Viewing Day 1

0:00:00- 0:34:06

* Begins with opening credits
* Ends with the monster being put into the dungeon

***Things to notice***

The mood is set immediately with the low-key lighting in the graveyard surrounded by the starkly barren landscape. As Frankenstein and Fritz dig, they even throw dirt onto the stature of the grim reaper, as if to show Frankenstein’s scorn for death. Frankenstein’s laboratory sits high upon a cliff, impressively gothic. This scene contrasts sharply with the “real world” of Elizabeth and Henry’s father, where order and light dominate even the very bad acting. The scene where the monster comes to life remains very effective even by today’s standards, and, the first time we see the monster alive, the director cuts very quickly with low-angle shots that give us a distorted sense of the monster at first. When the monster is locked in the dungeon, notice the twisted lines of the backdrop, and the shadowy, low-key light: it is something right out of the silent horror classic *Dr. Caligari.*

***Key sequence: 022:00-0:25:36***

This is the famous scene where Henry Frankenstein screams, “It’s Alive! It’s Alive!” It is one of the most famous scenes in movie history. The quick cuts, the expressionistic lighting, and the truly deranged performance of Colin Clive make this sequence the nightmarish climax of the first half.

Discussion Questions: Day 1

1. What motivates Henry Frankenstein to do what he does? Why are some people repulsed by what he does?
2. What are your feelings about the monster at this point? Based only on what you have seen so far, is he evil? What does Frankenstein himself think of his creation? Why does he call the monster “it” and not “him”?
3. Why do you think Elizabeth is in this movie? What is her role, and what is her effect on Frankenstein?

Viewing Day 2

00:35:06- End

* Begins with the monster escaping (he escapes often)
* Ends with closing credits

***Things to notice***

When Frankenstein is back home with Elizabeth, thinking that the monster will be killed by his colleague, the set lines, lighting, and costumes all signal a return to normalcy (birds are even chirping in the background!) and in fact, Frankenstein tells her he wants to forget about that “nightmare”. The nightmare, however, is going to intrude on his waking life because his doctor friend forgot to tie the monster down. Remember, the stupidity of the characters is a common element in all horror films. The scene with the monster and the little girl also ranks high on famous-shot lists, and hints at the humanity of the monster and his desire for control and communication. Be sure that you have the original version, which shows the monster actually throwing the little girl into the water- some later versions omitted it. When you see the original version, you understand that the monster kills the girl out of misunderstanding, not viciousness. With the monster on the loose, Frankenstein’s home begins to take on some of the same mazelike qualities of his laboratory castle. The crowd soons pursues the monster to the same barren landscape of the opening, and, after Frankenstein confronts his creation, the monster is burned and things are returned to normal, with Henry taken safely back home.

***Key Sequence: 1:00:00-1:04:00***

What do you say to your son who has been behaving badly? What would you sday to a father who has abandoned you? The monster cannot speak until the second film, and there are no words of apology from Frankenstein, who is bent solely on destroying him. There are a couple of nice shots when they look at each other through the spinning wheel, sizing each other up, and the framing seems to hint at an equality or at least a duality of the two men. As his punishment for pursuing power beyond his control, Henry is thrown from the mill like a rag doll (of course it might have *been* a rag doll, with special effects being what they were). The screams of the monster as he burns in the fire are pitiful and affecting. But we do get a type of happy ending when Frankenstein is returned to his house and nursed by Elizabeth.

Discussion Questions Day 2

1. What are your feelings about the monster now? Is he human, an evil monster, a lost soul? What does he appear to want? Do you have sympathy for him?
2. How do you feel about Frankenstein? Was he punished for his actions? Do you feel sympathy for him?
3. How are the townspeople portrayed? Why do you think this is?
4. The film was made in 1931. What aspects of the film seem very dated to you, and what elements still seem powerful?