In Frankenstein’s Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-Century Writing


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Abstract or Description

This book surveys the early history of one of our most important modern myths: the story of Frankenstein and the monster he created from dismembered corpses, as it appeared in fictional and other writings before its translation to the cinema screen. It examines the range of meanings which Mary Shelley's Frankenstein offers in the light of the political images of 'monstrosity' generated by the French Revolution. Later chapters trace the myth's analogues and protean transformations in subsequent writings, from the tales of Hoffmann and Hawthorne to the novels of Dickens, Melville, Conrad, and Lawrence, taking in the historical and political writings of Carlyle and Marx as well as the science fiction of Stevenson and Wells. The author shows that while the myth did come to be applied metaphorically to technological development, its most powerful associations have centred on relationships between people, in the family, in work, and in politics.

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He argues that monstrosity has not always had the same frame of reference that it does now in modern culture, and it was very important that Shelley chose such a word. According to him, one of the first important uses of the word was in reference to inmates in insane asylums. Monstrosity was said in reference to something that should be shown or put on display to show the results of “vice, folly, and excess.” Without exploring too much of Baldeck’s work, he presents a great insight into the choice of words for Shelley. Later in the same chapter, Baldick relates the events of J. Chris Baldick. In Frankenstein’s Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-Century Writing. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987. Print. The Monster Speaks: Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987. Print. Literary history is the great morgue where everyone seeks out his dead, those whom he loves or to whom he is related. Heinrich Heine, The Romantic School.