

Document Citation

Title	Eros in the cinema -- excerpt
Author(s)	Raymond Durnat
Source	<i>Publisher name not available</i>
Date	1966
Type	book excerpt
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	2
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Frankenstein, Richard, J., The bride of Frankenstein, Whale, James, 1935



patched together from limbs stolen from gibbets, sewn and bolted together, to be animated by the stolen brain of a dead criminal. The novel, 'Frankenstein' is not, as most people imagine, a modern pulp novel, but was written in 1812 by the wife of the poet Shelley, more or less in the tradition of the 'Gothic' horror novel then in vogue.

On one level, its theme is anti-Promethean, that is, it condemns the pride of modern man in usurping the creative role rightly that of the Creator (who is not the Christian God so much as some equivalent pagan life-force). On

another level, Frankenstein's impiety is the perverse determination to create human life without the aid of sex—an impiety which Victorianism in St. Augustine's tradition, considered an ideal unfortunately rarely attainable on this side of the tomb. On a third level, the novel, and especially James M. Whale's classic film adaptation, is a nightmare version of the erotic fantasy underlying mother's lie to baby: 'We got you from the butcher's.' Only here it's not butcher's hooks, it's gibbets and medical pickle, and the butcher doesn't chop you up into bits, he sews you together from bits.

Frankenstein's laboratory is a deserted stone tower on a hilltop, which is a classic dream camouflage for the phallus atop of the testicles. The doctor and his gibbering accomplice wait for the thunderstorm, and, as the lightning flashes, the 'embryonic' compendium of scraps of old carcasses is hoisted steadily, oh so steadily, with a Liebestod turgescence, to the very top. Frankenstein's Folly is Tumescence Tower. It's not surprising that, at the very climax of the film, the Monster (Boris Karloff) times its last breakout for its cruel creator's wedding ceremony, and makes straight for his white-clad bride (Valerie Hobson).

The film's innumerable sick jokes are amplified by a choice selection of carefully contrived 'naïveties'. In Reel I, Frankenstein cries, 'I have always longed to create human life' and after a suitable pause his innocent fiancée inquires: 'How?' In the sequel, 'Bride Of Frankenstein' the learned savant exclaims, 'Nothing is so enthralling as the act of creation'—so enthralling, indeed, that he neglects his wife and goes it alone, creating a future Mrs. Hyde—but improved Mark II (Elsa Lanchester) screams and seethes with snooty spite as obsolescent Mark I lumbers amorously towards her. Unlike Eve, she loves her Creator more than the mate he has decreed for her.

Any doubts as to the sophistication behind James Whale's

use of an archaic, operatic Gothic idiom may be dispelled by the scene in which a fond father carries his little daughter's murdered corpse back from the woods where the Monster left her. It is a village holiday. Raucous laughter and jolly jigs fill the soundtrack, while the child's dangling limbs swing in a grotesque parody of dancing, and a strip of thigh showing white against her thick black stockings sexualizes the corpse of an underage girl. The film takes a little necrololophilia in its stride. An infantile rape image recurs, and it occurs not on the screen, but in the audience's mind, during 'King Kong', where the immensely sympathetic 60-yard-high gorilla falls in love with screaming Fay Wray, who is just about five and a half feet tall.

While the horror films of the '30s have a rhapsodic quality, the cycle enduring from the mid-'50s to the present inclines to be more nonchalant but more self-aware. In a sense, the difference between Tod Browning's 'Dracula' (1931) and Terence Fisher's (1958) parallels that between early 'Gothic' romanticism, in the style of 'The Castle Of Otranto', and the gem-like brilliance of 'Les Fleurs Du Mal', whose sophisticated *delectatio morosa* is scarcely unfamiliar to the filmgoing masses. Whereas Bela Lugosi's black, tight-faced Count Dracula is seductive because so implacably evil, Christopher Lee's is so evil because so voluptuous. Even so, no film has yet dared depict two of the most revolting inventions in Bram Stoker's pop-art classic—Count Dracula bringing a new-born baby writhing in a black bag for his vampire 'brides' to consume; and his insistence that the heroine consummate their mystic marriage by reciprocally sucking his blood from his breast—a ritual made additionally revolting by the fact that his body is not only a 500-year-old corpse, of enormous physical strength, but also capable of metamorphozing into bats, wolves, dogs and a black fog.



The Fall of the House of Usher 1960

Vincent Price, Myrna Fahey

Notable among recent 'lyrical' horror films are Roger Corman's 'The Fall Of The House of Usher', 'The Pit And The Pendulum', 'The Premature Burial' and 'Tales Of Terror', a quartet of Edgar Allan Poe adaptations on the twin themes of burial alive and catalepsy. From Poe, Corman has disinterred the lost world of the American unconscious. This culture, so obsessed by efficiency and power that in the male imagination 'mom' herself is virilized into the six-gunned amazon of 'Johnny Guitar', so puritanical that woman is feared almost as much as pederasty, so optimistic as to deny death, despair, history, and paternal authority, so preoccupied by an anxious sociability as to be physically and emotionally hypochondriac, harbours the hell of its secret negation: Poe's world of recluses in silk smoking jackets and dressing-gowns, all fastidious to the point of effeminacy, paralysed by a hereditary curse, obsessed by the fear of having interred alive a beloved wife—