

## ***Frankenstein's Loose in Japan: Asian Re-imaginings of the Gothic Monster***

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### **Keywords**

*Frankenstein*, gothicism, Mary Shelley, reinvention, Tokusatsu

### **Abstract**

The article examines how figure of the Frankenstein monster was reinvented in the Japanese contexts. The analysis is conducted on the basis of the following movies: *Frankenstein Conquers the World* and *The War of the Gargantuas*. Firstly, the article provides introductory information about the films. Next, the respective storyline structures are outlined so as to correctly establish the Japanese formula of Frankenstein's re-imagining (Frankenstein not as a mad scientist, but Prometheus turned into a *Kaiju* monster). Then, the motion pictures are juxtaposed against Mary Shelley's vision of the creature for the purposes of challenging the visual framework of monstrosity (*Kaiju* monsters as figures of "kitsch" or, perhaps, new representatives of the Gothic trends) The analysis aims to show that Frankenstein still provides the stage for new translations of the story and its main protagonist also leads to new reinterpretations in the field of visual arts.

### **1. Introduction**

The theoretical concept of "the monster" encompasses a wide range of prevalent associations which do not complement each other in the formulation of a single and universal meaning. Some may regard the concept in relation to Antiquity. In the mythologies of various civilisations, monster-like creatures were frequently displayed as personified explanations for metaphysical phenomena, or, as a foreshadowing of wrath resulting from any sign

of disobedience against gods. Others may associate the term with modern protagonists of pulp literature for youngsters as well as black-and-white creatures on the hunt for screaming damsels-in-distress. In addition to this, “the monster” can also be interpreted in the psychological dimension as a violent and beast-like manifestation of our psyche. Therefore, it becomes apparent that there is a multitude of different understandings of the conceptual monster.

In order to narrow down the interpretative scope, an accurate context is very much required. *Chambers’s Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* provides the following definition of the word: “monster (n.): ‘mon’stêr, n. lit. that which admonishes or warns, a divine omen; anything out of the usual course of nature; a prodigy; anything horrible from ugliness or wickedness; [from root of *monere*] ‘to admonish, warn, advice,’” (Chambers 2017: 328). It can be inferred from this explanation that by saying “a monster” we can define an individual who is either abnormal in physical appearance or psychologically unstable. Thus, the supernatural individual may be a manifestation of mythological beasts, a hideous creature, but also a representation of a hidden villain, not recognisable at first sight. Such types of monstrous beings were used, and still are contemporarily applied in literature and culture, in order to illustrate topical issues as well as provide a reasonable word of warning. Additionally, they also function as a simple element of dread, which aims at bringing into focus moral issues epitomised through their opponents, the figures of archetypical heroes (Spooner and McEvoy 2007: 7). In my view, the perfect embodiment of such monstrous types, especially in the context of Gothic Literature, is the (anti)hero of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s classic literary work *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818).

Undeniably, the Frankenstein creature<sup>1</sup> is one of the most recognisable monster figures in Gothic fiction. An individual assembled from various body parts (Shelley [1817] 2020: 55), who challenges the notions of the dead and the undead by the sole fact of his existence. As portrayed in the novel, the monster is initially a delicate individual, filled with emotions, who just wants to live along with someone of his own kind. Unfortunately, a sense of unbearable solitude and misery pushes him to commit acts of violence and killing. While initially desiring to be understood and accepted, he is denied this privilege, and for that reason, he seeks revenge on his creator and humankind in general. Evidently, the tragic story about the human Prometheus

<sup>1</sup> For the sake of clarification, I intend to refer to the figure of the creature either by “the Frankenstein creature” or “the Frankenstein monster” phrases. However, where the context requires it, I also use the colloquial term Frankenstein, because that is how the creatures are referred to in the motion pictures. Victor Frankenstein is always mentioned by his given name.

and his creation inspired a vast variety of cultural representations. The aim of this article is to examine the way in which the figure of the classic Frankenstein monster became reinvented on the silver screen in Japanese contexts. The analysis is conducted on the basis of two motion pictures: *Frankenstein Conquers the World* (1965) and *The War of the Gargantuas* (1966). The aim is to show that, even in not-so-popular representations, the Frankenstein creature is still open to new translations of the original story well over one hundred years later, and its main character, and can also lead to new reinventions within the field of visual arts.

## 2. The Gothic Convention: Prometheus' Creation on Film

First of all, it is important to outline the Western mode of visual framework, according to which the Gothic monsters were appropriately stylised. Namely, with the advent of motion pictures, the image of a monster became widely popularised among the audiences. That is to say, during the age of silent movies, there was a tendency to present the monsters primarily as appalling in appearance. In order to reinforce the look, rather than the personage of the Gothic monsters, the screenwriters, for example, condensed the span of the stories, limited the number of characters, and changed the settings. Aside from the practical obstacles, like budget restrictions, lack of necessary props or insufficient cast, the creative intent was to evoke the feeling of fear and dread among the spectators. As a result, the viewers were introduced to distorted images of Gothic creatures (Spooner and McEvoy 2007: 233).

The movie industry found a target audience of monster horror films with such pictures as *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* (both released in 1931 by Universal Studios), and thus, a long-lasting series of low-budget productions focusing on the two characters was initiated. However, with the passage of time, the profitable formula for cinematic monsters eventually wore off. The convention shifted from serious undertones into completely surrealist and comic ones (notable example: *Abbot and Costello Meet Frankenstein* from 1948). In view of such changes, it would take a whole decade until the arrival of a renaissance period for the Gothic adaptations in cinema. New movies were often set in contemporary times, yet they frequently lacked any signs of modernity (for instance, planes, cars, trains, and even, modern-like appearance of the cast). Generally, the setting was represented in the form of an undetermined Europe, a somewhat alternative universe filled with horse-drawn carriages, archaic villages with god-fearing inhabitants, gypsy gangs, as well as demonic aristocrats in dilapidated castles. The best reflection of this cinematic convention can be found in the movies of Hammer Film Productions.

For that reason, the context of the creature's origin became reinvented with such movies as *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957), *The Revenge of Frankenstein* (1958), *The Evil of Frankenstein* (1964), and many others.

The outlining of this convention is important to understand the degree of dissimilarity between the American/European adaptations and the Japanese productions, which did not conform with the previously established film-making rules of presenting monsters on screen. This was due to the fact that their own approach towards depicting monstrosity on screen was entirely different, because they had a completely unique vision of monstrosity itself.

### 3. *Kaijū* Beasts and *Tokusatsu* Films: The Creature Reinvented

In order to understand the Japanese mode of creating cinematic creatures, it is necessary to consider the following terms: *Kaijū* [怪獣] and *Tokusatsu* [特撮]. The first one, *Kaijū*, literally means “a monster” or “a strange creature”, and the word has its origins in Japanese folk tales and legends (Allison 2006: 61). In a pop-cultural dimension, it is used to define giant beasts featured in science-fiction environments. The second term, *Tokusatsu*, can be explained as a live-action motion picture which heavily relies on the utilisation of special effects (direct translation: special filming) (Allison 2006: 95). Therefore, *Tokusatsu* may be perceived as a genre-specific convention which allows for *Kaijū* creatures to come into existence and operate within, as described by Susan Sontag, an “aesthetics of destruction” (Sontag 1966: 213)<sup>2</sup>.

The best example to represent this phenomenon is Ishirō Honda's eminent film *Gojira*<sup>3</sup> (transliterated into English as *Godzilla*), released by Tōhō Studios in 1954. The movie tells the story of a fifty-meters-tall monster who is reawakened and transformed by an American nuclear testing on the sea. The infuriated creature emerges at Tokyo Bay and goes on a destructive rampage across the country's capital city, crushing streets with his tail and releasing glowingly nuclear rays. As Anne Allison rightly notices in her text devoted to *Gojira*, this movie singlehandedly saved the Japanese cinema after dire years of functioning as a propaganda machine for the militarist government and of being censored by the Allied powers directly after the war (Allison 2006: 42-43). Apart from becoming a blockbuster hit, earning approximately 152 million yen, *Gojira* also became an exemplary symbol of escapist fantasy.

<sup>2</sup> An aesthetics of destruction: Visions of tragedy and destruction (dead bodies, destroyed buildings, flames, explosions) displayed on film. Their purpose is to make the viewers recall their wartime trauma.

<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this article, I refer to the original Japanese movie using an italicised version *Gojira* and a non-italicised version *Gojira* when referring to the character. All references to other movies from the franchise retain the transliterated titles.

The moviegoers were enchanted by the premise of transformation, the primordial monster completely reconfigured by modern-day technology: “Seeing themselves in *Gojira*, audiences also saw this entity as a deadly force [...], a monster that the Japanese viewers [...] could not only fear but also identify with: a monstrosity straddling the border between past and future, destruction and transformation, self and other [...] – a fitting symbol of America’s effect, both good and bad, on Japan’s postwar imaginary” (Allison 2006: 43–44). Indeed, as it is evident in the quoted passage, *Gojira* has become the figure of ambiguity. While serving as a reference to mythological beasts, the monster’s origin is inextricably grounded in the wartime history of Japan, as he is born out of an atomic explosion and provides a spectacle of annihilation equal to that of the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In this way, *Gojira* signifies a radically different kind of fantasy; a fantasy which allows the Japanese to relive the war trauma without taking into account their own responsibility for the committed atrocities, because *Gojira* assumes it for them (Allison 2006: 45). The Polish film researcher Andrzej Kołodyński cites Susan Sontag as well in relation to this issue, as he argues that *Gojira* provides the relief of suppressed aggression. According to him, a viewer is just an observer who finds satisfaction in watching the cataclysmic images of havoc (Kołodyński 1989: 47). Nevertheless, *Gojira* also transcends into a symbol of hope, as he is defeated by science, instead of fire power, at the end of the film, leaving Japan with a new direction to follow: a pacifist country with an advanced technological industry.

In view of the abovementioned characteristics, *Gojira* appears to be the perfect embodiment of Japanese “monstrosity”: a creature on the borderline between fantastic and real, historical and present, natural and technological. He is a monster that serves not as a source of fear or repulsion, like his Gothic counterpart, but as a conduit for channelling suppressed social fantasies. This understanding of the concept will prove to be essential in the subsequent analysis of the Frankenstein creature.

#### 4. Frankenstein Incorporated: Development of *Tokusatsu*

*Gojira* was not only a financially successful as well as critically acclaimed picture of its time, but it was also responsible for ushering in the so-called *Kaijū eiga*; that is, an era of monster movies. *Gojira* turned into an everlasting franchise with a total of twenty-nine movies produced by Tōhō Studios as of 2016<sup>4</sup>. After *Gojira*’s phenomenon, there also appeared *Rodan*, *Mothra*,

<sup>4</sup> Four American-made *Godzilla* movies (from 1998, 2014, 2019, and 2021), two American re-cuts (1956, 1985) and three animated features (2017–2018) are excluded from the count.

Ghidorah, and many other giant monsters who went on to fight against each other in the popular *versus* movies. Even the competition picked up the trend by devising their own “*Kaijus*”, as did Daiei Film with Gamera, Gyaos and Daimajin. Without a doubt, the Japanese monster craze became a widespread occurrence in the 1960s.

Sources of this mania can be traced back to the original *Gojira*; however, not just the appeal of a multilayered story and an eponymous monster were responsible for sparking the subsequent interest in the *Tokusatsu* genre, but, primarily, the way in which the movie was made. Inspired by a Hollywood classic *King Kong* from 1933, Eiji Tsuburaya the special effects supervisor, strived to bring the best out of practical trick photography. The usage of stop-motion animation became impossible due to time and budget constraints, hence Tsuburaya developed the low-cost “suitmation” technique, which basically required an actor inside a monster suit destroying a specially-crafted miniature city (Kołodzyński 1989: 46). A method which seems rather crude and inefficient, especially in view of CGI technology, is frequently looked down on by people of the West. Nevertheless, the Japanese to date are very proud of their own practical approach. Due to meticulous craftsmanship in devising the miniatures and the fact that a real human “operates” a monster, his motions and sites of devastation appear to be quite anthropomorphic (Allison 2006: 47). It has to be noted that *Gojira* was vehemently praised for its unconventional special effects at the time of the original release (Allison 2006: 47).

Having in mind Rick Altman’s process of creating profitable movies (Stadler and McWilliam 2009: 222)<sup>5</sup>, both Ishirō Honda and Eiji Tsuburaya found themselves generating such a successful formula thanks to the “suitmation” technique. In consequence, a whole group of aforementioned *Kaijū* monsters arrived in cinemas. Nevertheless, the direct outcome of their emergence resulted in an aesthetics of destruction stripped of depth and meaning. As Andrzej Kołodzyński points out, the Japanese filmmakers adapted the comic-book framework in order to simplify the storylines, so that the movies would become more palatable for Asian audiences (Kołodzyński 1989: 48). The iconography of these pictures remained consistently the same (a *Kaijū* monster appears and wreaks havoc), yet it was the visual appeal of a new creature which became the key to success (Stadler and McWilliam 2009: 218). What is more, many *Tokusatsu* films featured recognisable Hollywood actors, at least in supporting roles (Galbraith IV 2008: xiii)<sup>6</sup>. Their presence

<sup>5</sup> Altman’s Producer’s Game: The process of identifying what made a particular movie successful, only to apply the same set of factors into the making of another film.

<sup>6</sup> Galbraith IV, *The Toho Studios Story: A History and Complete Filmography*, xiii.



was supposed to boost the sales of Japanese productions on the American market.

After *Gojira*, Honda-Tsuburaya team went on to make *Rodan* (1956) about a gigantic, pterosaur-like bird with massive wings and radioactive fire, who can fly with the speed of sound; *Varan the Unbelievable* (1958) with a prehistoric creature as the titular behemoth; and *Mothra* (1961) which introduced a peaceful beast accompanied by two tiny fairies communicating on her behalf. Honda and Tsuburaya's ingenuity in bringing new monsters to life seemed endless. The immense popularity of Tōhō Studios' *Tokusatsu* movies was consolidated with the release of *King Kong vs. Godzilla* in 1962, the first crossover feature for the purposes of which Tōhō bought the rights to King Kong's character from Universal Pictures. However, the competition did not remain passive. In 1965, Daiei Film released *Gamera, the Giant Monster*, a picture about a colossal turtle with a pair of large tusks who is capable of flying. Soon after, Gamera received a string of his own *versus* sequels. Only a year later, Daiei also produced *Daimajin* trilogy, a period tale about a stone idol who transforms into a god-like figure. Additionally, Nikkatsu Corporation came up with their own *Gappa: The Triphibian Monster*. In view of such competition, Tōhō decided to borrow from Universal's film archive again, this time buying the rights to the Frankenstein monster (Kołodzyński 1989: 48).

Hoping to repeat the success of *King Kong vs. Godzilla*, Tōhō producers were searching for a new monster who could be incorporated into their beastly assortment. Hence, the company became interested in the classic Universal monster simply known as Frankenstein, yet the crucial differentiating factor between him and King Kong was that the first one constituted primarily a Gothic figure. Nevertheless, such a significant detail did not diminish Tōhō's efforts in bringing the cultural icon to the local market. The very first movie idea was to pit the Frankenstein creature against an established Tōhō figure, the Human Vapour, from the 1960 movie of the same title (Ghee 1998: 199). However, the plan for a science-fiction clash of the two, human-like, freaks of nature fell through in favour of a story treatment prepared by Takeshi Kimura. His screenplay bore the high-sounding title *Frankenstein vs. Godzilla* and its aim was to "link the Frankenstein monster with Tōhō's most proven commodity" (Ghee 1998: 199). Paradoxically, the two distinctly disparate types of monsters, each popular in its own cultural domain, were about to meet on the cinematic screen.

Even though Kimura's script was ultimately rejected, on the grounds that Frankenstein would not stand a chance against *Gojira*, many of the writer's ideas, such as playful references to Mary Shelley's work, human characters,

and the opening act, were retained for what would finally materialise on film as *Frankenstein Conquers the World* (1965).

#### 4.1. Rising from Hiroshima: The Gargantuan Frankenstein

In the mid 1960s, Tōhō made a concession to co-produce five motion pictures together with United Productions of America. The agreement proved to be profitable to both parties as Tōhō sought to expand its popularity abroad, whereas UPA wanted to capitalise on the Gojira phenomenon. With half of the budget backed by American investors, the first giant monster co-production was released in August 1965 with an international title *Frankenstein Conquers the World*; however, the original Japanese title card reads *Furankenshutain tai chitei kaiju Baragon* (Galbraith IV 2008: 221)<sup>7</sup>, whose literal translation reads *Frankenstein Against the Subterranean Monster Baragon*.

For readers unfamiliar with the movie in question, I am going to provide a detailed synopsis of the story:<sup>8</sup> the film begins in Germany, 1945, towards the end of World War II. In a laboratory full of test tubes and operating machinery, some unknown scientist hides a heart, covered in fluid, inside of a box. Suddenly, the Nazis burst into the lab and take the box away from him. Devastated, the scientist proceeds to destroy his workplace. The mysterious box is actually shipped over to Japan, only to arrive in Hiroshima on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1945. Its content is revealed to be Frankenstein's immortal heart, just before the city is struck by the nuclear bomb. The action then shifts 15 years later to Hiroshima International Institute of Radiotherapeutics and its staff: Dr James Bowen (played by Nick Adams), Dr Sueko Togami (Kumi Mizuno), and Dr Yuzo Kawaji (Tadao Takashima). Apart from taking care of patients, the doctors are also working on the multiplication of cells through radiation. In the meantime, a vagrant boy is lurking in the dark corners of the city. Sueko spots him from her balcony and throws the child some food in an act of kindness. Sometime later, the boy is chased by the police and bystanders. They are shocked to discover a cave full of dead animals. Dr Bowen and Sueko intervene, calmly persuading him to come out of the cave. Back at the institute, they discover that the child has not succumbed to atomic disease and, in fact, his body is accumulating radiation. The boy begins to

<sup>7</sup> Japanese productions often had two titles: the original and international. I refer to Frankenstein films by their most popular international titles; however, the Japanese ones are also retained.

<sup>8</sup> In my analysis of *Frankenstein Conquers the World* (1965) and *The War of the Gargantuas* (1966), I rely on the uncut and unabridged versions of the movies with the original audio and subtitles, issued on video cassettes by Daikaiju Enterprises Ltd.



grow at a rapid pace due to unknown reasons. Bowen eventually determines that he may be a child who lived near destroyed military hospital after the end of the war. Meanwhile, a mysterious reptile emerges at Akita Oil Fields and destroys the refinery. Bowen's further investigation reveals that the Japanese army secretly imported Frankenstein's heart in order to study its immortality. A scientist from the beginning of the film, Dr Reseindorf (Peter Mann), further explains that, thanks to proteins in his heart, Frankenstein's body can regenerate. Frankenstein himself keeps growing and he is locked in a cell. Although Sueko is the only person with whom he can communicate, he loses his emotional stability when journalists begin taking snapshots of him. Frankenstein escapes his confinement, now as high as a few-storey building. The scientists and Self-Defense Forces start searching for the monster across Japan. By studying a severed limb, Bowen confirms that beyond any doubt the escapee is Frankenstein and he is most likely travelling from Shizuoka to Mount Fuji, seeking for a climate which corresponds to that of Frankfurt in Germany. However, the refinery monster known as Baragon re-emerges and destroys a mountain village. A World War II captain, Kawai (Yoshio Tsuchiya), suspects that Baragon must be a dinosaur from the Mesozoic era who survived beneath the ground. As the protagonists are searching for Frankenstein, Sueko and Kawaji lose consciousness. All of a sudden, ray-spitting Baragon appears again and Frankenstein rushes to save his human friends. A spectacular fight breaks out between the two creatures which is interrupted by an earthquake. In consequence, Frankenstein and Baragon collapse into a crevasse in the ground. In the concluding scene, the three scientists are convinced that Frankenstein must have survived.

The most crucial point of concern is, evidently, the eponymous Frankenstein monster. Although the title and poster for the film provide the premise of fighting *Kaijū* creatures, the opening sequence presents the viewers with a familiar Gothic setting: the laboratory of a mad scientist. As the camera passes through a dark castle, unknown fluids circulating in tubes, flashing lights, and electrical currents are exposed. Such an opening could very well serve as the introduction to a generic *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* adaptation. Only when the Nazis enter the lab is the real *modus operandi* of Frankenstein's reinvention revealed. That is to say, Tōhō filmmakers did not come up with a standard giant monster figure with the name "Frankenstein" slapped onto his forehead, but they actually made an effort to take the *heart* of the original Gothic progenitor and integrate, or, we could even say *localise* him, in the *Tokusatsu* genre.

Even though there is an 11-year-long gap between *Gojira* and *Frankenstein Conquers the World*, during which over a dozen of *Tokusatsu* films were

made, the latter picture reuses, and also expands, similar themes that the first film introduced back in 1954. *Kaijū* movies were at the height of commercialisation in the mid of the 1960s and, as I mentioned in the previous subsection, many of these would drop the anti-war and anti-nuclear holocaust sentiments altogether for the sake of delivering amazing monster battles. Due to the skilled guidance of director Ishirō Honda, *Frankenstein Conquers the World* does not commit the same mistakes. The bombing of Hiroshima serves as the vehicle of Frankenstein's appropriation into a new cultural domain (*Tokusatsu*), yet the event's tragedy is not downplayed as Dr Bowen and Sueko visit the graves of victims shortly before encountering Frankenstein. In addition, the theme of radioactivity is very prevalent in the story. Gojira was born out of this deadly emission of particles and so was Frankenstein. Nevertheless, he still remains an anthropomorphic being (Kołodzyński 1989: 52). In the story, the protagonists briefly brush over a theory according to which the vagrant child somehow grew out of Frankenstein's heart due to radioactivity (Ryfle 1998: 122). This particular detail adds a whole new layer of meaning to the localised Frankenstein. In my opinion, the ambiguous birth of the Frankenstein *Kaijū* can be perceived as an indirect reference to *hibakusha* representations, as described by Yuki Miyamoto: "those who experienced a nuclear explosion and radiation exposure" (Miyamoto 2016: 1088). By no means is Frankenstein an accurate portrayal of male *hibakusha* experiences, but similarly to Gojira, he may figuratively function as a reminder of "the physical as well as emotional afflictions of *hibakusha*" (Tsutsui in Miyamoto 2016: 1091). Nevertheless, Miyamoto accurately points out in her research that the *Tokusatsu* genre may appear to be the only space to voice the tragic fate of men who survived nuclear explosions; yet, in fact, the genre devalues the importance of such experiences by transposing male bodies which suffered from radiation onto those of monsters who are eventually annihilated (Miyamoto 2016: 1088-1089).

Apart from the Frankenstein monster, the human characters also play an important part in the story. The most idiosyncratic character is Dr James Bowen. While his presence in the film can be superficially viewed as an attempt to appeal to American audiences, Bowen's personality is surprisingly well developed. In spite of being a *gaijin* (a foreigner), he is treated as an equal by his colleagues. What is more, Bowen is on extremely close terms with Sueko, yet their relationship can be hardly called romantic. The American physician seems simply to seek companionship in the culture so distant from his own. At one point, Bowen reveals to Sueko that he had been terrified by the bombing of Hiroshima and that is why he travelled to Japan after the war. He intended to devote his life to rehabilitating mankind, instead of

destroying it; however, his research work proved to be unfruitful in saving terminally ill patients. Perhaps, Bowen's presence in the story can be interpreted as an allegory for the presence of American GIs during the occupation of Japan, who served to influence "the fantasies and dreams of postwar Japanese" (Allison 2006: 42). However, Dr Bowen does not import the premise of American prosperity. Instead, he wants to bring hope and to help people regardless of their nationality. In consequence, a *gaijin* finds himself aiding the Frankenstein monster who also derives from a foreign cultural domain.

The two remaining human characters, Dr Sueko and Dr Kawaji, symbolise different approaches towards the figure of the monster. Sueko may be regarded on the surface as Frankenstein's love interest, similarly to King Kong's Ann Darrow, but her feelings to him correspond more to those of a mother. She takes care of him by bringing food and water, but also scolds whenever Frankenstein displays violent behaviour. Not even once does she doubt the monster's innocence when the army suspects him of destroying a village, which was actually Baragon's doing. In contrast to Sueko, Dr Kawaji desires to kill Frankenstein no matter what. The physician is convinced that the world would be better off without the monster, yet the preservation of his brain and heart are vital for medicine. Kawaji raises the fundamental question when asking if Frankenstein is a human or an animal. This ambiguity resonates deeply with Mary Shelley's original work and even mirrors its theme of rejection. In the novel, Victor Frankenstein is unable to stand the horrendous look of the creature. At a later time, when the creature glances at his own reflection, he as well experiences difficulty in accepting the image of himself (Botting 1996: 67)<sup>9</sup>. While desiring to be understood and accepted, he is denied both. The movie conjures up the uncertainty of the monster's nature through the character of Kawaji, who, while initially attempting to destroy Frankenstein, is ultimately saved by the creature during the fight with Baragon.

#### 4.2. The Unexpected Offspring: Sanda vs. Gaira

Following the release of *Frankenstein Conquers the World*, United Productions of America requested a sequel to be commissioned by Tōhō. As a result, the continuation was quickly rushed into preproduction phase in 1966. A number of working titles were announced at the time, most of which suggested the appearance of two Frankenstein monsters. Eventually, in June 1966, the movie was released with the international title *The War of the Gargantuas*; yet again, the original title, *Furankenshutain no kaiju- Sanda tai*

<sup>9</sup> Botting, *Gothic*, 67.

*Gairah* (Galbraith IV 2008: 231), significantly differed in meaning: *Frankenstein Monster– Sanda vs. Gaira*.

As in the case of the first motion picture, the outline for this film is also included: the story opens with a fishing boat in the midst of a storm. Suddenly, a giant octopus proceeds to attack the ship. A frightened steersman witnesses how his fellow crewmembers are killed until another giant monster appears and fights the octopus. Hospitalised steersman exclaims that the creature he had seen was indeed Frankenstein. The Maritime Bureau opens an investigation and calls the Frankenstein Research Unit at Kyoto Shinagata Institute for help. Dr Paul Stewart (Russ Tamblyn) and his assistant Akemi (returning Kumi Mizuno) confirm that Frankenstein was seen for the last time near Mount Fuji and they dismiss the idea of him living in the sea. However, the giant creature emerges again and attacks people on the shoreline, at a holiday resort, and at Haneda Airport. The only thing which prevents the monster from further rampage is the sunlight. Self-Defense Forces begin pursuit after the monster. Their plan is to lure him into Tokyo Bay, stun him in the water with electricity, and then annihilate with laser beams. The army's strategy nearly succeeds, but the monster is saved by his twin brother. Dr Stewart and Akemi determine that the two must be the offspring born out of discarded cells of Frankenstein from the first movie. This means that one spawned directly from Frankenstein and, later, the other came from his brother. They nickname the sea monster "Gaira" and the mountain one "Sanda". The gargantuan brothers display highly contrasting characteristics: Gaira is violent and bloodthirsty, whereas Sanda is peaceful and kind. Gaira eventually turns against Sanda and rushes at Tokyo. The army intends to destroy both monsters with explosives, but Stewart rejects the plan for fear that more Gargantuas may spawn from the cells of Gaira and Sanda. The siblings fight against each other on the streets of Tokyo, only to continue their battle in Tokyo Bay. An undersea volcano unexpectedly erupts, covering Gaira and Sanda with its burst of lava. It is uncertain if the monsters survived.

The above synopsis readily demonstrates a radical departure from the first movie. Stuart Galbraith IV rightfully calls *The War of the Gargantuas* "a quasi-sequel" (Galbraith IV 2008: 231) rather than an actual continuation of *Frankenstein Conquers the World*, even though Ishirō Honda returned for directorial duties. It may be inferred that the picture was hastily made in order to capitalise on the success of the first part. Interestingly, Frankenstein ceased to be an anthropomorphic figure with a back-story explaining his Gothic past and was converted into furry leviathans hell-bent on fighting each other. Moreover, the motion picture feels like a feature-length commercial of Self-Defense Forces, considering the technological advancement

and grandiloquent creativity with which they approach the creatures. That is especially visible in the scenes with the so-called “Maser Canons” (<http://godzilla.wikia.com>)<sup>10</sup>, tank-like vehicles which have a laser firing system placed on top of them, used against Sanda and Gaira.

The reasons as to why *The War of the Gargantuas* is a quasi-sequel to *Frankenstein Conquers the World* can be found in its troubled production. The American producers intended to have a new Hollywood actor featured in each co-production with Tōhō. Consequently, Russ Tamblyn replaced Nick Adams as the leading actor (Ryfle 1998: 131). I assume that, in order to amend continuity errors resulting from that change, a fictional flashback scene with Tamblyn recalling Frankenstein’s stay at the institute from the first movie was quickly put together. My theory can only be considered as a speculation because there are no official explanations for Adams’ replacement. Nevertheless, the filmmakers desired to establish some sort of a connection with the first film, which can be seen in the return of Kumi Mizuno, who basically reprises her role as Sueko but under a different name (Akemi).

Furthermore, the movie directly refers in its original audio track to the gargantuan monsters as “Frankensteins”<sup>11</sup>, yet the simple fact of the original Frankenstein’s absence made it possible for American distributors to cut out and replace any references to his character. Hence, Sanda and Gaira the Frankensteins were remodelled into Brown Gargantua and Green Gargantua respectively. Due to English dubbing and altered scenes, the American version of *The War of the Gargantuas* was effectively devoid of any linkage with the preceding picture. Such a drastic change confirms the advanced process of Frankenstein’s localisation: from the Gothic progenitor through the anthropomorphic *Kaijū* to the twin giants with contrasting personalities. Dr Kawaji’s doubts from the first movie have lost their footing, because the Frankenstein monster indeed became an animal on a rampage through Japan. Additionally, the “gargantuan tale” was hailed by some researchers as Ishirō Honda’s creative halting (Kołodzyński 1989: 52-53).

Intriguing is also the fact that, although Sanda and Gaira were never featured again in subsequent *Tokusatsu* films, the events of the two Frankenstein movies were incorporated into the fan-named “Kiryu Saga Continuity” (<http://godzilla.wikia.com>)<sup>12</sup> with *Godzilla Against Mechagodzilla* in 2002. In the film, the Prime Minister of Japan (played by Kumi Mizuno as well)

<sup>10</sup> *The War of the Gargantuas* marks the first appearance of this ingenious weapon. It was featured in eleven more *Tokusatsu* pictures.

<sup>11</sup> In *The War of the Gargantuas* (00:48:14): Daikaiju Enterprises Ltd. VHS.

<sup>12</sup> A fictional timeline consisting of eleven unrelated *Tokusatsu* movies which provide a back-story for two Gojira pictures: *Godzilla Against Mechagodzilla* and *Godzilla: Tokyo S.O.S.*

explains how humanity used scientific and technological advancements in order to protect itself from *Kaijū* attacks throughout the decades. By this paradoxical nod to the classic era of *Tokusatsu*, the Frankenstein creature did become, at least in a way, a part of the *Gojira* series.

## 5. Furankenshutain and the Creature Revisited

On the basis of the discussed motion pictures, the process of the Frankenstein monster's reinvention can be uncovered. It should now be apparent that Tōhō Studios decided to readapt the famous creature primarily due to economic aspects: expansion on foreign markets and competition from other companies. Nevertheless, the Frankenstein monster never had the stature of, for instance, King Kong, a giant animal already incorporated into the Japanese cultural domain. Nevertheless, the creature's literary origins were embraced instead of being rejected. Steve Ryfle correctly remarks that "it was a wonderful fusing of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein myth with the giant-monster motif" (Ryfle 1998: 122). The word "fusing" proves to be the most suitable adjective to describe the Japanese re-imagining of the Gothic figure.

As described in the novel, the creature is an eight-foot-tall appalling in presence entity with lucid yellowish skin, white teeth, glowing eyes, long dark hair, and black lips (Shelley [1817] 2020: 58). The monster makes an attempt to assimilate into human society; however, he is chased away by everyone who encounters him. The overwhelming feeling of abandonment drives him to seek revenge against his creator. The monster becomes a despised victim of intolerance. He aspired to be accepted by humanity, yet instead, he became rejected due to his frightful appearance.

With regard to the creature from *Frankenstein Conquers the World*, his physical presence is often described as a rendition of Jack Pierce's famous make-up from the 1931 motion picture. However, in my opinion, the creature highly resembles the protagonist of Francisco Goya's painting *Saturn Devouring His Son* (<https://www.art.com>). Undoubtedly, short hair, square-shaped head and crinkled eyes were meant to evoke the likeness of Boris Karloff, but when the creature increases in height to a proper *Kaijū* size, his half-nakedness and barbarity in the fight with Baragon conjures up the image of Saturn. Nevertheless, the Japanese monster is not a bloodthirsty savage, but rather "like Shelley's original[,] [...] a sensitive soul who is basically harmless until provoked" (Ryfle 1998: 122). Contrary to the literary progenitor who developed an intelligence, this creature seems very much like a feral child who, while being perceived as dangerous by the society, finds recognition and understanding only in the characters of Dr Bowen and Dr Sueko.



Whereas the Japanese monster is not vengeful at all, the literary creature begins pursuit after his creator in order to take revenge on him and his relatives. As the novel progresses, the characters of Victor and his creation become gradually dubious to the reader; yet, their stereotypical roles of a good human and a vicious creature are reinforced towards the end of the novel (Snodgrass 2005: 116). In the case of the movie, however, the creature becomes a misunderstood hero who sacrifices himself for the well-being of humanity.

Postcolonial studies also provide further interpretative field with regard to both characters. Namely, Mary Shelley's literary creature can be seen as "the Other" (Said 2003: 24). Edward Said in his 1978 book *Orientalism* analysed the relations between the colony and the metropolis and provided a simple framework of binary oppositions, dividing the West and the East geographically, politically, and culturally. He examined a historical separation between "the Occident" (West) and "the Orient" (East) and concluded that different cultural representations are the results of a clash between the opposing cultures of "Occident-Orient" (Said 2003: 201). The European colonisers stylised themselves as the keepers of civilisation, reason, and knowledge; whereas, the exotic world of the Orient was perceived as wild, untamed, and illogical (Said 2003: 171-172). This is very much the case with the Frankenstein creature. He is produced as the Other and, in view of social exclusion, he embraces his otherness by desiring to have a mate, which frightens Victor as the possibility of potential breeding may endanger mankind (Shelley [1817] 2020: 202-203). Therefore, the creature becomes a threat to the social order.

In a similar way, the Japanese creature can be viewed as the excluded Other, yet he does not pose any kind of threat to society<sup>13</sup>. Rather, he attempts to emulate human figures in terms of reproducing positive emotions. Accordingly, the creature's pattern of behaviour can be linked to the notion of "mimicry" (McLeod 2000: 53). In spite of the fact that the post-colonial concept carries a negative connotation, as the oppressed individual has to suppress his own cultural identity and imitate the cultural codes of the master, becoming in the process a civilised savage, the creature makes a genuine effort, while saving Sueko and Kawaji, to discard the animalistic savagery and uncover his human identity. In consequence, the creature born out of the immortal heart of his literary progenitor becomes not really a menace, but he evolves into a casualty of modern warfare.

<sup>13</sup> Referring to Said yet again, it can be further inferred that the figure of the Western Other has been appropriated by Japanese culture (part of Eurocentric Orient from the geographic perspective) and serves as a possible threat to as well as a helper of the Orient. In this manner, the post-World War II position of America in relation to Japan becomes redefined (a dangerous yet supportive Orient located east of Japan).

## 6. Conclusions: Frankenstein in Japan

All things considered, the Frankenstein creature is, indeed, the monster progenitor whose Gothic personage can be translated cross-culturally and who still provides the stage for new reinventions of his character. In view of the analysed motion pictures, we can observe how the creature is taken out of the literary context and integrated within the culture-specific framework of *Tokusatsu*. The matter of how the creature's new *Kaijū* image is received remains open to discussion. *Frankenstein Conquers the World* and *The War of the Gargantuas* were released over 50 years ago, in more than one version, thus their overall reception has unquestionably changed with the passage of time. When the *Tokusatsu* genre became more child-oriented in the 1970s, the *Furankenshutain Kaijū* may have certainly been viewed as the figure of kitsch. Nowadays, due to the resurgence of *Tokusatsu* in the pop-cultural mainstream, reinvented Frankenstein creature perfectly conforms to Sontag's concept of aesthetics of destruction by constituting an amalgam of a Gothic monster and a *Kaijū* one. When in the 2014 remake a confused protagonist asks what is Godzilla and the scientist replies: "not a monster... a god" (<https://www.youtube.com> 0:00:43–0:00:46), a new type of modern-day monster figure comes under the spotlight. By the manner of attributing god-like features to the reinterpretations of mythological figures, the term *Kaijū* receives a completely new meaning. It no longer denotes a figure of kitsch but a force of nature incarnate, with ambiguous personality.

What is more, apart from the cinematic realm, interest in the Frankenstein creature is visible in other areas of Japanese culture. For example, he is the main hero of a manga series called *Embalming- The Another Tale of Frankenstein (Enbāmingu -Ji Anazā Teiru obu Furankenshutain)* (<http://books.shueisha.co.jp>) and also of a drama television series *Frankenstein's Love (Furankenshutain no Koi)* (<http://asianwiki.com>). Nevertheless, the legacy of the two original motion pictures is primarily visible in the forms of intertextual references and sources of inspiration for present filmmakers.<sup>14</sup> Without a doubt, the Gothic monster is still in progression after 200 years since his conception.

<sup>14</sup> For more information, please refer to: Blanco, "Pacific Rim Director Guillermo Del Toro's Top 5 Kaiju Films," HipHopWired, accessed November 2, 2020, <https://hiphopwired.com/245180/pacific-rim-director-guillermo-del-toros-top-5-kaiju-films/>.

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