

UNIT 4

The Romantic Age

*Frankenstein* (1818)

No mortal could support the horror of that countenance

*At this point of the story the scientist is going to see the conclusions of his labours.*

FILMFLASH

4

*Frankenstein*

Directed by  
James Whale



Boris Karloff as the monster in the 1931 film version of *Frankenstein* directed by James Whale.

Before you read

- 1 What do you imagine Frankenstein's creature to be like? Write a short description and compare it with other students.

- 1 **dreary** : depressing, desolate, without cheer.
- 2 **beheld** : saw.
- 3 **toils** : labours, work.
- 4 **spark of being** : refers to the philosophy of vitalism, the idea that life is an impersonal energy source which flows through living beings.
- 5 **pattered dismally** : drummed in a depressing way.
- 6 **panes** : glass panels in a window.
- 7 **limbs** [lɪmz] : arms and legs.
- 8 **wretch** [retʃ] : miserable creature.
- 9 **endeavoured** [ɪnˈdeɪvəd] : tried.
- 10 **lustrous** : brilliant.
- 11 **luxuriances** : (here) these nice, attractive parts of him.
- 12 **dun white** : greyish colour.
- 13 **sockets** : holes in the skull for the eyes.
- 14 **shrivelled complexion** : (here) face marked with lines.

It was on a dreary<sup>1</sup> night of November, that I beheld<sup>2</sup> the accomplishment of my toils.<sup>3</sup> With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being<sup>4</sup> into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered<sup>5</sup> dismally against the panes,<sup>6</sup> and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs.<sup>7</sup> How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch<sup>8</sup> whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured<sup>9</sup> to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! – Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous<sup>10</sup> black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances<sup>11</sup> only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white<sup>12</sup> sockets<sup>13</sup> in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion<sup>14</sup> and straight black lips.

The different accidents of life are not so changeable as the feelings of human nature. I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the

## 4.2 Literature in the Romantic Age

room, and continued a long time traversing my bedchamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep. At length lassitude<sup>15</sup> succeeded to the tumult I had before endured; and I threw myself on the bed in my clothes, endeavouring to seek a few moments of forgetfulness. But it was in vain: I slept, indeed, but I was disturbed by the wildest dreams. I thought I saw Elizabeth,<sup>16</sup> in the bloom of health,<sup>17</sup> walking in the streets of Ingolstadt.<sup>18</sup> Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue<sup>19</sup> of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud<sup>20</sup> enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel.<sup>21</sup> I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew<sup>22</sup> covered my forehead, my teeth chattered,<sup>23</sup> and every limb became convulsed: when, by the dim<sup>24</sup> and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window shutters, I beheld the wretch – the miserable monster whom I had created. He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me. His jaws<sup>25</sup> opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin<sup>26</sup> wrinkled<sup>27</sup> his cheeks. He might have spoken, but I did not hear: one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped, and rushed down stairs. I took refuge in the courtyard belonging to the house which I inhabited; where I remained during the rest of the night, walking up and down in the greatest agitation, listening attentively, catching and fearing each sound as if it were to announce the approach of the demoniacal corpse to which I had so miserably given life.

Oh! no mortal could support the horror of that countenance.<sup>28</sup> A mummy again endued<sup>29</sup> with animation could not be so hideous<sup>30</sup> as that wretch. I had gazed on him while unfinished; he was ugly then; but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived. I passed the night wretchedly.<sup>31</sup> Sometimes my pulse beat so quickly and hardily, that I felt the palpitation of every artery; at others, I nearly sank to the ground through languor and extreme weakness. Mingled<sup>32</sup> with this horror, I felt the bitterness of disappointment; dreams that had been my food and pleasant rest for so long a space were now become a hell to me; and the change was so rapid, the overthrow<sup>33</sup> so complete!

Morning, dismal and wet, at length dawned,<sup>34</sup> and discovered to my sleepless and aching eyes the church of Ingolstadt, its white steeple<sup>35</sup> and clock, which indicated the sixth hour. The porter opened the gates of the court, which had that night been my asylum, and I issued<sup>36</sup> into the streets, pacing them with quick steps, as if I sought to avoid the wretch whom I feared every turning of the street would present to my view. I did not dare return to the apartment which I inhabited, but felt impelled<sup>37</sup> to hurry on, although drenched<sup>38</sup> by the rain which poured from a black and comfortless sky.

I continued walking in this manner for some time, endeavouring, by bodily exercise, to ease the load that weighed upon my mind. I traversed the streets, without any clear conception of where I was, or what I was doing. My heart palpitated in the sickness of fear; and I hurried on with irregular steps, not daring to look about me: –

- 15 **lassitude** : tiredness, apathy.  
 16 **Elizabeth** : Elizabeth Lavenza, Frankenstein's half-sister whom he refers to as his cousin.  
 17 **in the bloom of health** : in full health.  
 18 **Ingolstadt** : Swiss town where Frankenstein went to university.  
 19 **hue** : colour.  
 20 **shroud** [fraod] : cloth used for covering a dead body.  
 21 **flannel** : (here) material covering her.  
 22 **dew** : (here) cold sweat.  
 23 **chattered** : clicked repeatedly together.  
 24 **dim** : faint, pale.  
 25 **jaws** : bones which control the movements of the mouth.  
 26 **grin** : smile.  
 27 **wrinkled** : creased.  
 28 **countenance** : facial expression.  
 29 **endued** : endowed, gifted.  
 30 **hideous** ['hɪdɪəs] : ugly.  
 31 **wretchedly** : miserably.  
 32 **Mingled** : mixed.  
 33 **overthrow** : defeat.  
 34 **dawned** : came; i.e. the sun came up.  
 35 **steeple** : tall tower in a church.  
 36 **issued** : went out.  
 37 **impelled** : driven, urged.  
 38 **drenched** : soaked with rain.

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