

Robert Bussie  
Apex 6.3  
History of the Book 1450+  
11/11/16  
Dr. Lamb

## Cultural Icon Award for Mary Shelly's Frankenstein.

**Sound: Light orchestra music plays for 30 second. Fade out the music as the Applause starts.**

**Sound: Applause for 15 seconds. Fade out sound as the Announcer starts talking.**

**Announcer:** *(big booming voice)* Would you please welcome to the podium the star of screen, stage, comic books, and radio Mr. Boris Karloff. Joining Mr. Karloff on stage this evening is the star and hostess of her own late night television shows and the dreams of young men everywhere Elvira, Mistress of the Dark.

**Boris:** Good evening ladies and gentleman and thank you for attending this black tie event. This is an important night for the world of literature. We are gathered here to give out the first annual Cultural Icon Award for a Book. My career has personally been affected by this women's amazing gothic novel. I have portrayed her monster in many movies over the years; most notability in the Bride of Frankenstein. I am talking of course about Mary Wollstonecraft Shelly's novel Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus.

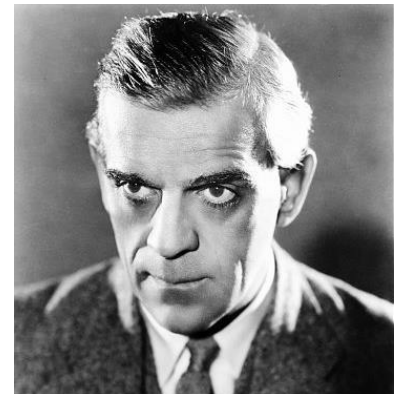


Photo from IMDB.

**Sound: Applause last for 20 seconds**

**Boris:** Elvira you know a thing or two about being a cultural icon. Please explain to the people in this theatre and those watching at home how a book becomes a cultural icon.

**Sound: Wolves howling for 5 seconds**

**Elvira:** Hello ghouls and ghosts in the theatre tonight and those special scary fiends watching at home. It is I, Elvira, the hostess with the most-ess. As Boris said I have two noticeable icons, er...um... I mean I do know about being a cultural icon. My name and especially my image are engrained in popular culture. I have been in a variety of mediums and have inspired many people. For example, here is a painting that the artist R. Bussie painted of me. Pretty cool, huh? But enough about me and enough script writer self-promotion. I want to explain about what makes a book a cultural icon. Malcom Crowley stated "*It is books that form the permanent record and books that furnish the most convenient basis for describing the mind of the world we live in*" (Crowley, 1939). I would like to take a moment and examine the second part of Malcom's statement; "*describing the mind of the world we live in.*" Mary published her novel in 1818 by Lackington, Hughes, Harding, & Jones in London (Hitchcock, n.d.) However, her name was not on the book as the author until 1831. This is a sign of the culture at the time. Women authors were not as accepted in society as male authors. Even though she was married to the famous poet Percy Bysshe Shelley her gender as a writer was still an issue. (CRRL, 2016). Mary was not the first in her family to tackle the subject of sexism. The issue of sexism was addressed by her mother Mary Wollstonecraft in her book *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792 (Biography.com, 2016). The issue of sexism is seen in Mary's book by Victor Frankenstein being the strong, intelligent male who has to rescue his bride Elizabeth. I ask you Boris, why couldn't Elizabeth take care of herself?



Photograph I took of Elvira holding the painting I did of her. She signed the painting in 2016.

**Boris:** My answer would be that women in the early to mid-1800s were seen as weaker and sub-servant to men.

**Elvira:** Yup. But you will never see me allow a man to treat me that way....Unless I let him borrow my handcuffs for a little role playing....(laughing).

**Boris:** Well, Elvira that is not the only reason this book was popular when it was first published. It resonates with issues that are still relevant today, for example, the quest for eternal life. Science, medicine, and philosophy were important areas of study when this book was written. In the book Victor reanimated a dead body. He was creating life or another way of looking at it is that he was looking to find a way to live forever. Victor considers the monster "*an account of the progress of my intellect*" (Heller, n.d.). However, the religious and cultural reasons for and against it at the time are present in the book Characters in the story pointed out that Victor is acting like a God. They question if he is going against the natural order of things. In the mid-1800s the church did not approve of men playing God. Yet science encourages us to discover new ways to make our lives better. These same religious, scientific, and society ideals are still seen today. Don't you agree Elvira?

**Elvira:** I like totally agree with you, handsome. That is another thing that makes this book such an important cultural icon. It has surpassed time and different genders, races, and cultures and is still

relevant today. Not every book has this cultural impact. For example, Dr. Annette Lamb pointed out in her Eduscapes presentation that the book *America* by John Stewart was a big hit when it first came out in 2005. However, flash forward to 2016 and the book is not as relevant or as important as it was a little over a decade earlier. (Lamb, 2016). In short, it is found in the bargain bin at your local store. You are not too good for the Daily Show are you now Mr. Stewart? I think not....Oh' sorry folks I went off on a tangent there for a moment. I just miss the old Daily Show. Let me continue.

**Boris:** By all means, please continue.

**Elvira:** By comparisons the science, medicine, and philosophy issues brought up in Frankenstein are still relevant in today's culture. With the Human Genome Project and stem cell research modern medicine is light years ahead of what was possible in the mid-1800s. However, there are many religious groups and political groups for and against this kind of research. They say that it raises moral issues (Vestal, 2008). When the Human Genome project completed its mapping of human DNA the possibilities of curing diseases opened up a new world of research. The problem is that "*as genetic knowledge increases, questions are being raised regarding the proper scope and limits of both science and medicine*" (McKenzie, 2009).

**Boris:** Well said. Issues that the novel Frankenstein brings up are still relevant today. This helps to cement its place as a cultural icon. Elvira, my dear you have brought up some excellent points.

**Elvira:** Stop flirting with me. Even though I do go for the tall, dark and gruesome type.

**Boris:** You little minx. You are making me blush, which is not a bad thing since I died in 1969. I could use a little bit of color in my cheeks. Anyway, the book Frankenstein has more topics that have stood the test of time.

**Elvira:** Correct you are. Here are a few more examples. The monster is alone in this world. He is intelligent; however because of how he was brought back to life society has deemed him different and evil. They shun him. They fear him. They refuse to try to understand him. How many people throughout history have felt as if they are outsiders? They feel ugly, dumb, useless, etc. only because they do not fit in. The monster represents this. All the monster wants is someone to love; someone to be like him. So, he asks Victor to make him a mate. Someone who feels like he does and someone he can love. And the jerk tells the monster no, because he thinks that he has created a monstrosity instead of someone with feelings.

**Boris:** sniff, sniff

**Elvira:** Boris, are you crying?

**Boris:** No, well maybe a little. Don't let the scary persona fool you. I am the strong sensitive type. And I find Victor Frankenstein to be very selfish. He has a fiancée and denies the monster the same kind of love. No wonder the creature acted out in anger by hurting and killing those close to Victor. All he wants; in fact, all anyone really wants is to be accepted and loved. This book could have been written today and it would still be relevant and Victor would still be a big butt head.

**Elvira:** Oh' come now. Pull yourself together there big guy so I can continue on with our examination of Mary Shelly's book *Frankenstein* as a cultural icon. Feel better now?

**Boris:** I am back to my normal self. Even though I am still angry at the way Victor treated his creation.

**Elvira:** Like gag me with a spoon or better yet gag Victor Frankenstein. You hit it on the head when you said angry. Anger and revenge are another two key points in the story. If Victor had seen that the creature was human and needed love then the story would have been different. Instead Victor is scared and embarrassed by what he created. So, instead of man-ing up and helping his creation he makes the monster angry. The monster is not bad in the sense of being evil; he is angry, lonely, and worst of all he is vengeful. Anger, fear, embarrassment, and vengeance are all human traits that are reflected throughout history. These traits are relatable to readers today.

**Boris:** Having universal emotional themes in a book really adds to it becoming a cultural icon that surpasses time. However, there is another way that a book gets the Cultural Icon Award.

**Elvira:** By blackmailing the nominating committee?

**Boris:** Elvira! No, that would be unethical.

**Elvira:** Wow, you have been out of the Hollywood scene for a long time. Get with the time, pops. However, I do know what you mean. As I so wonderfully explained earlier some books have a short life span within the current society. However, *Frankenstein* was a huge hit and expanded beyond the novel. In 1910 Thomas Edison made a movie using his Kinetoscope machine. Then in 1931 Universal studios made a brilliant movie starring a handsome young actor as the monster that spawned many sequels (Hitchcock, n.d.).

**Boris:** That handsome fellow is me folks.

**Elvira:** Sensitive, huh? You wanna ham it up some more for the folks watching at home?

**Boris:** Don't be jealous of my natural rugged good looks. Anyways I also have to give a salute to the Classic Hammer Horror Films of *Frankenstein* starring Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing. They helped revitalize the gothic feeling of the novel.

**Elvira:** However, I hate to burst your bubble especially since you could easily crush me. But your movie only took the core elements of the story and changed it into a monster movie. In short a lot of liberties were taken in the movies. However, that is not necessarily a bad thing. That's right; I am looking at you the 1994 movie *Mary Shelly's Frankenstein*. Can we say booooring? I mean yea, ok, you got the story closer to the book than any other adaptation so far, but wow, even Robert De Niro could not save this mess.

**Boris:** You mean the monster did not have a flat head and green skin? You mean I could have had spoken in the first movie instead of just grunting like a fool? The hours I spent in makeup.

**Elvira:** Don't sweat it ya big lug. Your movies are still my favorite. I love the black and white film with the gothic castles and atmosphere. Really old school scary.

**Boris:** Thanks Elvia. The story and characters in Mary Shelly's Frankenstein has taken on a life of their own within our culture. It has been transformed into many mediums, inspired countless artists, and interpreted so many different ways that its association with the book is sometimes by name only. The monster has been turned into a big lovable giant in the wonderful TV sitcom the Munsters and the story has been adapted into movie parodies like the brilliant Young Frankenstein and the Rocky Horror Picture Show.

**Elvira:** The original Rocky Horror; not the vomit inducing remake that was shown on TV a few weeks ago. Then there are theatrical plays, comic books, songs, novels, video games, action figures, t-shirts, cartoons, and many, many more things related to Mary's beloved book. The book and the characters have become a part of history.

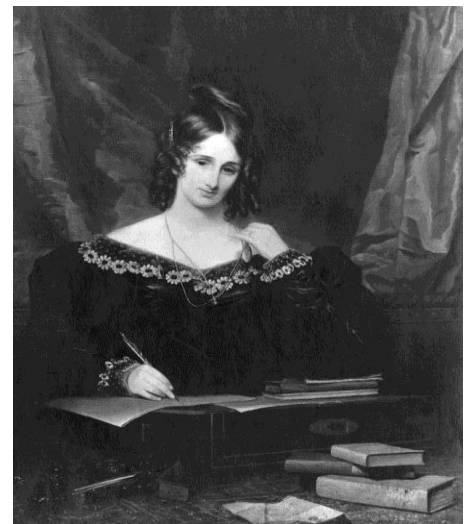
**Boris:** Now without further delay let's welcome to the stage Mary Wollstonecraft Shelly.

**Mary:** Thank You Boris and Elvira for presenting this award to me. I also would like to thank the nominating committee for bestowing this great honor on me. I am surprised and very grateful for all the love this story has received over the past 198 years. Also Elvira, I must thank you for your stance for women's rights. That is a very progressive outfit. I could never get away with that in my day. You go girl!

**Elvira:** Right back at ya Mary. By the way you look good for a woman of only 165 years old. You must keep the old guys howling at the moon. Talking about howling at the moon; this award show presentation has been going on all night and the moon is disappearing into the daylight. So, anything else to say Boris?

**Boris:** No ma'am. I just checked the criteria for this apex and it looks like we covered all the points with a bit of charm and sarcastic humor thrown into the mix. All that is left is let the credits roll, aka the cited sources. Good night ladies and gentleman.

**Elvira:** And until our next encounter Unpleasant Dreams, Darlings.



Mary Wollstonecraft Shelly.  
Photograph from A & E Television  
Networks.

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