

FRANKENSTEIN

by Mary Shelley

DRACULA

by Bram Stoker

DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE

by Robert Louis Stevenson

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

Stephen King



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INTRODUCTION

Within the pages of this volume you will come upon
three of the darkest creations of English nineteenth-
century literature; three of the darkest in all of English
and American literature, many would say . . . and not
without justification.

Here they are, as we make our first acquaintance
with each:

*Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the
work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of
a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly
whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more
horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost
of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which
they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight
black lips.*

—FRANKENSTEIN

*His face was a strong—a very strong—aquiline, with
high bridge of the thin nose and peculiarly arched
nostrils . . . and hair growing scantily round the temples
but profusely elsewhere. His eyebrows were . . . mas-
sive, almost meeting over the nose. . . . The mouth, so
far as I could see it under the heavy moustache, was
fixed and rather cruel-looking, with peculiarly sharp
white teeth; these protruded over the lips, whose re-
markable ruddiness showed astonishing vitality in a
man of his years. For the rest, his ears were pale, and
at the tops extremely pointed; the chin was broad and
strong, and the cheeks firm though thin. The general
effect was one of extraordinary pallor.*

—DRACULA

Mr. Hyde was pale and dwarfish, he gave an impression of deformity without any nameable malformation, he had a displeasing smile, he had borne himself . . . with a sort of murderous mixture of timidity and boldness, and he spoke with a husky, whispering and somewhat broken voice; all these were points against him, but not all of these together could explain the . . . disgust, loathing and fear with which Mr. Utterson regarded him.

—DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE

These three creatures, presented together for the first time, all have a great deal in common beyond their power to go on frightening generation after generation of readers apparently without end, but that fact alone should be considered before all others.

Consider: the title of each of these books, the most recent of which was published in 1897, has entered common usage. "She's got a Jekyll-and-Hyde personality" as a handy way of expressing schizophrenia; "He has a face like Frankenstein" to indicate extreme ugliness (the nameless monster and his creator, Victor Frankenstein, having become inextricably entwined by now); and "He came on like Dracula once the lights were out" to indicate . . . whatever you like!

One of the most common themes in all of horror fiction and the literature of the fantastic is that of immortality—"the thing that would not die" has been a staple from the tale of Beowulf on down to Poe's story of the telltale heart, Lovecraft's Cthulu Mythos, and even William Peter Blatty's undying demon, Panzuzu.

But these three—Dracula, Frankenstein's monster, and evil Mr. Hyde—seem to have actually achieved it. They live a kind of half-life outside the bright circle of acknowledged "classics" of English literature, and perhaps with good reason. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was written at white heat by Robert Louis Stevenson in three days. It so horrified his wife that Stevenson burned the manuscript and then rewrote it from scratch in another three days. *Dracula* is a frankly palpitating melodrama couched in the badly creaking frame of the epistolary

novel. *Frankenstein*, the most notorious of the three, perhaps, is also the worst written. Penned by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley at the age of nineteen, it is full of a young girl's wide-eyed sophistry and naïveté; with its frequent digressions to explore Great Philosophical Ideas, it often resembles a college-dormitory bull session more than it does a tale of gothic horror.

In the most unkind of critical lights, all three of these books can be seen as no more than popular novels of their day, with little to distinguish them from similar books in the genre, such as M. G. Lewis's *The Monk* or Wilkie Collins's *Armada*, which have been largely forgotten.

How then to explain the tenebrous existence of these three books? Just the fact that they continue to live a life of their own, quite apart from the assignments of high school and college instructors, makes them worth some careful attention. *The Rise of Silas Lapham* remains in print because teachers want students to read it; the same could be said of *Moby-Dick*, *Daisy Miller*, and a dozen other novels that cut deeper and speak more honestly about the human condition. But people continue to come to *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, not as students but simply as readers uneasily eager to make an acquaintance with these three monsters.

The movies account for some of it, no doubt. Some research revealed better than sixty films based on these three novels (actually there may be three times that number or more; I got to sixty-three and stopped counting). They range from Boris Karloff's performance as Mary Shelley's undying monster in the 1932 version of *Frankenstein* (a movie that was nearly not made because of unease about the sacrilegious implications of a creature created from dead bodies) to such bizarre permutations as *Daughter of Dr. Jekyll* and *Blacula*, in which the vampire becomes, as the title suggests, a black man. The movies explain a good deal, but not all.

All three books deal with one of the greatest human fascinations—secrets best left untold, things best left unsaid. And yet Stevenson, Shelley, and Stoker all promise to tell us the secret, which they do with varying degrees

of effect and success. It may be this that has kept them alive, and it may be this that has made them so exciting (one almost tends to say "vulnerable") to three generations of filmmakers—four generations if we include the great silent German film *Nosferatu*.

Also, each of these three writers has come to grips with the idea of evil personified in a different fashion, and each has succeeded very well, in his or her own way.

The evil in *Frankenstein* is suggested by its subtitle, "The Modern Prometheus." Prometheus, bringer of fire, ended chained to a stone, his eyes pecked out by ravens—punishment for stealing what belonged to the gods. Frankenstein comes to a similar end—not in fire but in ice—for his temerity in usurping the power which belongs to God alone: the power to create life. The fatal flaw in Victor Frankenstein is not madness; he is the antithesis of the "mad doctor" stereotype who so frequently bears his name in the movies. The flaw rather is simple pride, coupled with the distrust of technology that the romantics of all ages seem to feel.

It has been pointed out that *Frankenstein* is probably the taproot of science fiction as we know it today, but that is probably only true to the extent that most "negative Utopia" science fiction—of which *1984* and *Brave New World* are the most honored examples—springs from it. The evil that is personified in Victor Frankenstein's nameless and horrid creation has its genesis in the test tube; he is a creature spawned of knowledge ungoverned by morality. And when the monster lays waste about itself in its single-minded pursuit of its creator, we can well understand the meaning of such a common phrase as "What sort of Frankenstein have we created?"

The evil which Stoker creates in the person of Count Dracula is the exact opposite of that created by Mary Shelley. *Frankenstein* speaks to us from the beginning of the nineteenth century; *Dracula* speaks to us from the end. And rarely do two books prove so instructively what an accurate barometer of popular feeling popular literature can be.

Bram Stoker is positively entranced with technology. Dr. Seward keeps a phonograph diary (which only

proves to be a problem when he wants to find a specific entry on one of his discs), the forerunner of the modern dictaphone. When Mina Murray Harker collates the records of the little group that has banded together to fight the vampire, she uses a typewriter—a brand-new invention at that time. Van Helsing, the good doctor who speaks such irritating pidgin English, performs not one but four blood transfusions with great aplomb (eighty years later we are able to appreciate the unintended hilarity of this series of operations; with no blood typing, one of those blood transfusions would almost surely have killed the unfortunate Lucy Westenra), and later trepanns the madman Renfield. In his own way, Van Helsing provides a nice contrast for Victor Frankenstein: both doctors, both brilliant, both ahead of their time. But Shelley sees her brilliant doctor as a dangerous, flawed man; Stoker sees his as gentle, humorous, and ultimately heroic.

Frankenstein is a mystical morality tale about what happens when man dares to transgress the limits of knowledge. Stoker, on the other hand, seems to assert that there are no limits. Knowledge and technology are not the evils here but the saviors. The enemy is a sinister, crafty, and ancient vampire, symbol of all the ancient superstitions of mankind. The remedy is not much more than the scientific method, enthusiastically applied. It doesn't hurt to point out, I think, that in this clash of science and superstition, of the ultramodern and the incredibly ancient, it is not the gadgets and detective work that fascinate us; it is the dreadful appearance of the three hungry female vampires who vie for the right to "kiss" Harker; it is the explosive entry of the wolf into Lucy's bedroom; it is the thought of the "bloofer lady," un-dead spirit of a beautiful woman who now molests small children in her terrible, insatiable hunger; and above all it is the shadow of the Count himself, whipping the horses through the Borgo Pass, bidding Harker welcome to his castle, prowling the streets of London and Whitby. As *Dracula* approaches its centennial, Seward's dictaphone, Mina's typewriter and shorthand, and Van Helsing's operations are amusing in the same way that some of the gadgets in a turn-of-the-century Sears cata-

logue are amusing. They got old. But the Count retains his ability to horrify; he truly is one of the un-dead, and he hasn't aged a day.

Robert Louis Stevenson's tale differs from each. The evil of Mr. Hyde, who would rather walk over a small child than stop or go around her, is an evil that proceeds from the human mind.

Again, the movies are more of a hindrance than a help in understanding the true nature of this novella. The movies have persisted in seeing *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* as little more than a ripping good werewolf story; the doctor drinks the bubbling, smoking potion, gains a lot of hair, a few warts, an evil sneer, and goes out into the foggy streets of London to carouse and kill.

But what the book offers us is a stripped-to-the-bone "police-court narrative" (as one critic has put it) of a schizophrenic personality in the process of final and complete degeneration. If we sweep aside the business of drinking the potion (which Stevenson himself described as "so much hugger-mugger"), we're left with the bleak tale of a good man's ruin as his "lesser nature" gains the upper hand.

Stevenson wrote his little novel twice, as I have mentioned earlier. He evidently first conceived it as a "shocker," pure and simple. But his wife was so horrified that he redrafted it as a more moral tale, and he succeeded admirably in his own time. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was hailed from many pulpits as an example of the cesspools lurking in the most respected citizen's mind, and the consequences of not keeping said cesspools well plumbed with prayer and piety. In these days we are not so apt to see the overshadowing evil as the moral ruin of a good man but as an almost tabloid-style close-up of a man whose intellect is being ripped in two. The evil of Mr. Hyde is a sinister dark star into which saintly Dr. Jekyll is being pulled at an ever-increasing speed. The horror for a modern reader is the universal horror of mental degeneration.

Having spoken briefly of the portrait of evil drawn in each of these books, it might be wise to backtrack to

the beginning and reintroduce ourselves to the virtues they possess as *novels*. There has always been (and probably always will be) a tendency to see the popular fiction of yesterday as social documents—Charles Dickens comes in for a great deal of this sort of thing—or as moral tracts/history lessons, as precursors of more interesting fictions, or as anything but novels standing upon their own feet, each with its own tale to tell. When teachers and students turn to the discussion of a novel such as *Frankenstein* or *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* or *Dracula* upon its own terms—that is, as a sustained piece of craft and imagination—the discussion is often all too short. Teachers tend to linger on the shortcomings of style and technique, and students tend to focus on such amusing antiquities as Dr. Seward's phonograph diary, Quincey P. Morris's overdone Texas drawl, or Dr. Jekyll's potions.

I have pointed out in passing that none of these books approaches the great novels of the same period. If we think otherwise, we need only contrast any one of them with another book written during the same period—*Dracula* and Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, for instance. But no novel survives merely on the strength of an idea or the novelty of a conception. *Dracula* continues to reverberate in the mind long after the more ghoulish and clamorous *Varney the Vampire* has grown silent; the same is true of Shelley's and Stevenson's works.

Conception is to the novel no more (or less) than fertilization is to the egg that will become a child over the course of gestation. The creation of a good novel—never mind "great"; we will stick to "good" here, and hope to remember that good works are only slightly less noble than great ones—is less an act of exalted mental effort powered by an ethereal Muse than it is a fireman's chore requiring brute energy and endless invention. As the food the mother eats nourishes the fetus; as the coal the fireman stokes powers the engine; so the writer's invention in all the matters of the novel powers his creation. If the mother eats the wrong sorts of food, her child may be sickly. If the fireman stops stoking, the engine stops. And if the novelist grows short of invention, the

novel dies. It is buried under each year's tide of new novels.

Whatever else we may say about them, these three are survivors. Their creators—if we may return to the fireman image again—have stoked each book with enough invention to turn the novels into dark engines of entertainment that bear us speedily along to their conclusions.

Oddly enough, only Robert Louis Stevenson was able to stoke the engine successfully more than once. His adventure novels continue to be read, but Stoker's later books, such as *The Lair of the White Worm*, and Mary Shelley's later gothics have fallen into almost total obscurity.

Each book is remarkable in some way, not just as a horror novel or an early suspense yarn, but as an example of a much wider genre—the genre of the novel itself.

When Mary Shelley can leave off belaboring the philosophical implications of Victor Frankenstein's work, she gives us powerful scenes of desolation and grim horror—most notably, of course, the silent polar scenes as the monster's quest for retribution draws to its close. She conjures the area of Geneva remarkably well—especially when we remember that she had known it only a short time when she wrote *Frankenstein*.

Of the three, Bram Stoker gives us the most remarkable scenes of horror. His book may be overlong, but during its course we are rewarded, if that is the word, with set pieces and images worthy of Doré. Renfield patiently spreading sugar on his windowsill to catch the flies he will later eat with all the patience of the damned; the scarring of Mina's forehead with the Wafer; the entering of Lucy's tomb. Each is unforgettable, and no movie has quite done justice to any of them.

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde may be read for its style alone. Many critics have objected to its brevity—G. K. Chesterton called it "thin," and Grant Knight said of Stevenson, "[He] is wan and slight. He had no penetration. He was not a thinker"—but no less a critic than Henry James called the book "a masterpiece of concision." It is that. Rule 13 for composition in that indispensable little handbook, *The Elements of Style*, by

Strunk and White, reads simply: "Omit needless words." Along with Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, and James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, Stevenson's economy-sized horror story could serve as a textbook example for young writers on how Strunk's Rule 13 is best applied. Characterizations are quick and precise, pencil sketches rather than oil portraits (but not caricatures; you cannot read *Jekyll and Hyde* and come away with that feeling), matters of mood are implied rather than established, and the narrative fairly flies. If *Dracula* leaves one with the sensation of having been struck down by a massive, four-hundred-page wall of horror, then *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is like the sudden, mortal jab of an ice pick.

Each of the novels rewards in a more retrospective way as well. *Frankenstein* is Mary Shelley's conscious or unconscious parable of the Romantic sensibility; Frankenstein and his creation represent the yin and yang of a paradoxical whole, encompassing beauty and horror, flowering imagination and social consciousness balanced off by a great capacity for self-destruction, a capacity that can be seen in the lives of almost all the Romantics, from Percy Bysshe Shelley to Lord Byron, and perhaps right on up to such poetic but self-destructive personalities as Hart Crane and Sylvia Plath.

Dracula is a panting engine of late Victorian sexuality, a sexuality that has been barely sublimated into violence. The Count threatens Jonathan Harker but never actually bites him; it is the descriptions of his attentions to Mina and Lucy that Stoker lingers over. Stoker reserves his most seductive prose for his descriptions of the vampire's bite and ritual penetration. Presumably Lucy Westenra goes to her grave a technical virgin, but we can never doubt that Dracula has robbed her of her virginity in a more bizarre fashion, and that his bite provides her with a dreamy, orgasmic pleasure.

In *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, as in *Dracula* and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, we are afforded a different picture of Victorian society—an inkblot picture of the darker side of the life, more in keeping with secret rooms and hidden pornography than of ladies and gen-

lemen strolling decorously along the Serpentine in Hyde Park or courting under the watchful eye of a chaperone. With its stark prose and its hints of drunken debauches, violence, and hidden corruption, *Jekyll and Hyde* foreshadows Jack the Ripper, walking the London slums and murdering gin-soaked Whitechapel prostitutes. With its interest in the split personality, Stevenson's book, even more than Stoker's, hints at the dark side of the coin.

I will end this where I began—with the wonder and terror these three great monsters continue to create in the minds of readers. The most overlooked facet of each may be that it succeeds in overleaping reality and entering a world of total fantasy . . . but in the leap we are not left behind but somehow, magically and marvelously, brought along for the ride of our lives. And this, at least, surpasses "good." It is a great feat.

—Stephen King

FRANKENSTEIN

Or, The Modern Prometheus

by Mary W. Shelley

*Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay
To mould me Man, did I solicit thee
From darkness to promote me?*

Paradise Lost, X, 743–45

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

The text of the Signet Classics *Frankenstein or, The Modern Prometheus* is that of the third edition, revised and corrected by the author and published by Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, London, 1831. The author's Introduction, lacking in the first edition (1818) and the second (1823), was published in this edition for the first time. The text is reprinted here with permission from the Carl and Lily Pforzheimer Foundation, Inc., on behalf of the Carl H. Pforzheimer Library.