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Reorienting the Gaze: Monstrous Bodies in Remediations of *Frankenstein*

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Visual adaptations of the Frankenstein myth highlight the role of ocularcentrism and scopophilic power play. By engaging with the concept of the gaze, this paper analyzes remediations of Mary Shelley's masterpiece and discusses how visual narratives frame potentially monstrous bodies in order to assimilate or question traditional privileged visions and their construction of *otherness*, as well as to (re)orient spectators towards recognition of or detachment from the onscreen monster. It will address particularly relevant examples: Edison's *Frankenstein*, the YouTube series *Frankenstein M.D.*, Whale's and Branagh's iconic remediations, as well as the less known *Murders of the Rue Morgue* and *Frankenhooker*. Ultimately, this work will vindicate the role of remediations as an arena within which contemporary imaginaries regarding otherness and who holds the visual and narrative power are either legitimized or challenged.

Keywords: frame; otherness; orientation; phallogocentric; recognition

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Reorientando la mirada: cuerpos monstruosos en las remediaciones de *Frankenstein*

Las adaptaciones visuales del mito de Frankenstein resaltan el ocularcentrismo y poder escópico dentro del mismo. A través de consideraciones en torno a la mirada, este artículo analiza remediaciones de la obra de Mary Shelley y presenta la forma en que las narrativas visuales enmarcan cuerpos potencialmente monstruosos para asimilar o cuestionar la visión

tradicional privilegiada y su construcción de la *otredad*, y para re-orientar a la audiencia hacia el reconocimiento o el distanciamiento de los monstruos en pantalla. Se tratarán ejemplos relevantes como el *Frankenstein* de Edison, la serie de YouTube *Frankenstein M.D.*, las remediaciones icónicas de Whale y Branagh, así como las menos conocidas *Murders of the Rue Morgue* y *Frankenbooker*. En última instancia, reivindicará que las remediaciones son capaces de legitimar o subvertir el imaginario colectivo concerniente a la otredad y a quién ostenta el poder visual y narrativo.

Palabras clave: marco; otredad; orientación; falocular; reconocimiento

I. INTRODUCTION: FROM PAGE TO SCREEN

Writing on fiction, Patricia Waugh reflects that “life, as well as novels, is constructed through frames” (1984, 19), and in both scenarios this framing is understood to organize experience to “facilitate action and involvement in a situation” (30). As such, no literary or life experience is unmediated, given that we attempt to perceive and give sense to it. In Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818) narrative frames feature predominantly, and there are no innocent storytellers. Each of the three male narrators—Walton, Frankenstein and the creature—presents events through their own lens, and as readers we are made aware of their biased visions, each frame mediating its narrator and his circumstances. Audiences also work within varying frames. Who the monster really is fluctuates as the observer’s view of the scientist and his creation changes, while the sense of sight takes on huge importance as the source of horror or desire.

Frankenstein’s translation into pictorial remediations necessarily implies a greater reliance on the visual element, materializing images evoked in her readers’ imagination solely by Shelley’s descriptions in that they

foreground for the viewer precisely what the novel largely hides from the reader. By forcing us to face the monster’s physical repulsiveness, which he can never deny or escape and which aborts his every hope of gaining sympathy, [these visual] versions of *Frankenstein* prompt us to rethink his monstrosity in terms of visualization: how do we see the monster, what does he see, and how does he want to be seen? (Heffernan 2012, 445)

As the creature’s developed rhetoric mostly disappears in the films,¹ to answer these questions every new version draws from the plethora of previous adaptations, hence creating a cumulative *ocular* hypotext (Stam 2005, 31) or a form of universal *visual* cultural currency (Leitch 2007, 123). Given the “pictorial realization” of the novel that audiovisual media specifically entail (Leitch 2007, 97), such adaptations support the *ocularcentric* perspective that dominates Western culture (Jay 1994), playing visually with the spectator’s ability to perceive the creature as different, as *other*, as well as to identify with and project their gaze through the ideal ego on the screen, usually played by a male lead (Mulvey 1988, 63). As the body is “the primary referent in visually grounded categorizations of people” (Weedon 1999, 99), this framing pre-eminence moreover entails a *phallogocular* approach to the dichotomous monstrous/normative bodies. Irigaray sees this predominance of the visual as a colonizing gaze, given that in this patriarchal “dominant scopic economy” woman is consigned to “passivity” in that she is fetishized by male active and erotic specular pleasure as “the beautiful object of contemplation” (1985, 26). Yet she is also *other*, one to be controlled and

¹ Thus denying the audience a film’s “vococentrism,” a source for “spectatorial identification” according to Stam (2005, 36) and having them rely more heavily on the visual.

framed because of the fear a woman's body inspires in the male viewer (Mulvey 1988, 64). Woman's otherness is, then, read in terms of deviance or monstrosity (Braidotti 1994, 83), whilst it is still capable of arousing desire in viewers. Both aspects are present in Shelley's novel, told from the point of view of three men, thus reinforcing the phallogocentric position they have on the women framed within their narratives. The creature's observation of Safie and Agatha (Shelley [1818] 2012, 80); the reduction of Frankenstein's mother to a corpse (36) or a lovely portrait (51; 100), and of Justine to a beautiful and silent appearance before the creature seeks her disgrace (101) and she becomes a body to be "gazed on [...] by thousands" at her trial (54); Frankenstein's destruction of the inanimate female 'thing' (119); the dead body of the fiancée, first foretold then contemplated (36; 141); as well as Walton's unvoiced and disembodied female addressee, all reinforce the representation of women as predominantly silent and passive, culminating in fascination over their annihilated flesh. Theirs are bodies to be commodified (Irigaray 1985, 185), to be medicalized, opened, dissected, studied, although they nevertheless remain aesthetically pleasing (Liggins 2000, 131).

Remediations of the Frankenstein myth are informed by notions of the medicalized and monstrous female body, as well as by the urtext's phallogocentric presentation of the narrative. Most belong to the genre of horror, and, moreover, expose these bodies for the audience's consumption with a mixture of pleasure and disgust (Picart 2003, 5), based on recognition and detachment from what we perceive as ourselves but also the other. Women in these texts, often reduced to their bodies, "become objects of both fascination and aberration," simply "metaphoric others, reflecting the dominant subject's own concerns and anxieties" while spectators "identify with them, out of fear or fascination" (Braidotti 2014, 3). In these narratives, which have become part of the social imaginary, these female others "offer sites of formation of negative counter-subjectivities; they provide privileged negative *mirror-images*, often expressed in terms of monstrous and alien others" (Braidotti 2014, 3, italics added). This dual source of pleasure and fear, based on the power of an imaginary made possible by this phallogocentric economy, supports Laura Mulvey's classic analysis of the gaze in film in terms of power and narrative, sometimes supporting the male/female dichotomy as, respectively, *gazer/gazed* or *subject/object*, at others (re)positioning these classifications and destabilizing or even subverting such a reading. For if human experience is "always worldly, situated, and embodied"; if it is "the lived experience of inhabiting a body," then repeated and habitual actions such as female objectification contribute to "shaping [such] bodies" as well as the "worlds" they inhabit (Ahmed 2006, 544). Therefore, to destabilize the habitual gaze and its actions is to reshape how we experience life, our body and its closeness or distance from other bodies.

At the same time, this (re)orientation complicates the audience's process of recognition. Rita Felski identified recognition as one of the uses of literature, for the text enables "cognitive *insight*" and acknowledgment, often triggering a "spectrum of emotional reactions" (2008, 29; italics added). It becomes a mirror in which readers can

look at themselves, building affiliation and self-acknowledgment (33). Visual narratives have the same effect, perhaps even to a greater degree given the sensorial elements (image, music) that heighten the process of intellectual or emotional involvement. However, the opposite may also be true when the narrative deliberately constructs an *other* with whom recognition is not encouraged, detachment or estrangement being emphasized instead. In a phallogocultural culture this usually involves recognizing oneself as spectator within the male privileged vision from which these narratives are usually introduced whilst orienting oneself away from the other, objectifying it to prevent any form of personal recognition. Meanwhile, and still assuming the position of the gazer, these narratives build varied degrees of empathy through which recognition with the monstrous other is nevertheless possible, therefore creating opposing forces that orient the audience both *towards* and *away* from the object of visual desire and fear, forces of similarity and difference. An obvious example is when in such instances of Frankensteinian horror audiences either look away or lean in: it is a physical re-orientation triggered by fear or empathy, the wish to escape the vision that horrifies them, but also to engage with the suffering experienced through recognition with any of the *monsters*: the creature, the mad scientist, the woman.

These three categories indeed permeate the tradition of the Frankenstein myth and its innumerable audiovisual adaptations. When working from the Aristotelian conception of the monstrous as deviation from the norm, that which does not conform to the *natural order*, women and deviant male figures stand as sexual or cultural others to the normative man who occupies the core of an androcentric world. This monster can “exceed masculinity or femininity or dangerously mixes them [...] unsettling the boundaries between sexual identity and difference” (Picart 2003, 6). Women and the anti-normative males are, from this point of view, the very definition of a monster: a concept that men need to tell themselves what they are not (5). Monsters indeed remind viewers what they are not, but also, in a Ciceronian sense of the monstrous as omen, what they might become (6), or even who they already are. Picart points out that visual media provide a well-suited frame for these monsters given the etymological origin of the word as both *monere* (warn) and *monstrare* (show) (6-7): they can be visually staged, superimposing “monstration” on “narration” (Stam 2005, 35). Indeed, film’s “embodiedness” or “inescapable materiality” in comparison to literature (Stam 2005, 6) reaches its peak in “monster movies,” which often address the mind/body duality or even (re/mis)incarnation, the Frankenstein franchises among them (Leitch 2007, 106). Monsters in these narratives become “uncomfortable ‘body-doubles’ or simulacra that simultaneously attract and repel, comfort and unsettle: they are objects of adoration and aberration that play upon the deeper structures of our sense of identity” (Braidotti 2014, 4), uniting recognition and detachment, sameness and otherness. For Braidotti, the “metamorphic dimension fulfils another function, in that the monstrous triggers the *recognition* of a sense of multiplicity contained

within the same self. It is an entity whose multiple parts are neither totally merged nor totally separate from the human *observer*" (4, italics added).

Framed within these considerations, several remediations of the Frankenstein myth will be analysed to evince the ways in which these varied visual narratives force spectators to (re)orient themselves towards these potential monstrous bodies, either assimilating or questioning the traditional privileged male vision and its construction of otherness, while they share or reject the positioning developed through the visual narrative within the context of the Western scopic economy and recognize themselves (or not) in the deviant and rejected onscreen monsters. Following a chronological approach, in each remediation the position and reading of the fe/male body will be addressed and contextualized, highlighting aspects such as visual framing and how it reflects societal considerations. Taken together, these adaptations will, moreover, be shown to be part of that cumulative hypotext that the Frankenstein myth has become.

2. THE MONSTROUS MALE AND THE FEMINIZED BODY

In its thirteen minutes, the first film adaptation of Shelley's classic offers an enlightening triangle based on gendered otherness which it builds not only verbally, but, more importantly, visually. Produced by Thomas Edison, *Frankenstein* (1910) opens with the eponymous ambitious and obsessed student writing to Elizabeth to postpone his wedding. This surrender of his sanctioned patriarchal—and heterosexual—role already marks the scientist as an ambiguous, deviant, or monstrous figure, which is reinforced by his usurping of Elizabeth's potential motherhood through becoming himself the creator of life. Visually, the creature appears as a skeleton on which flesh progressively develops, contained in a tank of liquid within a metal structure resembling a mechanical womb, recalling the development of a foetus. Furthermore, if traditional theories inherited from Shelley's time pointed at the mother as almost solely responsible for the normal/abnormal psyche of her offspring (Davidoff and Hall 2002, 335), Frankenstein has become identified with women as a container of evil that can be passed on to his creation, thus producing a monster. The intertitles read: "Instead of a perfect human being *the evil in Frankenstein's mind creates a monster*"; "Frankenstein appalled at the *sight of his evil creation*" (italics added). Connecting with Lilith, Eve, Pandora and other potential creators of life associated with deviance from what is normative and *good*, he becomes an Aristotelian monster: the feminized other, that which is not the androcentric measure of all things, and which becomes, in a phallogocultural culture, a "silent image" (Mulvey 1988, 58).

Although the novel has been read as a "demonstration that positions of specularities are not gender-specific" (London 2012, 400), in this remediation Frankenstein's evil feminization is connected to his departure from the role of active gazer and the male body's positioning in art, reinforced visually by the film's intertextual debt to Henry Fuseli's *The Nightmare* (1781). While later adaptations will return to this painting

to portray the death of Elizabeth, strengthening the traditional position of woman in modern art (Bronfen 1992), here it is the scientist who, overcome by horror at his creation, faints twice on his bed in the theatrical manner of Fuseli's dreaming woman. The Romantic object of contemplation, the immobile, subjugated yet sexually aroused woman, is replaced by the effeminate and elegant man of science, reversing the eighteenth-century association of the female body with strong, debilitating passions. Moreover, the director preserves almost the exact layout of the painting, including the curtains, which now part to reveal not the dark and powerful horse of the original, but another symbol of disturbing masculine prowess: the creature, as described in the novel (Shelley 2012, 36). As his creation—a double or extension of himself—this visual representation would seem to extend the novel's "specularization of masculinity, its story of the male creator making a spectacle of himself" (London 2012, 394-95), for women are largely absent from novel and film alike, both forms dwelling on the creator and the creature gazing at each other, and being gazed at by the audience, to whom they become the core of the spectacle.

Being a silent film, this adaptation depends more than other rewritings on the visual, as evinced by this reinterpretation of Fuseli's work. This is made obvious as well in the use of frames which create the effect that Frankenstein adopts the position of the audience within the diegetic world. Hence the scientist observes the formation of his creature through a square window in the birth tank, and for a moment spectators share his point of view. To this end, in contrast to the book, the visual medium allows the audience to reproduce Frankenstein's first horrified reaction to his creation through this use of the subjective camera which enables spectators to experience his vantage point. Seeing what he sees, not mediated by the reliance of the literary on what words may or may not evoke in the reader's imagination, overcomes the obstacle imposed to the recognition of or identification with the scientist in the novel: how to empathize with his fainting and subsequent abandonment of the creature without completely understanding the height of his horror at this monstrous vision? During the rest of the film, however, the camera does not share his point of view, given that spectators also see the scientist framed in their screens, while he simultaneously sees the creature through windows or mirrors: he stands in front of an image, gazing through a frame, as does the audience. Frankenstein, then, stands at a liminal position between active/passive, subject/object, destabilizing the traditional dichotomy described by Mulvey (1988, 62) and recalling the ambiguity of Shelley's original scientist.

Reinforcing this ambiguous reading, the creature is recurrently presented not only as the opposite of the feminized Frankenstein, or even the bridal Elizabeth,² but also as the projection of the scientist's own mind (Buenza 2018, 180; 182), his double in a Jekyll-and-Hyde fashion. Margaret Homans underlines the narcissistic, and largely

² Buena indicates how the two characters replace each other in the mirror, and in terms of Frankenstein, how the mirror depicts the good and bad side of his mind (2018, 182).

misogynistic, substructure of Shelley's novel by stating that the scientist wishes to "do away, not only with the mother, but also with all females so as to live finally in a world of mirrors that reflect a comforting illusion of the male self's independent wholeness" (1993, 169). Indeed, throughout the film large mirrors return the image of the creature rather than Frankenstein's reflection, while windows constantly frame the creature in mirror-like fashion.³ However, this ultimately proves far from comforting, for this eradication of the female only gives way to new monsters. If the female body is the *other par excellence*, the deviant male body is also depicted as monstrous: it has lost its balance, its humanity. Frankenstein's creature as portrayed by Charles Ogle offers a two-fold reading of this otherness. On the one hand, his bulgy body, facial hair, large hands, and fur clothing highlight the creature's hypermasculinity, which echoes an animalistic nature that opposes the cultured man of society. At the end of the eighteenth century, the man of feeling, the man of fashion, was seen as assimilating a feminized culture of sensibility (Ellis 1996, 24); a culture that provided such models as Goethe's Werther, an acknowledged influence on the Godwin-Wollstonecraft circle, and one reading of Shelley's creature. If this adaptation returns to that idea in the beautiful, fashionable, and fainting Frankenstein, his creature is not a man of culture but of nature, monstrous and grotesque in its extremity. On the other hand, the creature's intent gaze on the scientist's unconscious self as he leans over Frankenstein's body places the monster in the position of the incubus and the horse in Fuseli's painting, towering over the immobile and helpless male body, thereby threatening it with the possibility of possession. In this sense, the film visually reinforces the homoerotic scopic pulsion that could be read into the relationship between Frankenstein and his creature, for in this case vision is not mediated or framed by a mirror which returns oneself, but is the direct contemplation of another's lifeless body. In this contemplation, the position of gazer and gazed at are interchanged as they were in the novel: while at the beginning the creator towered over and "beheld [...] the lifeless thing" (Shelley 2012, 35), in the end it is the creature who "hung over" the "lifeless form of his creator" (158), a scene accurately reproduced in this remediation. In the context of a horror film, this instability of the gaze heightens the unease of viewers at this detachment from "the bearer of the look of the spectator," in Mulvey's words (1988, 63), who is now the sexualized object. It demonstrates that (scopic) power is never stable and can be subverted.

In the end, Frankenstein's visual association between these two forms of otherness is counteracted by him returning to his place at the side of Elizabeth in order to fulfil his sexual and social duties: "On the bridal night Frankenstein's better nature asserting itself"; "The creation of an evil mind is overcome by love and disappears." These intertitles, and even the coeval promotional brochure, underline this reading (Buenza 2018, 175): his creature will vanish once Frankenstein renounces his *abnormal* orientation, his monstrous desires and behavior. The monster will disappear from the

³ The scenic device of the mirror appears often in the doppelgänger theme (Buenza 2018, 179-80).

reflection, which now only returns the image of Frankenstein embracing his bride. He is now unambiguously the active gazer, she is the passive object of contemplation who lets herself fall into her lover's arms to be supported: Elizabeth's redeeming role is fulfilled because she is the bride in white, beautiful, passive and mute.⁴ She is Fuseli's woman, the object of fetishist scopophilia whose physical beauty is heightened and enjoyed (Mulvey 1988, 64). Subsequent adaptations, from Whale to Branagh, will again return this role to Frankenstein's fiancée, but with an important difference: this voyeuristic pleasure will be intertwined with violence and death, as Frankenstein's original trauma in relation to women is acted out on the "guilty object" that is the female body (Mulvey 1988, 64).⁵

3. GAZING AT THE FEMALE CORPSE: BETWEEN HORROR AND DESIRE

Much has been written about James Whale's iconic *Frankenstein* (1931); less known is a film that owes much to it, *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (Florey 1932), an interesting hybrid between Shelley and Edgar Allan Poe. The story revolves around Dr Mirakle, played by an always unnerving Bela Lugosi, who kidnaps and experiments on prostitutes to prove the theory of evolution by replicating the lost stage between gorilla and human, mixing their respective blood. Obsessed with finding a pure woman whose blood is not corrupted, both scientist and his pet gorilla, Erik, fixate on the beautiful Camille. Anticipating King Kong's most recognizable scene, after a pursuit across the rooftops of Paris, Camille's partner, the young scientist Pierre Dupin, saves her. The remediation of Poe's classic tale of mystery therefore becomes another instance of the influence of Shelley's masterpiece in popular culture.

While not acknowledged as part of the myth's canon, it seems impossible to deny the intertextual relationship these films establish, reinforced by the fact that both Lugosi and Robert Florey were the first choices for the roles of creature and director, which would subsequently go to Karloff and Whale, respectively. The influence of the earlier film is evident in the characterization and plot, as well as in the shared visual and cultural referents, from Expressionism to Fuseli's famous painting. Both films introduce the figure of the scientist doubling as *unnatural* human, much like his

⁴ Edison's involvement reinforces this subtext. Converted by Auguste Villers de L'Isle-Adam into a technophile Frankenstein-figure in *L'Ève future* (1886), Edison's film reverts the position of his novelistic double. If the literary character preached the supremacy of the created woman over the biological one, here Elizabeth is a redeeming character and the ideal. Whereas Villers's Hadaly was her creator's reflection, shaped to mirror his mind and moral, Elizabeth turns Frankenstein away from his narcissism and his identification with the image in the looking glass. Thus, while still vindicating the visual medium through its self-referentiality, Edison's production offers humanity and love as the balance for technological advancement. Nevertheless, the balance still corresponds to the educated man who has overcome his passive *to-be-looked-at-ness*, while the monstrous male and passive female are still at opposite ends of the spectrum, distanced from the androcentric balanced middle or measure.

⁵ Frankenstein's trauma has been identified as pertaining to the loss of his mother, his fetishism with dead women, or his fear of women's sexuality (Liggins 2000).

creature, who will stop at nothing to fulfil his ambition, which echoes Whale's film and would become paradigmatic of the later Hammer adaptations, again stressing the importance of this piece in the tradition of the mad scientist that comprises much of the myth. In addition, Lugosi's interpretation, so close to his great role as the other Gothic icon in popular culture, the 1931 *Dracula*, reinforces this uncanniness and helps establish this Shelley-inspired overreacher as a villain in the collective consciousness, at least until the 90s redeemed him as a Romantic hero (Pardo García 2005, 228).

Yet the scientist plot here offers an interesting innovation, for there are two men of science, Dr Mirakle and Dupin, fulfilling the respective roles of villain and hero, while proving how unstable that division is with regard to their phallocular approach to women's bodies. The whole film revolves around the endemic objectification of the female form, evincing the phallogocentric nature of a scopoc society. It opens with the main characters visiting the fair, where Dupin and his colleague leisurely enjoy the bodies of silent exotic dancers that are on display. Mirakle also lusts after women's bodies, although as a source of material for his experiments. His potential victims are all women of the street, of low social value like the dancers, cyphers or no-bodies who, ironically, are all too visible and embodied for societal taste. In the long-standing reading of the prostitute as physique alone and no interiority (Borham-Puyal 2020, 51-53), the film presents these marginal bodies as the prize to be claimed in a drunken brawl, as human objects to be cut and inspected, and as corpses that will be rescued from the river, where these unclaimed female bodies were often found. The phallogocular dehumanization intrinsic to the recurrent spectacle of a beautiful female corpse finds echoes in the comments of the beggars and soldiers that recover these inanimate bodies: she is just "another" corpse, a weak woman that escapes a hard life, probably a prostitute. Tellingly, they state that these corpses are always women, always young, always a pleasing dead body to recall the phallogocentric captivation and disgust that in this film is channelled once more through the male protagonist. Much like his older counterpart, Dupin displays a morbid fascination with the dead bodies of the prostitutes, often visiting the morgue to inspect them and even taking a souvenir away with him on one of these visits. Both male heroes/villains appropriate women's bodies visually, but also by fragmenting them so that they can place the stolen part under their microscope, here a phallogocentric visual instrument.

This reduction of prostitutes to their mere bodies, to flesh to be visually enjoyed or physically used, transforms them in the popular imagination in the epitome of the diseased female body and a recurrent source of male horror (Borham-Puyal 2019, 103), especially as in this case fear springs from invisibility, from the impossibility of seeing their monstrosity behind their beautiful appearance, which heightens the threat they pose to the able male bodies. Mirakle voices these concerns as he accuses a prostitute of deceiving him into trusting her appearance and reveals his belief in the contamination of their bodies: he blames them for their indecency, their sin, which has infected their blood. This corruption renders prostitutes' bodies barren and unnatural,

and therefore monstrous (Borham-Puyal 2019, 102). Consequently, both as women and defective subjects in terms of the experiment, they are discarded and thrown into the river. In contrast, Camille is visually constructed as the Madonna in the traditional dichotomy, as the heroine with whom to identify: she is dressed in white, uncorrupted and preserved from sordidness, appealing, but never as the *other* women. In her role of virtuous woman and, indeed, potential wife, her body will be spared, and she will even be granted a voice; albeit used for little more than rejecting Mirakle and his gorilla's unwanted advances or screaming for help. Moreover, when the beast breaks into her flat and kills her mother, she falls senseless on the bed, in true Fuseli fashion, only to be carried away unconscious by the creature so that Dupin might redeem himself as the prototypical hero. She might be a purer or more desirable body, but she still plays the role of silent object, of the reward on which the hero sets his eyes, which triggers the male adventure in traditional narratives (Green 1991, 58; 72).

Ultimately, Mirakle is killed by his creature, by pure inhuman excess: his simian, recognized together with women by Donna Haraway as "monsters," "boundary creatures [...] which have a destabilizing place in the great Western evolutionary, technological and biological narratives" (1991, 2). Recalling Ogle's animalistic rendition and even the coeval simian Hyde in Mamoulian's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1931), Erik is a very recognizable other but also the embodiment of the lust and violence that lurked in his master, symbolized by the latter's facial hair, his long eyebrows, the shadows that strongly mark his facial features. This animalistic drive finally eradicates the threat of the unnatural human, the Aristotelic monster, while both succumb to the more cultured and visually refined man, Dupin. In fact, this triumph is signalled by the fact that Mirakle very fittingly concludes the narrative as a corpse in the morgue, therefore effectively closing the circle from gazer and doctor to a passive and silent object to be violated, dissected and observed. Yet a similar closure and safety seems to elude women, for the victor, Dupin, whose name evokes the epitome of the detective and hence the seer, will continue to hold his gaze over passive female bodies, whether his girlfriend, the dancers, or the female corpses that populate detective fiction for the spectators' pleasure and horror.

This combination of desire and unease also defines *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), in which the power of ocularcentrism is explicitly addressed, building bridges with previous and later versions in its representation of the female dead body. At the core of the novel, the creature recalls his acceptance by a blind man in contradistinction to the cruelty of those who can see (Shelley 2012, 94). This version recovers that episode and fully humanizes the creature, who could barely speak in the first film, by his interaction with the blind musician: his escape from ocularcentric societal assessment enables him to be read as more than a monstrous other, permitting a form of recognition with the now speaking, eating, drinking and smoking creature. Yet this respite from the framing of the gaze is only granted to the male: the eponymous bride will never escape the scopic economy, nor will the other female bodies. The film again emphasizes the

objectification of women in the dolls Dr Pretorius—a darker, older scientist that resembles Mirakle—creates, a dancer and a siren in stereotypical phallogocentric fantasy, who experience male lust and must be kept away from men. This remediation, moreover, evokes Dupin’s necrophiliac connotations via Pretorius’s obsession with the corpse of a young girl, Madeleine, whom both the scientist and the creature admire as beautiful and a prospective mate for the monster. Moreover, the potential corruption of the female body is again present in an interesting echo of Universal’s earlier horror film, for the name Madeleine is a variant of Magdalene, the Biblical character which the Catholic tradition portrays as a prostitute and who has become fixed as such in the popular imagination. It is to this tangible threat of decay or the frailty of female morals that Pretorius seems to answer when he expresses the hope her bones are still firm. The quality of her body is tantamount for her to become an eligible mate for the creature; the composite of female human parts is reduced to merely that once she becomes the Bride and is finally and literally embodied after being just a reference in the title or an unfulfilled threat for most of the film. She is meant to be seen, but not heard (Hawley 2015, 222).

Indeed, scopophilia frames the whole film, its most evident instances being at the beginning and the end, with the doubles Mary Shelley/Bride played by Elsa Lancaster. This version very conspicuously embodies the writer, for while in Whale’s previous version she is credited as “Mrs. Percy B. Shelley” she is now “Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley,” and together with a full name that echoes the mother of feminism, she is given a body to be both desired and feared in her dual nature as sexualized object and powerful writer.⁶ With references to her delicate white fingers, which were able to create the monster, the female body is identified as potentially deviant, the source of nightmares. She is an intellectual being whose head is praised by Byron, who nevertheless also fixates on her physical attributes. In this sense, Mary is portrayed both as angel in the house and temptress, which is echoed in Lancaster’s later performance: the female monster is the bride in white, the potential angel to the creature. There is, however, one important difference: similar to her novelistic counterpart, the Bride is pure body, given that her intellect is never developed before she is destroyed at the hands of a man. She is beautiful and strange, fearful yet appealing under the gaze of both scientists, the creature and the audience. She remains inarticulate, mechanical, a doll-like figure with no possibility of becoming human beyond being a mere product, in contrast to what the male creature achieves. In both the title and the advertising that surrounded the film, the Bride seemingly takes centre stage; however, she is in reality a mere footnote to the men’s story and the silent object of anticipated enjoyment that typical horror slogans provided: in the promotional poster, the Bride was said to be “more fearful than the monster himself,” yet she was visually consumed and then destroyed. The only

⁶ This visualizes the scholarly debate on the visibility and (textual) embodiment of Percy and Mary Shelley. See London 2012, 396-401.

relevant female presence remains the disembodied intellect of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, the woman behind the story who outlives her creatures and through narrative escapes her initial scopic value, while her female creation stands as a surrogate to be devoured by the avid eyes of the male gazers.

4. EXPLOITING AND POSSESSING THE FEMALE BODY

As stated above, much has been written on the desire for/fear of women's bodies in Shelley's masterpiece, both that of Elizabeth and that of the female creature, and how this results in direct physical violence and annihilation (Liggins 2000, 138). Kenneth Branagh's 1994 *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* has been heralded as the most faithful to the literary source, including its visual representation of Frankenstein's approach to the female body as a site of both fascination and aberration. Pardo García offers an insightful account of this Frankenstein's reconstruction of his ideal bride using the corpse of Justine, the maid, and Elizabeth's head, uniting his unacknowledged desire for the maid's body and his fiancée's personality and evoking prior remediations in the creator's necrophiliac desires (2005, 235-36). Yet similarities with *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957) should also be addressed. Recalling *Curse*, in which Frankenstein has an affair with a sexualized Justine while Elizabeth is the attractive yet demure future wife, Branagh's maid is reduced to her desirable body, exposed as a spectacle, a source of visual pleasure both for the masses that attend her hanging and the film's audience, while Elizabeth's head is scarred and bald, eliminating the possibility of visual enjoyment and emphasizing the love Frankenstein has only for her mind. Her lack of sexualization visually reinforces the narratives of good and bad women, moral recognition and detachment, proving that Branagh's cinematic narrative is not as progressive as it might seem. This conservative reading is reinforced by the eradication of Elizabeth's character and intelligence: that brilliant mind the spectator is meant to believe Frankenstein loves so much is gone. In Branagh's (re)construction, the strong and articulate Elizabeth is rendered speechless, while Frankenstein is obsessed with her visual recognition of him: "Say my name!" he demands, while he attempts to limit her vision to himself and not his creature. He attempts to possess not only her physical head, but her mind as well.

Interestingly, this duality mind/matter and the (re)possession of the female head/body also appears in Frank Henenlotter's low-budget *Frankenhooker* (1990), which follows Hammer's signature adjustment of the source text through sex, gore and provocative female characters (Leitch 2007, 101-102; 110). The film revolves around failed doctor and now electrician Jeffrey Franken, whose fiancée Elizabeth dies in a gruesome accident that destroys her body. Determined to bring her back to life, he develops an "estrogen-based serum" to preserve her head while he goes on a killing spree in order to later amputate parts of the bodies of dead prostitutes so as to (re)construct the slightly overweight Elizabeth in the shape of the perfect woman, a

“goddess” that resembles the models in his pornographic magazines, another instance of the phallogocentric nature of the gaze in popular media.

Frankenbooker's prostitutes are portrayed as objects for male consumption, their bodies described as meat in a market of human parts and depersonalized by the camera through close-ups of parts of their body. They are objectified fragments, never full subjects; they are “the perfect product, whose body, stylized and fragmented by close-ups, is the content of the film and the direct recipient of the spectator’s look” (Mulvey 1988, 65). Elizabeth’s head, which Jeffrey takes on dates and kisses, reinforces this fragmented, immobile, and silent female self which is idealized by the male scientist.⁷ Framed in a horror film, all of these women allow the male lead to perform the “devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object” (64), still granting him the active role and depicting high levels of the sadism identified by Mulvey as a trait of this form of voyeurism (64), for Jeffrey disturbingly enjoys his control over these bodies. However, they are transformed from an object of voyeuristic sadism, victims of his thirst for control and punishment, to the fetish of Jeffrey’s scopophilia—and necrophilia—when the fragments come into being as a unified ‘new’ Elizabeth. Nevertheless, this illusion of a reassuring object of admiration is soon replaced by a sense of threat: Elizabeth is now merely a sum of her parts, of the “many different women” she claims she feels “inside [of her],” (1:12:55-57) who are reduced to their sexual and financial drive. Consequently, the male fragmentation of the female body returns to haunt the gazer: her previously pleasurable body, built of the parts Jeffrey and the viewers have consumed, destroys the men with whom she has intercourse, in a clear allusion to the aforementioned threat posed by the diseased female body. On the other hand, while the parts of the prostitutes come back to life and kill their abusive pimp, they remain dismembered pieces, never again becoming whole but remaining elements of horror for the spectators who recoil at the sight of arms and legs crawling towards the camera, a product to enhance the spectacle of aberration and desire. In true horror fashion, the privileged gaze has constructed the metaphoric other as the embodiment of its fears—i.e., STDs, the corruption of the male body, the supersession of the virginal and wifely model by a sexually voracious woman—yet also exploited it visually as the source of its recurrent pleasure, again moving from paper to screen, only this time to transform printed into cinematic pornography.

5. REVERSING THE GAZE: FEMALE SCIENTISTS AND MALE BODIES

At the end of *Frankenbooker* the assembled Elizabeth reverses the role of scientist and creature, and to some extent also that of observer and observed. Wearing a sexy lab coat, hence still fetishized as a sexualized scientist, she appropriates Jeffrey’s resources and resuscitates him. However, his experiments were only meant to work on women,

⁷ In *The Bride*, Pretorius and the creature dine in the crypt with Madeleine’s skull.

the traditionally medicalized and pathologized beings reduced to their bodies (Liggins 2000, 130). Consequently, in a parallel narrative, she preserves his head and attaches it to a female body reconstructed from pieces of the dead prostitutes, to Jeffrey's utter dismay: castrated, he "is now the same sexualized creature he wished to enjoy [...] just one more female body that is exposed from head to toe for the audience's voyeuristic pleasure, and [...] speaks to men's greatest horror: becoming women" (Borham-Puyal 2020, 61). Recalling the fear of the female so present in the horror genre and in remediations of Shelley's novel, the gazer has been transformed into the monstrous body he wished to possess and enjoy, now a spectacle to be consumed by new gazers. At first the diseased body of the prostitute was the monstrous other that threatened the male body and reduced his pleasure at the spectacle, and therefore the voyeuristic male protagonist/spectator demanded punishment. However, now Jeffrey, very literally, embodies the fear of castration that the monstrous woman signifies in horror narratives, which is effective if the—mainly—male spectators build recognition towards the protagonist. In narratives where the initial victim becomes an emasculating female monster, female viewers achieve a sense of retaliation if they recognize themselves in the objectified bodies of characters such as Elizabeth; this recognition might thus have the cathartic effect triggered by monstrous others described by Braidotti, "as if the monster was within our embodied self, ready to unfold" (2014, 5) and lash out against the monsters that lurk in women's lives. Whilst this recognition requires (re)orienting oneself towards these monstrous women, from a phallic position, these endings merely reinforce the position of these "metaphorized, devalued others" as "objects of horror" in the Kristevan sense, placing them in a liminal stance between repulsion and attraction, embodying in their fragmented or mutated bodies the "cultural fascination with the amorphous, the shapeless and the obscene" (Braidotti 2014, 4). In-between object and subject, these female bodies are still scopically problematic.

Less ambiguously, *Frankenstein M.D.* (2014) provides a more metaphoric appropriation of the phallus by reclaiming traditional spaces of male dominance—the field of science and the lab—and the power of the gaze. This YouTube web series follows a young medical student, Victoria Frankenstein, in her attempt to succeed in the male-dominated field of STEM. She has an assistant, Iggy, and the corpse on which she experiments is that of Robert Walton, her initial cameraman. In this adaptation, Victoria is visually presented as the scientific subject—investigating and violating the male body—, while her assistant and Walton are now placed in the position of objects, the former experimented on and having to be resuscitated by Victoria, and the latter as the attractive corpse that will become a 'desirable' creature to be consumed by the targeted female audience. When Victoria experimentally paralyzes her gender-swapped friends Eli Lavenza and Rory Clerval—Elizabeth and Henry in the novel—it is the latter who more violently reacts against her forced immobility. Moreover, women are no longer visualized on the operating/dissecting table, the roles have been reversed: even if Clerval is now a deceased female friend,

Victoria resists transforming her body into ‘scientific’ matter and a new creature for Walton and the audience.⁸

Contrary to *Frankenbooker*’s Elizabeth, Victoria is no longer enacting a male-centred erotic fantasy turned horror, but rather gives visibility to another type of fear as seen by the many obstacles posed by male mentors and colleagues, who, from a phallogocentric perspective, have been in control of the position of subjects—inspecting, dissecting—and wish to hinder women’s advancement, and this includes Victoria’s own mother. Victoria’s monstrosity, her fulfilment of the ‘mad scientist’ trope, in this case unfolds not only because of her personal grief at the loss of loved ones, much like Frankenstein, but also by her need to overcome prejudices, to push the boundaries more than others do, to escape the vision of herself as an object of science instead of its subject, therefore presenting the gender inequality that drives her interaction within science as the ultimate monstrous force to be overcome. Given the mad scientist’s representation as mainly men driven by hubris (Wagner 2012), and its caricaturizing in YA literature (Norris 2015), this gender reversal and nuanced representation of the trope in a product for a younger audience characterizes these digital cultural artifacts as new “sites for the production and circulation of discourses [...] of meanings that a society considers possible (thinkable) or feasible (legitimate)” (Casetti 2004, 82), a role traditionally assigned to literature and film.

Considering the matter of recognition and the (re)positioning of the audience, if film viewers can be described as voyeurs performing “unauthorized scopophilia” (Hutcheon 2013, 132), this is increased in a digital medium, which in itself fosters greater immersion and involvement (133), but reaches its peak in the form of the fictional vlog (video blog). Audiences access Victoria’s vlog, a liminal narrative between public and private, between narrated object of contemplation and narrating subject, which enhances the possibility for them to identify with her. In addition, viewers can quite literally position themselves as part of the narrative. As Morán-Sánchez has argued, this transmedia approach enables the building of a faithful audience of thousands of subscribers who consume and engage with the web-series, commenting on the videos, and even interacting with the ‘characters’ via Twitter or other social media (2018, 74). With a final statement where she warns of the dangers of inhuman scientific development, Victoria in a way becomes an object of social study, framed by the camera in her story of ambition, fall and personal loss, yet also a role model in her attempts to answer questions from the audience and stimulate the conversation around science, stepping out of the metaphorical frames or limiting narratives traditionally established to contain women. After all, she is a creator who echoes Shelley’s own vindication of the role of women as producers of (literary) progeny (2012, 169)—even if with the anxiety that accompanies a female overreacher in a male-dominated field (Morán-Sánchez 2018, 75-76)—together with her defiance of the eradication of female visibility and

⁸ For Liggins, Clerval’s dead body becomes “feminized by the medical gaze” in the novel (2000, 140).

voice in the field of science, and in the ethical debates that develop around it, as shown by her introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein* in which she vindicates her own presence. She makes herself visible to those readers that have attributed her work to the imagination of a man:

I shall thus give a general answer to [...] ‘How I, then *a young girl*, came to think of, and to dilate upon, so very hideous an idea?’ It is true that I am very averse to *bringing myself forward in print*; but as my account will only appear as an appendage to a former production, and *as it will be confined to such topics as have connection with my authorship alone, I can scarcely accuse myself of a personal intrusion.* (2012, 165; italics added)

In her coming forward as the author, Shelley’s vision of men and science, of her society and its monsters, is presented as the framing gaze, while she creates three male figures who see and narrate, who frame the female living bodies and corpses, and whose vision is questioned. Moreover, although her language has been interpreted as playing into the stereotypes of the young and modest author (London 2012, 397), and as granting the reader power over her textual body, she nevertheless has control over this visibility, she refuses to become an object of curiosity by limiting this textual embodiment to her role as author and diminishing those played by Percy and Byron, reducing the textual presence of the Romantic male exemplar (Shelley 2012, 167; 169). Her later description of how she envisioned both scientist and creature foregrounds her shared position with Frankenstein, not the monster, as well as her female framing and possession of the promethean Romantic symbol so admired by her husband (2012, 168). In *Frankenstein M.D.* the death of Walton, the bearer of the camera/gaze in parallel to the novel’s framing narrator, and his subsequent transformation into the immobile and unseeing cadaver signals that vindication for Victoria as well, as she now takes more control over her story and, quite literally, over the gazer’s male body, which Shelley also did by overseeing the legacy of her dead husband.

6. CONCLUSIONS

As demonstrated in the previous sections, these remediations resume many of the topics developed by Shelley’s novel regarding scopic power, the feminization of silent, fragmented or immobile bodies and the horror/pleasure dichotomy awakened by the monstrous fe/male body. They also challenge assumptions and highlight the instability in the roles of gazer/gazed upon, as well as the reversal of gender roles in more contemporary remediations, enhancing processes of recognition or detachment. In doing so, they indeed show that audiovisual media can become the arena “for legitimizing or subverting contemporary imaginaries,” orienting our gaze “to consider women’s bodies as transactional objects of male desire, violence or simple use” (Gómez and Maseda 2018, 9; 12) or rather to challenge limiting frames, visual or otherwise.

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