

Introduction

The Frankenstein Complex: when the text is more than a text

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ADAPTING *FRANKENSTEIN* APPROACHES THE seemingly endless adaptations, appropriations and re-appropriations, the prolific progeny of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus*, as inextricably intertextual pieces of popular culture. Arguably, *Frankenstein*¹ has a greater presence in popular media than any other single narrative over nearly two centuries,² only growing more extant and cogent as the popular culture machine begins to ever more resemble the patchwork monster which Shelley's precocious student created. In the context of this perpetual-motion phenomenon *Frankenstein* invites a reading of itself in relation to what amounts to a potentially infinite network of intertexts, or what we have termed the 'Frankenstein Network'. Unlike other popular texts which generate adaptations periodically, *Frankenstein* has reached a critical mass, to the point that adaptations flow forth continually at an unparalleled rate.³ Perhaps this is because Shelley touches the central nerve of our ambivalence toward a modern world that interrupts the notion of the human. Or perhaps it is simply her novel's recognition that any time a created thing becomes a sentient being, capable of thinking for itself, complications will inevitably arise. Shelley could not have imagined, however, the technology-saturated culture we now live in or the ways it has forced us to adapt ourselves, and, in turn, continually to adapt *Frankenstein*.

Understanding the proliferation of Frankenstein adaptations, including many made for young audiences, demands a creative and broad approach. Totalising mythic and topical readings of *Frankenstein*, popular in the past, have addressed important issues and cultural and historical themes such as sexual politics (Picart), race (Young), and literary politics (Baldick). But mythic and topical approaches, as helpful as they have been to Frankenstein studies, usually limit possible meanings by defining carefully circumscribed parameters of text (typically having a clear relationship to Shelley's novel), genre (primarily literature to film), and criticism (often cultural criticism's focus on race, gender, and class). But these approaches may not be comprehensive enough to account for the Frankenstein Network. As Kamilla Elliott notes, scholars have rarely 'considered that the failure of adaptation studies to conform to theoretical paradigms might arise from the inadequacies and limitations of the theories' (20). She goes on to argue that adaptations are a special case in textual studies and that they may 'require

theories to adapt to *them*' (20–1 italics in original). We argue that this is particularly true in the case of *Frankenstein*. Straightforward literary theories, and even totalising mythic theories applied in the past, simply can't explain or describe the growing field of texts associated with *Frankenstein*. In an effort to comprehend this field, the adaptation studies approaches found in this collection focus on the complex relationships *between* the various texts, disparate traditions, and dynamic media in which *Frankenstein* has been adapted. From this perspective the meanings of any given adaptation, or of Shelley's novel itself, for that matter, are not perceived to be the result of a single text, a particular myth, or a set of cultural issues alone, but also the product of multiple relationships to other adaptations.

An adaptation studies approach to any work of art, including those associated with *Frankenstein*, requires that it be studied in the contexts created by other texts, since many of the perceived meanings are negotiated in webs of intertextual dialogue.⁴ At its most basic level adaptation studies involves the comparison of one text to another, or to many others. We might argue that the distinguishing feature of an adaptation is that it is at least perceived by someone to be derived from the text to which it is compared. But it may be more accurate to say that adaptation is both a kind of text and a way of studying texts. Speaking specifically of *Frankenstein*, Thomas Leitch suggests that

Adaptation theory tends to assume that adaptation focuses on the plot of the progenitor text, but arguments about fidelity to the earlier text's spirit should be equally open to adaptations based on a character like Sherlock Holmes or Frankenstein's monster with the ability to generate continuing adventures, especially if those adventures follow the same narrative formulas over and over again. (*Film Adaptation* 120)

There may, indeed, be no more fitting way to choose to understand *Frankenstein* than as a series of adaptations. Kyle Bishop suggests that some adaptations undergo what he calls a 'Frankensteinian process' by which they 'can no longer be seen as simply one side of a reductive dichotomy (original/copy), but neither can they be considered totally original products. Instead, seemingly new narratives are constructed from pre-existing pieces, pieces drawn from a complex system of related texts', and Shelley's novel is not the only source for these pieces (269). An equally weighty centre of the *Frankenstein* adaptation machine is, of course, James Whale's 1931 film, with its indelible and sympathetic portrayal of the monster by Boris Karloff in Jack Pierce's iconic make-up, German-Expressionist Gothicism, and dazzling electrical creation scene.

Mary Shelley's novel itself paves the way for the obsession with adaptation that has followed. Published in 1818, the title page, in fact, references texts that it adapts: the Prometheus myth noted in the title, three lines quoted from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and the mention of *Caleb Williams* in the book's dedication to Mary's father, William Godwin. Among the most adapted texts in literature, *Frankenstein* was an immediate literary phenomenon upon publication, leading to fifteen different stage adaptations before 1851 – five in 1823 alone. Interestingly, Shelley revised her novel in 1831, making several significant changes that virtually amount to a minor adaptation. As



Figure 0.1 Boris Karloff as Frankenstein's Creature chained in a German expressionist dungeon.

Anne Mellor notes, 'the most striking thematic differences between the two published versions of the novel concern the role of fate, the degree of Frankenstein's responsibility for his actions, the representation of nature, the role of Clerval, and the representation of the family'. The most significant result of these revisions is the loss of some of the book's internal philosophical coherence (205).

While Whale was ostensibly adapting Shelley's novel, in truth his film was primarily

adapted from Peggy Webling's then popular stage adaptation of the novel, which, in turn, followed many of the venerable stage traditions in practice since Richard Brinsley Peake's 1823 *Presumption; or, the Fate of Frankenstein*. *Frankenstein* (1931), for instance, made the monster mute and gave the doctor an 'Igor' assistant, both innovations introduced by Peake. In addition, Whale drew on German Expressionist *mise-en-scène* as well as on Gothic imagery to create an almost surreal atmosphere. These choices gave the story a look and feel that instantly transformed Shelley's philosophical and grotesque tragedy into a Gothic horror film – one that has not only been central to the development of horror cinema, but that has been more influential on most subsequent film adaptations than Shelley's novel.

Any understanding of *Frankenstein* in the twenty-first century will be delightfully riddled by such complex intertextual networks, and that makes these texts the ideal subject matter for an adaptation studies approach. In their introduction to *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions*, Jorgen Bruhn, Anne Gjelsvik, and Eirik Frisvold Hanssen write that 'another detectable trend in adaptation studies is the movement away from a one-to-one relationship, that is, between *one* source (such as a novel) and *one* film. Instead, adaptation is viewed within a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural and textual networks into which any textual phenomena is understood' (8). They cite Christine Geraghty's analysis of Joe Wright's *Atonement* and her development of the idea that 'an adaptation necessarily relies on and cites a widespread web of influences' (8). Networked relationships like these have even changed the way the novel itself is read.⁵ Traditionally, the many versions of *Frankenstein* have been viewed as mere exploitation, copies that are always inferior to the 'original'. But adaptation studies, as Harriet Margolis suggests, creates a space in which adaptations might be more than mimesis, more than an always-inferior copy. She argues that it is hard to imagine 'a literature class including [*Frankenstein*] without confronting the Hollywood versions of Mary Shelley's vision' (160). Imelda Whelehan and Deborah Cartmell argue, more specifically, that the cultural studies approach typically taken by adaptation scholars 'foregrounds the activities of reception and consumption, and shelves – forever perhaps – considerations of the aesthetic or cultural worthiness of the object of study' (as found in Elliott 'Rethinking' 580).

It is easy to imagine, for instance, a student reading Shelley's novel after⁶ viewing Whale's *Frankenstein* interpreting Victor/Henry as a sympathetic and well-meaning, though ambitious, scientist with an unfortunate nervous incapacity to handle the results of his experiment. On the other hand, someone reading Shelly's Victor in the context of *I Was a Teenage Frankenstein* (Strock 1957) might see a very different man. The ruthlessness of Strock's Victor magnifies flaws underlying Shelley's romanticised characterisation, revealing a fundamentally cold, fierce, self-protecting man who refuses to do all he can to save Justine, Elizabeth, and the rest of his family. In *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994), Kenneth Branagh adapts the end of his story to allow a clearly desperate and even unreasonable Victor to use his horribly unaesthetic science to bring the dead and mutilated body of Elizabeth back to life.



Figure 0.2 Kenneth Branagh as Frankenstein feverishly working on his creation in *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*.

This resurrection, and the ensuing scenes, highlight Frankenstein's character as a self-obsessed child, unable to respond to grief, form relationships, or generally function as an adult. This particular reading of *Frankenstein* aligns quite well with that of several contemporary scholars.⁷ On the other hand, two other adaptations, both made for TV, *Frankenstein: The True Story* (1973), directed by Jack Smight, and *Frankenstein* (1973), directed by Glenn Jordan, emphasise the monster's childlike innocence. By so doing these adaptations heighten our sympathy for the monster, and stress Frankenstein's position as flawed creator/father.⁸ Both of these adaptations actually anticipate the now popular reading of Frankenstein as a failed parent,⁹ a thread picked up by Mel Brooks a year later in *Young Frankenstein* (1974).

As these examples suggest, from an adaptation studies point of view, any text is subject to multiple readings, or to put it another way, each text contains potentially innumerable meanings. Christa Albrecht-Crane and Dennis Cutchins reference this idea when they write in *Adaptation Studies* that there are any number of paths through a text, each potentially a source for an adaptation (18). Literary texts like Shelley's *Frankenstein*, by their very definition, retain a plenitude of both intentional and unintentional meanings, indicating the various paths that may be taken through the text. Adaptations may or may not adopt these meanings, but the very act of adaptation inevitably creates even more meanings, more possible paths with which future adaptors may engage. This makes future adaptations ever more suggestive and meaningful, certainly more daunting for scholars, and fitting subject matter for what we have

termed a 'Complex' approach. Because there have been important innovations from plays, films, and from the language itself, one purpose of this volume is to demonstrate that because *Frankenstein* has been refracted through so many media, and processed by so many diverse audiences, it has become innately plural and unstable, the possession of millions of individual reader/viewers. In *The Lives and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge*, Paul Davis notes the same kind of trajectory for Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. He suggests that any contemporary audience can only understand *A Christmas Carol* in the light of all the other Carols they have experienced. 'The Carol,' he writes, 'is the sum of all its versions, of all its revisions, parodies, and piracies' (5).

Thomas Leitch complicates this matter even further when he, with some reservations, proposes that 'the question of whether a particular adaptation counts as an adaptation rests not with any properties of the adaptation as such but with its audience' ('Adaptation and Intertextuality' 95). Recognising an adaptation, in other words, is not the result of structural elements of the text so much as it is the result of perceptions of an audience. Matt Lorenz, in this collection (Chapter 7), discusses *I, Robot* (2004) as a *Frankenstein* adaptation, though others may not notice the connection. Thus, when someone experiences a new *Frankenstein* adaptation, acknowledged by the creators or otherwise, the meanings they apprehend are automatically filtered through the internal and personal palimpsest of other 'Frankensteins' they have experienced. Hence, each person's aesthetic experiences become a personal collection of texts; or, we might say, they become part of a personal, rather than global, mythology of their own, a Frankenstein Complex, if you will. *Adapting Frankenstein* rests on this critical premise. We contend that an adaptation studies approach, and the idea of a Frankenstein Complex located in the minds of individuals, in fact, may offer the only real way to comprehend the web of texts that *Frankenstein* has become. This is true because none of us has experienced every *Frankenstein* adaptation. Our complexes, then, are all idiosyncratic. They include those Frankensteins we have actually experienced, along with the more general cultural knowledge we have been able to absorb. Thus a complex is created by what Judith Buchanan terms 'random accidents of critical attention' (158).

If the 'Frankenstein Complex' is the personal experience of *Frankenstein* that each of us carries within, then the entire potential collection of *Frankenstein* texts, the repository, if you will, may be labelled the 'Frankenstein Network'. It includes easily identified texts such as *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, but may also consist of texts like Wally Pfister's *Transcendence* (2014), Doug Liman's *The Bourne Identity* (2002), or Stephen Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (1993), films that could be identified by audience members as *Frankenstein* narratives.¹⁰ Obviously, tracing the many potential ideological and thematic connections within the vast Frankenstein Network is all but impossible, given the number of genres, texts, and media involved, as well as the fact that each adaptation reflects its own version of the Frankenstein Complex, and each audience member potentially sees new connections. This isn't finding a needle in a haystack, this is finding a particular needle in a barrel of needles.

Edison's 1910 *Frankenstein*, the novel's first film adaptation, was heavily influenced by the many early stage productions of *Frankenstein*. But the concept of Frankenstein and his monster which most of us carry around was archetypally established with Whale's two films *Frankenstein* (1931) and *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), followed distantly by the rest of the Universal series. These films deeply influenced radio, comics, and other media. In the 1950s Hammer's *Frankenstein* series added colour, sex, and more graphic violence, and centred on an essentially evil Baron Frankenstein who creates a different monster for each film. In turn, both the Universal and Hammer series continue to be reimagined by campy-ironic, nostalgic, and even pornographic Frankenstein films, adult and young adult books, stage plays, graphic novels, games, transmedia, comics, art, and so forth. And each of these media generates its own traditions in which the monster, not to mention its creator, takes on all imaginable roles – victim, superhero, clown, tragic figure, PhD, child, teenager, parent, avenger, and on and on. The aim of *Adapting Frankenstein* is to present a sampling of readings addressing aspects of this miasmatic composite; in short, it represents a collective attempt to probe individual texts and media to make as many connections among them as possible.

The approaches taken by the chapters in this book engage popular as well as under-represented adapting genres to examine Frankenstein as an unrestricted network, an intertextuality writ large. The twin ideas of the Frankenstein Complex and the Frankenstein Network act as a liberating negative capability, demanding that scholars examine simultaneously numerous genres and meanings relevant to Frankenstein. These chapters tend to involve multiple texts in the analysis of any one text or set of texts, rather than one-to-one case study comparisons. In 2006 Linda Hutcheon introduced the term 'palimpsestuous' to adaptation studies, suggesting that adaptations allow audience members to experience multiple texts at once, as one text becomes a layer through which another text is experienced (6). We would add that artists, as well as audiences, also operate within these textual layers or palimpsests, at least some of which they have chosen. This idea is reiterated in a number of the chapters that follow. Since intertextual adaptation studies teach us that a text's meaning derives from its relationship to other texts, the more of these texts that become part of the conversation, the more meanings can accumulate. For example, in light of *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, Danny Boyle's National Theatre production of *Frankenstein* (2011), and *Frankenstein's Wedding: Live in Leeds* (Teague and Hampton 2011), one might be tempted to note a trend towards re-enshrining Shelley's novel as the preferred source for adaptations. The wider contemporary field, however, including Dean Koontz's Frankenstein series (2004), *I, Frankenstein* (2014), *Victor Frankenstein* (2015), and recent television appearances of Shelley's characters in *Penny Dreadful* (Showtime 2014–16) and *Once Upon a Time* (ABC 2011–), demonstrates an equal interest in adapting Whale's film, exploring Shelley's characters through new contexts such as graphic novels and fairy tales, and creating completely new backstories.

The awesome task of making sense of such a vast network of texts forces scholars to adopt innovations, not the least of which is a non-linear, hypertextual notion

of reading. Thus the Complex/Network approach to *Frankenstein* is not a simple methodology but, rather, a recognition of the interrelatedness of *Frankenstein* texts that opens doors to multiple possibilities. How, for example, do we compare texts from differing genres, such as DC Comics' *Frankenstein: Agent of S.H.A.D.E.* (Lemire 2005–), Marvel Comic's *The Hulk* (1962–), and James Whale's *Frankenstein?* We might begin by comparing the dual natures of David Banner and the Hulk to the Creature as it was portrayed by Karloff. These characters are dangerous as well as sympathetic, and both the Hulk and the Creature have their origins as collateral damage of imperfect science. We might also observe the way both the Creature as an agent of S.H.A.D.E. and the Hulk as an Avenger are forced to negotiate the problems of working within groups. Not stopping there, questions might then be asked about the influence of these characters on the creation of other comics and on recent cinema. Ultimately, broader meanings might be explored about all of this in terms of the ways both *Frankenstein* and his Creature are brought into various imaginative universes. In short, recognising the complex nature of *Frankenstein* tends to illuminate unexpected and even revelatory pathways through many texts.

Clearly, *Frankenstein* is more than a text. It's more than a novel, more than a film, and even more than a series of films. And this continuous and ongoing popularity demands scholarly attention. As Susan Hitchcock put it, 'the monster's story says something important. Otherwise we would not keep telling it' (Hitchcock 11). Thomas Leitch suggests that the 'something important' is 'to explore the mystery of human identity', a pattern which he notes in all the great Hollywood monster franchises (*Film Adaptation* 106). Leitch is right, of course, because what it means to be human is one of the central questions that drives Shelley's narrative, as well as many of the adaptations. But it's more complicated than that. Writers, filmmakers, new media artists, playwrights, and storytellers of all kinds don't just keep retelling the *same* story. Instead they continue to reinvent *Frankenstein* and his Creature – reinscribing them with meanings, and remaking them in their own images over and over again. It's not just that these characters can't die; instead we have actually fulfilled the fictional scientist's worst nightmare and provided the monster with an endless progeny 'propagated upon the earth' (Shelley 119). Evidence for this may be found in the fact that early readers were less focused on the Creature that runs amok, and more concerned with the good doctor's 'presumption'. Later nineteenth-century readers and theatre goers saw an analogue of social unrest. Mid-twentieth-century readers and viewers often focused on the fear of out-of-control technology, while scholars in the late twentieth century discovered a tale of male usurpation of the birthing process. Each of these readings would suggest a different central question and a focus on different anxieties that a Complex approach can highlight. Hence, the 'Frankenstein Complex' is constantly evolving ideologically, culturally, technologically, and generically.

The causes and cultural significance of this seemingly endless reinvention are really the subject matter of this collection, but a clue to the reasons for *Frankenstein's* fecundity may be found in the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin. Ellen Cronan Rose has suggested

that ‘certain texts become “canonical”’ because of ‘their plasticity [and] capacity for adaptation to the complex, often bifurcated needs and sensibilities of successive generations of readers’ (809). Bakhtin would likely agree with this notion, but he employs a metaphor to describe this ‘plasticity’ that is particularly fitting for the study of *Frankenstein* adaptations. In his analysis of Rabelais’s writings Bakhtin defines what he calls the ‘grotesque body’. He describes it as ‘a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body’ (*Rabelais and His World* 317). As examples, Bakhtin suggests images of consumption, regurgitation, birth, or copulation. A body or bodies engaged in these kinds of acts becomes difficult to delineate or distinguish. ‘Thus,’ he continues, ‘the artistic logic of the grotesque image ignores the closed, smooth, and impenetrable surface of the body and retains only its excrescences (sprouts, buds) and orifices, only that which leads beyond the body’s limited space or into the body’s depths’ (318).

These grotesque bodies are literal for Bakhtin as well as metaphorical. He equates the grotesque body, typically associated with ribald humour, with grotesque texts that tend to open themselves to interpenetration by other texts, symbolic interpretations, and the constant generation of other texts. ‘If we consider the grotesque image in its extreme aspect,’ he writes, ‘it never presents an individual body; the image consists of orifices and convexities that present another, newly conceived body. It is a point of transition in a life eternally renewed, the inexhaustible vessel of death and conception’ (318). Thus, grotesque texts for Bakhtin are those which seem constantly to generate other texts. Perhaps it should not be surprising that Bakhtin’s grotesque bodies resemble, at least in some respects, *Frankenstein*’s Creature. The monster, in essence, becomes the dark side of Rabelais’s grotesque creations. Upon first seeing what he has created from the parts collected at the slaughter and charnel houses, Shelley’s Victor Frankenstein finds it difficult to ‘delineate’ or define his creation. Then, as it comes to life, he notices with horror the Creature’s thin ‘yellow skin’ that ‘scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath’ (Shelley 60). The Creature may not have Bakhtinian ‘orifices’, but its insides, nevertheless, are nearly on display. Images of the monster from television, stage, and film seem, if anything, to emphasise the grotesque nature of the Creature’s body, which is often covered with oozing wounds and bursting stitches – all threatening to split open at any moment. But let us be clear that Bakhtin sees this literal lack of a thick skin, at least in so far as it applies to texts, as a positive thing in that it engenders new texts. ‘The events of the grotesque sphere,’ he writes, ‘are always developed on the boundary dividing one body from the other and, as it were, at their points of intersection. One body offers its death, the other its birth, but they are merged in a two-bodied image’ (322). At least part of the attraction of *Frankenstein*, then, may be the monster’s grotesque body – a body that never seems completely closed or finished.

Bakhtin contrasts this image of the grotesque body or grotesque text with that of the canonical or closed body or text. These he characterises as smooth, finished, and impenetrable. With the closed body the ‘opaque surface and the body’s “valleys”

acquire an essential meaning as the border of a closed individuality that does not merge with other bodies and with the world' (320). Thus, these closed bodies or texts tend to lose their symbolic value, along with their ability to generate new texts (321). Shelley's *Frankenstein*, on the other hand, seems to retain the ability to generate new texts and simultaneously leave itself constantly open to new interpretations. Thus, as Hitchcock puts it, 'the very "plasticity" of the novel, as more than one critic has mentioned, goes far in explaining Frankenstein's longevity' (323).

Louis James explored some of this plasticity when he outlined the varied ways in which just one aspect of the Frankenstein phenomenon, the monster, has been interpreted, including as 'a type of the unconscious', as a Jungian shadow, as Rousseau's natural man, as a Wordsworthian child of nature, as a Romantic rebel, as Mary Shelley's abandoned babe, as part of the Darwinian debate on evolution, and as a representation of the colonised other (James 78). Interpretations of this single element are definitely varied, and many of those interpretations have served as the foundations for strikingly different adaptations, some of which are treated in the pages of this collection. But the ubiquitous nature of Frankenstein may lead us to make the mistake of treating individual texts or iterations of Frankenstein as undistinguished and ahistorical parts of a greater whole. Chris Baldick warns against this when he suggests that a truism like Frankenstein plays on 'our deepest fears' 'refuses to recognise that fears are themselves subject to history' (6). Thus, to write about Frankenstein is to grapple with the problem of writing about specific texts in specific historical, biographical, political, or cultural contexts, without losing sight of the larger, sprawling context that is the Frankenstein Network.

Some scholars have chosen to solve that problem by grounding any discussion of Frankenstein in the relatively solid foundation of the novel. But even that is not always safe or simple. Until fairly recently the many adaptations of Shelley's work were typically viewed by the literati as pop-culture ephemera, unworthy of scholarly attention. In the words of Linda Hutcheon, 'even in our postmodern age of cultural recycling, something – perhaps the commercial success of adaptations – would appear to make us uneasy' (3). Early on, the popularity of the many commercial, seemingly simplistic, adaptations took a heavy toll on the novel's prestige, intellectual elites apparently assuming that anything this popular with the general public simply could not be the highest form of art. Upon its publication the novel, too, was criticised by some as 'uncouth' and 'disgusting' Gothic sensationalism, a trend that was reinforced by the early stage adaptations – several of which were parodies or farces (Hitchcock 74). As late as the early 1970s Levine and Knoepfelmacher were afraid that their book on *Frankenstein* would 'be received as a self-parody of the solemnity of academic criticism' (xii). With the advent of feminism, cultural criticism, and other more flexible critical tools, however, the justification of Frankenstein criticism, dealing with either the novel or its progeny, has become unnecessary.

But choosing to focus exclusively on the novel does not solve the problem of understanding individual 'Frankensteins' in specific historical contexts at the same time that

we recognise them as parts of a larger whole. As poststructural theory teaches, the story exists only in the reading or the telling, but unlike, say, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which is experienced almost exclusively by reading the novel that Joyce wrote, the balance of what we identify as 'Frankenstein' is not experienced in the novel. The solution that became popular in the late 1980s was to view Frankenstein as a 'myth'. This makes some practical sense, and several of the major critical statements concerning Frankenstein adaptations since that period agree that, having moved beyond the status of a mere novel to that of a myth, Frankenstein's adaptations are, in fact, engaged in a myth-making process that reinterprets and adds new dimensions to Shelley's story (Hand; Baldick; Picart). The Frankenstein 'myth', the 'essence' of Frankenstein, if you will, is defined by Baldick as a two-part structure that he believes may be found in most adaptations: (a) that Frankenstein makes a living creature out of bits of corpses; and (b) that the Creature turns against his creator and runs amok (3). In addition to Baldick's basic framework, many scholars also agree that adaptations have tended to grow out of the cultural anxieties of the time when they were produced (Botting; Baldick; Picart). Botting, for example, notes that since the monster is usually the locus of cultural anxieties, many adaptations become warnings (*Making Monstrous* 192). For Picart these cultural anxieties typically revolve around issues of power, gender, and technology (*Cinematic Rebirths* 20), while Baldick, following the novel-centred current we mentioned earlier, insists that although a cultural focus is inevitable in criticism and adaptation, it should be historically grounded in the anxieties originally part of Shelley's novel – the non-sexual creation of life and technology run wild (5–7).

We are not convinced, however, that 'myth' is the best way to conceptualise the Frankenstein phenomenon, at least when our intention is to study adaptations. Identifying a body of texts as representative of a myth has a tendency to hide or ignore the idiosyncrasies and differences of a particular adaptation while emphasising shared motifs and similarities. As Richard Hand and Jay McRoy put it, 'a myth lives, and the "truth" of it is not to be found in the earliest version but, as Lévi-Strauss claims, in all its versions' (2). Baldick, also citing Lévi-Strauss, carries this argument even further, suggesting that 'the mythic value of myth remains preserved, even through the worst translation' (2). But we find this statement highly problematic for the study of adaptation, since the 'translation' is exactly the thing we are hoping to study.¹¹

When scholars identify Frankenstein adaptations as iterations of a myth they tend to ignore the specific *tellings* in favour of defining an archetypal or overarching and generalised version of the myth. This is exactly what Baldick's 'skeleton story' is, his attempt to define the 'essence' or central motifs shared in the adaptations, since, as he argues, a myth's true substance 'does not lie in its style, its original music or its syntax, but in the story which it tells' (2). A great deal of important information is lost, however, when we ignore a particular text's style, music, or syntax. Hence Baldick's two-line 'least common denominator' version of Frankenstein is not really the 'essence' of *Frankenstein*, but simply another adaptation. In addition, nor does such a narrow reduction of the 'myth' account for various types of indirect adaptations

or appropriations, which may use some elements from a source text but not others. *I, Robot* or *Her* (2013), for instance, can certainly be read as Frankenstein stories even though the man-made beings in both of these films are not created from ‘bits of corpses’.

Moreover, a mythic approach to Frankenstein does not account for much of our pleasure with adaptations. When we read a new novel with ‘Frankenstein’ in the title, or watch a new film adaptation, we do so not only to remind ourselves of what it has in common with other texts, but also because we hope to be surprised and to find something new *combined* with something familiar. Afterwards we may return with pleasure to Shelley’s novel or to an older film, texts that we may have known for years, but that we have suddenly learned to see with new eyes. This is one of the marvellous gifts that any adaptation can offer us: the chance, the excuse, to return to a familiar text and read it or watch it over again. Perhaps this happens when we see *Young Frankenstein* and then return to the Whale films, or when we read Brian Aldiss’s *Frankenstein Unbound* (1973) and then return to Shelley’s novel. And the pleasure we experience is usually not found in either text alone but, rather, in between them, in the places where the texts meet in shocking dissonance or unexpected harmony.¹² Any new adaptation of *Frankenstein* will, no doubt, introduce new elements, but will also steal parts from the still living body of work that has come before.

The relationships among texts in the Frankenstein Network are complicated, to say the least. As Bakhtin put it in the early part of the twentieth century, all texts, including any new adaptations of Frankenstein, are intertexts. ‘The living utterance,’ he writes,

having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness and around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. After all, the utterance arises out of this dialogue as a continuation of it and as a rejoinder to it – it does not approach the object from the sidelines. (*The Dialogic* 276–77)

In effect, Bakhtin defines the Frankenstein Complex here. So, although the plot of *I, Frankenstein* (2014) may have nothing to do with the plot of Shelley’s novel, the filmmakers explicitly ask the audience to see their film in conversation or dialogue with other Frankenstein texts, including the graphic novel of the same name. And there are good artistic and practical reasons for that. The dialogues create in the minds of the viewers, at least potentially, a richness that a similar fantasy film without these sorts of explicit dialogues might lack. Shelley herself, in fact, began this dialogic process by incorporating into her novel Giovanni Aldini’s radical experiments in galvanism, the Prometheus myth, Rousseauian philosophy, *Paradise Lost* (1667), the Faust legend, *Caleb Williams* (1794), and arguably François-Félix Nogaret’s *Le Miroir des événements actuels, ou La Belle au plus offrant* (1790)¹³ and Senjūshō’s ‘Making a Humanoid at Mt Kōya’ (ca. 13th century),¹⁴ among others. The more of these texts that a reader of

Shelley's *Frankenstein* has in her or his mind – the more, in other words, they are part of the reader's Frankenstein Complex – the more likely those texts will be drawn into conversation with each other. This dialogue between texts is precisely the locus for intertextual adaptation studies.

And the 'influence' which these texts have on each other, based on an individual's Frankenstein Complex, likely has little to do with the historical order in which they appeared. Anyone who reads Shelley's novel for the first time today inevitably brings to it their own version of the Complex. The consequence of this saturation is that our various experiences with Frankenstein bring emotional and intellectual baggage with them that inescapably conditions our reactions to the new adaptations which we encounter. Such an intertextual definition of our relationship with proliferating Frankenstein adaptations becomes a natural model for our approach to Frankenstein in this study, since the Complex approach to Frankenstein suggests that the 'meaning' of any given text is to be found not in the text itself, but only in its relationship to other texts around it. Frankenstein, in fact, may offer the adaptation version of the 'wave-particle duality' found in physics, in that individual texts may be studied as 'particles', discrete from other texts, or as part of a 'wave' of texts, all interrelated. Just as physicists have had to come to terms with the fact that the definition of light depends on how it is studied, so those approaching the vast Frankenstein Network will inevitably need to come to terms with intertextual relationships to explore its 'wave' effect.

In the twenty-first century that network has become increasingly more complicated as Frankenstein has been reimagined in many novel environments. These include providing new back stories for characters such as Igor (*Victor Frankenstein* 2015), featuring the monster in comic-styled supernatural action adventures (*I, Frankenstein* 2014), updating the science used to create the Creature (*Frankenstein* 2015), building a family drama in which a dead cop is brought back to life to try to mend his ways (*Second Chance* 2016), making Frankenstein into a 200-year-old who uses his techniques to keep himself alive while creating an army of 'monsters' in a plot to rule the world (*Frankenstein* 2004), turning the tale into a dark, Victorian detective television series (*Penny Dreadful* 2014–16, *The Frankenstein Chronicles* 2015–), setting the key characters in a fairy tale to help the evil Maleficent (*Once Upon a Time* 2011–), historicising post-World War II as a grisly, camp, gore-fest (*Frankenstein's Army* 2013), targeting mass audiences with animated comedy adaptations (*Hotel Transylvania* 2012, *Igor* 2008), and, harkening back to James Whale's masterpieces, animating with stop-motion a boy's attempts to bring his dead dog back to life (*Frankweenie* 2012). While adaptations in the 1960s and 1970s added sexuality to Frankenstein (*Flesh for Frankenstein* 1973), contemporary adaptations often push the boundaries of violence and gore, add human interest and dark mystery, and appeal to children. Perhaps most significant is how television has begun finally to invest in the Frankenstein franchise with expensive, well-produced series. In the past, aside from children's Saturday-morning animated shows like *Frankenstein Jr. and the Impossibles* (Hannah-Barbara 1966) and *Milton the Monster* (Seeger Productions 1965), television only periodically came out with films

that were, for the most part, not innovative. Clearly the Frankenstein Network 'is alive' and well in a broad variety of inventive adaptations.

The present study includes chapters in five categories of adaptation media: dramatic presentations on stage and radio, cinema and television, literature, illustrations and comics, and new media. Part I, on stage and radio, begins with two chapters on nineteenth-century stage adaptations by Lissette Lopez Szwydky and Glenn Jellenik, who explore how these become models of adapting Shelley's novel to various media, particularly film, identifying ways in which addressing audience-specific needs have been a crucial component to the ongoing fascination with Frankenstein. While Szwydky (Chapter 1) focuses on the early key innovations to Shelley's story in Peake's *Presumption* and other early nineteenth-century stage adaptations that eventually became foundational in subsequent adaptations in various media, Jellenik (Chapter 2) approaches Peake's play in terms of its intertextual model of adaptation, claiming that the play created Shelley's *Frankenstein* as much as the novel structured the play. Laurence Raw (Chapter 3) then analyses a companion media, radio, in terms of its special conventions relevant to its more general listenership, particularly noting how radio adaptations reflect their historical and cultural contexts.

Film and television, arguably the most influential genres of Frankenstein adaptations, are covered in Part II through crucial moments as they have developed from the 1950s to our day, reflected through the lens of modern critical theory. Dennis R. Perry (Chapter 4) looks at how *Forbidden Planet* (1956), a science fiction film not before linked to Frankenstein, explores the Atomic Scientist Movement's attempt to wrest control of the bomb from the military as a reflection of the Frankenstein power motifs in the film. Kyle Bishop (Chapter 6), on the other hand, examines television, an under-explored medium of Frankenstein adaptations. TV adaptations of *Frankenstein*, he argues, tend to be more fragmented and tangential than full-length films, often appearing as special episodes in series like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *X-Files*. Unsurprisingly, Victor and his monster seem quite at home within the fragmented structure of television. Morgan C. O'Brien (Chapter 5) traces the production paper trail to unfold how Hammer Studios made Shelley's tale meaningful to a post-World War II audience and simultaneously effected a paradigm shift in horror films generally. Also looking at Hammer's Frankenstein franchise, Maria K. Bachman and Paul Peterson (Chapter 8) view these films within an evolutionary context which is focused almost exclusively on the creator, rather than the Creature. They argue how and why Hammer makes the scientist the monster and his creation the victim. Further blurring the boundaries between the creator and the created, Matt Lorenz, too (Chapter 7), focuses on two indirect adaptations (*I, Robot* and *X-Men First Class*) to examine questions of the psychological creation of the Creature character, rather than merely its physical creation.

Literary adaptations of *Frankenstein* (Part III) discover a range between new identities (personal and literary), and the function of mad scientists. While Farran Norris Sands (Chapter 11) examines mad scientists in young-adult dystopian literature, wherein

the Frankenstein figure, not his creation, becomes the locus of cultural anxieties and a harbinger of the apocalypse, Jessica Straley (Chapter 11) looks at how children's books have appropriated the Frankenstein monster's 'glorious grossness' as children's comedy, at the same time helping young readers examine infirmities, diets, and what counts as a normal body. Jamie Horrocks (Chapter 9) explores how new adult literary genres, like neo-Victorian novels,¹⁵ use the Frankenstein trope as models for textual resurrection – an apt allegorisation of this emergent literary genre. The creation of Frankenstein's Creature becomes a symbol for the textual reincarnation that takes place in neo-Victorian literature on both narrative and meta-narrative levels. Carol Davison (Chapter 10) examines Scotland's featured role in Shelley's novel in terms of Scottish literary reimaginings of the bride motif in *Frankenstein* in order to engage issues surrounding transgressive female power in relation to Scottish history, politics, and national identity. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Chapter 13), on the other hand, examines H.P. Lovecraft's Frankenstein-inspired tale, 'Herbert West – Reanimator', in terms of the new object-oriented materialism theory, noting how Frankenstein tales tend to demolish human exceptionalism.

Art and comic adaptations of Frankenstein (Part IV) often become metaphors for the monster's creation itself from used body parts. Kate Newell (Chapter 14) suggests the term 'repurposing' to describe how illustrations for various editions of Shelley's novel are sometimes recycled or recaptioned – like old body parts – and then applied to different moments in the book. She nicely defines how the choice and use of illustrations can reinforce an essential reading of the novel or suggest new ways of apprehending it. In a similar way, Joe Darowski (Chapter 15) discovers in issues of Marvel's *X-Men* both an alien Frankenstein monster and an articulate leader of a subterranean race. In classic comic book fashion, the monster is repurposed to fit the fanciful Marvel universe of changelings and mutants. Finally, Veronique Bragard and Catherine Thewissen (Chapter 16) note similar repurposing with the un-superhero-like Frankenstein monsters found in *bande dessinées* Franco-Belgian comics. Here forlorn monsters, often traumatised outsiders, struggle to find their place in lonely landscapes and in solitude.

In Part V Kelly Jones' chapter (Chapter 18) moves firmly into the twenty-first century, examining live-broadcast stage and television productions in terms of the uncanny effects of the theatrical Gothic as a product of its 'liveness'. More specifically, she emphasises the effect produced on the audience by the horrific playfulness of the corresponding liveness of monster and medium. Tully Barnett and Ben Kooyman (Chapter 17), on the other hand, consider how the themes of Shelley's novel interact with notions of hybrid textuality in Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* (1995) and Dave Morris's *Frankenstein* iPad app (2012). Both of these texts, Barnett and Kooyman argue, create new media identities that explore the boundaries of the human offered by an engagement with digital frameworks for storytelling. Richard Hand (Afterword) wraps up the book by turning our attention briefly to the unexplored range of the Frankenstein Network. He touches on pop-culture Frankenstein ephemera, including *Night Gallery* (1969–73) shorts, a *Black Mirror* (2011–) episode, political campaign

appearances, and a surprising number of Frankenstein adaptations premiering at the 2016 Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

Shaping many of these studies of adaptation, and linking them to their various critical perspectives, is a crucial dimension of the Frankenstein Complex: the monster's patchwork creation. This, in fact, is a central feature of adaptation itself. In this sense, of course, we are following in Shelley's own footsteps, as she appropriated a number of sources in creating her masterpiece. This collection is intended to broaden the scope of future research on Frankenstein by focusing on the important relationships between texts, especially as they are processed in the minds of their diverse audiences and demonstrate the Frankenstein Complex at work.

Notes

- 1 The sheer number of adaptations in virtually every medium makes the Frankenstein phenomenon difficult to approach, to say the least. In fact, it is hard to know exactly what we mean even when we do something as simple as write the word 'Frankenstein'. Are we referring to Shelley's novel, a particular adaptation, the popular culture phenomenon, or something else entirely? To lessen confusion we have adopted the convention of writing 'Dr Frankenstein' or 'Victor Frankenstein' when referencing the character, '*Frankenstein*' or 'Shelley's *Frankenstein*' when discussing the novel, '*Frankenstein* (1931)' when dealing with specific film adaptations, the 'Frankenstein Complex' when referring to a given person's personal experience with Frankenstein, and the 'Frankenstein Network' or simply 'Frankenstein' when working with the body of related texts that are the subject of this collection.
- 2 Paul Davis has suggested that Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* should hold this title, and he may be right. Both *Carol* and *Frankenstein* are unquestionably culture-texts that continue to generate adaptations on a regular basis.
- 3 As of September 2016 the IMDB lists six films (*I, Frankenstein*, *Victor Frankenstein*, *Frankenstein*, *Baby Frankenstein*, *Frankenstein's Monster*, and *Frankenstein Created Bikers*) released in 2014–16, and no fewer than five new Frankenstein films in development. In addition, it lists two new television series adaptations, ITV's *Frankenstein Chronicles* (2015–) and Fox's *Second Chance* (2016), as well as dozens of individual television episodes with 'Frankenstein' in the title. It also notes *Frankenstein*, a full-length ballet production by Lian Scarlett (2016), as well as several live simulcasts.
- 4 We, along with Thomas Leitch and others, 'begin with the axiom that adaptation is a subset of intertextuality – all adaptations are obviously intertexts'. ('Adaptation and Intertextuality' 89)
- 5 For a discussion of the notion of a 'two-way' change see page 25 of Kamilla Elliott's 'Theorizing Adaptations/Adapting Theories'.
- 6 The order of reception may be more important here than the order of production.
- 7 See, for example, Mellor (48–59).
- 8 One actually has the impression when watching both of these adaptations that if Frankenstein had had access to quality day care the resulting problems never would have arisen.
- 9 As in the work of Randel (195).

- 10 We note that two of these films, *The Bourne Identity* and *Jurassic Park*, were adapted from novels by Robert Ludlum and Michael Crichton, making the question of adaptation that much more complicated for these films. Were Ludlum and Crichton influenced by Shelley? Did the film adaptations bend toward Frankenstein and away from the ostensible source texts? The potential points of influence, if not infinite, are certainly numerous.
- 11 While Frankenstein likely does *function* as a myth in contemporary culture, we need to recognise what myths are in order to understand what that means. Myths are not, as Lévi-Strauss would have us believe, timeless truths, unbound by culture or language, and able to survive ‘even the worst translation’. Folklorist George Schoemaker defines myth, as many folklorists would, as a ‘sacred narrative ... about the beginnings of things’, and often associated with ‘ritual and ceremony’ (237). In most of its iterations Frankenstein certainly is a story about the beginning of something, a creation story, if you will. And this is, perhaps, the most valuable reason to identify Frankenstein as a myth. If Frankenstein is about the creation of new life, or even the creation of a new kind of being, then it is a myth in this technical sense of the word. Professor of religion Robert A. Segal, in a broader definition of ‘myth’, begins by suggesting that myths are stories ‘about something significant’, in which the main figures are personalities rather than ‘impersonal forces’ (4–5). That part of Segal’s definition would apply to many narratives, but he goes on to propose that myth ‘accomplishes something significant for adherents’, who deeply believe and hold to the myth ‘tenaciously’ (6). Hence, the Frankenstein phenomenon functions as something like a myth for millions of readers, listeners, and viewers in that it expresses, through narrative and characters, central, or even core beliefs that many people find deeply significant.
- 12 Linda Hutcheon goes a long way toward defining what is, perhaps, the central pleasure of adaptations, generally, and at least some of the pleasure we derive from adaptations of Frankenstein. She argues that imitation is second nature for human beings, something we do largely without thinking (20). In short, we love repetition because it is safe and predictable, but it is also boring. And we enjoy variation, though it can be chaotic and frightening. It’s ironic that Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, which may be the most adapted literary text ever written, concerns itself precisely with the creation of a copy of a human being, but one who is deeply uncanny, since he is both familiar, and yet quite different from other humans. The monster, in short, is himself a living, breathing adaptation.
- 13 See Julia Douthwaite and Daniel Richter, ‘The Frankenstein of the French Revolution: Nogaret’s Automaton Tale of 1790.’ *European Romantic Review*. 20.3 (2009): 381–411.
- 14 Thanks to Professor Jack Stoneman for introducing us to this tale.
- 15 Neo-Victorian novels and films have become, themselves, the subjects of adaptation studies, and Imelda Whelehan has pointed out that they have ‘garnered an astonishing amount of interest and yet, in common with adaptation, the area inspires fascination and loathing in equal parts’ (272).

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