

The Indirect Path to the Literary Canon Exemplified by Shelley's *Frankenstein*

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**David Fishelov,**

**"The Indirect Path to the Literary Canon Exemplified by Shelley's *Frankenstein*"**

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**Abstract:** In his article "The Indirect Path to the Literary Canon Exemplified by Shelley's *Frankenstein*" David Fishelov examines the indirect path of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to the literary canon. Fishelov offers a multi-dimensional model for describing the dynamic process of acquiring, maintaining, and changing canonical status. The model emphasizes the important role played by artistic dialogues and echoes that certain works initiate or inspire in other authors and artists in the form of allusion, homage, parody, and adaptation. The data introduced in the article suggest that the popular cinematic versions of *Frankenstein* probably not only played a mediating role but also contributed to making Mary Shelley's novel part and parcel of the contemporary literary canon.

David FISHELOV

### The Indirect Path to the Literary Canon Exemplified by Shelley's *Frankenstein*

How does a literary work escape oblivion and become part of the literary canon? Before presenting my answer to this question, and before discussing the case of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, it is important to remember that only a very small fraction of published literary works escapes oblivion (Moretti). If we focus on the hard core of the literary canon (see Fishelov 51-53) we are usually dealing with no more than about several dozen authors and literary texts (e.g., texts included in the *Norton Anthology*). If we adopt a more inclusive view we can offer a list of several hundred authors and literary texts, like that suggested by Harold Bloom in his *The Western Canon*. Even such comprehensive lists, however, represent only a minute fraction of the literary works that have been published throughout the ages. One important indication of the canonical status of books is their place in the curricula, especially of higher education. To select a set of texts to be transmitted in a community via its education system indicates the privileged status that these texts enjoy in such a cultural community. This set of texts, together with other, non-literary (political and philosophical) texts, as well as rituals, can be described as constituting society's "cultural DNA." When we focus on this aspect of canonicity, it becomes evident that the number of chosen texts is necessarily very limited, no more than several dozen, depending on the level of education involved. Even if we assume that several hundred texts can be included in the curricula, it is still clear that the number of possible "candidates" for inclusion is much higher. A rigorous principle of selection was already practiced in Classical Greco-Roman literature, although it is difficult to determine the number of papyrus scrolls held in the collection of the Library of Alexandria. If we assume that at some point the library held some 120,000 scrolls of classical poetry and prose (see MacLeod 6) this would still leave us with thousands of "candidates" out of which only a few dozen or a few hundred had to be chosen, that is, to be taught by Roman educators (see Vardi). Further, as we move from the classical literature of ancient Greece and Rome to modern times, the cruelty of the principle of selection increases dramatically. Whereas the number of works which constitute the hard core of the literary canon remains relatively small (several hundred at most), the number of published literary works has become exponentially higher.

We can illustrate this principle by looking at the number of new titles published in the UK during the past three centuries. During the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first, the pace of growth has increased exponentially. According to the latest report of the International Publishers Association, 184,000 new titles and re-editions of existing titles were published during 2013 alone (<<http://www.internationalpublishers.org/images/reports/2014/IPA-annual-report-2014.pdf>>). Even when we assume that only one quarter of these new titles are *belles lettres* (i.e., possible "candidates" for the literary canon), we are still left with a staggering number. Table 1. below illustrates the exponential growth in published books and that puts pressure on the principle of selection:

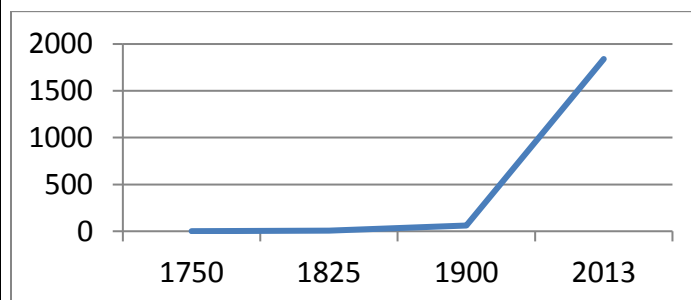


Table 1. Number of new titles in the UK: 1750-2013 (1 on the y-axis represents 100)

The exponential growth in literary production since the beginning of the twentieth century can be seen as a game changer in the process of canon formation. If before modern times we could assume, at least in principle, that the process was based on first-hand knowledge of all possible candidates, the staggering numbers of published works during the past century undermines such an assumption. In other words, the very idea that the pertinent literary agents (e.g. educators, critics) are making an informed decision about the texts worthy of inclusion in the literary canon has become questionable: after all, who can read all possible candidates, let alone form an opinion about them? Facing such numbers, it is quite clear that: a) the contemporary literary canon has to rely to a great extent on perpetuating established lists for pragmatic, not necessarily ideological, reasons and b) there is a strong element of arbitrariness in the process, much stronger than in ancient times or even in previous modern generations.

According to an accepted view of canon formation, for a literary work to escape oblivion it has to draw positive reviews in newspapers, then in literary magazines, and then be brought to the attention of critics and scholars who publish in-depth analyses, evaluation, and interpretations (see Van Rees). C.J. Van Rees emphasizes the decisive role played by literary critics, while Marc Verboord calls attention to additional factors that assign literary prestige to authors: for instance, devoting a relatively large scope to authors in literary encyclopedias and awarding them literary prizes. According to this picture portrayed in socio-literary studies, an author or a literary work can escape oblivion and become part of the literary canon if they gain in a steady and accumulative way sufficient critical evalua-

tion and other accepted indications of literary prestige. This view focuses almost exclusively on what can be described as top-down processes led by pertinent social agents who hold privileged position in the literary field (e.g. editors in publishing houses, literary critics, literary educators, and scholars) and in the socio-cultural field (e.g., committee members appointed by the Ministry of Education). I question, however, the assumption that a literary work first has to gain a significant body of positive critical evaluation before it can be considered a potential candidate for the exclusive club of the literary canon. Furthermore, an accumulated body of critical discussions devoted to a literary work is perhaps one important indication of the canonical status of such work, but this body cannot, in and of itself, explain the processes by which a literary work escapes oblivion, becomes part of the literary canon, and maintains its position in it. In other words, I would like to argue that the critical acclaim which follows the publication of a literary work is by no means the rule or even the highway for escaping oblivion and acquiring and maintaining canonical status. By focusing our attention only on top-down factors we may miss other important dimensions of the multi-layered dynamics of canon formation.

True, editors, critics, and educators play an important role in marking certain literary works and authors as worthy of our attention and appreciation: for example, by offering in-depth interpretations of a specific literary work the critic signals that work as an important one and bestows (or tries to bestow) upon it the aura of canonicity. I would like to suggest, however, that there are other factors that play an equally important role in forming and maintaining the canonical status of authors and literary works. These factors involve literary and artistic dialogues and echoes that certain works initiate or inspire in other authors and artists in the form of allusion, homage, parody, and adaptation (e.g. a novel adapted for the stage or made into a film). Whereas according to the standard view of canon formation such echoes and dialogues are mere by-products of a work's canonical status, I argue that such echoes and dialogues are the vital force responsible for forming and securing the canonical status of a literary work, certainly in the long run. Viewed from this perspective, institutional forms of appreciation (e.g. by critics and educators) sometimes merely play the role of a formal "stamp" offered a posteriori, that is, after the literary work has already established for itself a place in culture thanks to a sizable wave of artistic dialogues and cultural echoes. Furthermore, such a wave may sometimes occur not within the domain of canonical literature or high culture but, rather, in popular culture, as evidenced in the case of *Frankenstein*, to which we will turn shortly.

Thus, to better understand how certain works gain a stronghold in the literary canon we should broaden our perspective and adopt a multi-dimensional model of the literary work in culture. This model must take into account the literary and artistic dialogues and cultural echoes that certain works generate in the form of allusions, sequels, imitations, translations, parodies, re-writings, artistic recreations, and film adaptations (Fishelov). It will be uncontroversial to assume that literary echoes and artistic dialogues initiated by certain works have a direct impact on the initiating work's visibility: e.g. after watching a movie based on a novel the audience may discover or re-discover that novel. More than fifty years ago, George Bluestone called attention to this dynamics and wrote that "more copies of *Wuthering Heights* have been sold since the novel was screened than in all the previous ninety-two years of its existence" (4). It should be equally uncontroversial to assume that the increased visibility can also have an impact on the initiating work's canonical status: for example, an audience's interest in the novel will encourage publishers to issue new editions and critics and scholars to decide anew to interpret the novel. The model proposed here offers a simple way to describe the dynamic process of acquiring, maintaining, changing, and even sometimes losing, canonical status. Moreover, this multi-dimensional model can also help us explain certain phenomena that are otherwise often left unexplained. Figure 1. below of the ponytail model (see Fishelov 70) describes the dynamics by which a literary work acquires and maintains canonical status.

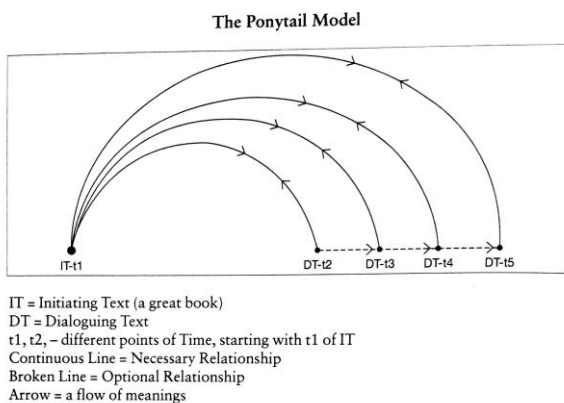


Figure 1. The ponytail model

Figure 1. captures the basic structure of the role played by what I call Dialoguing Texts in canon formation. To better understand the dynamics of canon formation we can simply imagine how each and

every additional Dialoguing Text (be it literary or artistic) adds visibility and volume to the Initiating Text: these echoes and dialogues direct the attention of the audience not only to themselves but also to the text that served as their source of inspiration. The very decision of an author or an artist to devote time, energy, and talent to a specific literary work written by another, marks it as a work worthy of our attention. In a complementary manner, when a text that once enjoyed a canonical status ceases to initiate new Dialoguing Texts, its visibility and its perceived greatness will diminish and its canonical status will ultimately weaken, and the author or work will either become "minor" (see Damrosch) or even eliminated from the realm of the literary canon altogether.

Before moving to discuss the path of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to the literary canon, we need to address one important methodological issue. When we attempt to explain canon formation it is sometimes difficult to disentangle the *explanans* from the *explanandum*: a great number of scholarly discussions devoted to a specific literary work can be treated as part of the *explanandum*, an indication of the work's canonical status that calls for an explanation. When these scholarly discussions, however, contain laudatory statements about the literary work, they can also be treated as active players in fostering the work's high canonical status, and hence as part of the *explanans*. For methodological reasons, however, we have to draw a line somewhere. The line I propose to draw consists of the following assumptions: 1) There are several facts that can be primarily treated as indications of the canonical status of a literary work 2) These indications consist of a) the number of editions of a literary work, which make the work available to readers, b) the number of scholarly discussions devoted to a literary work, reflecting the importance that critics and scholars assign to certain works, and c) the place that a literary work holds in the curricula, especially in higher education 3) Other dimensions can be primarily treated as possible explanations of these indications, and may include intrinsic literary qualities of the work in question and/or pertinent institutional and ideological factors (e.g., the decision to foster social realism in the Soviet Union) and/or the wave of literary and artistic echoes and dialogues a work has initiated. These methodological assumptions do not mean that in some contexts facts that are treated primarily as indications of canonicity cannot be viewed also as part of an explanation of canonicity.

The first edition of Shelley's *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* came out in 1818, and the second in 1831. Today, the novel enjoys a respectable position in the literary canon and it is widely read and studied. In 1979 George Levine wrote that "Of course, *Frankenstein* is a 'minor' novel, radically flawed by its sensationalism, by the inflexibly public and oratorical nature of even its most intimate passages. But it is, arguably, the most important minor novel in English" (3). Since Levine wrote this statement more than thirty years have passed and I suspect that today many students of literature will not consider the work a merely "minor" novel. If we take the number of academic discussions devoted to a literary work as an indication of a work's canonical status, then Shelley's *Frankenstein* scores quite nicely. In Table 2 below I present the results obtained in a search for "Frankenstein AND Mary Shelley" in the MLA International Bibliography (2015). To get a sense of the significance of the results, I also conducted searches for three other novels that enjoy a consensual canonical status in modern English literature. In all three cases I added the name of the author to avoid results that may refer to derivative works (e.g., James Whale's film *Frankenstein* based on the novel) or to the literary character or myth rather than to the specific literary work (e.g., the character of Ulysses in Homer rather than James Joyce's *Ulysses*).

| Frankenstein<br>AND Mary Shelley | Emma<br>AND Jane<br>Austen | Tom Jones<br>AND Henry Fielding | Ulysses<br>AND James Joyce |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1,074                            | 626                        | 468                             | 4,008                      |

Table 2. MLA International Bibliography (2015)

If we focus on a more exclusive indication of a work's canonical status, namely its place in the curricula of higher education, we note that Shelley's *Frankenstein* has recently been introduced into the highly respected and probably the most widely used volume: *Norton Anthology of English Literature* (Greenblatt's and Abrams's *Norton Anthology*). As I argued earlier, to include a literary work in the curricula of higher education is a very strong indication of its canonical status, because it suggests not only that an important body of the literary community has deemed the work worthy of reading and studying, but it also guarantees that present and future students include this work and the name of its author as part of their "cultural baggage" (Milo 486). That is, at least until future editors of the anthology will decide to issue a new edition with a new selection.

When Shelley's *Frankenstein* was first published, however, it was difficult to foresee its bright future in the literary canon: the novel was perceived and tagged as a minor horror story. The book's reception as well as its inception was closely associated with the tradition of horror and ghost stories. The trigger for writing the story came during a gathering that would later become famous in the history of English literature, and included Lord Byron, John Polidori (Byron's physician), Percy B. Shelley, and Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin (soon to be married to Percy B. Shelley) and her stepsister Claire Clairmont, in Villa Diodati on the shore of Lake Geneva in the summer of 1816. After reading a collection of ghost stories (*Fantasmagoriana*), Lord Byron suggested that the participants each write a ghost story. Shelley worked on the story that would later evolve into *Frankenstein*, first published in 1818. After the book first came out it received a few mixed reviews (Baldick 56-62; Hunter 215-40). Since the author's name did not appear on the title page, readers assume that it was written by her husband, the Romantic poet Percy B. Shelley. Only in the revised edition that came out in 1831 did Shelley's name appear on the book's cover as its author (she also added a Preface describing the circumstances of the book's inception). During the first few decades of the nineteenth century, howev-

er, Shelley's literary reputation was overshadowed by that of her husband. Contrary to the picture assumed by the standard view of canon formation, the novel did not generate a cumulative body of positive criticism or a significant token of appreciation from the contemporary literary elite. Moreover, when we examine the number of new editions of the novel – a fundamental, even a prerequisite indication of a book's canonicity – we discover that after a small number of reprints of the book, and despite the fact that *Frankenstein's* "monster" began to gain momentum in popular culture, notably in theatrical shows, no new editions of the book were published for about a century (!) as the following chart illustrates:

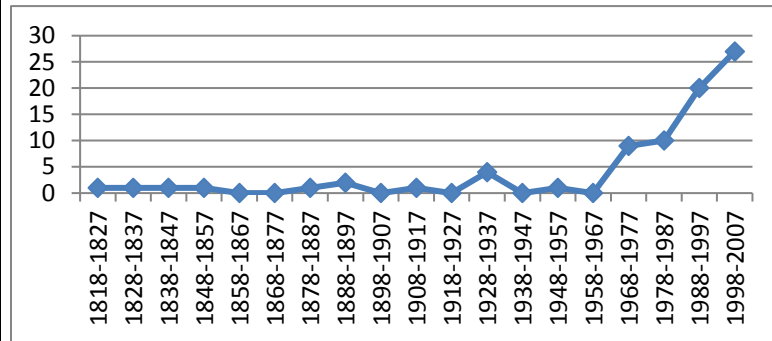


Table 3. Number of new editions of *Frankenstein*. Library of Congress (2014)

As shown in Table 3, following a century with almost no new editions, during the 1930s we suddenly witness the publication of four new editions of the novel. How can we explain the renewed interest in the novel evidenced thereby? We can first examine two immediate suspects, which are part of the top-down processes of canon formation: the decision to include a work in the curricula of higher education and a positive wave of critical discussions, whereby a book is praised and sanctioned by distinguished critics. The results of such examination, however, will in this case yield disappointing results: there is no indication that something significant had happened on these two fronts. The book was still generally perceived as part of a minor, non-canonical tradition of horror or ghost stories, associated with other popular Gothic novels, and it had not become part of the respected curricula of higher education. We also cannot detect any wave of serious critical discussions devoted to the novel during the pertinent period (the 1920s and the 1930s) that could explain the decision to publish new editions. In fact, as far as the available record of academic articles shows, for about a century and a half Shelley's *Frankenstein* was not studied as a serious literary work. The following chart presents an overview of critical, academic discussions of the book in the past century: it reveals that only during the past four decades did the book begin to attract a growing number of critical discussions.

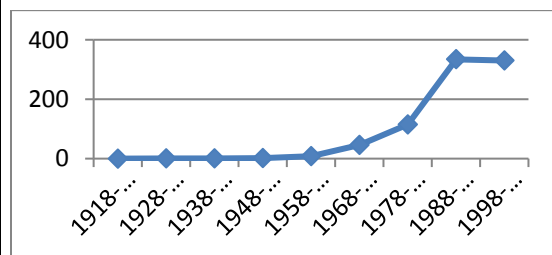


Table 4. Number of scholarly discussions of the novel. MLA International Bibliography (2014)

A more promising approach lies in directing our attention to the field of cultural echoes and artistic dialogues. From its first publication, the novel triggered a series of artistic dialogues, especially in popular culture in the form of theatrical shows. Steven Earl Forry has meticulously documented ninety six dramatizations of *Frankenstein* from 1821 until 1986. Most of these theatrical shows were melodramatic or burlesque, watered-down versions of the novel. Shelley herself attended in 1823 the first theatrical adaptation, titled *Presumption or The Fate of Frankenstein* and authored by Richard B. Peake. Although she was amused by the show and liked the fact that the play excited "eagerness in the audience" and "all stayed till it was over" (Schor 63), she also had some reservations about the way the story had been managed (Baldick 58). Perhaps the most challenging theatrical recreation of the novel came quite late, in 1965, with the Living Theatre's production *Frankenstein* (Forry 69; La-Valley 278-79).

The theatrical shows of the nineteenth century, nineteen in number (Forry), were followed during the twentieth century by an impressive wave of film adaptations. The first film adaptation based on Shelley's *Frankenstein* was produced as early as 1910, only about a decade after the new art media of the motion picture had taken its first steps. The fact that film producers decided to take the story of

Frankenstein as the basis for a film indicates that the basic story line was well known in contemporary culture. This first film adaptation, produced by Edison Studios, like most films of that period and those produced by Edison Studios (over one thousand), was quite short, lasting less than a quarter of an hour (<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TclxsOJK9bs>>). Consequently, it necessarily had to sacrifice many parts of the novel and to focus only on what the producers considered to be the essential elements of the story: Frankenstein's studies, his marriage plans, the creation of the creature, the threat the creature poses to his marriage, and the resolution of the threat, and of the story. Needless to say, the producers' decision to conclude the movie with a happy ending in which Frankenstein and his bride are happily united and the creature perishes, dramatically deviates from Shelley's gruesome version in which the creature murders the bride and it is Frankenstein who perishes. This alteration was probably a nod to the popular demand of movie-goers for a happy ending. Nonetheless, despite watering down the more gruesome aspects of the novel, and despite the strict confines imposed by the length of this short movie adaptation, the film offers at least one new, inventive, and thought-provoking sequence. Esther Schor describes this sequence in the following manner: "When the creature glimpses himself in the mirror, he spontaneously fades out, as if this self-recognition evaporates him. When Frankenstein enters the room and looks in the same mirror, it is the creature's reflection that looks back at him; hence, what he had previously glimpsed at a remove, as a spectator [the creature's creation], he must now acknowledge as his own creation. But Frankenstein repudiates this reflection and before our eyes, the reflection fades, leaving in its stead a vision of 'his young manhood' in the mirror. In this moralized melodrama, Frankenstein, by forfeiting the power to regenerate life, redeems his own and joins his bride – presumably to make new life the old-fashioned way" (Schor 66-67). Schor's description harmonizes several tensions raised in the sequence (11:35-12:05 in the version accessible on Youtube) and is consistent with the film's happy end. This harmonizing description, however, cannot efface the puzzling effect created by the scene in which Frankenstein stares at the mirror and sees there the creature rather than his own reflection. The immediacy of this powerful image brings to mind the idea that the creature is in fact Frankenstein's "reflection," and hence that the creature's distorted figure reflects distorted aspects in his creator. Thus, through one powerful cinematic image the audience is invited to ponder on the intimate and intricate relationship between creator and his creation, including the idea that the two are not only opposites (human vs. monster; good looking vs. ugly) but are also similar and that the latter is a reflection of the former.

After the first 1910 film, several followed: *Life without a Soul* (1915), *Il mostro di Frankenstein* (1921), and James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931) with Boris Karloff as "the monster." Whale's *Frankenstein* presented a captivating version of the story and a memorable image of "the monster." One of its central scenes depicts the creature's coming to life in Frankenstein's laboratory: the "It's alive" scene later echoed in several sequels to that movie. Whale's film won immediate success and initiated a series of sequels: *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) also directed by Whale, *Son of Frankenstein* (1939), *The Ghost of Frankenstein* (1942), *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* (1943), *House of Frankenstein* (1944), and the list goes on and on. The International Movie Database (IMDb) lists about two hundred films, TV films, videos, TV series, TV episodes, and video games with "Frankenstein" in their title. In fact, Whale's *Frankenstein* itself has become a "classic" of horror films and initiated its own "ponytail" of sequels, echoes, and artistic dialogues as Table 5. below illustrates:

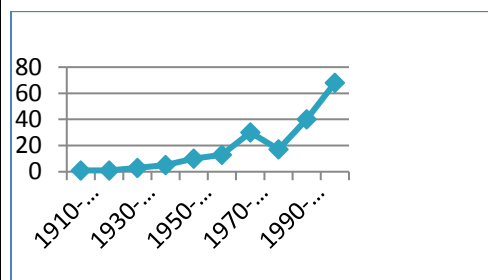


Table 5. The number of cinematic variations on *Frankenstein*. IMDb (2014)

One can reasonably assume that it was the popularity of Whale's *Frankenstein* that led to a renewed interest in the novel and to the publication of the four new editions during the 1930s. As Table 3 shows, after these four new editions, thirty years then pass with only one new edition. During the 1970s we witness another wave of new editions, as well as a rise in the number of critical discussions devoted to the work (Table 4): after decades with only a handful of critical discussions, the number rises dramatically to a two-digit figure. What can explain the renewed interest in the 1970s? As suggested earlier, the publication of new editions and a significant number of critical discussions are clear indications of a work's canonical status. To provide an explanation for the fact that in the 1970s Shelley's novel started to gain a momentum that would eventually give it a respectable place in the literary canon is quite a challenging task. Before answering this challenge, I would like first to dismiss one possible explanation: namely, the idea that the novel started to gain canonical status at that time because it was serving the interests of the ruling social hegemony. I believe that such an explanation, which is offered all too quickly by Neo-Marxist thinkers, cannot find any compelling evidence for its support simply because during the 1970s no new hegemony took over in the pertinent societies. Rather than clinging to the ready-made explanation based on "the interests of the ruling hegemony" we require a multi-dimensional explanation that takes into account several pertinent processes in litera-

ture, in culture, and in science. First, the renewed interest in Shelley's novel since the 1970s coincides with the general trend among readers and critics to pay more attention to the writings of women in past centuries. The fact that Shelley was the spouse of Percy B. Shelley and that her own literary reputation was overshadowed at the time by his, stimulated even further the drive to "rediscover" and "recover" her work and present it as worthy on its own merits. Second, the figure of the monster relates to a contemporary preoccupation with marginal voices in society in general and with the figure of the Other in particular. Last but not least, since the late 1960s and during the 1970s there has been a growing interest in research conducted in bio-engineering (the first program in biological engineering was created at Mississippi State University in 1967), with the fears and moral dilemmas involved in bio-engineering and in cloning increasing and becoming more prominent during the 1990s (e.g., Dolly the sheep was created in 1996). Thus, Shelley's novel about a scientist who succeeds in creating life reverberates with this development in science.

In addition to these pertinent processes in literature, culture, and science, I suggest that, just as in the 1930s when we direct our attention to the realm of artistic dialogues, fruitful results await us. As presented in Table 4., during the 1970s we witness a new wave of *Frankenstein* movies. Among these film adaptations, there is Mel Brooks's 1974 *Young Frankenstein*. The film, a parody of the *Frankenstein* horror movies of the 1930s and 1940s, is replete with wild humor, puns, slapstick, and sexual innuendos. The film is also an homage to that tradition. In parody the parodying artist usually mocks the parodied work, exposing it as ridiculous, artificial, and inadequate. Brooks's *Young Frankenstein*, however, illustrates the fact that parody can also be generous and even benevolent towards the parodied text (or style or genre). Caroline Joan S. Picart rightly titles a chapter in her *Remaking the Frankenstein Myth on Film: Between Laughter and Horror* in her discussion of Brooks's film "Loving Parody" (41). While imitating many motives and sequences directly taken from the *Frankenstein* horror movies and creating effects akin to that tradition (e.g., fear, tension, shock), Brooks's *Young Frankenstein* offers humorous twists to these elements whereby tension turns into liberating laughter. The special blend of mocking parody and homage is also evident in Brooks's take on the famous "It's Alive" scene: *Frankenstein* discovers that the creature has come to life when, during dinner, he hears a sound that he mistakes for a "yummy" sound. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that it was no coincidence that around the time of Brooks's highly popular parody of the *Frankenstein* horror movies we witness a surge in the number of new editions of Shelley's *Frankenstein*, as well as a significant increase in the number of critical discussions devoted to her work. Both Whale's classic horror movie of 1931 and Brooks's parody of 1974 seem to have had an impact on the canonical status of Shelley's novel.

Kenneth Branagh's 1994 film *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* marks an interesting case in the series of cinematic adaptations of the novel. Unlike many films which have *Frankenstein* in their title and were part of the "B movies" industry, Branagh's film was created by a group of prominent artists who already enjoyed a highly respected position in the world of cinema: Kenneth Branagh, the director, also plays the role of Victor Frankenstein, alongside Robert De Niro who plays the creature. Perhaps even more importantly, as the film's title suggests, Branagh's version signals a genuine attempt to produce a faithful adaptation of Shelley's novel and not perpetuate the sequels to Whale's version. This attempt is particularly noticeable in two strategic decisions made by Branagh: first, the decision to include in the film the story of Walton, the major character in the framing story in the novel. Walton's story, both in the novel and in the film, is not just a superficial framing story, a mere channel to deliver *Frankenstein*'s story to the readers or audience (i.e. Walton meets *Frankenstein* at the north pole and the latter tells him his story), but also contains a significant thematic analogy to the main story: both *Frankenstein* and Walton are daring scientists who try to push the boundaries of human knowledge and, while doing so, risk the lives of the people surrounding them (*Frankenstein*'s close family; Walton's ship crew). Second, Branagh follows the novel in telling the creature's story from his own perspective: how he was banished by his metaphorical father (*Frankenstein*), how he stumbled his way to a family living in a small hut in the wood and learned from them to speak and read. Hence, the creature can present to *Frankenstein* his grievances, protest why he was forsaken by his creator, and express his need for a female companion like himself, one that will not shun his ugliness. This decision has far-reaching thematic and rhetorical consequences: readers and audience are invited to see "the other side of the coin" and not only to be repelled by the creature's ugliness (referred to in the novel and presented in the film) and, perhaps what is even more important, by the creature's cruel acts of vengeance (e.g., the killing of William, *Frankenstein*'s little brother). Further, the film also elaborates on several themes presented in the novel, especially that of a problematic familial relationship, verging on the incestuous: Elizabeth, Victor *Frankenstein*'s betrothed, is an orphan adopted by Victor's parents when he was five and raised as his sister (or as she is called in the novel, "cousin"). Troubled familial relationships also surface in secondary stories: Justine Moritz, William's nanny, has left her estranged mother who had treated her badly and become part of the *Frankenstein* household; while in the story of the De Lacey's, the family living in the hut, we learn that Safie, Felix's beloved, had fled from her cruel Turkish father to join the De Lacey family. This recurring motif in the novel echoes the ultimate twisted parent-child relationship between Victor *Frankenstein* and the creature. Branagh's Oedipal interpretation of the story (i.e., Victor *Frankenstein*'s motivation for pursuing his scientific endeavor is to revive his beloved mother) also accentuates the ambiguous, unnatural relationship between Victor *Frankenstein* and Elizabeth, already present in the novel, whereby the bonding of siblings explicitly transforms into an erotic attraction. Thus, by offering a more faithful adaptation of Shelley's novel, Branagh's cinematic version seems to have come full circle: Shelley's novel is no longer a remote and vague source of inspiration, remembered for its basic story line alone, but is placed in the foreground with all its complex structure and themes.

Branagh's version not only recreates important elements of the novel but also deviates from the cinematic tradition initiated by Whale's *Frankenstein*. A departure from the tradition of horror movies



and an attempt to engage in genuine dialogue with Shelley's novel can be found not only in Branagh's film but also in several theater productions of the 1970s and 1980s (Forry 68). One conspicuous example in which Branagh's film deviates from the cinematic tradition is the change in the setting of the creation scene: instead of a stretcher to which the creature is tied being elevated to the sky (accompanied by electrical lightning), Frankenstein creates the creature in a container, suggesting a strange combination of a giant metal womb and a sarcophagus. The association with a womb is accentuated by the fact that in the preceding scene Frankenstein has collected embryotic fluid from women giving birth and used it to fill the container. In this particular aspect, Branagh's version of the creation scene resembles more the first 1910 film adaptation in which the act of creation takes place in a huge pot than the creation scene in Whale's version. Although Branagh's film is closely modeled after Shelley's novel, this does not stop him from exercising poetic license. This is evident not only in the development of an Oedipal interpretation but also in the changing of some elements in the story line (e.g., Frankenstein implants Dr. Waldman's brain into the creature) and the omission of others (e.g., Clerval, Frankenstein's friend, is not murdered by the creature). Perhaps the most inventive element introduced into the story is found towards the film's ending: after Frankenstein brings to life the murdered Elizabeth performing the same procedure he had used in creating the creature, the scene evolves into a grotesque love triangle consisting of Victor Frankenstein, the creature, and the female-creature/Elizabeth. The two males now compete for the attention and love of the female-creature/Elizabeth and she seems to be torn between her two suitors. In creating this emotional scene, Branagh also deviates from the influential cinematic version that first presented the creation of a female partner for the creature: Whale's 1935 *Bride of Frankenstein*. In *Bride of Frankenstein*, after the creature is rejected by the female-creature (his "bride"), he destroys the laboratory in a suicidal act, but allows Frankenstein and Elizabeth to escape and live. In Branagh's version it is the female-creature/Elizabeth who, after realizing her unbearable situation, immolates herself in a suicidal act, thus leaving Frankenstein and his creation to continue their intense, tragic entanglement that will eventually end in mutual destruction.

The advantages of the ponytail model introduced earlier (see Figure 1) is that it can show how a dialoguing text sometimes initiates a trail or a ponytail of its own -- as happened with Whale's *Frankenstein* -- and it also shows how a later dialoguing text can choose to bypass previous dialoguing texts and go back to the original text that initiated previous dialoguing text as happened with Branagh's cinematic version, which chose to return to Shelley's novel rather than to continue dialoguing with Whale's version and its sequels. Albert J. LaValley opens his discussion of the stage and film children of Frankenstein with the following statement: "Most of us first became acquainted with Frankenstein and his terrifying creation not through the pages of Mary Shelley's 1818 novel but through our childhood Saturday afternoons at the movies or leisurely sessions before the family television set" (243). A similar statement can be found at the beginning of Esther Schor's discussion of Shelley's *Frankenstein* in films: "Readers who arrive at Shelley's novel by way of the cinematic Frankenstein -- which, today, includes nearly everyone -- are inevitably surprised by the quietness and dimness of the creature's animation" (63). Both LaValley's statement and Schor's parenthetical clause ("which, today, includes nearly everyone") acknowledge the fact that most readers encounter the novel after watching at least one film adaptation of the story or at least Karloff's image of "the monster." My argument is that the cinematic versions of the story have not only played a mediating role vis-à-vis readers' personal experience but also played an important role in the overall cultural system: Shelley's novel is read and interpreted today thanks to the numerous theatrical and cinematic adaptations that have kept it alive for over a century. Furthermore, the data introduced in this article suggest that the popular cinematic versions probably not only played a mediating role but also contributed to making Shelley's *Frankenstein* part and parcel of the contemporary literary canon. Shelley's novel was kept alive (albeit in an adapted version) over the course of decades not in the realm of canonical literature; rather, it was alive and kicking in popular culture, especially in the form of several successful film adaptations that had engrained in broad culture the basic story line, as well as several memorable images. This broad cultural foundation facilitated and contributed directly and indirectly to the rapid growth in the novel's canonical status during the late twentieth century. When scholars and literary critics "re-discovered" Shelley's novel, they were in fact treading a path already paved in different layers of culture.

In conclusion, the path taken by Shelley's *Frankenstein* to its place in the literary canon is special in many respects, but it is by no means a unique case. There are other cases that can illustrate how echoes and artistic dialogues initiated by a literary work can pave the way and contribute to its placement in the literary canon: for example, the case of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (see Fishelov 172-82). In order to better understand the complex process by which a literary work escapes oblivion and acquires canonical status we should pay close attention not only to the "usual suspects" (e.g., the pronouncements of literary critics) but also, and rather, to the artistic dialogues and cultural echoes initiated by certain literary works. The egg (=the trail of echoes and dialogues) has a significant role in creating the chicken (=canonical status) at least as much as the other way around if not more so.

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