

Monstrous Situations

You should never judge a book by its cover, and you should never judge a man by his looks. That simple statement helps drive both the plot of *Frankenstein*, written by Mary Shelly and *Igor*, directed by Anthony Leondis. Both Shelly's creature and Leondis' character Igor have stereotyping at the base of why they are where they are, and one could be so bold as to say that's where the similarities -aside from plotline- stop. But, I say there is far more to the animated story of Igor and his friends than simply a funny children's movie. The simple yet unusual way that Igor is told not only exposes children to some of the basic themes of Frankenstein, but it expands upon those same themes to address situations children may face as they grow up.

Igor is a fun animated parody of the Classic Frankenstein story, and the tale proceeds as such: Igor is a member of society shunned for the physical deformity of a hunch upon his back, part of the group known collectively and individually as Igor(s). But this Igor is intelligent and inventive, and his deepest wish is to be a mad scientist; when the scientist he serves explodes only days before the kingdom's annual Evil Science Fair (ESF), Igor finally has his shot to prove himself as an inventor by accomplishing something no-one else has ever done: create life. Igor succeeds in making life with the help of two of his prior inventions, a reanimated immortal rabbit called Scamper, and a brain in a robotic life support jar called Brain. But the creature - who names herself Eva- isn't as expected, she's tame and gentle, even refusing to hurt a fly, so Igor, Brain and Scamper take her to the brainwash to become eviler. The brainwash fails due to brain inadvertently switching the channel on Eva's screen, and she leaves the brainwash able to speak perfect English with a passion and dream for

acting. Igor then tricks her into being willing to fight in the ESF by saying the whole thing is an audition for *Annie*. Eva learns of Igor's trickery through the manipulations of the villain, and she is carted off for the ESF to fight for the villain. Igor is sent to the recycling plant, and Scamper and Brain rush to save him; Igor had resigned himself to his fate, but Brain and Scamper convince him that he can't give up on Eva. The trio escapes the recycling plant, and Igor makes his way into the Killiseum to save Eva -who under the influence of the villain fell into being the monster she was made to be- and we end the story with the villain saying, "She's an Evil Invention!" and Igor replies "No. Everyone has an Evil Bone in their body, but we choose whether or not to use it. And as someone I love once said, "It's better to be a good nobody than an evil somebody." (Igor Script)

Now since the tale of Igor is designed for children, there has been a heavy dose of simplification/child-friendly changes made to the story of Frankenstein, but it is in some of those changes that Igor is so much easier for a child to connect with. Take the character of Igor as an example. The character -and therefore the stereotype- began in 1823 in the play *Presumption; or, the Fate of Frankenstein*, (Wikipedia) and has since been portrayed over and over as the hunchbacked lab assistant to an evil scientist. Such use of a stereotype is incredibly beneficial for the quick paced story of *Igor*, since with it children and their parents already have a basic picture of the character and his history; but what defines Igor is his motivation. He wants to be seen for more than his appearance -which is a mental monster children may have to face. So many kids grow into teens who believe that their physical image is everything, and that is such a toxic thought that teens have killed themselves because they couldn't see past the physical.

Igor doesn't care how he looks, he has the brains to compete with the other evil scientists and he is going to compete no matter how people see him simply because of his physical features. Continuing with the simplicity, take Igor's motivation for competing in the EFS: fitting in. Igor wants to create life so that he will be admired and respected, so he'll fit in – which every young child wants. No-one wants to be the odd one out. As the Health of Children website says in its article on peer acceptance:

“Peer acceptance and friendship provide a wide range of learning and development opportunities for children. These include companionship, recreation, building social skills, participating in group problem solving, and managing competition and conflict. They also allow for self-exploration, emotional growth, and moral and ethical development. Parents, teachers, and other adults are a good source of social support for children, but it is among other children that kids learn how to interact with each other. (Health of Children)

If children don't have social support from and connection with other children their age, they simply won't develop right. They won't know what proper social interaction is, and they certainly will be at a disadvantage when they are thrust into our “adult” world -as much of a social game as it is.

Aside from addressing common growing up problems children face, *Igor* also tackles several social problems stemming from the original *Frankenstein* and expanding upon them. The first of these that I will address is solitude. Solitude is defined -by the Oxford English Dictionary- as “the state of being or living alone; loneliness, seclusion, solitariness (of persons).” In *Frankenstein*, the creature is driven to his violent actions because he feels terribly alone and shunned “Believe me, Frankenstein: I was

benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity: but am I not alone, miserably alone?" "I am alone and miserable; man will not associate with me" (Shelly 81,120) All the creature ever wanted was a companion, but for the entirety of his short life he was shunned. First by his maker, then by the cottagers, then by Frankenstein again when he will not make the creature a mate. Humans -and in *Frankenstein*, creatures made by humans- are a social species:

Having close, meaningful relationships is essential to our well-being. When we feel cut off from the people around us, our health suffers. We become more susceptible to anxiety, depression, and anguish. We hurt. We don't sleep well. We get sick more easily and take longer to recover. People can cope with loneliness in self-defeating ways. Some turn to alcohol and drugs to ease the burden of feeling unwanted. Others indulge in food, or become obsessed with gambling. Still others seek anonymous sexual hookups. Whatever the strategy, each tries to fill the void that comes with being deprived of meaningful connection. (Why Loneliness Hurts So Much)

Social connections are an integral part of a human's wellbeing. Without interconnectivity, we are unable to be our best. We are overcome by negative feelings and often end up hurting ourselves in the process of trying to fill the void. One of the few things that may be worse than solitude is alienation, or "the state or experience of being isolated from a group or an activity to which one should belong, or in which one should be involved." (Oxford) The life of an igor is one of alienation:

And the bottom of the heap? Those are the poor slobs like me, born with a hunch on our back: igors. ... But I never wanted to be an Igor. I always wanted to be an

Evil Scientist. Unfortunately, the hunch on my back was a one-way ticket to Igor School. (Igor Script)

Igors are forced into servitude because of their physical deformity regardless of intelligence or aptitude, comparable to how African-Americans were segregated against for the color of their skin, no matter how intelligent or able they were. Children may find themselves being alienated or see alienation happening, and we must show them this is a bad thing.

The other social problem from *Frankenstein* I will address is grief, and it begins most prominently when Victor learns that Justine is charged for the murder of his brother, while he knows full well it was the creature who killed William:

Alas! I had turned loose into the world a depraved wretch, whose delight was in carnage and misery; had he not murdered my brother? No one can conceive the anguish I suffered during the remainder of the night, which I spent, cold and wet, in the open air. But I did not feel the inconvenience of the weather; my imagination was busy in scenes of evil and despair. (Shelly 59)

Victor is tortured by the fact that his creation murdered his brother, so much so that he claims even being in Justine's place is a better circumstance than his: "The tortures of the accused did not equal mine; she was sustained by innocence, but the fangs of remorse tore my bosom, and would not forgo their hold." (Shelly 65) Guilt is what drives Victor to declare Justine is innocent, but he doesn't do anything besides say that and just feel bad. This behavior isn't very conducive to the main purpose of guilt, helping us realize we have done something wrong:

Guilt is also useful in preventing conflict in the first place. We all have a moral code, or an idea of what we think is right and wrong. Whenever we consider doing something in contrast with this moral code, our guilt will often kick in and prevent us from doing so before we ever act. ... "guilt directly contributes to good relationships by promoting behaviors that benefit relationships..." We treat people in accordance with our moral codes because we don't want to feel guilty.

(Corissajoy)

Guilt is biological. It helps us to learn to not hurt each other, helps our violent tendencies stay infrequent, helps us to start to learn what we did wrong and how to grow. But Victor doesn't let the guilt he is feeling drive him to solve his problems, instead he wraps himself up in it and slowly wastes away from it. But Igor too is not free from guilt, and he really feels the guilt of lying to Eva about the ESF the night before, when Eva gives himself, Brain and Scamper heartfelt gifts:

Eva: I'm never gonna take this off. That way all of you will be close to my heart forever. ...

Igor: See, this is the kind of moment that'd be tough for someone who wasn't meant to be an Evil Scientist. Somebody who'd go all soft and want to tell her the truth. But lucky for us, I'm evil, right?

Scamper: Yeah. Lucky us.

Brain: I don't feel lucky. (Igor Script)

But while Victor lets guilt take him over -which Igor falls to, as well- Brain and Scamper are there to help Igor out of this slum and he goes on to save those he loves.

Igor is a child-centric movie with themes of growth interwoven with some of the basic themes of *Frankenstein*. Igor is shunned for his physical appearance, but he has grown past how he looks and wants to be seen for his other qualities. Both Igor and the monster are placed into solitude, but Igor is also alienated against and stands as an example of proving you're more than what the world says you are. Victor and Igor both feel guilt directly relating to their creatures; but unlike Victor, Igor's grief helps him to grow and admit he was wrong. *Igor* is a tale of growth, and perhaps we can use it as an example of how we can grow past our faults.

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