

Beyond Adaptation: Frankenstein's Postmodern Progeny

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This chapter examines Kenneth Branagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994) in order to demonstrate how, despite the film's avowed claim to be faithful to the book, it displays important differences with it which are related to other films, not only previous adaptations of *Frankenstein*, but also contemporary adaptations of other texts—Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) in particular. After a brief overview of the Frankenstein cinematic myth, the chapter focuses on the elements apparently restored from the book but in fact transformed after Coppola's example, which turn Branagh's film into a romantic *Frankenstein*. Then it moves on to outright additions, elements which have nothing to do with the book but ultimately point to other film versions of the myth, although reinterpreted and transformed in order to produce a postmodern *Frankenstein*. The final section discusses the implications of this particular case for a theory of film adaptation and proposes a redefinition of adaptation as cultural intertextuality.

The Frankenstein Myth

When Mary Shelley referred to *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* (1818; 1831) as 'my hideous progeny' (Shelley 1993: 197), she could not be aware of how her statement would be prophetic of the cinematic afterlife of her masterpiece. Victor Frankenstein's fears about a race of monsters populating the earth have become reality in the legion of film versions of his monster haunting thousands of cinemas and in the imaginations of millions of spectators. Few books in world literature have been so constantly and intensely adapted to film, to such an extent that, as Paul O'Flinn has argued, this ceaseless reproduction has altered the perception of the literary source and engendered a multiplicity of *Frankensteins*, as many as film

adaptations have been made: ‘The fact that many people call the monster Frankenstein and thus confuse the pair betrays the extent of that restructuring’ (O’Flinn 1995: 22). To be exact, however, it is not just the literary source that has been ceaselessly reproduced: most film versions do not take Mary Shelley’s text as a point of departure, but previous film versions. In fact, what different versions have in common is not so much the book as the myth created by its dramatic and cinematic reproduction, to the extent that the book has become one more version of that myth—the founding, but not necessarily the most influential one. The mediation of myth in the transference from page to screen must be taken into account in any study of the film adaptations of *Frankenstein*, as the title of this chapter emphasises: it does not refer to *Frankenstein’s*—the book—but Frankenstein’s—the myth—progeny. Its topic is the latest adaptation by Kenneth Branagh (1994), a paradigmatic example of this mediation: the film claims to restore the myth to its original purity from the title itself—*Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein*—but in fact it adapts the myth as much as the book, and is ultimately one more version of the myth.

The story of the transformation of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* into the Frankenstein myth starts very early, with its first dramatisation by Richard Brinsley Peake in 1823, *Presumption; or, the Fate of Frankenstein*.¹ This is the beginning of the process of omission and simplification characteristic of drama and film adaptations and well summed up by Albert J. Lavalley when he writes that ‘we never see Justine and the locket that betrayed her, we never meet Walton, and no one has ever seen the Monster read *Paradise Lost* or Plutarch’ (1979: 246). Adaptations, however, also add new elements to the myth: ‘a creation scene, a wedding night scene or an abduction of the bride, and a scene of fiery destruction’ (Lavalley 1979: 245-6). The process

¹ The success of Peake’s stage adaptation led to Mary Shelley’s father arranging for a reprint of the novel (1823); a new edition, revised by Mary Shelley, was published in 1831. The Oxford University Press edition of 1993 publishes the 1818 text, with an Appendix by editor Marilyn Butler where, previous to the collation of the 1818 and 1831 texts, the types of change made in 1831 are summarised: the characters of Walton and especially Frankenstein are softened and made much more admirable, Frankenstein’s scientific education is largely rewritten and he is given an explicitly religious consciousness, and the family and their blood-ties are revised (e.g. Elizabeth is no longer Frankenstein’s cousin but a stranger). Shelley’s 1831 revision might be seen as part of the very process of rewriting/adaptation of the Frankenstein myth explored in this essay.

of addition is clearly at work in the two classic films by James Whale, *Frankenstein* (1931) and *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935). The paraphernalia and gadgetry of the laboratory and the creation scene, the presence of an assistant—who provides the wrong brain for the creature—and of a mad scientist, Dr Pretorius, the intervention of the mob chasing the monster and the completion of the creation of a mate, all of them absent in Shelley's novel, recur in most of the later versions and have become part of the cinematic myth. After the Whale films, the myth splits in two traditions, as Martin Tropp explains:

In fact Whale's two films each inspired its own branch of the Frankenstein tradition. Part One, with its silent Monster and well-meaning but misdirected scientist, became the basis of Universal Studio's many sequels, which in turn firmly established a pattern that would influence science fiction and horror films through the Fifties and Sixties. *The Bride of Frankenstein*, with its articulate Monster and cold, perverse 'Pretorian' scientist, was, for the time being, forgotten. Late in the Fifties, these characters returned to inspire a whole new Frankenstein cycle. (1999: 47)

The new cycle referred to by Tropp was the series of films produced in Britain by the Hammer Studio, which started in 1957 with Terence Fisher's *The Curse of Frankenstein* and ended in 1974 with Fisher's *Frankenstein and the Monster from Hell*, adding up to seven films altogether, as many as the Universal cycle.² The Hammer series contributed the recreation of Victor (Peter Cushing) as Gothic villain, and the lush Victorian décor as well as period costume (enhanced by the fine colour photography which replaced black and white); it innovated in the creation scene and the new importance attached to sexuality; and it developed to unexpected extremes the brain motif in a series of brain transplants taking place in succeeding films. After the

² Tropp's *Mary Shelley's Monster* (1977) remains the most complete survey of the fortunes of Shelley's book on film, and it has been recently (1999) re-issued as a long article that extends the survey to the 1990s—and therefore to Branagh. The other critical cornerstone is Lavalley (1979), which includes interesting sections on nineteenth-century dramatisations and on 'Monsters in Film before the Universal *Frankenstein* of 1931'. O'Flinn (1995) is more selective and focuses on Whale and Fisher, but his views complement Tropp's on the two traditions. Finally, there is the overview in French by Menegaldo (1998), a good summary of previous materials with some interesting contributions, and including short discussions not only of Branagh, but also of the television film produced one year before (Wickes 1993) and of Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands* (1990).

Universal and the Hammer cycles, there was a third stage in the development of the cinematic myth aptly characterised by Lavalley as one of excess, parody, and reinterpretation. There was an attempt to retell the myth in new ways, adding a touch of playfulness and self-consciousness, but nonetheless, as Tropp remarks, in line with the two previous traditions. Paul Morrissey's *Andy Warhol's Frankenstein* (1974) revisits the Hammer tradition by taking it to shocking excess, Mel Brooks's black-and-white *Young Frankenstein* (1974) is a parody of the Universal series, and the television film *Frankenstein: The True Story* (1973), directed by Jack Smight for NBC, makes explicit the drive towards retelling and reinterpretation: the 'true' story is not so much Shelley's, but the 'real' story Shelley never told because of its biographical and homosexual implications.³

The story of Shelley's *Frankenstein* on film is therefore one of distortion, of omissions and additions, simplification and elaboration, or simply, one in which the myth has supplanted the novel (Tropp 1999: 74), or rather, film has supplanted the novel as a source of myth (Tropp 1999: 39). It is not surprising, then, that after a twenty-year gap without any new adaptation, the latest one, Branagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, purported to return to the book from its very title—a move anticipated one year earlier by a television film, *Frankenstein, The Real Story*, directed by David Wickes for Turner Television. Branagh's purported restoration of the novel, however, is only true to a certain extent. It is undeniable that Branagh restores precisely those parts usually absent from film adaptations, as pointed out by Lavalley: the Justine subplot, the narrative frame including Walton and the Arctic setting, and the creature's process of self-education. But the scenes noted by Lavalley as recurrent additions in all adaptations are also present: the creation, wedding-night and destruction scenes. These and other changes discussed below prove that Branagh is well aware of the cinematic tradition of adaptations preceding him and that, in accordance with this tradition, he views Shelley's novel as 'a mythic text, an occasion for the writer to let loose his own fantasies or to stage what he feels is dramatically effective, to remain true to the central core of the myth, and often to let it interact with fears and tensions of the current time' (Lavalley 1979: 245). Apparently

³ A more—although not totally—faithful retelling can be found in another television production of the same year, *Frankenstein*, directed by Dan Curtis for ABC.

Branagh intended—perhaps just pretended—to film a faithful adaptation of the book, but he did not succeed in circumventing the cinematic myth. His film adapts not only Shelley's book, but also the previous film adaptations. In fact, it blends the two central traditions of the myth, its Universal and Hammer elaborations.

And these are not the only traces of previous films in Branagh's *Frankenstein*. In his fake or half-way restoration of Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Branagh is also indebted to Francis Ford Coppola's earlier—and similarly fake—restoration of another Gothic classic, *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992). The parallelism in titles entails a parallelism not only in the restoration they announce, but also in the romantic and spectacular rendition of the literary source they effect. Coppola wraps his film in the cultural prestige of the literary text, but in fact carries out an ideological subversion of its meaning and a spectacular visualisation of its content (Pardo García 2003). The Gothic vampire is transformed into a romantic hero, both in the sense of the protagonist of a love story crossing 'oceans of time', as Dracula himself says—and the film credits advertise: 'Love never dies'—and a Romantic rebel-misfit in search of the absolute. The visual spectacle results from a combination of stylised costumes, highly saturated colours, impressive settings, and climactic peaks of frantic action, as well as from the presence of a composite vampire whose metamorphic capacity is used to offer a series of intertextual quotations of previous cinematic vampires. The film thus exhibits a self-conscious awareness of the film tradition particularly conspicuous in the scene of Dracula at the cinematograph. It goes without saying that these strategies ultimately respond to conditions of production, to the Hollywood conception of film as industrial product and the ensuing need to fabricate goods for popular consumption by tuning them to contemporary sensibilities and expectations. Despite the aura of cultural prestige advertised in the title, this is the hidden agenda behind Coppola's adaptation—and behind Branagh's. Coppola's *Dracula*, then, is the second important mediation of film—the first being the cinematic Frankenstein myth—between Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Branagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*: Branagh adapts Coppola—and Whale, and Fisher—as much as Shelley.

The Romantic *Frankenstein*

Branagh certainly restores the three elements which had been persistently suppressed in previous versions and which endow his film with a much closer narrative kinship to Shelley's novel. In the first place, the Promethean theme of the overreacher who defies God by assuming his power of creating life is brought to the foreground by reinstating the novel's narrative frame, Walton's expedition to the North Pole, which mirrors Victor's Promethean efforts. This theme is developed by narrating in detail the origins of Victor's thirst for forbidden knowledge and his acquisition of it at Ingolstadt. In the second place, the restoration of the creature's autodidactic acquisition of a voice and his later use of it to face his creator on the sea of ice and to narrate his story from his point of view is central to the retrieval of another thematic strain of the story, the monster's vindication of his humanity and of the inhumanity of men, his Satanic—Miltonic—dimension of rebel with a cause. Finally, the recovery of a secondary character frequently sacrificed for the sake of condensation, Justine Moritz, points to a larger motif, that of the natural and familial milieu—to which Justine belongs and from which Victor radically severs himself for the sake of science—and therefore to the female critique of male aspiration subtly articulated by that milieu and by Elizabeth in particular. Furthermore, that milieu is set in the novel's original space and time, thus restoring another Romantic dimension of the book, the sublime landscape, usually erased because of the cinematic habit of presenting the story in more contemporary settings. All three elements identify the dominant trait orienting Branagh's restoration of Shelley's *Frankenstein*: the reanimation of that original Romantic core missing in previous versions. But these elements which are apparently restored are in fact subtly transformed into something different, not wholly Romantic, but rather simply romantic.

As far as Victor's Promethean quest for the secret of life is concerned, this is motivated not just by Romantic aspiration but also by personal reasons absent in the novel. The film presents Victor's decision to create life as the result of the traumatic death of his mother while giving birth—not of scarlet fever, as in the novel—and his desire to prevent women from dying in similar conditions. This is highlighted by the visual conception of the creation scene as procreation, and by the production of the monster as reproduction: a shower

of electric eels—spermatozoa—descend from enormous bags resembling testicles to a container of amniotic fluid—a surrogate womb—where the creature is lying and from which he breaks out—the birth waters flood the ground—naked and helpless like a newborn infant—in fact it starts breathing after being slapped. Further, the brain of this creature belongs to Victor's mentor and predecessor in the struggle to create life, Professor Waldman, whose murder triggers Victor's decision to create artificial life. In short, creation for the cinematic Victor is a personal, affective response to the death of his loved ones. There is also a covert attempt to reanimate Waldman—his brain—superimposed on the overt act of artificial birth. This covert conception of creation as resurrection is made overt and developed to its furthest consequences in the making of a female creature, which is not Victor's response to the monster's appeal for a mate, but to the death of Elizabeth and therefore an attempt at resurrecting her. This is the climax of Branagh's transformation of Frankenstein's Promethean quest for knowledge. Victor is basically fighting death; his Promethean rebellion against God springs from his refusal to accept death, not in an abstract sense, but in a very specific one: his mother's, his friend's, his beloved's. Feeling, not intellect, is the force driving him, again not a general love for mankind, but for certain human beings—the love of a dutiful son, a friend, a lover. Branagh's Victor is a Promethean man of feeling, his life a Promethean love story. His grandeur thus decreases, but so does his blame: his sin is not the result of inhuman ambition, but of very human feelings. The changes introduced in relation to the other two elements restored from the book, the humanised creature and Justine, also contribute to this contraction.

The transference from book to film of the creature turned into a monster by the inhuman treatment of humanity is nuanced by two apparently minor additions which turn out to be very significant. In the first place, the creature is given a criminal body. In making him, Victor uses convicts' bodies, particularly that of the murderer of Waldman, which he steals after he has been hanged. This casts new light on the creature's criminal acts, which cannot therefore be explained only in Rousseau's terms as the effect of the corrupting influence of society on a noble savage. The intertextuality contributed by the actor playing both the murderer and the creature, Robert de Niro, well-known for the parts as criminal, gangster and psycho he has

played, also adds to this characterisation of the creature. In the second place, the idea of inherited evil is further highlighted when the creature introduces in his speech on the sea of ice a topic which is absent in the novel. His questions—‘In which part of me does this knowledge [how to play the flute] reside: in this hand, in this mind, this heart? ... Who am I? ... Who are the people of which I am comprised? Bad people?’—suggest the existence of a kind of ‘corporeal memory’ (Zakharieva 1996: 747) and imply that the creature’s body might remember and hence contain its criminal experience, as it does the ability to play the flute. Unlike Shelley, Branagh suggests that evil might be part of his innate nature as much as goodness, that monstrosity is not just a social construct but also a product of heredity. This casts a dark shadow on the creature’s self-vindication and his later murderous acts, and also tends to mitigate Victor’s responsibility for them, especially because, instead of fleeing his creation and thus letting it loose upon the world, he firstly attempts to destroy it and then, when it runs away, he takes for granted that it will succumb to the plague—another film addition serving well Victor’s vindication.

In this respect, Justine is also significant. In the film, unlike the novel, she is not given a fair trial before a court, but is lynched by a mad mob despite Victor’s desperate attempts to save her. The difference is not irrelevant. In the book, the creature is presented as Victor’s double, embodying in his outer monstrosity Victor’s inner or repressed monstrosity, and thus representing the Romantic figure of the *Doppelgänger* (Tropp 1977: 37). In this sense, Victor’s inability during Justine’s trial to make public the existence of the monster that has actually killed William and thus save her life is representative of his inability to acknowledge his dark, repressed self. It is also an act of cowardice that, despite Victor’s protestations, adds to the inconsistencies in the creation of the creature and its mate—he abandons the task for reasons which are no better than his abandonment of the creature for its ugliness. This undermines the image of doomed hero in which he tries to cast himself in his writing, and hence makes his narrative unreliable. But in Branagh’s *Frankenstein* he *is* such a hero; both his duplication and his duplicity disappear, the Justine episode being perhaps the clearest indication of this. Another interesting implication of the episode is that Justine is equated to the creature as the mob’s scapegoat, as the victim of monster-making and monster-chasing which uses exclusion as community affirmation. The fact that this

scapegoat is female, and that her body, like Victor's mother's at the beginning and Elizabeth's at the end, is cruelly destroyed, emphasises the representation of the female as victim of male desire and violence. The female is thus included in the discourse on social victimisation and, again like the creature, is also given a stronger voice. This voice is Elizabeth's, who is a more important character in the film than she was in the novel and is presented as a strong-willed woman (Laplace-Sinatra 1998: 255-6) who makes decisions such as leaving Victor or marrying him, and takes actions such as going to Ingolstadt to fetch him or forcing him to abandon the creation of the female creature. The critique of male ambition originally present in the novel is thus reinforced and developed through female self-assertion and vindication—but only to a limited extent, as will shortly be seen.

As a result of all these changes, the restoration of Shelley's book advertised in the film's title is subverted. What takes place instead is a process of 'romantisation', that is to say, the transformation of the Romantic into the romantic by turning Victor into a hero less complex and obscure, more heroic and one-sided, ruled by human affection rather than Promethean aspiration, the protagonist of a love story involving the other two apexes of the traditional Gothic triangle. The outcome in which the monster competes with Victor for Elizabeth perfectly dramatises both this triangle and his condition as passionate lover rather than overreacher, Pygmalion rather than Prometheus. Branagh does not seem to be aware of Victor's unreliability—of his duplicity and duplication. Elizabeth and the creature, although given the voice that the cinematic myth had denied them, seem to be ultimately subordinated to this romantisation and their traditional Gothic roles: the creature is given a criminal body; Elizabeth is still a woman in love.

In proposing his film as a restoration of Shelley's *Frankenstein* and then subverting it through romantisation, Branagh is following in Coppola's footsteps. Coppola had effected a similar revitalisation of lost elements from Stoker, including a Romantic dimension—which in Coppola was an addition rather than a recovery—and a similar process of narration by a series of different voices—which played an important part in creating the illusion of literary authenticity. The illusion, however, was undermined by Coppola's romantic transformation of Stoker's plot—as is the case in Branagh. The strategies guiding both adaptations—restoration and

romantisation—are consequently the same, which is not surprising if we consider that Coppola was actively involved in the production of *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, choosing both director and scriptwriter.⁴ It would not seem, then, too far-fetched to suppose that Coppola's previous experience in adapting *Dracula*—and making it a box-office hit—weighed heavily on the script. It undoubtedly did on Branagh's visual treatment of that script: the spectacular *mise-en-scène* is so conspicuous in Branagh's film that it can be considered the third strategy of adaptation derived from Coppola. In turning Shelley's *Frankenstein* into a romantic spectacle, Branagh carries out a similar ideological and visual subversion of the book to Coppola's, under the same cover of restoration. And this creates an analogous conflict between the will to make the film a popular product and the pretension to endow it with the cultural prestige of the literary.

In Branagh, however, there are additional conflicts already hinted at in the preceding analysis. The creator is a blending of the procreator and the re-animator, so the conception of creation vacillates between reproduction and resurrection. The creature is presented both as noble savage and vicious criminal, so there is a hesitation in the presentation of monstrosity as product of environment or heredity. And Elizabeth is strong and outspoken but also submissive and dependent. These conflicts are not restricted to the interiority of the three central characters, but also result from their interaction. The margins—the female and the monstrous—are vindicated, but this vindication, which implies a critique of Victor's inhumanity, selfishness and irresponsibility, collides with and is ultimately submitted to Victor's vindication, to his heroic romantisation, so the critique loses edge. The film thus seems to be a composite product, made up of parts not successfully integrated into a whole, perhaps as a result of its belatedness—with respect to both Coppola's film and the *Frankenstein* cinematic myth—and ensuing self-consciousness. On the one hand, Coppola's strategies do not seem to have been properly di-

⁴ Columbia TriStar Pictures, which produced *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, conceived of *Frankenstein* as its sequel so as to cash in on its success, and resorted again to Coppola, who had had a project to adapt *Frankenstein* since the 1970s. Although he eventually declined to direct the film—as did Tim Burton, who was also offered the project—he became one of the producers and chose Branagh instead. Furthermore, Coppola, who was not satisfied with the initial treatment of the story by Steph Lady, chose Frank Darabon to rewrite the original script.

gested; on the other hand, similar tensions can be detected as regards the influence of the cinematic Frankenstein tradition. The examination of the traces left by this tradition makes clear the composite, self-conscious nature of the film, which is perhaps the major symptom of its postmodern nature.

The Postmodern *Frankenstein*

The postmodern affiliation of Branagh's *Frankenstein* is best observed by focusing on three recurring contributions of film versions to the myth or, in other words, three traditional sites of divergence between book and films. If the presence of these sites in *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* points to the mediation of the cinematic myth in Branagh's adaptation of the book, the way he handles them reveals its postmodern approach to that myth.

The first of these sites is the creation scene taking place in Frankenstein's laboratory and producing a specific visual representation of the monster. After the impact created by the inclusion of these elements in the first version by Whale, they have become the hallmark of all Frankenstein adaptations, a must on which to a certain extent each succeeding version lays its claim to originality and, if not to posterity, at least to recognition.⁵ Branagh seems to be well aware of this, since he evokes and blends elements from the two main traditions of the cinematic myth. As in Whale's and the Universal films, the creation involves the vertical ascension of the creature towards the sky as well as the electrical apparatus associated with it. As in the Fisher films, though, the creature is also submerged in a tank of liquid, and eels are used as a source of animation. In this respect, the influence of Wickes's 1993 television version, where the creation takes place in a tank of liquid that duplicates whatever is submerged in it, cannot be altogether discarded. However, as Menegaldo has observed (1998: 54), this technique equates creation and cloning, thus developing the idea of the creature as Victor's double, which is absent in Branagh. In

⁵ The incorporation of a creation scene is not only the result of the cultural weight of Whale's 1931 film, as Laplace-Sinatra has argued (1998: 261), but it is also related to the visual nature of film. Film is compelled by its visual nature to objectify the creature, and thus forces viewers to face his ugliness, elusively alluded to rather than fully described in the book (Heffernan 1997: 141).

fact, Branagh's visual contribution stresses the differences between creator and creature rather than their affinities. We see Victor frantically moving like a dancer in a carefully designed choreography and exhibiting a naked, muscular bust possibly intended to elicit the spectator's admiration—and probably stealing the creature's traditional centrality in the scene. The creature's body is also naked but, in contrast to Victor's, it is disproportionate and full of stitches, of the scars left by the assembling of body parts, and therefore fragmented or composite. The overall impression left by the scene is therefore that creation is a physical rather than an intellectual activity, an exertion of body—suggesting not only childbirth but also a kind of narcissistic male sexuality—rather than brain. In fact, throughout the film Victor remains quite a physical hero, not only exhibiting his muscles like Schwarzenegger, but also climbing up a vertical ice wall like Stallone, or horse-riding with his pistols on like a Western hero—another echo from Coppola.

The surprising supremacy of body over brain in the creator points to the second site, the relation between the creature's brain and body—the brain motif, once more created by the first adaptation by Whale. Whale's Victor steals the bodies of hanged convicts for his creature, but intends to give him a normal brain, although, as a result of his assistant's mistake, it is replaced by a criminal one instead. Whale thus institutes the motif of the abnormal brain as motivation for the creature's criminal impulses. Branagh is evidently paying homage to this invention, albeit reversing its terms, when he has Victor put Waldman's—a scientist's—brain in a convict's—Waldman's murderer's—body, but in fact he is also alluding to the Hammer films, where the brain motif becomes central as a series of transplants transfer Frankenstein's—a scientist's—and other—usually gifted—people's brains to subsequent creatures' bodies. The brain always determines the creature's personality and behaviour, thus asserting the supremacy of brain over body as the seat of individuality and identity (Tropp 1999: 63-4). Again, Branagh follows this pattern but reverses its implications: in his film, the body seems ultimately to have the upper hand, or at least it is able to rule as much as the brain since, despite Waldman's brain, the creature turns out to be an extraordinar-

ily relentless, bloodthirsty killer.⁶ Branagh's film seems to be a response to the Hammer films with their equation of mind and self, their hatred or denial of the body. Branagh—even the creature when he raises the issue of corporal memory—asserts the opposite; in fact, he seems to propose the body as the seat of the soul or, at least, as *one* seat of the soul. It is precisely the creature, with his fractured, composite identity visualised in a fragmented body and face, who raises the question of the seat of the soul when he asks: 'What of my soul? Do I have one? Was that the part you left out?'

The centrality of the body is confirmed by the third mythic site, the creation of the mate, maybe the most original and interesting turn to cinematic tradition provided by the film. In Whale's *The Bride of Frankenstein*, Victor creates a female companion for the creature and this companion, when confronted with both creator and creature, is appalled by the latter's ugliness and rejects him. The creature, in despair, sets fire to the laboratory with both of them inside. Branagh is undoubtedly making use of that episode when Victor accomplishes the creation of a female creature that is confronted with a similar choice as both the male creature and Victor himself try to gain her for themselves. But he again reverses the situation because, in this case, the female creature is a resurrected Elizabeth, intended as Victor's—not the creature's—mate, who rejects Victor. In this respect, Branagh is again incorporating the Hammer tradition, for example *Frankenstein Created Woman* (1967), where the female creature is the object of the creator's desire, of his sexuality and even necrophilia.⁷ This is related in Branagh's film to the powerful presence of a latent, perpetually delayed sexuality—of the body again—in the relationship between Victor and Elizabeth. And it is fully developed in the most original trait of the episode: the mate is, like the creature himself, a composite body, in this case made up by stitching Elizabeth's head—brain—to Justine's body. Although, on the level of the story, this is

⁶ Zakharieva relates this supremacy of the body in the film to the cholera epidemic that devastates Ingolstadt as the creature is delivered—the plague representing a similar obliteration of the social and the rational by the body and the flesh (1996: 746).

⁷ In Branagh's treatment of the creation of the mate the trace of more recent films can also be detected: Franc Roddam's *The Bride* (1986), Roger Corman's *Frankenstein Unbound* (1990), which adapts Brian Aldiss's novel of the same title, and Wickes's 1993 television film, *Frankenstein, The Real Story*.

motivated by the fact that the creature has gored Elizabeth's body by pulling out her heart, the implications are nonetheless significant on a psychological or symbolic level. Since Justine seemed to be in love with Victor, and in the film her body is clearly a more fleshy, desirable one than Elizabeth's, it is perhaps not ludicrous to suggest that Victor, driven by his frustrated sexual appetite, has fabricated his Mrs Right—Justine's better body plus Elizabeth's superior brain—as he did with the male creature. Of course by that point the spectator knows better than Victor, and is aware that the female creature is not Elizabeth—as the male creature was not Waldman—but a fractured individual, a composite body, and that the body, at least as much as the brain, is the seat of the soul. The female creature seems to be aware of it as well and, to Victor's surprise, rejects him and commits suicide by burning herself—and the building, as in *Whale*. Although this is the most definite instance of female self-assertion in the film (Zakharieva 1996: 750), the explanation for Elizabeth's behaviour, in my view, lies in that awareness, as intimated by her shocked look when she realizes the situation, a look which implicitly poses similar questions to those explicitly formulated by the male creature: who am I? Where is my soul?

The examination of these episodes reveals, in the first place, the extent to which Branagh's adaptation is the result of a dialogue not only with its literary source, but also with previous film adaptations, especially the classic ones by *Whale* and *Fisher*, and therefore with the cinematic myth. This undermines the alleged restoration of the book carried out by the film, and reinforces the basic contradiction running through it between the literary and the popular through the added tension between literary source and cinematic tradition. In fact, Branagh's film is a pointed demonstration of the impossibility of 'faithfully' adapting a novel once it has been transformed into a cinematic myth which will necessarily mediate, at least visually, any further adaptation (Tropp 1999: 75). Far from ignoring this fact, and despite the restoration the title misleadingly proposes, Branagh's film self-consciously adds and re-interprets motifs and episodes inspired by disparate film traditions, and it is thus, like the creature, a composite body itself. Behind all these additions and transformations, however, lies not only the burden of cinematic tradition, but also the burden of contemporary cultural concerns or, to be more precise, of the body. In the film, the three traditional sites of cinematic elaboration of the book

turn on the question of body and soul, of identity. Identity is a defining theme of the Frankenstein myth, but the film adds a touch characteristic of contemporary culture: the dominance or supremacy of body over brain; the composite body as representation of a fractured identity. The film uses the myth in order to ponder the time-honoured topic of the seat of the soul, but it does so from the perspective on the body afforded by a cultural milieu where the physical dominates, and which is populated by creatures who are first of all bodies, walking collections of body parts and therefore fractured selves. The shattering of the illusion of a unified and coherent self and the dehumanisation which attends the valorisation of body and physical reality over mind and spirit are typical postmodern concerns. We are thus eventually situated at the core of Branagh's reworking of the Frankenstein myth, and also of the significance of adaptation as symptom of a certain cultural system: the film is a postmodern elaboration of the myth, a postmodern *Frankenstein*, whose exploration of the ascendancy of the body and the uncertainty of identity implies a representation of the self not in terms of Romantic inner division, but of postmodern fragmentation and dehumanisation.⁸

Adaptation as Cultural Intertextuality

The complexity of the dialogue between literature and film, as manifested in Branagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, suggests the extraordinary possibilities for the study of adaptation once it is freed of certain traditional and obtrusive misconceptions. The first step towards this liberation undoubtedly consists in revising and enlarging the concept of adaptation, so as to refine it and perhaps even redefine it. In particular, three propositions for a theory of adaptation spring from the preceding discussion of Branagh's film. It is evident, in the first place, that film adaptation always implies a transformation, not just as regards the code or semiotic system, but also in meaning.

⁸ Covert adaptations, not intended as imitations of Shelley's book, revisit the Frankenstein myth with more freedom and originality and use the creature's facet as double/replica in order to carry out a similar questioning of identity, making explicit the postmodern assumptions that are implicit in Branagh's overt adaptation. The most exemplary case is *Blade Runner* (Scott 1982), but *Robocop* (Verhoeven 1987), *Alien Resurrection* (Jeunet 1997), *The Sixth Day* (Spottiswoode 2000), or *Solaris* (Soderbergh 2002) also come to mind.

Adaptation in this sense is always deviation, in varying kinds and degrees. It is also always a reading of the source text; as Michel Serceau puts it, adaptation is not simply ‘une transposition, une sorte de décalque audiovisuel de la littérature, mais un mode de *réception* et d’*interprétation* des thèmes et de formes littéraires’ (1999: 9-10 [emphasis in original]). Furthermore, as Serceau makes clear throughout his book, other elements apart from the adapted text—myth, genre, character, discourse, and image—converge in this reception or interpretation, so that the study of adaptation cannot be reduced to the comparison between film and source text.

In the second place, adaptation is always acculturation, insofar as the transformations it effects of the literary source are related to—or even motivated by—the cultural system or context in which they originate. Indeed, adaptations not only reflect issues and topics prevalent in a certain culture or cultural tradition—as Branagh’s postmodern elaboration of previous versions of the Frankenstein myth demonstrates—but also evince strategies of adaptation active in that system—as the analogies between Branagh’s *Frankenstein* and Coppola’s *Dracula* testify. This points to a fact which is of paramount importance to a poetics of adaptation: an adaptation is not only influenced by previous adaptations of the same text, which act as a sort of repository of images, motifs and themes, but also by contemporary adaptations of different texts which share a certain approach to adaptation, both visual and ideological, and are therefore also repositories of images, motifs or themes. Adaptation, in this sense, depends not only on the conscious will or intentions of filmmakers, but also on certain strategies, issues and concerns emerging from a specific cultural system. This explains why very poor films in terms of cinematic artistry can make for very interesting adaptations—as is the case of Branagh’s *Frankenstein*. This symptomatic value of adaptation is one of the central insights afforded by Patrick Cattrysse’s application to the study of adaptation of the polysystem theory of literature and particularly of translation, which implies a shift of focus from the interplay of adaptation and source to the role and functioning of adaptation in the target cultural system that produces the adaptation and generates a series of norms of selection and transposition observable in other adaptations (Cattrysse 1992a, 1992b).

Ultimately, it is evident that film adaptations of literary texts adapt films as well as texts, and they do so in a double way: they adapt

films adapting the same text but also films adapting other texts. The concept of intertextuality explains much better than adaptation the complex interplay of sources and the different kinds of relationship involved. This is not just to substitute a new, trendier term for an older one, but to replace the classical conception of adaptation as a one-way relation running from text to film—and therefore, inevitably, characterised by fidelity or betrayal—by a dialogue involving many shades and nuances, and running in both directions: not only from literature to film but also from film to literature, since other films determine in different ways how a certain text is adapted. In a key contribution to the theory adaptation significantly entitled 'The Dialogics of Adaptation', Robert Stam describes adaptation as 'intertextual dialogism', thus referring to 'the infinite and open-ended possibilities generated by all the discursive practices of a culture, the entire matrix of communicative utterances within which the artistic text is situated, which reach the text not only through recognizable influences, but also through a subtle process of dissemination' (2000: 64). Stam exemplifies this approach by applying Gérard Genette's five categories of transtextuality—the relation between one text and other texts—to film adaptations (Genette 1982). Indeed, Genette's transtextual relations are well illustrated by the preceding study of Branagh's adaptation of *Frankenstein*: the film is a hypertextual transformation of the literary hypotext by Mary Shelley. Insofar as the film interprets the book, it can be understood as a metatextual commentary on it from a postmodern perspective, while insofar as it alludes to previous versions, it implies the intertextual presence of other film intertexts as well as the literary hypotext. Finally, the title is both a paratextual indication of the film's intention to restore the book and also, insofar as it evokes Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, an architextual generic indication of the kind of adaptation and film one can expect.

Intertextuality, as defined by Stam, is the key term for redefining the concept of adaptation, since it accounts for the three propositions formulated above: (i) it implies both transformation and critical interpretation—Genette's hypertextuality and metatextuality—of the source, as much as the reproduction of that source—Genette's intertextuality; (ii) it suggests the existence of different kinds of adaptation, depending on their hypertextual and metatextual approach to the source, of different sources of the adaptation—other intertexts, including films—and of other architextual relations; and (iii) it

includes not only other films as intertexts, but also other kinds of discourse and representation, since it is seen as taking place in a given cultural system. Adaptation can therefore be defined as a practice of cultural intertextuality, and Branagh's *Frankenstein* is an exemplary case in more than one sense: it is not just that the film perfectly exemplifies the concept, but also that its representation of the creature turns it into a walking metaphor of cultural intertextuality. William Nestrick (1979: 294-303) suggests that Frankenstein's creature can be regarded as a metaphor of film since, like film, it is the product of an assembling of parts—montage—and of animation by electricity—light. Branagh's emphasis on the fragmented, composite body of the creature turns it into a perfect embodiment of the composite nature of adaptation as cultural intertextuality, which the film illustrates in an extreme way in its postmodern, self-conscious assembling of fragments from previous films. Adaptation, Branagh's adaptation, and the creature featuring in it, are all patchwork quilts made out of fragments, texts or body parts. There is a perfect correspondence between matter and form in Branagh's film: it is a postmodern hybrid, made of heterogeneous and disparate parts, which ruminates on the hybrid and fractured nature of the self. Branagh produces a composite body in order to talk about the composite body, a fragmented film on fragmentation. It could also be argued, in the reverse direction, that Branagh's creature is a perfect emblem of the composite nature of artistic creation in postmodern times.

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