named Alita. Eventually, Alita realises that her battle skills were originally those of a warrior and she prepares to defeat with them the corrupt concerns that run Iron City.

CONNECTION WITH MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Robert Rodríguez (San Antonio, Texas, 1968) is a popular filmmaker that has worked in practically all aspects of his profession. The first hit of his long career was *El Mariachi* (1992), a low-budget thriller shot in Mexico. Other highlights are the vampire film *From Dusk till Dawn* (1996), *Sin City* (2005, from Frank Miller's comics), and the franchise *Spy Kids* (started in 2001). The screenplay for *Alita: Battle Angel* was co-authored by world-famous director and producer James Cameron (author of *The Terminator* (1984), *Titanic* (1997) and *Avatar* (2009)) and Laeta Kalogridis, known for *Alexander* (2004), *Shutter Island* (2010) and Netflix's *Altered Carbon* (2018). They based their work on the manga *Gunnm* (1990-1995) by Yukito Kishiro, previously adapted for the screen in the 1993 anime film of the same title by Hiroshi Fukutomi known in English as *Battle Angel*.

Alita Battle Angel did reasonably well at the box office, grossing \$404 million (it had a very high \$170 million budget), but pleased audiences and reviewers much below expectations. This is a live-action movie and a controversial issue was the use of CGI to enlarge the eyes of actress Rosa Salazar, giving her Alita in this way a look closer to that of her anime counterpart. This alteration created, as a reviewer notes (see Russo below), an ‘uncanny valley’ effect that made it hard to sympathise with the character and, besides, made Salazar hard to recognize. A sign that *Alita* is, in essence, a failed film is that it received 14 nominations (in minor awards, besides) but won no prizes. The expected film franchise will most likely not materialize.

Alita has two Frankensteinian creators. One is the unseen person or persons who manufactured the battle cyborg she originally is. The other is Dr Dyson Ido who, like Victor, is a scavenger collecting different body parts to build new life. Frankenstein’s creature is a replicant made of actual human body parts, whereas Alita is a cyborg twice all over: originally and in her second embodiment, provided by Dr Ido. He connects the torso and skull he salvages to the body originally meant for his deceased daughter, giving his new ‘daughter’ the name of the dead girl, Alita. The brain lodged in the skull of Victor’s monster keeps no memories from its original owner, but Alita’s does and this is the story the film tells: how she recovers her lost identity and, with it, her battle skills. This connects her story with that of Major Motoko Kusanagi in *Ghost in the Shell* (1995, see the factsheet in this volume), which is hardly surprising since both are fantasies emanating from 1990s Japanese cyberpunk manga. *Ghost* is, in any case, a far more sophisticated story.

In *Frankenstein* a terrified Victor turns his back on the hideous monster he has created. In *Alita* Dr Ido (and his assistant nurse) shows awe and admiration when first seeing the new Alita come to life. Alita is called an ‘angel’ because of her slim body and her porcelain doll features, though this begs the questions of whether her anatomy makes sense for a super-soldier. As happens in *Logan* (2017, see the factsheet in this volume), in which the genetically engineered super-soldier is an eleven-year-old child (Laura), the contrast between the small female body and the brutal violence it can unleash confuses the enemies which these girls face. However, Laura is still growing whereas Alita seems stuck for ever in a teen body. Typically for a teen, then, she rebels against Dr Ido’s over-protectiveness (which springs from his considering Alita to be his lost daughter reborn). Their relationship, in any case, can be said to be a rather positive father-daughter bond, as different as possible from the mutual hatred binding creature and creator in *Frankenstein*.

Arguably, *Alita*’s failure –despite Salazar’s obvious efforts to make the protagonist engaging– signals a certain spectator fatigue with the motif of the artificial creature who gains a progressive awareness of who he or she really is. The story has been told hundreds of times in the last one hundred and twenty years since the birth of cinema, and it is time now to recycle Mary Shelley’s myth from a new perspective. Many of the ideas currently explored in Frankenstein’s film legacy come basically from the 1980s and 1990s. Films like *Alita* insist, as many others have done since *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935, see the factsheet in this volume), that the focus of interest should be the female, specially because unlike the male monster, she is physically appealing and even much superior in her abilities. It is perhaps a pity that these are mainly abilities for combat used in ultra-violent stories, and not in other kinds of new fables about what it is like to be a different type of human.

FROM THE REVIEWS

Samantha Nelson, “*Alita: Battle Angel* is a Worldbuilding Triumph and a Storytelling Failure”, *The Verge*, 1 February 2019

<https://www.theverge.com/2019/2/1/18207027/alita-battle-angel-review-rosa-salazar-robert-rodriguez-christoph-waltz>

The amnesiac Alita (Rosa Salazar) progresses from wonderstruck child to moody teenager over the course of days, rebelling from Ido’s fatherly protectiveness to spend time with her generic “criminal with a heart of gold” boyfriend Hugo (Keanu Reeves). Alita has a particularly good reason for thrill-seeking, as a battle against the cyborg equivalent of Jack the Ripper triggers some memories of her past life, and convinces her that more violent conflict might reveal more information. Like a video game hero, Alita progresses through the film, earning gear upgrades and memories of extremely lethal martial arts that allow her to take on increasingly more powerful threats.

William Bibbiani, “*Alita: Battle Angel* Review”, *IGN*, 31 January 2019

<https://www.ign.com/articles/2019/02/13/alita-battle-angel-review>

And at the center of it all, Rosa Salazar gives a phenomenal performance. Though assisted by CGI limbs and artificially enhanced eyes, she imbues Alita with warmth and humanity. Her earnest humanity gets fused over the course of the film into a solid warrior’s shell, but her scenes with her would-be boyfriend Hugo (Keanu Reeves) have all the tenderness of a good YA adaptation. Their story pops through the post-apocalyptic wasteland like a flower emerging from a concrete crack, and unfortunately, it’s just as likely to thrive.

Tom Russo, “It’s Cyborg Central in Robert Rodriguez’s *Alita: Battle Angel*”, *Boston Globe*, 13 February 2019

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/movies/2019/02/13/cyborg-central-robert-rodriguez-alita-battle-angel/CZRu5ye7i0l0olcRLzCtwO/story.html>

Throughout, Salazar and the filmmakers have us pulling for Alita, and feeling for her, and largely believing in the reality of the character –but more so when the dynamic is solo-and-endearing than tender opposite someone else. For all of Alita’s she-Pinocchio charm –and her Cameronian estrogen-charged badass attitude– she can’t quite carry the audience all the way across that pesky uncanny valley.

LINKS

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- IMDb: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0437086/>
- Metacritic: <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/alita-battle-angel/>
- Rotten Tomatoes: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/alita_battle_angel
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alita:_Battle_Angel

Film list (and factsheet contributor)

1. <i>Metropolis</i> (1927). Helena Salesas
2. <i>Frankenstein</i> (1931). Pol Vinyeta
3. <i>The Bride of Frankenstein</i> (1935). Ekaterina Litvinova
4. <i>Godzilla/Gojira</i> (1954). Irene Vizcaíno
5. <i>2001</i> (1968). Mariona Llacuna
6. <i>Young Frankenstein</i> (1974). Paula Valenzuela
7. <i>The Rocky Horror Picture Show</i> (1975). Lena Anherth
8. <i>Blade Runner</i> (1982). Carlota Villoro
9. <i>WarGames</i> (1983). Víctor Flores
10. <i>The Terminator</i> (1984). Marçal Escartín
11. <i>The Bride</i> (1985). Celia Moratalla
12. <i>Weird Science</i> (1985). Irina Dot
13. <i>The Fly</i> (1986). Lily Mae Sumbling
14. <i>Robocop</i> (1987). Marcel Paloma
15. <i>Akira</i> . (1987). Berta Serrat
16. <i>Making Mr. Right</i> (1987). Marc Pozuelo
17. <i>Bicentennial Man</i> (1990). Remei Escudero
18. <i>Edward Scissorhands</i> (1990). Aitana Pérez
19. <i>Jurassic Park</i> (1993). Jordi Camí
20. <i>Mary Shelley's Frankenstein</i> (1994). Natàlia Amo García
21. <i>Ghost in the Shell</i> (1995). Mertixell Aljama
22. <i>Mary Reilly</i> (1996). Andrea Delgado López
23. <i>The Adventures of Pinocchio</i> (1996). Alba Guijarro
24. <i>Alien Resurrection</i> (1997). Remo Garcia Pellicer
25. <i>Gattaca</i> (1997). Kateryna Hlazovska
26. <i>Gods and Monsters</i> (2014). Pol Salinas
27. <i>Deep Blue Sea</i> (1999). Mireia Cot
28. <i>The Matrix Trilogy</i> (1999- 2003) Lali Nibladze
29. <i>Hollow Man</i> (2000). Tàlia González
30. <i>A.I.</i> (2001). Patricia González
31. <i>S1mOne</i> (2002). Carla Vélez
32. <i>Hulk</i> (2003). Lydia Rivera
33. <i>Van Helsing</i> (2004). Laura del Valle
34. <i>I, Robot</i> (2004). Ana Gómez Gasol
35. <i>The Island</i> (2005). Martina Coy
36. <i>Wall-E</i> (2008). Queralt Oliver
37. <i>Splice</i> (2009). Kerly Argos
38. <i>Moon</i> (2009). Paül Liarte
39. <i>Never Let Me Go</i> (2010). Àgia Tost García
40. <i>EVA</i> (2011). Ainhoa López
41. <i>La piel que habito</i> (2011). Eva Verdugo Serrano
42. <i>Rise of the Planet of the Apes</i> (2011). Clara Sánchez

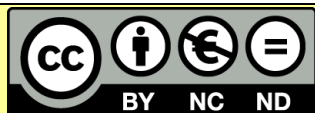
43. <i>Hotel Transylvania</i> (2012). Maria Giol Muñoz
44. <i>Frankenweenie</i> (2012). Sofía Lázaro
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46. <i>Her</i> (2013). Beatriz Ariza
47. <i>The Machine</i> (2013). Svilen Zhivodarov
48. <i>Dawn of the Planet of the Apes</i> (2014). Youzra El Bair
49. <i>Lucy</i> (2014). Laura Parera
50. <i>Victor Frankenstein</i> (2015). Ada Montón
51. <i>Chappie</i> (2015). Belén Llave
52. <i>Morgan</i> (2016). Pamela Visiedo
53. <i>Blade Runner 2049</i> (2017). Rocío Bueno
54. <i>The Shape of Water</i> (2017). Alex Maureso Mestres
55. <i>Logan</i> (2017). Marta Cirera
56. <i>Mary Shelley</i> (2017). Mar Puig Serradell
57. <i>Alita: Battle Angel</i> (2019). Victoria Recio

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