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


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Abstract or Description

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

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Sometimes, indeed, he left marks in writing on the barks of the trees, or cut in stone, that guided me, and instigated my fury. "My reign is not yet over..." First examining the range of meanings generated by Mary Shelley's Frankenstein in light of images of political "monstrosity" produced by the French Revolution, Baldick goes on to trace the protean transformations of the myth in the fiction of Hoffmann, Hawthorne, Dickens, Melville, Conrad, and Lawrence, as well as in the historical and political writings of Carlyle and Marx and the science fiction of Stevenson and Wells.