


Frankenstein, Dracula, and the Workings of Genre

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Abstract: *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* represent two different genres in print but only one in film. The emergence of science fiction from the Gothic exemplifies normal public genre development. The translation of the written *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* into film exemplifies genre development as an adaptation both to historical moment and to medium. In both the print and film cases, we can see the same mechanisms by which a genre is not only established in the public sphere but in the mind of a reader or viewer, a dialectic process in which the genre forms and informs reading and viewing and potentially, as a genre, is reformed by reading and viewing. Consideration of cognitive mechanisms involved in verbal and visual cognition shows both the interaction and the typical dominance of the visual, although genre, and hence individual works, can be modified by increasing our focus on the verbal.

Keywords: fantasy, genre cognition, genre theory, Gothic, horror, phenomenology, science fiction

Trick or Treat

The very first results page for an image web search under “great movie monsters” (19 June 2008) returns thumbnails of Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi each in their most famous film roles, Frankenstein’s monster and Dracula, together at last, or, more accurately, together still. Frankenstein, the older in print by nearly eighty years, and Dracula, had begun their popular lives, or fictional un-deaths, in novels, but in novels their association had seemed rather distant. Carl Laemmle, Jr., producer of both movies, brought them together by remaking them as part of the same genre, horror films. In the years since the 1931 releases of *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*, those faces have popped up together often not only at millions of front doors on Halloween and on countless fun house rides, but in many movies like *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948), a slapstick horror parody also featuring the Wolfman and an “appearance” by The Invisible Man, voiced by Vincent Price. What that catch-all movie does not include, however, is Frankenstein himself. Thanks in large measure to the movies, the monster had come to supplant his creator in the popular con-

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sciousness so thoroughly that the obsessed scientist would have been an impediment to that parody's chaotic plot. In the Hollywood star system, essentially a regime of commercial branding, the visually commanding monster,

not the scientist, spelled box office, as did the sweet lunacy of Abbott and Costello. I know, from my own childhood experience, that even without the scientist in tow those comedians were still meeting Frankenstein's monster profitably in Brooklyn, New York, movie houses at least five years after the film's first release. But Frankenstein's monster and Dracula first met on the Universal lots in Hol-

lywood during the Great Depression. The paths of these characters, from print to film to popular consciousness, illuminates both the workings of genre and, ultimately, the centrality of genre to how we understand the world.

Science Fiction and the Place of Frankenstein

There was no "science fiction" (SF) before 1926. Really. Take a look in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED). Its earliest exemplary quotation, from 1851, refers to a book that puts real science into a romance narrative: "Science-Fiction, in which the revealed truths of Science may be given, interwoven with a pleasing story which may itself be poetical and *true*—thus circulating a knowledge of the Poetry of Science, clothed in a garb of the Poetry of Life." But this is not what we mean by science fiction. To most of us, SF connotes mad scientists, ray guns, alternate histories, alien contact, raw post-apocalyptic landscapes, and telepathy. To some, like Darko Suvin, SF includes all utopian fiction (1979: 61); for others, like John Rieder, imaginary voyages like *Gulliver's* (2008: 35–36). In fact, none of those works is scientifically "*true*." Science fiction is a branch of fantastic fiction, the branch that rhetorically justifies its narrative world against a background of organized knowledge (Rabkin 1976: 118–38).

Besides, even the OED notes that its 1851 citation "shows an isolated use. The expression did not come into general use until the end of the 1920s." But, one may object, if, say, utopian fiction is part of science fiction, and if Plato's *Republic* is utopian fiction, surely there was science fiction before 1926. Not when viewed in 1925.

When Thomas More coined the term "utopia" for the imaginary setting of his 1516 narrative essay on social organization, he not only named a place, he crystallized a concept. Before More, no one spoke of "utopian fiction." Nor did they speak instead of "Republican fiction" à la Plato. They simply didn't articulate the coherence of the genre which, so far as we can tell, means they did not recognize the existence of the genre. Individual works were known, of course, but they were not known to be utopian works or any other sort of works that form a set we would understand as synonymous with "utopian."

And genre membership matters. That's why policemen wear uniforms, so we'll know to treat their words differently than we would the very same words from random strangers. Genres are phenomenological categories, sets of perceived phenomena, so, absent their perception, they do not exist. Before the turn of the nineteenth century, there were no policemen in the modern sense. However, the process of naming (which Adam began), like the process of assigning visually coordinated clothing to people performing socially coordinated functions, calls meaning into existence and orders the world. Wallace Stevens reports an instance of this process in his "Anecdote of the Jar":

*I placed a jar in Tennessee
And round it was, upon a hill.
It made the slovenly wilderness
Surround that hill
...
And [sprawl] around, no longer wild.
The jar was ...
... tall and of a port in air. ([1919] 1971: 46)*

Stevens' "tall" jar presides over what had been wild but is now ordered not by an act of placing the jar in Tennessee—one cannot, after all, do such a thing in reality; Tennessee is too big for that to make sense; one can only, say, place a jar on a table in a house in Tennessee—but by his making a poem, a word-thing, that represents this impossible but imaginable placement. In the poem, and now in our minds, the jar serves both to receive and send meaning, to "port," or carry, ideas to and from this now-shaped domain.

In April 1926, in the inaugural issue of *Amazing Stories*, in an editorial called "A New Sort of Magazine," founding editor Hugo Gernsback placed the jar of science fiction in the slovenly wilderness of popular fiction.

Another fiction magazine! ... True. But this is not [just] "another fiction magazine." AMAZING STORIES is a new kind of fiction magazine! It is entirely new—entirely different—something that has never been done before ... [It is] a magazine of "Scientifiction" [by which] I mean the Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, and Edgar Allan Poe type of story—a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision. (1926: 3)

While the reference to "scientific fact" may suggest that Gernsback had adopted the 1851 usage, his ostensive definition makes clear that "prophetic visions" might well include a mesmeric stand-off with death as in Poe's "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," an encounter with a beast never before seen as in Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* ([1870] 1976), and an utterly symbolic landscape like the terminal beach in the year 30,000,000 that Wells shows us near the end of *The Time Machine*.

Poe thought of “Valdemar” as one of what he called “Tales of Ratiocination” (Hoffmann 1972: 100, 161), a genre that included both what we would now call science fiction and, like Poe’s “The Purloined Letter,” what we would now call Tales of the Great Detective. Poe saw the defining quality of that genre as the probing of a mystery by the rational mind, a behavior presumably manifest both in characters and in the engaged reader. Verne thought of *20,000 Leagues* as one of his “*voyages extraordinaires*” (Versins 1972: 943), a genre of which the defining quality was the simultaneous connection with and superseding of ordinary circumstances by means of travel in some also-extraordinary vehicle. And Wells thought of his own early fables as “scientific fantasies” ([1934] 2001: 255), the defining quality being that the narrative world be shaped by something impossible but then understood as methodically as possible. Poe’s genre is much broader than modern SF in straddling the divide most seen between fantastic and realistic fiction; Verne’s genre is much narrower than modern SF in defining an invariable dramatic pattern; and Wells’s genre is more intellectually demanding than modern SF by requiring, once the initial fantasy is admitted, the strictest possible extrapolation. Today, of course, these works by Poe, Verne, and Wells are all exemplars of what we call science fiction, a genre crystallized by Gernsback. True, he did not succeed in pressing his new coinage, “scientifiction,” into general circulation, but he succeeded overwhelmingly in focusing attention on a genre almost immediately called simply “science fiction.” Even Gernsback himself, market barometer that he was, embraced this nominal shift. As the editor of *Science Wonder Stories*, in 1929 he sought to stoke his readers’ vigorous attention to the newly recognized genre when he “promised to pay \$50.00 for the best letter each month on the subject of ‘What Science Fiction Means to Me’” (OED).

Science fiction still may mean many things (Rabkin forthcoming), but all modern critics, like Brian Aldiss, agree that Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* ([1818] 1969), is “[much] more than a merely convenient place at which to begin [its] story” (Aldiss 1986: 18). Shelley’s novel grows in one sense from the Gothic tradition. As is well known, those brooding Romantic novels of supernatural events, crimes and curses, and hardly checked dark passions, take their name from Horace Walpole’s 1765 classic, *The Castle of Otranto*. This work opens in the eponymous pile, a heap of hidden passages and heavy history in an architectural style called Gothic. Walpole’s subtitle, “A Gothic Story” ([1765] 1963: 2) refers both to the ominous setting and to the notion, current at least since John Dryden in the previous century, that “Gothic” conjures the “barbarous” beliefs and excesses Englishmen then associated with the medieval (OED). The taste for the Gothic in that literary sense has never died. Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* ([1897] 1975) is itself an enduring instance of supernatural sexual predation that sucks the will or even life from its victims, its undead villain drawing the innocent into his grim castle, and then launch-

ing himself from that threatening keep to the ships, houses, and rock-walled asylums of the modern world. As I write (11 June 2008), the top three places on the *New York Times* hardcover fiction best seller list are taken by Laurell K. Hamilton's *Blood Noir*, the sixteenth book in the saga of "Anita Blake, Vampire Hunter" (amazon.com); Stephenie Meyer's *The Host*, a human-human-alien love triangle by the "creator of the phenomenal teen-vamp *Twilight* series" (amazon.com); and Dean R. Koontz's *Odd Hours*, the fourth installment in a series of detective-story thrillers starring Odd Thomas, a short-order cook who communicates with real ghosts.

Because of the continuing popularity of the Gothic, writers continue to produce it, thus multiplying through time not only copies of the same works but new works of the same genre. Readers can always find another Gothic novel, if they wish. However, consuming too many exemplars of any single sort of thing can produce a "jaded familiarity" that George Kubler calls "aesthetic fatigue" (1962: 80). Thus many artists, knowing a market has been large, tweak a genre to wake it up. Jane Austen did that in *Northanger Abbey* ([1818] 1963) in which Catherine Morland, having read too many Gothic romances, including Ann Radcliffe's famous *The Mysteries of Udolpho* ([1794] 1963), believes that the title abbey, used as a family residence and to which Catherine is invited, must harbor if not the supernatural then certainly the signs of dire crime; she is wrong, but, of course, marries well anyway. The Radcliffe reference should and probably did prompt Austen's contemporary readers to view Catherine ironically as in thrall to fiction, a haunted rather than heroic Quixote, because Radcliffe's novel had already set the high-water mark for another manner of genre tweaking. Radcliffe's heroine, in fact confined to a castle wherein she suffers one apparently supernatural encounter after another, finally learns that she has been victimized by the quite natural workings of villainy masked by contrivance as supernatural. That ultimate unmasking, what one might call the Scooby Doo ending ("Why, it's Mr. Johnson from down the street!"), is Gothic *expliqué*, a recognizable genre one might think of as a subset of the Gothic but is more usefully understood as a development from it. While the supernatural lives in the true Gothic, the defining characteristic of Gothic *expliqué* is that what had seemed fantastic, by one further fantastic twist, is revealed as realistic.

In *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley moved the justificatory revelation from the end of the Gothic *expliqué* novel to the beginning, and by that stunningly simple innovation created what, more than a century later, Gernsback's readers had to recognize as science fiction. The "Preface" to the first edition of *Frankenstein* begins, "The event on which this fiction is founded, has been supposed, by Dr. Darwin, and some of the physiological writers of Germany, as not of impossible occurrence" ([1818] 1969: 13). The Darwin referenced here, of course, is Erasmus, Charles's grandfather and the writer of, among other

works, the then well known *Zoonomia*, which lays out an evolutionary scheme for the relations among the species in the biological world. Notice that Shelley adduces a single “event,” presaging Wells’s ideal for extrapolative “scientific fantasies.” Shelley relates her event, in the preface to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, to “galvanism,” that is, Luigi Galvani’s late eighteenth-century demonstrations that a severed frog’s leg could be impelled to move by electricity, and so, she thought, “[p]erhaps a corpse would be re-animated” ([1818] 1969: 9). The re-animation of the stitched charnel parts by raising the monster-to-be to the tower top, calling down the very lightning of heaven, forms an unforgettable sequence in James Whale’s movie. It is, however, absent in the novel. In prose, Victor simply works on a table, and in no great detail.

Shelley’s novel is not about the monster but community and the obligations it fosters. In the novel’s epigraph, from *Paradise Lost*, John Milton’s Adam complains to God, “Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay / To mould Me man? Did I solicit thee / From Darkness to promote me?—” (Shelley [1818] 1969: 1). Why must I now lose Paradise? The problem for Victor Frankenstein, the aspiring “modern Prometheus,” is that he apes the ancient Prometheus who disobediently steals the gods’ fire and ultimately is punished himself and inspires Zeus to visit upon humanity Pandora and her box. Curiosity—scientific eagerness?—drives her to expose to the light what she had been warned to leave unseen, unleashing all evils and keeping only, as defense against them, hope.

The plot of *Frankenstein* begins with a hope, expressed by Robert Walton, the outermost narrator, on the very first page of the main text, that the ancient myth of a warm Hyperborean region may be confirmed. He imagines a polar zone where “the sun is forever visible” (Shelley [1818] 1969: 15). Light imagery provides bookends for the creature’s story. He arises reanimated by electricity and on the last page, with his own creator dead of exhaustion and himself therefore consigned to be one of a kind, forever isolate, he leaps off into the arctic from Walton’s ice-bound ship vowing to put an end to “these burning miseries [of loneliness] . . . I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly, and exult in the agony of the torturing flames” (223).

At the center of the novel, which is a series of nested narratives, we have the tale of Felix and Safie, a story of familial betrayal across generational and religious lines. The creature overhears this story and weeps for the young couple. But when he is seen, for his ugliness he is rejected violently, a violence he resists. The tumult results in the cottage, where the creature had served hidden as almost a fairy helper, burned to the ground. The novel is about community, and the obligations we have to others; its central exemplum is one of community betrayed. Victor, too, betrays communal bonds, by ignoring his own family, by promising to end the creature’s loneliness with a bride and then destroying her half made, and by egotistically leaving his own bride to

the fatal devices of the desperate creature. The creature is the visible sign of the way in which curiosity unbridled by a recognition of the just claims of society may separate the individual, bring punishment to him, and unleash terror on the world. From Genesis on, “light” stands for knowledge (as in perspective, vision, clarity, and even brilliance, see?), but the flame of knowledge, the power it sets loose, is fearful indeed. “[F]or there shall no man see me, and live,” God says of his overpowering glory (Genesis 33:20). In this combination of social morality and equivocal imagery, science fiction was born.

Frankenstein and Dracula

Science fiction often uses the rhetoric of science. In “Valdemar,” the narrator claims to have double-checked his own memory of events from notes taken by a medical student who had been engaged specifically to track the progress of the narrator’s “experiments” in which he “mesmerize[d Valdemar] *in articulo mortis*” (Poe [1845] 1973: 269). He could have mesmerized Valdemar “at the point of death,” but Latin—the language of the corresponding Fellows of the Royal Society (of Science in London) in the seventeenth century—still sounds so much more scientific than English. Even when its language is not only vernacular but emotional, a science fiction story may proceed by scientific means, as when, in the second chapter of *The Time Machine*, Wells’s Time Traveler explains the underlying principles of time travel and then to prove his point sends a working model off to . . . *somewhen* (Wells [1895] 2001: 66). Other techniques, too, have the effect of situating a reader instantly, as Shelley did with her Preface, in a fantastic world rhetorically justified against a background of an organized body of knowledge. On the first page of *Beyond This Horizon* ([1942] 1948), Robert A. Heinlein’s main character “mounted a slideway to the left, and stepped off . . . at a door [that] dilated, and a voice inside said, ‘Come in, Felix.’” The unremarked uses of “slideway” and “dilate,” which the reader immediately understands as technological extensions of our world, rhetorically justify this fantastic world as realistic.

At first glance, *Dracula*, too, may look like a science fiction, but it is not. Stoker’s novel is told as a series of documents evidently assembled with great attention to objectivity. “Chapter I. / Jonathan Harker’s Journal. / (*Kept in shorthand.*) / 3 May. *Bistritz*.—Left Munich at 8.35 p.m. on 1st May, arriving at Vienna early next morning; should have arrived at 6.46, but train was an hour late” (Stoker [1897] 1975: 1). Harker might as well be one of Poe’s medical students, writing objective data in a foreshortened language attentive only to verifiable fact. His world begins in numbers, times, and locations, not in moods, moments, and situations, although an attentive reader already notices that modern technology may not be trusted. As did the Royal Society seeking a rhetoric that instantiated objectivity, Harker eschews constructions that reveal agency. Indeed, he so thoroughly silences agency that we do not even

read who actually left Munich. Successive chapters give us other journal entries, both by Harker and others, letters among the characters, and diary entries. Characters consult shipping records, newspaper articles, and other documents—all made directly available to the reader. A major component of the action is the organization of a posse of Old and New World Anglophones and communication among them to resist the predations of the ancient aristocrat from the east. One of the main contributions of Lucy, Harker's fiancé, to this effort is using that wonderful new instrument, the typewriter, to clarify and multiply copies of handwritten documents so the group, and the reader, can share them. Poe would be pleased, but ultimately not the Poe of Tales of Ratiocination but the thanatophilic Poe whose work led to so much memorable screen time for Vincent Price in gruesome films like *House of Usher* (1960), *Pit and the Pendulum* (1961), *The Raven* (1963), *The Tomb of Ligeia* (1964), *The Masque of the Red Death* (1964), and more.

The trappings of scientific method are overlain in *Dracula* on the epistolary novel. One thinks of *Les liaisons dangereuses* (1782) in which the exchange of letters chronicles the progress of corruption and its conquest of innocence. Creeping, self-serving, life-draining sexuality is as central to Choderlos de Laclos's ([1782] 1962) novel as it is to Stoker's. And just why are Laclos's characters rapacious? Presumably because they represent the excesses of French pre-Revolutionary aristocracy. And why is *Dracula* rapacious? Presumably because he, too, represents what a modern (in 1897) Englishman would have thought to have been an aristocracy long dead. But evil like *Dracula's* cannot die. Why not? Simply because it cannot.

Frankenstein and *Dracula* are both concerned with community, but very differently. Shelley's undergraduate (only the movies make him a count, doctor, or baron) is not isolated because he is the last of his kind but because he is the first, an alienation expressed existentially by his doppelganger, whom he calls a monster, a uniqueness he brings on himself not by multiplying mortal sins, as had *Dracula*, but by pursuing normal curiosity beyond the bounds of community. The successful staking at the end of *Dracula* ultimately represents the triumph of the posse, democracy, over criminal aristocracy. The death of Victor and the promised death of the creature at the end of *Frankenstein* ultimately represent the futility of egotism. Stoker, despite naming his novel after the vampire, focuses on the defense of the many. They coordinate old lore with current events to repress ancient evil. Shelley, despite naming her novel after the scientist, complicatedly explores the fate of scientific excess, incarnate in the monster, an excess potentially both miraculous and destructive, much like fire itself. The key symbols in *Frankenstein* are fire, including lightning, and ice, frozen fertility; the key symbols in *Dracula* are blood and wine, a perverse communion in which the victim is given eternal death. Shelley looks to the future and sees genius within the community as a danger, yes,

but potentially progressive; Stoker looks to the past and sees privilege outside the community as a danger, yes, and odious.

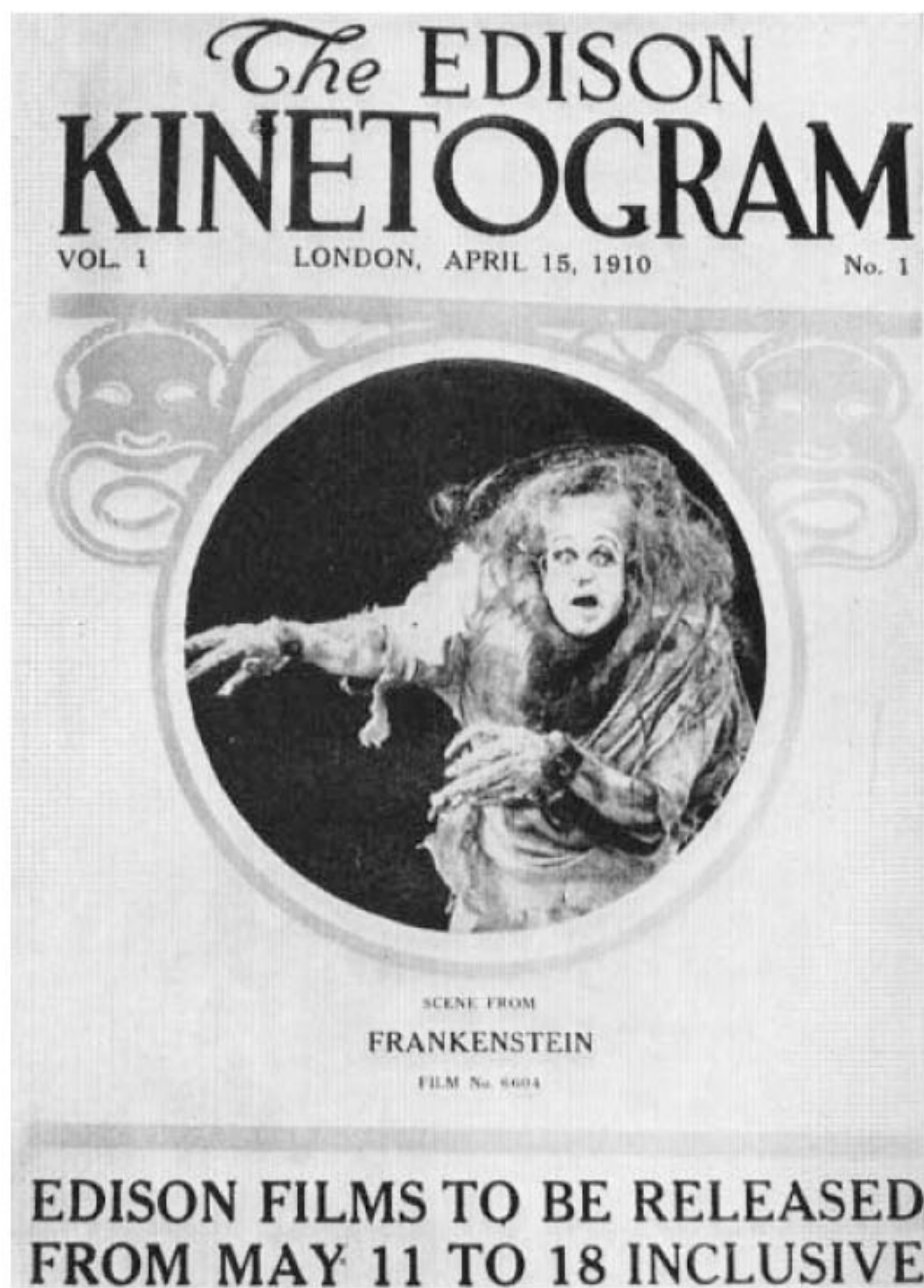
Although the use of documents and document sharing in *Dracula* recalls the correspondence of the Royal Society, the contents of those documents are anti-scientific. As is common in epistolary fiction, Harker writes about his own writing situation. “Here I am, sitting at a little oak table where in old times possibly some fair lady sat to pen, with much thought and many blushes, her ill-spelt love-letter, and writing in my diary in shorthand all that has happened since I closed it last. It is nineteenth century up-to-date with a vengeance. And yet, unless my senses deceive me, the old centuries had, and have, powers of their own which mere ‘modernity’ cannot kill” (Stoker [1897] 1975: 38). Harker’s stereotyped sense of women, their education, and their comportment goes unchallenged in the novel, just as the putative newness of his writing—the two most widespread shorthand systems, Pitman and Gregg, were introduced in the 1830s and 1880s respectively—remains invisible to the reader and in no way changes the received language refracting Harker’s thoughts. And while we see that Lucy can spell, we also see that most women in this novel serve best by suffering. What are those old powers Harker mentioned? They include the vampire’s ability to shift shapes, continue undead indefinitely, produce other vampires, move preternaturally swiftly, and so on. But he must sleep in his native soil, casts no shadow on a wall or reflection in a mirror, and can be killed by a wooden stake through the heart (211–14). Why? Because. I recognize that all of these characteristics are metaphoric. If light is knowledge, and particularly divine knowledge, of course it would destroy the sinner, since it was sin, after all, that made the vampire in the first place, right? The stake in the heart represents the Cross, obviously fatal to a vampire. Obvious, that is, if the “old powers” obtain and modernity is mere façade. The knowledge that Dr. van Helsing and the posse bring to bear against Dracula represents discovery not as invention but recovery, learning and trusting the ancient lore so that modern democrats can finish what the French Revolution started. Victor Frankenstein, however, looks forward. He believes in *inventio*; his world is Aristotelian, susceptible to human understanding and manipulation. Harker and van Helsing, however, look backward. They believe in *anagnoresis*; their world is Platonic, susceptible at best to imperfect understanding, but understanding enough, one hopes, to push back the medieval curse that is with us yet. *Frankenstein* is a science fiction; *Dracula* is a Gothic novel.

The Face of Horror

In 1969, Denis Gifford published a quite handsome “Studio Vista | Dutton Pictureback” called *Movie Monsters*. Like Gernsback, Gifford offers an ostensive definition. The book contains three parts, “Creation,” “Resuscitation,” and “Metamorphosis.” “Creation” includes “The Monster,” by which Gifford means

Frankenstein's monster, the start of the whole book and Gifford's whole cinematic genre, and "The Golem." "Resuscitation" includes "The Mummy" and "The Zombie," although, had one Shelley's book in mind, rather than Whale's movie, "The Monster" might better belong here. "Metamorphosis" includes eight shape shifters, first among them "The Vampire." So Gifford inaugurates two of the three branches of his "movie monsters" genre with our classic fictional undeads. Two years later, Gifford issued a companion volume called *Science Fiction Film*. Its three parts are "Invention," "Exploration," and "Prediction." Reading the members of these groupings—"The Machine" and "The Ray" under "Invention," for instance, or "The Time Machine" and "The Bomb" under "Prediction"—one would think of SF film as wholly different from monster movies, much more "ratiocinative," to adapt Poe's term, with a single apparent exception, that under "Exploration" we find "The Alien," which might be monstrous. The generic distinction between these two books seems to be that movie monsters started out as human while the objects of our fascinated gaze in science fiction film did not. The only obvious point of overlap in the

Figure 1. Charles Ogle as Frankenstein's monster, 1910



tables of contents is that the category of "The Mutant" under "Metamorphosis" in *Movie Monsters* can be expected—and in fact is found pictured—in the section called "The Bomb" under *Science Fiction Film* "Predictions." Were these genres really as discrete as Gifford's apparent publishing needs suggest?

While all good "picturebacks" will have some defining theme, they sell on the basis of their pictures. Look through *Movie Monsters* and you will see the very first movie monster, Charles Ogle as The Monster in the Edison Company's 1910 *Frankenstein* (Figure 1). And you will see that monster again, in many forms, and his visual cousins, on every page of Gifford's book. Look through *Science Fiction Film* and you will see submarines and robots, to be sure; however, you will also see a menacing giant squid in the submarine chapter, menacing robots in the robot chapter, menacing Morlocks (Wells's far-

future devolved human troglodytes) in the time machine chapter, menacing aliens in the alien chapter, and so on. What sold both these books was movie menace, which Gifford surely knew, because it was menace that sold those movies. Look at the posters advertising them and this is clear. Even a most science fictional film like Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) is represented by the looming, potent city and the seductive, inhuman fembot (Figure 2). And two years later still, Gifford got it right.

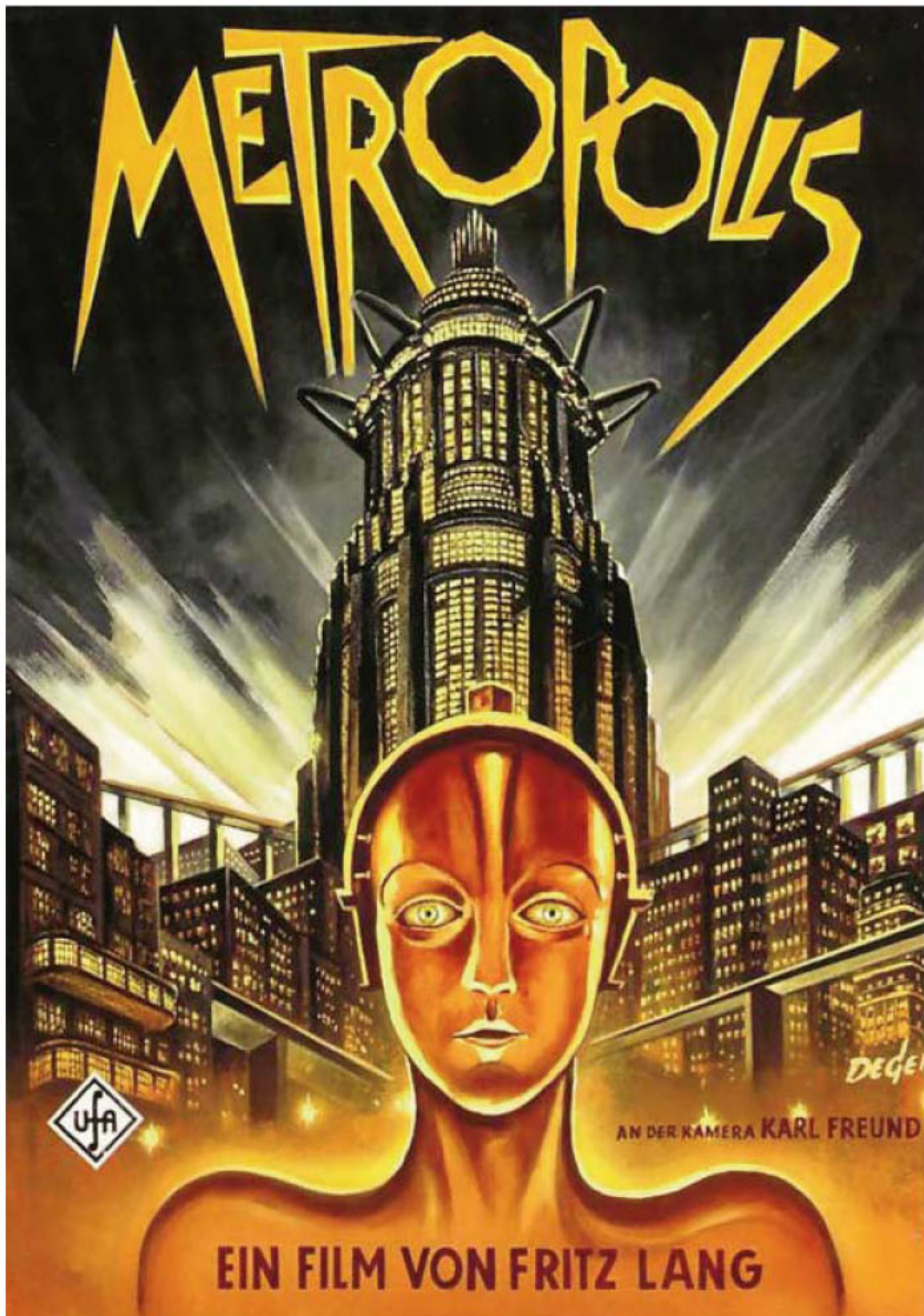


Figure 2. *Metropolis* poster, 1927

In his 1973 *Pictorial History of Horror Movies*, Gifford devotes an early chapter to the shape-shifting scientific monster called Jekyll and Hyde; another to the actor Lon Chaney, the “Man of a Thousand Faces” (76); and another, implicitly acknowledging the impact of Carl Laemmle, Jr., to “Karloff and Lugosi, The Universal Monsters,” finally together not merely on the Universal lot but in Gifford’s criticism. According to the “Monster Tracks” on-screen annotations in the 75th Anniversary DVD edition of Whale’s *Frankenstein*, Carl Laemmle, the founder of Universal Studios, said, “I don’t believe in horror pictures. It’s morbid. . . . Only Junior wanted it.” In addition to *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*, Junior produced *The Mummy* (1932), *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1932), and *The Invisible Man* (1933), not to mention many non-horror movies such as *Destry Rides Again* (1932) and *Showboat* (1936). But morbidity was a problem. Some jurisdictions forbade the showing of *Frankenstein* (“Monster Tracks”), so Junior’s post-preview addition of a happy ending, in which the servants bring an alcoholic toast (this was still Prohibition, by the way) to Victor (called Henry in the movie) and Elizabeth after their successful escape from the monster’s clutches, may have been meant to mollify objections. Whatever the conscious intent, it had the effect of opening room for sequels, which Universal produced prolifically.

Both the book and the movie of *Dracula* concern sexuality. The classic image (Figure 3) of the vampire from F. W. Murnau’s filming called *Nosferatu* (1922), based on Stoker’s novel and subtitled “A Symphony of Horrors,” shows the blood-sucker emerging from an inscrutable, vaginal arch, arms pressed into his sides, fully erect, bald head nothing but taut skin, his exaggerated ears suggesting a ring of flesh. He is an inexorably advancing instrument of rape, his horrid penile impersonation only compounded by his piercing eyes and lax, ready mouth. In both the book and the movie, the conflict we see is between the vampire who comes at night and the fiancé, Harker, who has not yet come at all but seeks to protect his Lucy, “light,” by day. Only by descending into the darkness, though, can the power of daylight love hammer a Freudian stake into the unbeating heart of the recumbent vampire.

Junior released his film, as was usual in the 1930s, on a Saturday. The one he picked was 14 February 1931, Valentine’s Day.

To this day, most horror movies make great date flicks, titillating, sexual, and providing all the excuses teenagers could want for the boy viewers to “protect” the girls. The bad girl on screen—shown as such by running around unclothed—is always the first to die. This is equally true in slasher horror and in Steven Spielberg’s *Jaws* (1975). But movie death doesn’t so much warn us as fascinate us. Safely out of the theater, boys will be boys, if the girls have become excited enough to let them.

Frankenstein, despite its excrescent heir-raising toast, is not a date movie. Both these films, produced during the Great Depression, offered social commentary. *Dracula* is a rapacious aristocrat with unimagined and illegitimate



Figure 3.
Frankenstein
poster, 1931

powers that enable him to take our women. Frankenstein, the scientist that is, is upper middle-class, also privileged, but a member of a family that includes his kindly father who drinks that toast at the film's end. When the villagers swirl up the hillside with torches and finally burn the monster, Karloff conveys deep pathos. The most articulate character in Shelley's novel, the movie monster becomes a mute Savage, at first Noble and then much less so. Modern viewers typically forget that familial coda and the many remakes and sequels and pastiches typically omit it. The true horror of Frankenstein, the monster, was that of a man, wanting to be good, bewildered by his reception in the world, oppressed, and denied even the simplest of life's pleasures in what should have been his own land.

In his presidential proclamation of a national day of Thanksgiving, issued 3 November 1931, Herbert Hoover wrote that "Our country has cause for gratitude to the Almighty. We have been widely blessed with abundant harvests. We have been spared from pestilence and calamities. Our institutions have

served the people. Knowledge has multiplied and our lives are enriched with its application. Education has advanced, the health of our people has increased. We have dwelt in peace with all men. The measure of passing adversity which has come upon us should deepen the spiritual life of the people, quicken their sympathies and spirit of sacrifice for others, and strengthen their courage.” The feckless Hoover counseled that the experience of the Depression should make us glad and trust in communal effort. Junior was not so sure. He released *Frankenstein* on 21 November 1931, the Saturday before Thanksgiving.

Carl Laemmle, Jr., took these classic books, one a science fiction, one a Gothic novel, and turned them into horror movies. George Slusser pursues an analysis of two versions of “The Horla” by Guy de Maupassant in order to compare and contrast science fiction and horror in prose. Slusser argues that both genres must deal with a “positivist” framework, a belief that something truly is “out there” (2002: 71), not just what we imagine or believe. The difference, he claims, is what we make of the “out there” (“*hors-là*” in French). If its existence, although astonishing, accords with what we know or believe we can know, the result is science fiction; if its existence forces us to abandon what—and even more deeply, how—we know, the result is horror. (Of course, one can imagine an abandonment, as in *It’s a Wonderful Life* [1946], that leads to consolation, not horror, but Slusser understandably stays close to his touchstone Maupassant examples.) A cinematic truism is that horror keeps its monsters hidden as long as possible. When this may happen to be so, one might suggest that it allows the audience to struggle between Slusser’s epistemological poles, hoping to find a way to understand the world as merely an extension of what we know, fearing that it is much different than that, a reality in which we are essentially inexperienced and therefore one for which we may be radically unprepared.

But in the realm of movies, everything on the screen is a figment of our imaginations. It is either out there or it isn’t. If you truly convince yourself that “it’s just a movie,” the movie ceases to be scary. But even when it is scary, it remains in some unconscious way a movie. So the fact of voluntarily watching a movie tames whatever fears its content may provoke. In that sense, horror movies offer the same thrill ride that Bruno Bettelheim (1976: 147–49) claims underlies the enduring popularity of the Grimmet of Grimm tales. And like fairy tales, horror movies work well indulging repetition compulsion. In other words, the power of a horror movie may come in part on a first viewing from the absence of the monster, but on subsequent viewings the horror comes from knowing precisely that that monster will appear, even if that entrance is deliciously retarded. Indeed, even on a first viewing, the production values and set design and music, often from the establishing shot, tell us that the monster will eventually appear and whether or not, as in “Rapunzel,” our central character will prevail.

Movie producers want repeat viewings. Abbott and Costello pulled many in to meet Frankenstein five years after their film's first release. By now, how many times has an average American male, if teenaged in 1977, seen *Star Wars*? Is there anyone born before 1980 who doesn't know that an arm across one's face, sweepingly opened, should be accompanied by a weirdly accented proclamation that "I vahnt to trink your blud"?

Even before we see the movie, we see the poster. It appears in newspapers, on billboards, and behind glass on the exterior of the theater. Although the opening credits to *Frankenstein* coyly put a question mark where we expect the name of the actor portraying the monster, the presence of the monster dominates the earliest posters (Figure 4). The movie may be called "Frankenstein, The Man Who Made a Monster," but our eyes tell us the monster himself is the largest element of the movie. He arises from death (the skeleton on the left) through the agency of science to a tense encounter with a bride. Frankenstein himself is absent. Does the light shining strategically on his monster suggest an awakening sexual desire or Noble knowledge of what is right in God's world? The movie, of course, suggests both.

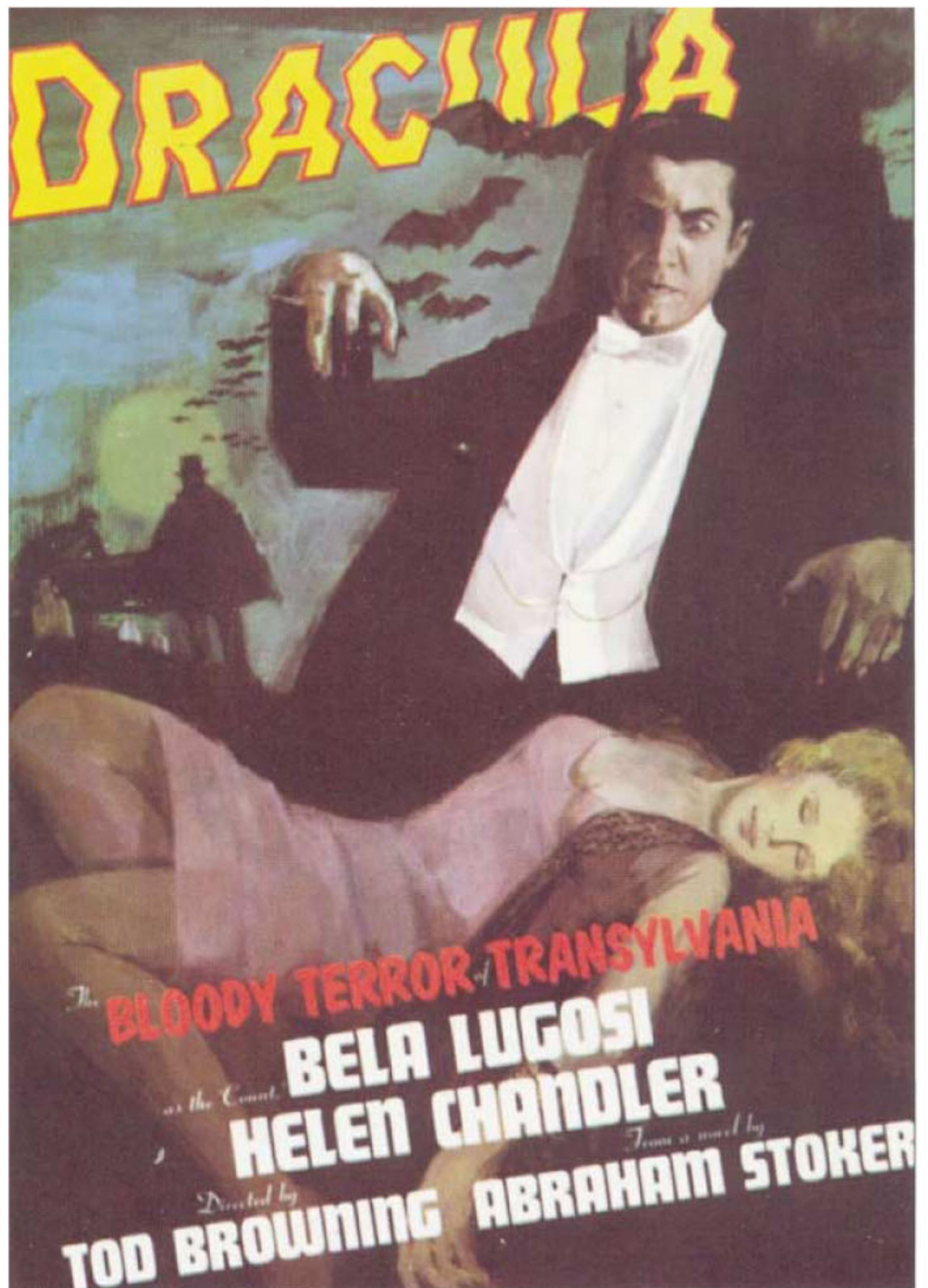
Dracula, too, conveys menace in the face of the monster. On his poster (Figure 5) it is not the victim dressed for a wedding but the evildoer.

Both these faces created brands. From the first Frankenstein monster in 1910 to the first Dracula (*Nosferatu*) in 1922, the movies understood that these two central images defined a genre. The fact of their innumerable successful sequels suggests the effectiveness of the genre and its Frankenstein and Drac-

Figure 4. *Nosferatu*, 1922



Figure 5. *Dracula*
poster, 1931



ula subgenres. And the tweaking of it, like Abbott and Costello's or Mel Brooks's *Young Frankenstein* (1974), suggests a market saturation that leads to aesthetic fatigue, and the consequent development of whole new genres. What shall we call the works that flow from the cantina scene in *Star Wars*? Cantina movies? Here the face of horror is horrible no more, or not necessarily so. The face that had marked menace now marks only strangeness. The new *Battlestar Galactica*, the many variations of *Star Trek*, and *Enemy Mine*

(1985), all argue that we must both see and see past the face of horror. In fact, we can make full-face masks of the monster and give them to children for their innocent use on Halloween. How cute they look!

How Genre Works

Children in monster masks are not the same as bank robbers in monster masks. Context and content change the meaning of genre and genre changes the meaning of context and content. Children all wearing the same monster mask would appear more menacing, because they would be further hiding their individuality and hence identifiability when they made their demands. Bank robbers all wearing the same monster mask would become more identifiable, because at least the police would have some clue about a group decision those hidden individuals made beyond the one to rob a bank. In these cases, we form our genre notions, and understand and react accordingly, in part by context and content. A masked child at the door on Halloween is not the same as a masked bank robber at the teller's window on a Thursday morning or, for that matter, the same as a masked child at the door on a Thursday morning. Genre is complex, drawn quickly from diverse cues, a process that offers enormous cognitive power, allowing us to filter myriad stimuli swiftly (Ariely 2008: 150), but sometimes leads to confusion and even error (Marcus 2008).

Genre implies structure. At the end of this sentence, you will find a colon and after that twenty-five words which I ask you to read once, as slowly as you like, and then close your eyes and try to repeat them: I love New York in the spring when the rains wash the air clean and young people start to stride the streets in cheerful clothes.

Did you try? How did you do? It's not easy, perhaps, but certainly not impossible. Check yourself if you like. And then try it again with these twenty-five words: merger messiah meter mezzotint middle age miles gloriosus Milton minister misadventure miss mixed number modifier moll mongoose monopodium moola moribund Mössbauer effect mountain sickness mucoprotein.

How did you do that time? Personally, I couldn't get those perfectly after three slow readings.

The first twenty-five words have a lot going for them in terms of coherent memorability. We recognize them as forming a grammatical sentence, so every word has not only a meaning but a function. This increase in information density means we are getting more with each word we read in the first twenty-five than in the second. Further, the twenty-five word sentence presents a brief narrative about the season, people, and speaker that builds from beginning to end. Internally, there are some additional prosodic devices link-

Genre is complex, drawn quickly from diverse cues, a process that offers enormous cognitive power, allowing us to filter myriad stimuli swiftly, but sometimes leads to confusion and even error.

ing the words, like the susurrus in “start to stride the street in cheerful clothes.” When we weave, the more threads we can interlock, the stronger the fabric, and the more easily we can retain the pattern in it.

The second twenty-five words also emerge systematically. They are the first guide words on the upper-left side of subsequent even-numbered pages in a copy I happen to own of the *American Heritage Dictionary, New College Edition*. Unfortunately, in terms of memorability, that selection system—which, because they are mostly alphabetical, you may even have suspected—shapes one’s thinking not at all.

Genres, like grammar and narrative and prosody, offer deeply meaningful structure.

Once formed, every genre has a purpose, if not more than one. We can recognize a bodice-ripper by the rhetoric of the title, the content and style of the cover image, and the first paragraph. Publishers and booksellers want to help bodice-ripper readers find their fix. They want to supply their fix. They want to sell them their fix.

“Blessed are the list makers” because the “principle of the list” may help us find what we really want (Heffernan 2008) and may not have even known we wanted. Like “scientifiction.”

Genres, whether received or shaped in the process of observation, not only reflect what we have encountered but project expectations about what we will encounter. In horror movies, we expect the monster to appear. Proprietors of upscale restaurants create expectations in many ways: by the décor, by the process of being seated, by the table settings, by the spacing of the tables. We all know that. What we may not realize is that by “creating an expensive dish, a restaurateur can lure customers into ordering the second most expensive choice (which can be cleverly engineered to deliver a higher profit margin)” (Ariely 2008: 4).

We use visual genre cues powerfully to set genre expectations. The genre of the prose Western, which John Cawelti (1976) so well articulated, contains an in-group, an out-group, and a lone hero. The in-group has more civilized institutions, like courts; the out-group has more individual survival skills, like marksmanship. The in-group has women; the out-group has freedom. There is a conflict between the groups. The lone hero, for whatever reason, shares the values of the in-group and the skills of the out-group. He settles the conflict in favor of the in-group and then, having become the most dangerous person on the scene, must either hang up his guns, like Owen Wister’s *Virginian*, or leave, like Fennimore Cooper’s *Leatherstocking*. Notice that this formula for prose does not reference the vast open spaces that were the precondition of the American frontier the existence of which shaped this formula. But Hollywood understood anyway, so John Ford’s *Stagecoach* (1939) famously winds through Utah’s Monument Valley. That emptiness became, in

the movies, one of the genre markers of the Western. Thus, from the pilot on, the television series *Gunsmoke* (1955–1975) used an establishing shot during the opening credits that focuses on the sheriff but places him with the buildings of the one-street Dodge City to his side while the vastness of the West stretched out behind him. Of course we expect him, weekly, to settle matters with his marksmanship in favor of the in-group, and, once they are settled, return to “the sheriff’s office” where he—temporarily—hangs up his guns.

All other things being equal, the visual is more memorable, even if not consciously noticed, than the verbal. We can remember many more images from most movies than we can spoken lines. Many people complain of not being able to put a name with a face, many fewer with not being able to put a face with a name. But all things are not equal. The verbal arrives sequentially, which gives a speaker or writer strong control over how we take in those words. The visual we may scan at will. Consider the famous three-pronged tuning fork (Figure 6).

This is obviously an impossible object in our shared extra-textual world, but wherein lies that impossibility? At what point does the object represented become fantastic? Put your hand in front of your eyes in such a way that only the three ends on the upper-right are visible. Now slowly move your hand to the lower-left. At a certain point, the image shocks us. Please follow this process of hiding and slow revelation again, but this time beginning with only the handle visible. Again, eventually the image shocks us. In the first instance, the shock occurred when we reached the cross-bar and switched from a two-dimensional code of representation to a three-dimensional code. In the second instance, the shock occurred when we reached the ends of the prongs and switched from a three-dimensional code of representation to a two-dimensional code. In other words, in the visual, which allows us to sequence our observation, the experience is variable even when there is no doubt about what lines are on the page, although, of course, the overall experience of shock is common to both experiences, what might be called readings.

We switched between readings, of course, by the movement of our hands in front of our visual field. There are other ways to switch. Consider this diagram (Figure 7). Fixate on its center for a long time. Eventually, according to Wolfgang Köhler ([1947] 1961: 107ff.), the diagram will cease to look flat and will manifest a foreground and a background. If you continue to fixate on it, the foreground and background will begin to exchange places. If you continue to fixate yet longer, the exchange rate will increase, so that there will be a visible oscillation. And if you continue to fixate longer still, that oscillation will become so fast that it will suddenly cease, and the diagram will be flat again. Try it.

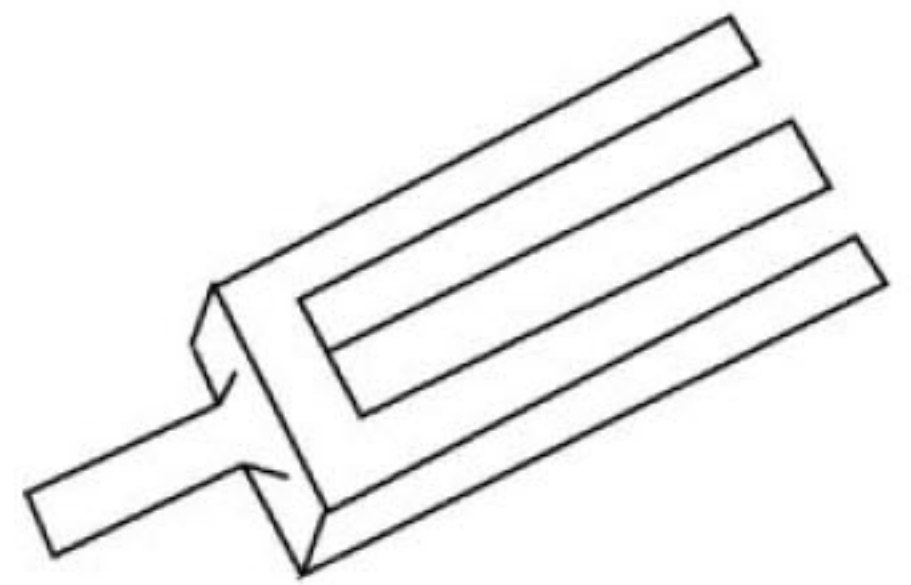
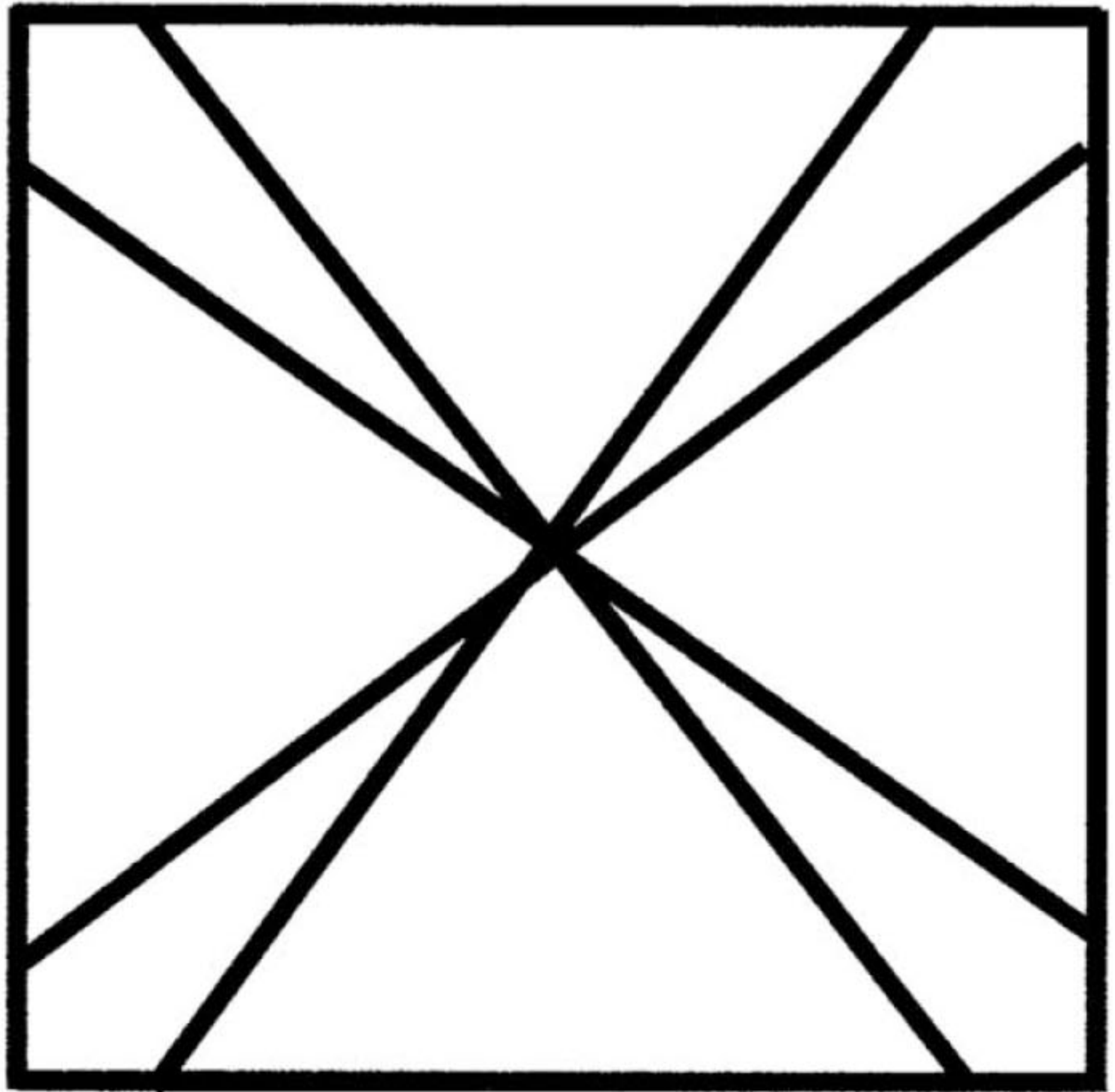


Figure 6. Impossible tuning fork

Figure 7. Propeller-cross



My own experience with hundreds of students indicates that Köhler's report is correct for the majority of people but by no means for all. To help along the others, I explain that one way of seeing the diagram is as a propeller with the tips of the four narrow blades at the apices of the square. The other way of seeing the diagram is as a sort of wide-bladed Maltese cross with the low blade resting on the horizontal bottom of the square. If you didn't see one or the other before, you should be able to do so now. Please give that a try. Now, whether or not you saw both before, you should now be able to fixate on the center, see the oscillation, and stay with that oscillation until it ceases. And now comes the fun part. Once it ceases, look at the diagram again and think either "propeller" or "Maltese cross." Whichever words you think, that is what you will see.

Just as content in a work of a given genre can be changed by words, so words can change a genre. Discovering that Daniel Defoe, a well known Dissenter, was the anonymous author of the "The Shortest Way with the Dissenters" (1702), impelled many who had first taken it seriously to recognize it as a satire, a mental revision so infuriating that Defoe was tried for sedition

and pilloried (Jenkins 2007). George Zebrowski (forthcoming) rehearses the common lament of critics specializing in SF that movies simply can't be good SF because science fiction specializes in ideas while movies are overwhelmingly visual. Zebrowski does not accept this lament as absolute, but he does allow that achieving good SF in movies is difficult. One of the three successes he admits is *Metropolis*. But we have already seen that *Metropolis*, while neither a monster movie nor a horror movie, certainly sets our minds to expect menace. *Dracula* is certainly Gothic, as is its 1931 filming, but the movie is far from the book. We viewers, with the book in mind, can focus more on the scenes featuring documents, but the change in our "reading" of the film will not be dramatic. However, understanding the centrality of the laboratory to the film of *Frankenstein*, we can watch it anew. Say "science fiction" when the film opens in the cemetery and suddenly the importance of the observers shown waiting for the interment to end changes, the moonlight matters, the connection between Henry/Victor's sparking electrical devices and Fritz's flaming brand snaps into focus, and at the end the flames consuming that mute face recall the lightning that re-animated it. Whisper "science fiction" to yourself and, in a way, the film is remade. Trick or treat?

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