

The Gothic, the Mad, and Psychology: Horror and Homosexuality in James Whale's *Frankenstein*

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Terms and Ideas

The Gothic? What's that?

The Gothic mode (the Gothic) is a term for an artistic approach that focuses on the dark, primal forces that exist within humanity and the tensions they have with civilization, which is meant to bury them. Gothic works explore conflicts between the rational and the supernatural, violence and reason, and the taboo and society. They often use evocative settings, Romantic sensibilities, and science-fiction/horror elements to accomplish this.

So, the Gothic Mode is a Genre?

Not quite. Literary modes are elements of a work that are distinct from and work across genres and forms. For example, a work can be a poem in form, be in the genre of science-fiction, and use the comic mode, maybe making it a funny poem about aliens and space flight. Modes are approaches that works take to a story, genre, or form.

Methodology

How is there Homosexuality in *Frankenstein*?

Remember how the Gothic mode explores tensions between society and its taboos? Well, it does not do this directly. It uses other objects and actions to stand in for them, like how we text <3 when we are too lazy to spell out I love you. While *Frankenstein* has no gay sex scenes or relationships, there are elements of it that can be seen as representing homosexual desires and actions.

How do You Find and Examine these Symbols? Gaydar?

No. I used Freudian theory to examine the film. Freud believed that we use socially acceptable objects and acts to stand in for genitalia, sexual power, and unacceptable desires, among other things. This is where we get the idea that men with large cars are using them to compensate for a small penis or a lack of sexual prowess or power.

Analysis

This poster will present the analysis in two sections: an analysis of the visual homoerotic moments and an analysis of the sublimated homoerotic elements of the plot.

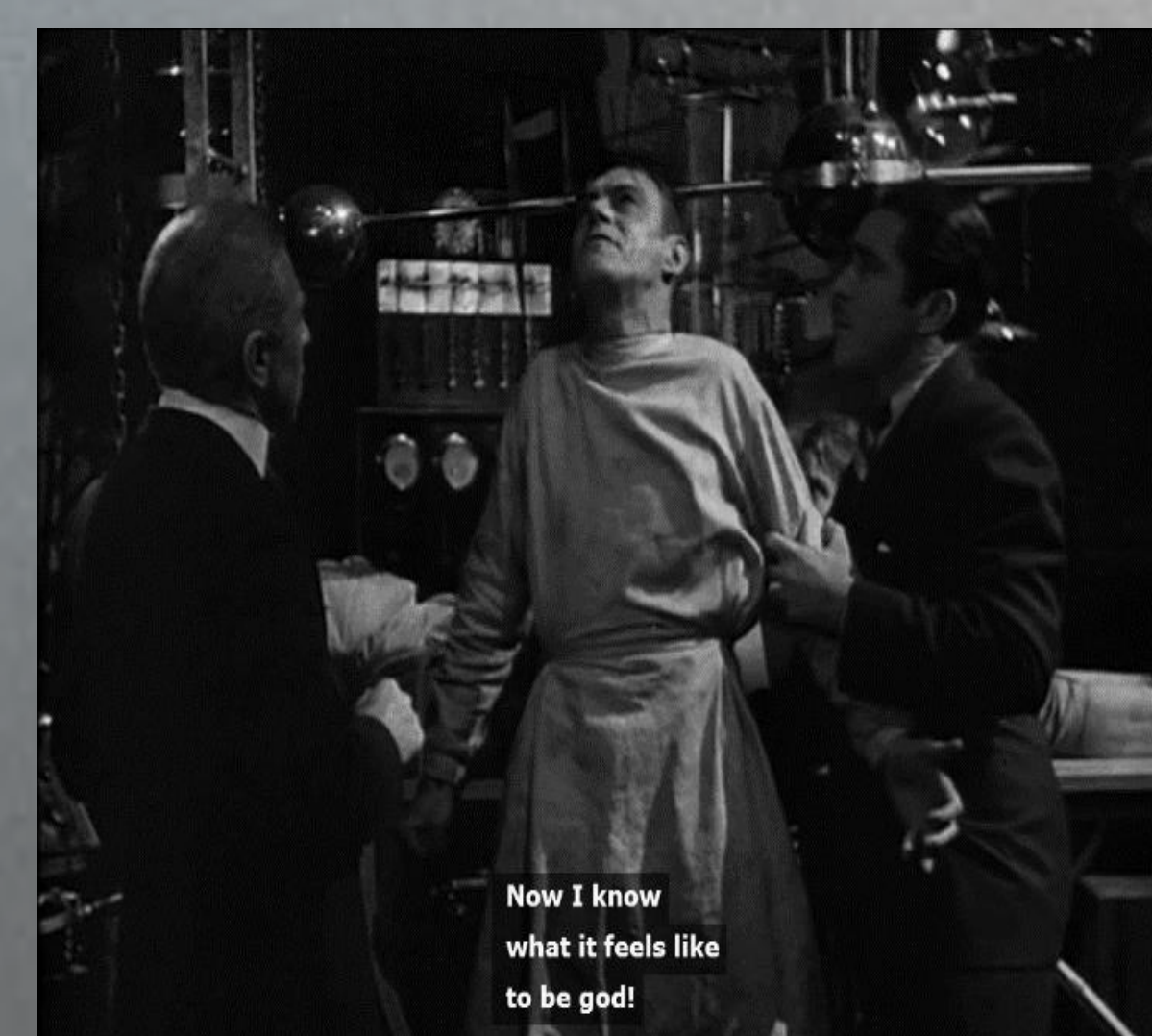
My Project

My project is a paper that analyzed homosexual subtext in James Whale's 1931 film adaptation of *Frankenstein* by using Freudian psychology and literary theory to examine the film's use of the Gothic mode to both hide and express homosocial and sexual desires that would have been considered taboo at the time. This is not an analysis that results in findings, but rather one that engages the film and offers this as a lens through which to interpret it. This poster explains what I analyze, the methodologies I use to analyze it, and what the work looks like when viewed through this lens.



Phallic Symbols

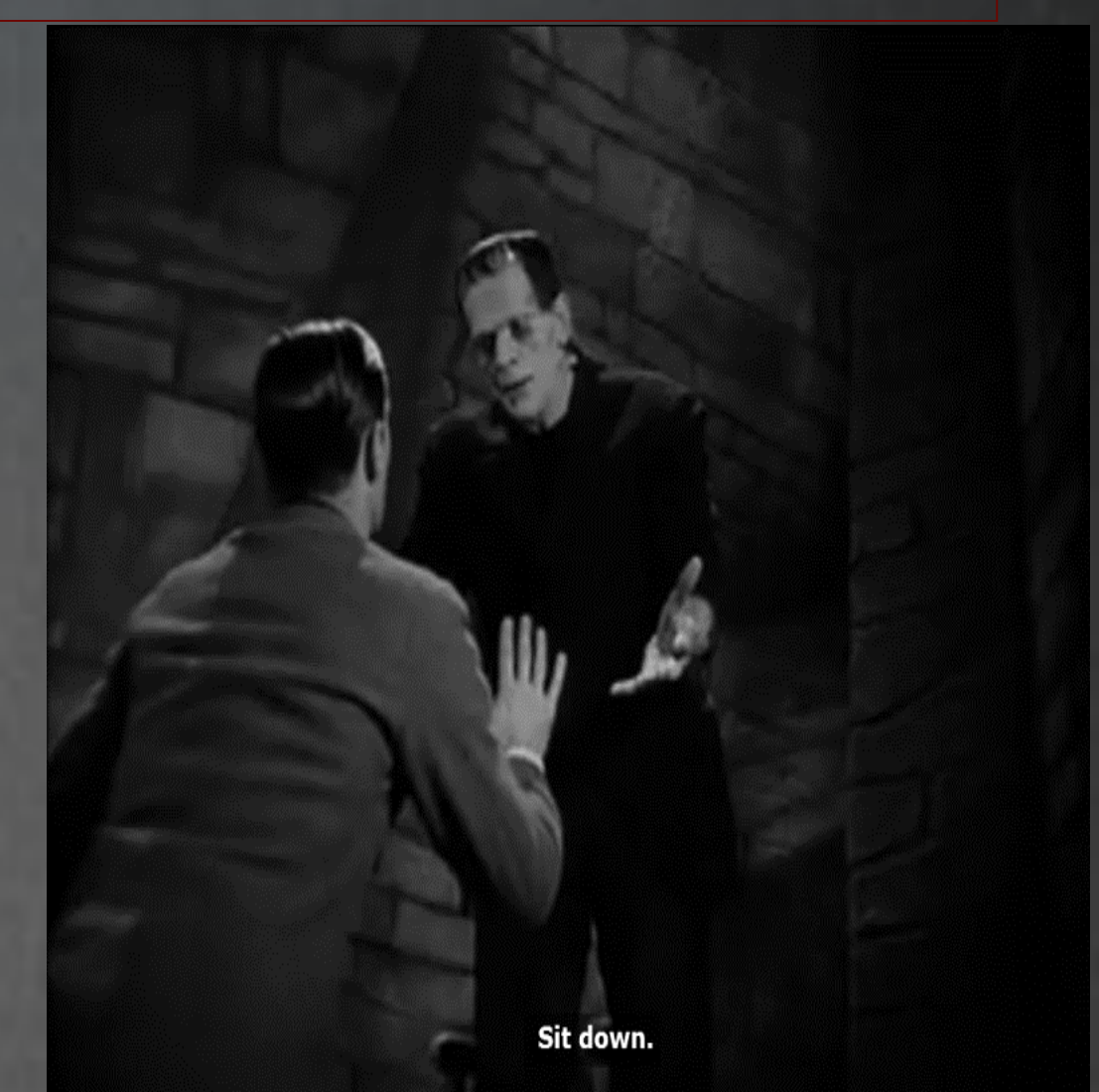
The above screenshots show phallic symbols, objects, often Penis shaped, that represent male masculinity, reproductive ability, and sexual power. Frankenstein's tower, on the left, represents homo-sexual reproduction, as it is a penis shaped castle where two men meet in the middle of the night to, in an act involving grunting, sweating, and near orgasmic expressions (see below), make new life. The shot on the right is of the inside of the lab, which is filled with scientific equipment phallic in shape and function. These scenes also combine the unknown and the homosexual; that which man is not meant to know is channeled through phallic symbols by men to create life in the dark of night. These scenes are the culminate of the primal fears that the Gothic gains much of its horror and tension from.



Plot and Relationships as Read Through this Lens

The plot is built on sublimated homosexual elements of society. Henry and Fritz's desire to create life without female help goes against what the Romantic notions of the Gothic considered to be the natural order. The fact that they do so using science only makes the homosexual elements even more apparent, as the Gothic mode is about releasing the tensions that society and civilization hide in a safe manner. The ending, in which Henry is toasted and the prospect of him and Elizabeth having a child is raised, is especially noteworthy in this regard, as it comes only after Henry tried everything in his power to create life without Elizabeth or female interaction period. This return to the "natural" order of things only serves to make Henry's deviation from the norm even more obvious and allows the film to pull back from the homosexual subtext.

Henry is at the core of the homosexual elements and readings of this film. His creation of the Creature is made all the more interesting by his constant deferrals of his marriage to Elizabeth, choosing instead to focus both on the birth and "death" of his creation. At several points in the film, he willingly leaves Elizabeth in the arms and protection of his romantic rival, Victor, so that he may concentrate on the Creature. The Creature and Henry have a very intense bond, one that seems to go beyond that of Creator and Creation. After the Creature's birth, Henry treats him with love and affection, to the point that Fritz becomes jealous and torments the Creature till he lashes out in pain. There, the relationship moves from physical affection to physical violence, one of the only acceptable outlets of homosexual attractions during this time period and the one that the Gothic mode is most able to make use off, due to its primal nature. The violence between the two, as well as the male on male physical violence in general, serves to vent libido while allowing for male homosocial contact, both physically and socially.



Other Visual Elements

Besides the phallic symbols, *Frankenstein* has multiple images and scenes with a homoerotic component to them. The frame on the above left is of the creation scene, which when combined with the scenes to the left implies sexual release within the act of creation. The middle frame is of the Creature fighting Henry, while the one on the right is of Henry communicating with the Creature shortly after its "birth." Both the middle and the right frames show the different ways that the homosexual subtext between the Creature and Henry are expressed. On the right, the Creature approaches Henry with his arms spread in an affectionate manner as Henry gently asks him to sit down, showing a level of concern that he extends to no one else in the film. In the center, Henry and the Creature are attempting to kill each other, forced into combat by society's rejection of The Creature.

For cited literature and images, see the attached paper's works cited