

Beyond Monstrosity: Rewriting the *Frankensteinian* Creature Through Abjection

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Received: 30-01-2026

Revised: 15-02-2026

Accepted: 02-03-2026

Published: 17-03-2026

ABSTRACT

This study examines the rewriting of the monster in selected adaptations of Frankenstein, particularly Frankenstein (1994 film) and Frankenstein (2004 miniseries), to explore how contemporary screen narratives reconstruct the creature from an abject and horrifying figure into an emotionally and ethically recognizable subject. The study employs Abjection by Julia Kristeva as its theoretical framework and adopts a qualitative audiovisual methodology informed by Gillian Rose's visual methodology. Through the analysis of selected scenes, including visual representation, facial expression, framing, sound, and dialogue delivery, the study investigates how meaning is audio visually constructed within the adaptations. The study concluded that the selected adaptations humanize the monster by emphasizing its emotional vulnerability, loneliness, and ethical subjectivity, thereby challenging traditional boundaries between the human and the non-human and reflecting broader cultural shifts toward recognizing marginalized forms of identity and existence.

Keywords: *Frankenstein adaptations, Monster rewriting, Abjection, Audiovisual analysis, Ethical subjectivity*

INTRODUCTION

The figure of the monster in *Frankenstein* has persistently functioned as a cultural symbol of otherness, excess, and transgression. In Mary Shelley's original narrative, the creature is constructed as both a physical and existential anomaly that disrupts established distinctions between life and death, human and non-human. The monster's self-description as "miserable, alone, and abandoned" (Shelley, 2008) underscores its condition of social exclusion as much as its corporeal difference. This dual positioning situates the creature within a long-standing tradition of interpreting monstrosity as something that must be rejected to preserve the coherence of the human. However, such a reading risks fixing the monster within a static framework of horror, overlooking the evolving ways in which it is reimagined in contemporary adaptations.

Modern screen adaptations complicate this conventional understanding by reconfiguring the monster as more than a figure of fear. These adaptations foreground the creature's emotional depth, linguistic development, and ethical awareness, thereby shifting its position from object to subject. Rather than presenting the monster as a purely grotesque spectacle, they invite the audience to engage with its suffering and self-consciousness. This transformation signals a departure from earlier cinematic traditions that

emphasized visual horror and instead reflects a growing cultural tendency to interrogate the boundaries of humanity.

To theorize this shift, the present study employs the concept of Abjection as developed by Julia Kristeva. Kristeva defines the abject as that which “disturbs identity, system, order” and “does not respect borders, positions, rules” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). The *Frankensteinian* monster exemplifies this condition, as its fragmented body and unnatural origin collapse the distinctions that sustain symbolic order. Historically, this has positioned the creature as an object of revulsion. However, the selected adaptations destabilize this response by reframing the monster’s abject qualities through narrative and visual strategies that elicit empathy rather than disgust.

This article argues that the 1994 film and the 2004 miniseries participate in a process of “rewriting the monster,” transforming it from an abject Other into a figure of posthuman subjectivity. Through the expansion of the creature’s voice, the intensification of its emotional interiority, and the reconfiguration of its relationship with Victor *Frankenstein*, these adaptations challenge the traditional logic of exclusion. As the monster articulates its suffering and demands recognition, it complicates its status as abject and begins to function as an ethically legible subject.

Furthermore, this transformation reflects a broader cultural shift in the perception of the non-human. In contemporary contexts marked by technological and biological developments, rigid distinctions between human and non-human are increasingly unstable. The rewritten monster thus emerges as a site of negotiation where anxieties about alterity intersect with evolving possibilities of inclusion. Rather than serving solely as a warning against transgression, the creature becomes a figure through which changing conceptions of identity and agency are explored.

Accordingly, this study examines how the selected adaptations reframe the monster through the lens of Abjection, tracing its movement from grotesque exclusion to conditional recognition. By focusing on key scenes and visual strategies, the analysis demonstrates that the transformation of the monster is not merely aesthetic but ideological, reflecting a shift in cultural attitudes toward the non-human. In doing so, the article contributes to ongoing discussions in adaptation studies and posthuman theory by positioning the *Frankensteinian* monster as central to the redefinition of the human.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly engagement with *Frankenstein* has historically foregrounded the figure of the monster as a manifestation of otherness, anxiety, and transgression. Early influential readings, such as those by Chris Baldick (1987), situate the novel within Gothic traditions, emphasizing monstrosity as a symbol of excess and moral warning. Similarly, Fred Botting (1996) interprets the Gothic mode as a site of cultural fear, where figures like the *Frankensteinian* creature embody anxieties surrounding the limits of scientific ambition and social order. These approaches, while foundational, largely reinforce the monster as an object of fear and deviation, maintaining its position as an abject figure that must be excluded.

Subsequent scholarship has expanded this perspective by focusing on the philosophical and ethical implications of monstrosity. Anne K. Mellor (1988) reads the novel through a feminist lens, highlighting issues of creation, responsibility, and patriarchal authority, thereby complicating the moral framework surrounding Victor and his creature. Meanwhile, George Levine (2010) examines the novel in relation to scientific discourse, suggesting that *Frankenstein* reflects broader tensions between scientific progress and ethical accountability. While these studies move beyond purely Gothic interpretations, they still tend to privilege the novel itself rather than its adaptive afterlives, leaving the question of how the monster evolves across media relatively underexplored.

In the context of film and adaptation studies, critics such as Linda Hutcheon (2006) have argued that adaptations should be understood not as derivative texts but as creative reinterpretations shaped by cultural and historical contexts. Hutcheon's theory of adaptation as both repetition and variation provides a crucial framework for analyzing how *Frankenstein* has been reimagined in visual media. Building on this, scholars like Thomas Leitch (2007) emphasize that adaptations often reflect contemporary concerns, thereby transforming the ideological implications of the original text. However, despite this theoretical groundwork, relatively little attention has been paid to how specific adaptations—such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1994) and *Frankenstein* (2004)—reconstruct the monster's identity through visual and narrative strategies.

More recent developments in theory, particularly within posthumanist discourse, offer new ways of understanding the monster beyond traditional humanist frameworks. Thinkers like Rosi Braidotti (2013) conceptualize the posthuman subject as one that destabilizes fixed boundaries between human and non-human, while N. Katherine Hayles (1999) explores how technological and biological transformations challenge the coherence of human identity. These perspectives align closely with reinterpretations of the *Frankensteinian* creature as more than a failed human, suggesting instead that it may be read as an early figure of posthuman subjectivity. However, while posthumanist readings of *Frankenstein* are increasing, they often remain abstract and insufficiently grounded in detailed analyses of adaptation.

The concept of Abjection, as articulated by Julia Kristeva (1982), provides a particularly productive lens for bridging this gap. Kristeva's notion of the abject as that which “disturbs identity, system, order” (p. 4) has been widely applied to Gothic literature, including *Frankenstein*, to explain the monster's disturbing presence. Yet, most applications of Abjection theory continue to treat the creature as a static embodiment of disgust and boundary collapse, without considering how this abject status may be reconfigured in modern adaptations. This limits the ability of existing scholarship to account for the increasing humanization of the monster in contemporary media.

Therefore, a significant research gap emerges at the intersection of adaptation studies, posthuman theory, and Abjection. While previous studies have examined *Frankenstein*'s monster as Gothic Abjection or as a philosophical problem, and others have theorized adaptation as cultural reinterpretation, few have brought these frameworks together to analyze how specific adaptations actively transform the monster's abject identity into a form of posthuman subjectivity. This study addresses that gap by examining how the 1994 film and the 2004 miniseries “rewrite” the monster through visual and narrative strategies that shift it from an object of horror to a subject of ethical recognition. In doing so, the article contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how contemporary culture negotiates the boundaries of the human through adaptation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs the concept of Abjection as articulated by Julia Kristeva to examine the transformation of the monster in contemporary adaptations of *Frankenstein*. Abjection, as developed in *Powers of Horror* (1982), provides a critical framework for understanding how certain bodies and identities are excluded in order to preserve the boundaries of the human. Kristeva defines the abject as that which “disturbs identity, system, order” and “does not respect borders, positions, rules” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). The *Frankensteinian* monster, constituted through fragmented corporeality and unnatural creation, exemplifies this condition by collapsing distinctions between life and death, self and other, and human and non-human. Within Kristeva's formulation, Abjection is not merely a reaction of disgust but a fundamental mechanism through which subjectivity is constructed. She argues that the abject “draws me toward the place where meaning collapses” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 2), indicating that it occupies a liminal position at the threshold of symbolic order. The monster in *Frankenstein* functions precisely within this liminality: it is neither fully human nor entirely non-human, and its existence destabilizes the categories through which identity is

defined. As a result, the creature is subjected to rejection and exclusion, not solely because of its appearance, but because it threatens the coherence of the human subject itself.

Furthermore, Kristeva emphasizes the bodily dimension of Abjection, noting that it is often associated with what must be expelled in order to maintain purity and order. She describes the abject as “the jettisoned object” that is cast off to secure the integrity of the self (Kristeva, 1982, p. 2). The monster’s assembled body—composed of disparate parts and marked by visible seams—renders it a literal embodiment of this expulsion. It is a body that cannot be assimilated into normative structures and is therefore positioned outside the domain of the acceptable. In traditional readings, this reinforces the monster’s status as an object of horror, defined by its abject materiality.

However, this study argues that contemporary adaptations complicate and partially reconfigure this abject status. In Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1994) and *Frankenstein* (2004), the monster is not only presented as a fragmented body but also as a being capable of articulation, emotional depth, and ethical reflection. While its corporeality continues to evoke Abjection, its capacity for speech and self-awareness introduces a tension between rejection and recognition. This shift aligns with Kristeva’s suggestion that the abject is never entirely external but remains intimately connected to the subject, producing both repulsion and fascination.

By applying Abjection theory to these adaptations, this study demonstrates that the monster’s identity is no longer fixed within the domain of exclusion. Instead, its abject qualities are recontextualized in ways that invite empathy and ethical engagement. The creature’s transition from a silent, rejected body to a speaking subject complicates the binary opposition between human and non-human, suggesting that Abjection is not a stable category but one that can be renegotiated through representation. In this sense, the monster becomes a site where the limits of the human are both enforced and contested.

Therefore, Kristeva’s theory of Abjection provides a crucial lens through which to analyze the rewriting of the monster in contemporary adaptations. It enables a nuanced understanding of how the creature’s disturbing presence is transformed from a marker of exclusion into a condition that demands recognition. By tracing this movement, the study situates the *Frankensteinian* monster within broader cultural shifts that challenge fixed boundaries of identity and open up new possibilities for conceptualizing the non-human as a legitimate subject.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on close audiovisual analysis to examine the representation of the monster in selected adaptations of *Frankenstein*. The methodological approach is informed by Gillian Rose’s framework of visual analysis, particularly the site of the image. In this study, meaning is interpreted through detailed attention to cinematic elements such as framing, lighting, camera movement, mise-en-scène, costume design, facial expression, and sound design. These elements are not treated as separate units but as interconnected audiovisual strategies that construct the monster’s identity on screen. Dialogue is also considered as part of the audiovisual composition, specifically in relation to tone, delivery, and emotional framing rather than textual content alone.

This methodological framework is applied to two selected case studies: *Frankenstein* (1994 film) and *Frankenstein* (2004 miniseries). The analysis focuses on carefully selected scenes that are significant for the representation of the monster’s bodily form, emotional expression, and interaction with other characters, particularly Victor *Frankenstein*. Each scene is examined through a structured audiovisual lens, where visual composition and spoken dialogue are analyzed together to understand how meaning is constructed. The aim is not to compare the adaptations but to use them as illustrative case studies that demonstrate

different modes through which the monster is visually and emotionally constructed across contemporary screen interpretations.

ANALYSIS

The monster in *Frankenstein* (1994 film) is initially introduced through imagery that strongly evokes bodily fragmentation and disorder. During the creation sequence, the creature's unstable body, stitched flesh, and violent movements position it as a figure that exceeds the boundaries of the natural human form. The camera repeatedly focuses on fragmented body parts and distorted facial expressions, creating a sense of discomfort and instability. This visual construction aligns with the monster's position as a being rejected immediately upon birth. Victor *Frankenstein's* horrified reaction to his own creation reinforces this rejection, demonstrating society's tendency to exclude bodies that do not conform to accepted standards of normality. A similar phenomenon can be observed in contemporary society where individuals with visible bodily differences or disabilities are often subjected to social marginalization because their appearance challenges dominant perceptions of normalcy.

However, the film gradually complicates this initial image of monstrosity by allowing the creature to articulate its emotional suffering. In one of the most significant moments of the film, the monster tells Victor, "I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel" (Branagh, 1994). This dialogue transforms the creature from a silent object into a speaking subject capable of self-awareness and emotional reflection. The line reflects the monster's awareness of abandonment and exclusion, emphasizing that its monstrosity emerges not merely from its body but from society's refusal to recognize its humanity. The scene becomes particularly powerful because the dialogue is delivered in close-up framing with subdued lighting, encouraging the audience to empathize with the creature rather than fear it. In the modern world, similar patterns can be observed in debates surrounding immigrants, refugees, and socially excluded groups who are frequently perceived as threats until their personal narratives become visible.

The audiovisual construction of the monster in *Frankenstein* (2004 miniseries) further develops this movement from exclusion to recognition. Unlike earlier adaptations that foreground horror, the miniseries emphasizes the creature's intellectual and emotional development. Scenes depicting the monster secretly observing human interaction portray it not as inherently violent but as curious and socially conscious. The camera often adopts slow and intimate framing during these sequences, presenting the creature as isolated rather than dangerous. Through these cinematic choices, the monster becomes less associated with fear and more connected to loneliness and alienation. This representation reflects contemporary social realities in which marginalized individuals are often misunderstood because society interprets difference before understanding experience.

The transformation of the monster into an emotionally legible subject becomes more evident when the creature directly questions Victor's responsibility toward him. In the miniseries, the monster declares, "You gave me life, but left me alone to suffer" (Connor, 2004). This dialogue is significant because it shifts ethical responsibility away from the creature and toward the creator himself. The monster no longer appears as an irrational being driven solely by violence; instead, it emerges as a subject demanding accountability and recognition. The emotional intensity of the scene is reinforced through restrained music, prolonged silence, and the creature's controlled tone of speech. In contemporary society, similar ethical questions arise in discussions surrounding artificial intelligence and technological advancement, where creators are increasingly expected to consider the consequences of what they produce rather than disowning responsibility once creation is complete.

Another important aspect of the monster's rewriting is the gradual reduction of visual horror throughout both adaptations. Although the creature's scars and fragmented body remain visible, the camera

increasingly prioritizes facial expression and emotional reaction over grotesque spectacle. In several scenes, close-up shots focus on the creature's eyes while it experiences rejection or grief, thereby encouraging identification rather than disgust. This cinematic strategy weakens the traditional association between physical deformity and moral corruption. The monster's appearance still marks it as different, yet the adaptations repeatedly demonstrate that difference itself is not equivalent to evil. This reflects broader contemporary shifts toward questioning discriminatory attitudes based on physical appearance, race, or bodily difference.

The role of dialogue remains central to this transformation because speech enables the creature to enter the symbolic and social order from which it was previously excluded. In *Frankenstein* (1994), the creature asks Victor, "Why did you make me?" (Branagh, 1994). This simple yet emotionally charged question reveals existential awareness and emotional vulnerability. The line is not delivered with rage alone but with confusion and pain, emphasizing the monster's search for meaning and belonging. Through dialogue, the creature gains narrative agency and challenges the assumption that it exists merely as an object of horror. In real-world contexts, this mirrors how marginalized communities often reclaim agency through storytelling and self-representation, resisting identities imposed upon them by dominant social structures.

The selected adaptations also demonstrate that monstrosity is socially constructed rather than naturally inherent. The creature repeatedly attempts to seek companionship and understanding, yet it is consistently rejected because of its appearance. As a result, violence emerges as a consequence of exclusion rather than an original characteristic. This representation destabilizes traditional Gothic binaries of human versus monster by suggesting that society itself participates in the production of monstrosity. Contemporary social discourse surrounding prejudice and exclusion reflects a similar dynamic, where individuals who are denied recognition and dignity are often pushed toward alienation and anger. The monster therefore functions not merely as a fictional being but as a reflection of broader cultural anxieties surrounding difference and belonging.

Ultimately, both *Frankenstein* (1994 film) and *Frankenstein* (2004 miniseries) participate in the rewriting of the *Frankensteinian* monster from an abject and rejected body into a figure capable of emotional and ethical recognition. Through audiovisual strategies such as close-up framing, softened emotional representation, and reflective dialogue, the creature is reconstructed as more than a source of fear. The monster's ability to speak, suffer, and question its exclusion challenges rigid definitions of humanity and exposes the instability of boundaries between human and non-human. In this way, the adaptations align with broader cultural shifts that increasingly encourage empathy toward forms of alterity once considered threatening or unacceptable.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that *Frankenstein* (1994 film) and *Frankenstein* (2004 miniseries) significantly rewrite the representation of the *Frankensteinian* monster by transforming it from a traditionally abject and horrifying figure into an emotionally and ethically recognizable subject. Through audiovisual techniques such as close-up framing, softened visual representation, expressive facial gestures, and emotionally charged dialogue, the monster is gradually humanized and positioned beyond the conventional framework of monstrosity. The analysis revealed that the creature's ability to speak, reflect, and express suffering destabilizes the rigid distinction between the human and the non-human, thereby challenging the traditional understanding of monstrosity as something entirely external to humanity.

The study further demonstrated that the monster's abject condition emerges not solely from its fragmented body or unnatural creation, but from the social rejection and exclusion imposed upon it. By applying Abjection, the analysis showed that the creature exists within a liminal space that disrupts established

boundaries of identity, order, and normalcy. However, the selected adaptations complicate this Abjection by encouraging viewers to empathize with the creature's loneliness, alienation, and emotional vulnerability. As a result, the monster is no longer represented merely as a source of fear but as a figure whose suffering exposes the ethical limitations of human-centered systems that deny recognition to those perceived as different.

The study also concluded that the rewriting of the monster reflects broader cultural and ideological shifts within contemporary society. In an age increasingly influenced by technological advancement, artificial intelligence, and evolving perceptions of identity, the boundaries separating human from non-human have become progressively unstable. Within this context, the *Frankensteinian* creature functions as a symbolic site through which anxieties surrounding difference, embodiment, and belonging are negotiated. The selected adaptations therefore move beyond the traditional Gothic function of the monster as a warning against transgression and instead reposition it as a figure through which modern culture reconsiders the meaning of humanity itself.

Ultimately, the study established that the monster in these adaptations is reconstructed as a subject demanding ethical recognition rather than exclusion. Its voice, emotional depth, and desire for acceptance reveal that monstrosity is socially produced rather than naturally inherent. Through the rewriting of the monster, the selected adaptations challenge fixed humanist assumptions and open space for a more inclusive understanding of subjectivity that extends beyond conventional definitions of the human.

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