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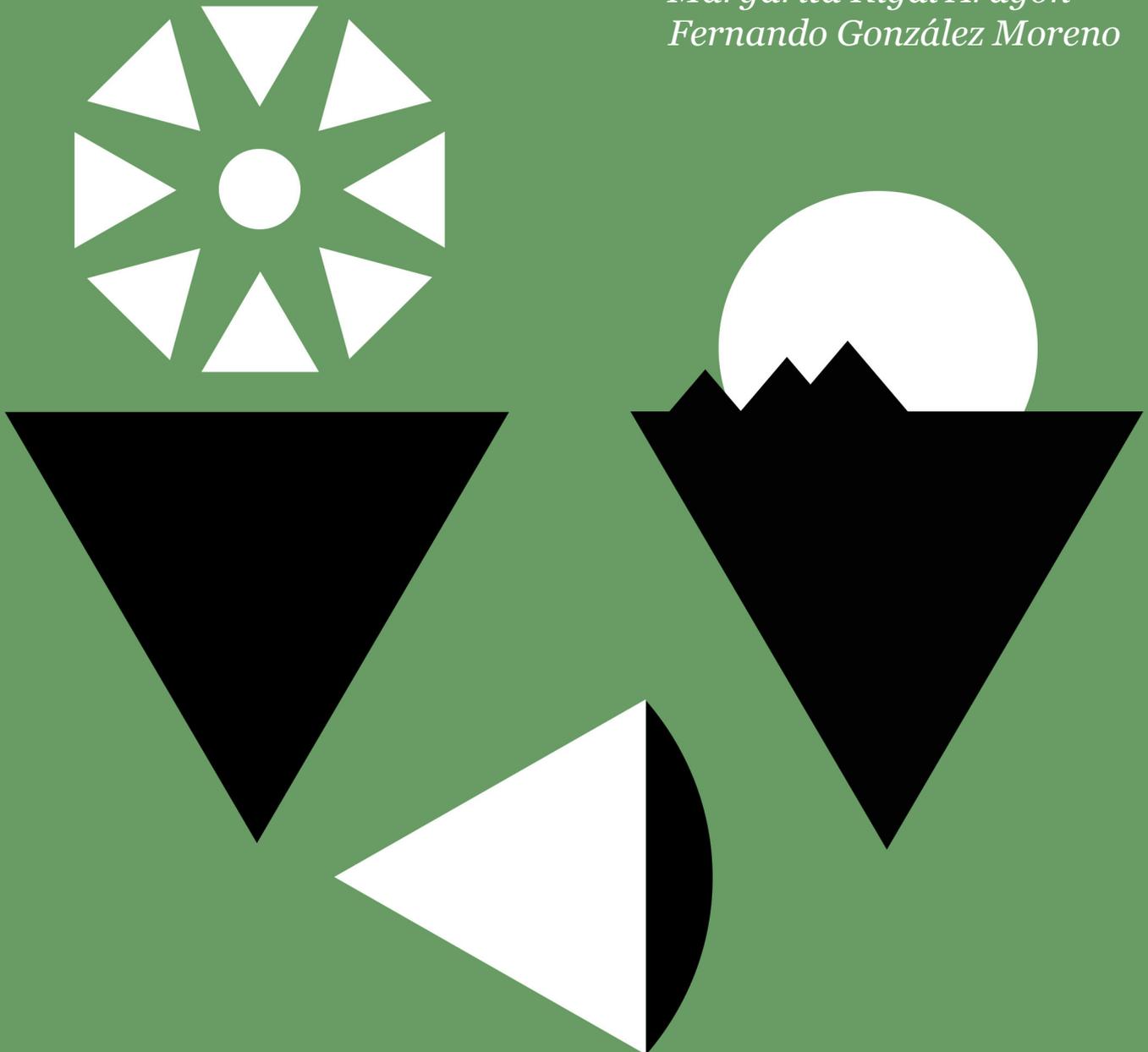
Estudios de Literatura Comparada 3

LITERATURA Y ECOLOGÍA,
LITERATURA Y VISUALIDAD,
VOCES DE ÁFRICA

EDITORES GENERALES

Margarita Rigal Aragón

Fernando González Moreno



Estudios de Literatura Comparada 3: Literatura y Ecología, Literatura y Visualidad,
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Dialogue between Literature and Early Silent Cinema: an Approach to J. S. Dawley's Frankenstein

*Diálogo entre la literatura y los inicios del cine mudo: una aproximación al
Frankenstein de J. S. Dawley*

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Abstract

In 1818 when Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus*, she could hardly infer the impact her masterpiece would have. Critics agreed from the very beginning on its astonishing power over man's imagination. Let us consider the innumerable translations and adaptations. Shelley could not think of an invention that was to come, the cinema, and the impact it would have. Unfortunately, however, little attention has been paid to one of the earliest productions: *Frankenstein* (1910), a short film directed by J. S. Dawley. This 14-minute film is the first screen adaptation of Mary Shelley's novel. We intend to show and analyze the productions of two authors separated by a little more than a century, who used the resources available to them, both achieving the visuality of their texts. Dialogue, then, is mutual, between literature and cinema.

KEY WORDS: Frankenstein, Monster, Horror, Literature, Silent Cinema

Resumen

Cuando en 1818 Mary Shelley escribió *Frankenstein; Or The Modern Prometheus*, difícilmente podría inferir el impacto que su obra maestra tendría. En todo caso, los críticos coincidieron desde el principio en su asombroso poder sobre la imaginación del hombre: tengamos en cuenta las innumerables traducciones y adaptaciones. Shelley no podía pensar en un invento que estaría por llegar, el cine, y el impacto que tendría. Sin embargo, lamentablemente, poca atención se ha prestado a una de las primeras producciones: *Frankenstein* (1910), un cortometraje dirigido por J. S. Dawley. Esta película de apenas 14 minutos es la primera adaptación a la pantalla de la novela de Mary Shelley. Pretendemos mostrar y analizar las producciones de dos autores separados por algo más de un siglo de diferencia, los cuales se sirvieron de los recursos que tenían a su alcance, consiguiendo ambos lograr la visualidad de sus textos. El diálogo, pues, es mutuo, desde la literatura y el cine.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Frankenstein, Monstruo, Terror, Literatura, Cine Mudo

«If you can look, see, if you can see, notice.»

José SARAMAGO (2005)

Introduction

The nature of this contribution is associated with several aspects ranging from Gothic to Gothic-decadent films (a paradox, since literary decadentism coincides with the birth of the

cinema), including early silent horror cinema from the beginning of the twentieth century and some marks of gothic and decadent romanticism associated with it.

In 1818 when Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein; Or, The Modern Prometheus*, she could never imagine the impact her master work would have on future readers, writers, generations and society. Often named as a science fiction, horror, ethical, mythological (not only the known Prometheus, but also Narcissus, so brilliantly explained by Professor Ballesteros González 1998) story, the vast reception of Mary Shelley's novel and famous character (farther than just the monster) over the years has swung between fascination and sometimes repulsion. However, no one can deny that both the scientist and his creature (both taken one for another) are now undeniable myths: consideration should be given to the many translations of Shelley's work as well as its adaptations into media. Undoubtedly, she could not think of a future invention to come, cinema, and the impact it would have. In this sense, many a film has been released since the Lumière brothers gave birth to the motion picture. However, shamefully, little attention has been paid to one of the first productions: *Frankenstein* (1910¹), a short film, written and directed by James Searle Dawley and produced at the Edison Studios. This film, whose run time is 12 minutes 42 seconds, is the first adaptation to the screen of the often filmed Mary Shelley novel. The film included traditional silent film conventions: black and white games, shadows, different spaces, the magical use of the mirror, the importance of light and the power of words in a silent release.

Entering Shelley's progeny...

In talking about literature, a common device is the reinterpretation of a literary work. In other words, each of them is written with a certain intention but, once published, readers and literary critics attribute it others different to what the author wanted. The reasons why this occurs are multiple; in the case of the work we are dealing with, the fact that it was written at a historical moment of important scientific discoveries such as the birth of experimental physiology, the development of chemistry or the birth of scientific medicine (Porter 2016, 294-335). *Frankenstein* was inspired –among others– by the Italian Luigi Galvani's (1737-1798) attempts to reanimate the bodies of dead frogs when stimulated with metal bars. The body manipulations exemplified in both the novel and the film share a similar purpose: improving and taking control of bodies. What is undeniable is the relationship between the power of electricity and the force of life, a theory that captivated Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft, Lord Byron and the unfortunately forgotten John William Polidori.

Less known is the fact that shortly before, in 1803, the British physician Thomas Percival (1740-1804) published *Medical Ethics*², perhaps the first modern book on this subject beyond the Hippocratic texts. This work is especially important because it raised the fact that a doctor who wants to try new medical remedies or surgical treatments should consult with other colleagues before starting them. This is a point especially relevant when you enter the analysis of Shelley's work.

Anyway, scientific progress was at times far from being ideal. As MacArthur (2015) expresses, the mad scientist is one of the most alluring and interesting characters we find in Gothic science fiction, in the past but even more evident in the present. Sometimes arrogant, the mad scientist believes in his work, confident that his experiments and research will work in the progress of humankind, an idea found in the two productions we are dealing with. This complex character seems to 'play God'.

Being such an interesting character, he has never been out of fashion, just as Chris Baldick (1987, 141-163) explains. One of the earliest examples of the mad scientist in fiction is

¹ This film was originally released on Friday March 18th 1910.

² The complete name is: *Medical Ethics; or, a Code of Institutes and Precepts, Adapted to the Professional Conduct of Physicians and Surgeons*.

Marlowe's Dr Faustus. Whilst Marlowe's play is not concerned with science properly speaking, Faustus is certainly a suitable candidate for inclusion in the mad scientist category. The mad scientist is a key part of Shelley's *Frankenstein*; it is in fact the scientist himself that the novel is named after rather than the monster.³

Having said this, terror and horror intermingle in *Frankenstein*. It is not supernatural explained following Radcliffe's style, it is something new: the supernatural explained by science. In this sense, *Frankenstein* marked a before and after in Gothic literature, but it also strengthened the development of another genre: science fiction. Brian Aldiss (1973, 8) would point out: «We look at the dream world of the Gothic novel, from which science fiction springs».

Although some consider it as a horror novel, Mary Shelley considered other aspects of great importance such as the responsibility of one's own actions and the consequences of not assuming them. Looking at it from our perspective we would also see the limits of medical research and the need for control. The novel touched also sensitive topics for the Church as the possibility of creating life, something reserved for God. The expected rejection led Shelley to initially publish it anonymously (as such critics first erroneously attribute the authorship to her husband, the writer Percy Bysshe Shelley), although in later editions her name will appear. Not in vain, the critiques it received were similarly contradictory. Some, such as *La Belle Assemblée*, described the work as «a very bold fiction... likely to be very popular» (139-140); others, like that of John Wilson Croker, were less right: «What a tissue of horrible and disgusting absurdity this work presents... it inculcates no lesson of conduct, manners, or morality; it cannot mend, and will not even amuse its readers, unless their taste have been deplorably vitiated» (382).⁴

Contemporary critics did not stay behind and attacked not only the work itself, calling it grotesque and immoral, but also pointed out how much the author herself it demeaned; the fact that the author was a woman meant a humiliation. If there is an inaccurate review lacking a vision of the future it is the last one. Time has shown that *Frankenstein* is not just a moral lesson, but also a work that admits a wealth of approaches; a polymorphic work, adapted in countless times which has not stopped entertaining the public since it was published.

On January 1st 1818, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley published her book *Frankenstein*, a terrifying story of a doctor who builds a creature from scavenged body parts. More than two hundred years later, *Frankenstein* is still an essential reading. Thus, literature has fuelled cinema since the earliest days of the 'Seventh Art' (Canudo 1988), which links literature to cinema.⁵ It is a fact that classical cinema was influenced by a «script culture» (Boo 2008), and since the silent cinema, literature has provided material and stimulated adaptations.⁶ After the pioneering brothers Lumière and Georges Méliès, cinema kept on producing films crowded with vampires, ghosts and mummies. In the USA, J. Searle Dawley's production was banned by censorship because it was considered profane and irreverent. In 1980, the American Film Institute declared it one of the top ten most culturally and historically significant lost films, becoming immediately the most famous lost film of all times. According to Hunter (2017), Edison's production was considered a lost film for several decades. A print held in Wisconsin by the private, eccentric and archivist collector Alois Felix Dettlaff Sr. was gradually made available by its owner in the late 1970s and early 1980s, before finally being screened at the Avalon Theater in Milwaukee in 1993.⁷

³ A very important detail to keep in mind is that the whole novel is narrated in the first person by several characters, so that the term monster is only used by other characters to refer to the creature.

⁴ Both references in González Moreno 2018, 8.

⁵ Literature (poetry) together with music, dance, and space (architecture, sculpture and painting), would offer the basis of an emerging art.

⁶ As an example, Georges Méliès' *Le Voyage dans la Lune* (1902), inspired by the works of Jules Verne (*Autour de la Lune*, 1870) and H. G. Wells (*First Men in the Moon*, 1901).

⁷ For a deep reference about this fact, see Dress 2016.

Since then, dozens of adaptations and re-readings of Mary Shelley's work have succeeded in film and television.⁸

The Gothic literary movement came to life (a metaphor of its own characters) in the British Isles in the 1970's (although its origins can be traced earlier)⁹. Just as if it was a dead being, it made its way out into the British society taking hold of the popular imagination of the time, with key Gothic concepts and ideas such as the «uncanny, the abject and haunting» (Spooner & McEvoy 2007, 127).

Many of the horror genre films had their roots in English Gothic literature. Following Hunter (2017), the application of the generic label of 'horror film' is not straightforward and is often marked by its complex and amorphous usage, although there is a clear attempt to generically label films as such. Many of the silent-era films that we might now term as horror were for a long time referred to simply as *cinéma fantastique*: a broad term that has tended to encompass horror, science fiction and fantasy films of all kinds. The term comes from Latin *phantasticus*, Greek *phantastikós*, both coming from *phantasia*, which in turns comes from the Greek φαντασία, φαίνω, and it also comes from the root *bha-*, *bho-*, *bhe-* meaning 'shine, show', present in many Indo-European languages.¹⁰

It is also quite often said (erroneously in fact) that Dawley's production is the world's first horror movie. This is, however, simply not the case as that honour goes to Georges Méliès' 1896 film *Le Manoir du Diable* better known as *The Haunted Castle*.¹¹

Since the pioneering filmmaker Georges Méliès (1861-1938), science fiction cinema has found an inexhaustible source of inspiration in literature. The first film adaptation¹² of *Frankenstein* was produced by Edison Manufacturing Company in 1910, written and directed by J. Searle Dawley –approximately two decades before the most notable adaptation of Shelley's novel, directed by James Whale, with Boris Karloff as the creature. According to Mubarki, Dawley's *Frankenstein* forged an alliance between the two genres of horror and science fiction and later films. This alliance was redefined later in the 1950s, featuring monsters that were the result of a science gone wrong (2015, 249).

In other words, new life was breathed back into Gothic literature, leaving behind in the mouth of the audience a taste for Gothic horror, a distinct, tasty one, which would last for many decades, as it still does. In general terms, revisiting Gothic has undoubtedly proved to be immensely successful and profitable (Hunter 2017).

The English movie *Frankenstein* is, on the other hand, far more than a filmic English view of the theme of terror and human nature. In the movie, things are not the way they seem to be. In cultural, historical and literary heritage, these two works, *Frankenstein* (1818) by Mary Shelley and *Frankenstein* (1910) by Dawley represent different cultural and civilizational legacies, however, convergent in what concerns the aesthetics of terror. In both the novel and the film we face the theme of fear in its various aspects (let us recall both productions have almost a century of difference).

The aesthetic of fear focuses on a narrative construction which starts from two basic principles, that fear is a construction of the mind and that this construction is shaped by the individual's ideological and cultural context. The construction of the *locus horribilis* is essential to the production of fear. The objective characteristics of narrative spaces are as important

8 Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) had a similar fate. In France, Victor Hugo, Flaubert and Zola, among others, did not go unnoticed by the film industry.

9 See Sánchez-Verdejo Pérez's (2011) Ph. D. for an in-depth analysis.

10 Pokorny 1959, 104.

11 In this time of silent movies other films appeared such as *The Golem* (Paul Wegener 1915), *Häxan* (Benjamin Christensen, 1922) the first film including occult and demonic themes or *The Phantom of the Opera* (Rupert Julian, 1925). Likewise, the first time *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* came to the silver screen was probably in 1910, in August Blom's Danish short film (*Den skæbnesvangre opfindelse*).

12 So far, we can assure this to be true, since we have not found any other. Future research, however, might prove there were previous productions based on Shelley's novel.

as the subjective perception that characters and readers themselves have of the environment. Such perceptions respond to certain cultural conditions (Tuan 1979).

The monstrous beings, the haunted places, the psychiatric distortions of reality function, in the foreground, as catalysts of fear, just as fairy tales, legends and myths function in the plane of imagination.

Fear represents the less comfortable paths that we do not know or control, and as such, it becomes less easy to enter this universe. In addition, our religious and cultural background, since our roots are undoubtedly Jewish-Christian, all leads us to face this situation far from the pagan origins. In this sense, the absence of a detailed physical space (*Frankenstein* and *Dracula* share this characteristic) provides a sense of deep horror stronger than if it were explained *de facto*.

It is therefore our purpose to analyze the sometimes consonant, dissonant dialogue between the *Frankenstein* film and the novel *Frankenstein* and the common place for horror tradition in western society.

Some theoretical considerations

To start with, we must express the lack of awareness existing around the original novel by most of society, and due to this ignorance, the concept of the monster as an icon has been generated, leaving aside the real weight of the character. The monster is nameless (having no name, he is excluded from society), but a great amount of society mixes and confuses the creator's surname.

The monster gets life without God's intervention, nor any woman. This fact is, undoubtedly, a key element since it breaks all the stereotypes of how human beings can be created. The creation of new beings is one of the oldest arguments of literature, and cinema did not ignore this. The creature devised by Mary Shelley warns about the fatal consequences of questioning the female prerogative of reproduction –for it is a male scientist who intends to create life by altering the natural process.

The above referred assertion is supported by the fact that the monster is closely connected to the myth of Prometheus¹³ and its different variations (Prometheus *Pyrphoros*, that is, Prometheus as a carrier of fire; Ovidius' Prometheus *Plasticator*, who modelled a man of clay and gave life by stealing a spark from the chariot of the Sun, Aeschylus' Prometheus Chained, having his liver eaten daily by an eagle, only to be regenerated at night, due to his immortality.)¹⁴ In a broad sense, Victor Frankenstein and Prometheus challenge the established laws. In turn, both suffer from an intense eternal punishment.

Just as it happens with Bram Stoker's creation, the eternal *Dracula*, Mary Shelley took her inspiration from old legends. The history of Frankenstein has its roots in religion and Jewish, Greek and Indian legends. The full title of Mary Shelley's story clearly reveals that the initial influence was a familiar Greek myth: «the myth of Prometheus deals not only with the theft of the sacred fire from the gods, but also the re-creating of man by animating a figure made of clay» (Shepard 1997, 16). The Prometheus myth exemplifies the archetypal conflict of human freedom in relation to divine desire. We think, as John Sutherland also affirms in his great *Is Heathcliff a murderer?* that, in literary terms, the creation of the young Swiss Victor, the monster, is very close to the mythical mud beast of Jewish folklore, the Golem, animated by the formulas pronounced by the medieval rabbis (1996, 31).

13 In Greek mythology, Prometheus confronted Zeus by creating mortal human beings out of clay. He was usually depicted undergoing punishment for creating and educating humans, and for giving them fire; Aeschylus' play «Prometheus Bound» (c. 5th century B.C.) conveys in its title and text the common image of him being bound and tortured (Ziman 1994).

14 For a greater, better and perfect exemplification and expansion of these versions, we place the reader to the masterful explanation proposed by Professor Antonio Ballesteros (1998, 97 *et passim*).

We must also allow for other influences (works and characters) considering Mary Shelley's novel: Both Marlow's and Goethe's Faust, the Golem from Prague, Milton's Satan, and especially the myth of Narcissus. Related to this last myth, Frankenstein is the anti-Narcissus. When it stares at its reflection in the pond, it notices how horrifying it is. In the cinema, however, the monster has traditionally been shown as a silly, almost speechless being. This characterization is absolutely incorrect compared to the loquacity and rhetoric mastery shown by the monster in the novel, characteristics shared by Milton's Satan. We can say that the monster and Satan use the language in a masterful way.

From Frankenstein to Frankenstein

Before dealing with the film itself, it is relevant to look at an almost unknown work by Shelley, a more than probable inspiration for the Dawley. «The Mortal Immortal», one of the best stories by the English writer Mary Shelley, was originally published in the December 1833 edition of the literary journal *The Keepsake*, and then reissued in the 1891 anthology, *Tales and Stories*.

«The Mortal Immortal» deals with one of the essential themes in her work: immortality, and especially the ethical and moral dilemma that involves prolonging human life outside natural limits. In fact, the work has many similarities with both productions we are dealing with.

The plot of «The Mortal Immortal» tells the story of Winzy, who drinks a mysterious brew prepared by his mentor, Cornelius Agrippa (we call attention to the choice of these names). It is an elixir of immortality, the source of eternal life, made from alchemy. At first, the idea of immortality (revealed as the promise of eternal wisdom) seduces Winzy. However, that promise quickly becomes a curse. Winzy is condemned to an eternal psychological torture: see all surrounding him die, and among others, his beloved Bertha. «The Mortal Immortal» is narrated by Winzy himself, almost three hundred and twenty-three years since he drank that elixir of eternal life.

We cannot forget, however, the ideas that directly relate «The Mortal Immortal» with the short film: the protagonist's teacher is an alchemist; there is a wedding like in the short one; there is a fluid that burns when it falls to the ground (the magic potion of Cornelius, so-called or elixir of immortality); the powers of darkness are invoked; there is a mirror in which the protagonist looks at himself several times (the numerous allusions to this object are noteworthy); from the first page we have references to magic and its utensils: spells, ovens, stills, crucibles, invocation of spirits... Therefore, we are not talking about a doctor but about something else. We are convinced that Dawley was aware of this story, which shows very well that facet of the alchemist who is so far from the scientist of Shelley's work.

James Searle Dawley's short film *Frankenstein* is a one-reeler movie filmed at the Edison Studios in the Bronx (New York City) over three days somewhere between January 13 to 19, for a total budget of \$500.¹⁵ It was well-received by critics, though others were quick to denounce the film as blasphemous. Whether the public found it too horrible or frightening, or even too offensive, or whether they were confused by its subject matter, is unclear. In this sense, foreseeing the problems critics might pose, Edison ordered the moral tone of his films to be improved. In fact, Edison's production is a story that deals with human condition (and the dangers of surpassing the extremes, trying to occupy God's place), life and death. They deliberately omitted whatever might shock audience, any repulsive situations, concentrating on the psychological basis.

¹⁵ For this research, we tried to find the closest version to the original, taking into account that many of them have been colourized and provided with new technological updates. Being our intention to follow the one spectators watched at the time of its premiere, we have chosen, thus, the following one: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=soKMwXeMRYo>.

As the researcher José Bértolo said, in the beginning of the twentieth century, «cinema was a decadent spectacle»¹⁶ not attended by good people, not accustomed to admiring exotic actresses of dubious conduct, phantasmagorical magicians who did tricks, or characters who, perhaps by some diabolical work, still dared to look the spectator in the eyes. The cinema was grotesque, exotic and scary. This view is in line with the aesthetic tendencies of the late nineteenth century, unequivocally associated with the decadent, the gothic, the terrifying and frightening, which yielded many pounds to the booksellers for whom this was not really new, since penny dreadfuls were fashionable.¹⁷

It is a shamefully unknown film, despite being a silent film with outstanding effects for the time (mirror reflections, the slow morphing of the monster...). Starring Charles Stanton Ogle (the monster, responsible for his effective creation, his own makeup and costume design –a common practice at the time– his straw-like hair and clawed hands that remind of Nosferatu's¹⁸), Augustus Phillips (who plays Frankenstein, a well-known, skilled, respected Broadway performer, showing the use of making sweeping gestures and exaggerated posing whenever he enters a scene) and Mary Fuller (who played Frankenstein's fiancé Elizabeth; she hardly has any screen time, but acts very natural compared to her two companions). This production is a silent black and white short film, with five scenes coloured in sepia and one in blue. Edison had pioneered the idea of tinting films to add colour in 1884. By 1910, tinting of films had become common. Colouring does not change the symbolic consensus of the silent film: ochre because the monster was born of fire, blue at night scenes, green for woodland scenes.... Let us remember that, talking about brown and orange colours, *electros* in ancient Greek meant amber.

Despite Edison Motion Picture Studios having produced Frankenstein's first cinema adaptation, the film had no creative input from Thomas Alva Edison (1847-1931) himself. Nevertheless, it is quite difficult to watch the film without being aware of the link between Victor Frankenstein and Thomas Edison as scientists and inventors.¹⁹ There is consequently some significance, in one of the film's titles, that «Frankenstein has discovered the mystery of life». It begins with Victor Frankenstein leaving for college and discovering the «mystery of life», remarking his intention to create «the most perfect human being that the world has known»,²⁰ leading eventually, however, to the creation of a monstrous rather than a perfect creature. The exchanges between monster and creator in this film are dramatic. The film depicts a sort of ethereal struggle: that between Victor and evil. The defeat of such evil is portrayed in the astounding monster's reflection disappearing from a mirror – a witty device present in such an early film that it still surprises today's viewers.

The movie begins with Frankenstein leaving for the university to study science. Two years later, as we are told, he discovers «the mystery of life» and sets out to create «the perfect human being». His experiment goes wrong, and a grotesque monstrous creature is brought to life instead; the title card reads: «Instead of a perfect human being, the evil in Frankenstein's mind creates a monster». The dangers of science if not controlled properly, and the audacity of trying to play God, hardly need further explanation. The monster is cast rather as a reflection of Frankenstein's instincts and reflection of a dark mind that aimed at ruling God's realm.

16 Expressed by Bértolo in his speech called «O cinema como fantasmagoria» during the course «Cinema Português e Ibero-Americano: Diálogos Históricos, Literários e Culturais», organized by the Centro de Estudos Comparatistas, Faculdade de Letras of the Universidade Clássica de Lisboa, on July 12th, 2016, in Lisbon (Portugal).

17 Penny dreadfuls, which appear in England in 1830, were weekly publications at a very low price; obviously, being very economical, they reached a large audience, presenting tricky creatures.

18 Probably he decided to drive away Thomas Porter Cooke's appearance for the 1823 English Opera curious, original stage production (even before the reprinting of *Frankenstein* in 1831), called *Presumption or the fate of Frankenstein*. We know that it was seen by Mary Shelley herself, who approved of it. The Creature was tall, menacing yet human, walking the line between human and other.

19 The invention that is usually associated with Edison is the light bulb. Significantly, Edison's inventions –most famously the phonograph, and the kinoscope– were the first machines that prepared the path to cinema.

20 Let us bear in mind the echoes of the meaning of the creator's name in Latin.

The central point of the movie is the scene where Frankenstein creates his creature. Unlike in later versions where the creature is constructed from dismembered body parts, here Frankenstein literally creates his monster from a cauldron containing a mixture of chemicals. We watch the monster assembling itself around a skeletal frame, and thus the creature is created. The idea is deeply original: it is about, as far as we know, the only adaptation in which Frankenstein's work is really shown as a work of creation and not only of (re)composition.²¹ In fact, another key element is fire, fire as creator instead of destroyer. If in Shelley's work fire destroys, in this picture, fire creates the monster; it is born surrounded by flames.

Consequently, it is the creation scene that is the centrepiece of this film. The key scene of the monster's creation was meant to be accompanied by Anton Rubinstein's «Melody in F. » When the movie came out, theatre pianists were directed to play the music at a *moderato* pace and then speed up the tempo to *agitato* as terrifying moments were about to turn on screen. The musical accompaniment was carried out through an orchestra that performed the pieces live indicated in the script for each screening. Following the release of the rights, we know that the initial sequence was accompanied by the piece «Then You'll Remember Me» (Charles Hackett). The birth of the monster was framed with an *agitato* (probably by Franz Liszt), and the scene in which the monster visits Frankenstein in his bed was accompanied by *Der Freischütz* (Carl Maria von Weber). The rest of the production shifted between this piece and the Bridal Chorus of *Lohengrin* (Richard Wagner) for the wedding scene of Frankenstein and Elizabeth.

In the creation scene, we as spectators and Victor, who is again placed as another spectator, witness the monster rising from his alchemical cauldron, his hideous features revealing themselves little by little. This is surely one of the creepiest images. Indeed, in this moment the monster's body holds the attraction thanks to its special effect. In fact, the creation scene certainly owes more to alchemy than to science. Shadowy and somewhat difficult to outline at this point in the film, the monster's body is also uncanny. Later it will be more human and thus less threatening. For the psychologist Ernst Jentsch, the uncanny appears when we have «doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate» (1995, 11).

The metaphor with the power of cinema, at this moment in its full effervescence, finds here its full *raison d'être*: opposed to the decadence of the end of the century (the emergence of the cinema having been contemporary). At this moment in the history of cinema, in this first Frankenstein, the creature is the materialization of Frankenstein's dark (evil?) side. We could infer that art looks enviously and full of fascination to Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.²²

We want to highlight another key scene: the one that refers to the table on which Victor leans while writing his formula. In fact, it is a clear metaphor of *vanitas*. Indeed, on the table we find his papers, his long pen with which he writes, a lit candle and an hourglass (a symbol of mortality against which Victor fights and which he challenges) just behind the candle. If we look closely at the position, they are aligned. The candle is right in front of the clock: a proper *vanitas* image. The curious detail is that the candle is lit and in *vanitas* is usually off, which could mean either wisdom or, as in the extinguished candles, the transience of life. Regarding its meaning as symbolism, the question is: at what moment does that scene appear? Just before Victor challenges nature. *Vanitas*, therefore, reminds us how insignificant we are and how ephemeral our nature is; also, *vanitas* consists of believing one is what in fact is not.²³ Consequently, this *vanitas* can be a warning or sign for what is coming: Victor does not feel insignificant but powerful and will transgress that temporality and limitation of human life. Therefore, he transgresses the two warnings of *vanitas*: our insignificance and our temporality in this world. Finally, let us

²¹ There is something of Golem in this creature. Apart from the obvious relationship to Paracelsus, Cornelius Agrippa, etc. we must also consider the discoveries about electricity (by Benjamin Franklin, the galvanization of the corpses...)

²² This film is the one where Frankenstein's deed is the most assimilated to that of God's, who creates indeed *ex nihilo*.

²³ Maybe this is the reason why this sin is Devils' favourite, since it represents the Original Sin at its greatest magnificence.

emphasize that when he stands up after writing his formula for life, he takes the lit candle that is right in front of the hourglass, a scene that is repeated twice; obviously, with the intention of giving more importance to that gesture. In fact, it is the only time that happens in the entire short. He repeats just that magical and decisive moment in which he goes from *vanitas* to perform the challenge to natural laws and human essence. It goes toward immortality and its destruction. That visual echo that will last maybe 2 or 3 seconds is certainly important.

Following the storyline, we first find the *vanitas* scene, when he writes the secret recipe; then the creation of the monster takes place, to reach the third, that of the nightmare, since the monster will be its enemy, its torment, from that moment on. The order is important because everything is spun: vanity and knowledge-transgression- punishment. Here *vanitas* related to another sin: arrogance.

Another important moment refers to the moment in which Victor falls into bed (or divan) and the monster appears from behind, through a slit in the curtain. At that time, the parallels with the painting *The Nightmare* (1781)²⁴ by Johann Heinrich Fussli (1745-1825) are obvious. And that is important for several reasons. That painting is part of the subconscious of the audience since it was very famous. A second version was even made by the same author between 1790-1791, being called *Second version of the nightmare* (the work has the original title of «Nachtmahr», Mephistopheles' horse, the demon of German folklore). The picture keeps similar elements. The woman lies asleep while the incubus, with darker features, perches on her chest. The horse of the first representation acquires a ghostly tone, and it is more noticeable.

Therefore, the image of the frame would be easily recognized and identified by the audience even though they might not be aware of it and relates that image not only to a newborn monster but to the pictorial work and its theme: the torment, the nightmare... something that destroys inner peace. It tells us that the newly created monster is Victor's nightmare. Both in the film and in the painting there is a small table just on the left of the image. The curtains form a triangle in both cases on the head of those who look through them. And both Victor and the woman lying down are not sleeping but rather fainted. Even in the film there is a cord that holds the curtain and in the picture hangs a cord with a tassel. In view of the above, it is evident that they used the painting as a reference for the scene, both in the aesthetic and in the symbolic, given that at that moment Victor's nightmare begins. When he fades it is actually a product of the terror by having created the monster.

Repulsed by what he had done Frankenstein leaves his intentions and returns home to his beloved fiancée, Elizabeth. The monster follows its creator home, but its creator wants nothing to do with the abomination he brought into being. The monster rebels after getting envious (a human emotion) over the affection that Frankenstein shows for Elizabeth. Creature and creator fight but Frankenstein is unable to do anything compared to the monster's strength. Then the monster spots its own reflection for the first time, shocked by the image (another human feeling).

The excellent use of mirrors in these scenes (one of the innovations and a key element in this production, never seen again in later *Frankenstein* versions) emphasizes the central theme of the movie. Dawley then takes us to Frankenstein's wedding night. After the wedding guests have left, the bride and bridegroom are alone but then suddenly the monster reappears. Breaking into the house, he pursues Elizabeth into the bedroom while Frankenstein is off (a reading of the –so traditional– hero's absence and a metaphor of Elizabeth's meeting the monster on her wedding night). Here Dawley gives us something truly witty to think about. The monster, seemingly conflicted over its actions, stares at its own reflection in the mirror, and then vanishes leaving only the reflection behind. At this time, Frankenstein enters the room and sees the mirror. For a moment Frankenstein sees the monster reflected at him in

24 Even Freud himself, who believed that dreams were at the same time the guardians of sleep and the vehicles of the repressed desires of wakefulness, had a reproduction of it in his Viennese office.

the mirror, slowly the reflection of the monster fades. The title card reads: «The creation of an evil mind is overcome by love and disappears» (echoing the earlier «the Evil in Frankenstein's Mind Creates a Monster»). Elizabeth and Frankenstein embrace in triumph.

In twelve minutes and forty-two seconds, it is surprising that the monster has a more human and sweet behaviour than that of its creator. The creature, who is perhaps only a narcissistic projection of its creator, falls in love with the same person as Frankenstein and, conscious of its ugliness and monstrosity, decides to fade away, to disappear, so that the loved one stays with who is, or seems, more beautiful and able to make her happy. Although we are faced with a figure that physically represents the grotesque, brutal and animalistic, it is clothed with an unexpected humanity –the monster falls in love, loves and sacrifices, for love and for a love that knows to be impossible.

The duality of mankind is portrayed brilliantly in this last scene where good is seen to triumph over evil in the battle for a man's soul. Ultimately, and thanks to the mirrors, the point brought into question is whether Frankenstein really created this hideous creature or if it were a mirage, a dream, a Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde-like manifestation of his own personality. While the creature's murderous stalking of Frankenstein in the novel runs intimate to the legend of the *Doppelgänger*, this climax in the film feels more like Stevenson's. The term *Doppelgänger* can be defined as «a mirroring or duality of a character's persona, the concept of the *Doppelgänger* refers to the twin, shadow double, demon double, and splits personality, all common characterizations in world folklore» (Snodgrass 2005, 83). As the titles make clear, it is Frankenstein's love for Elizabeth that banishes the creature. The creature's willingness to hide itself from Elizabeth indicates Frankenstein's attempts to hide his darker side from the woman he loves.

Since J. Searle Dawley's adaptation of *Frankenstein* in 1910, cinema has clearly and undoubtedly demonstrated a continued fascination with Mary Shelley's creation.²⁵ The film does not follow the original story, since the creature is made in a sort of magical way, and it is quite like a monster, different from Shelley's description. In J. Searle Dawley's *Frankenstein*, the Doctor Frankenstein, reminding us of an alchemist, «who has discovered the mystery of life» creates the whole creature using chemistry. In his laboratory there are flasks, bottles, skeletons and a large boiler where after mixing different products, a terrible monster will arise in the middle of smoke: a spectacular trick with a paper figure consumed by acid with the shot running in reverse.

The mirror

The theme of the mirror, so present in J. Searle Dawley's *Frankenstein* will be a motif frequently used in gothic-decadent romantic literature and early silent cinema. In this short black and white production, rather than focusing the narrative on the monster, because of the presence of the mirror, we come across the character who manages to manipulate the reader/spectator so that he feels sympathy and conspires with his/its criminal and brutal behaviour. We can detect, in this short story, the *topoi* of the English Gothic literature. On the other hand, we can find, in this short story, two types of symbols, both associated with the mirror: the object that reflects observed reality and the object that reveals a more psychic and frightening reality of the most hidden instinctive, animal side of the human being. All rules are broken, as far as common behaviour and moral values are concerned –and one can get pleasure out of that transgression – revealing the malevolent, diabolical side of the human being. This allows us to reflect about the multifaceted composition of human behaviour, both in a private context and in society (being this assertion not so far from Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886).

²⁵ Everyone is familiar with the image of Boris Karloff's 1931 characterization as Frankenstein's monster, full of neck-bolt and stitches. So, Kenneth Brannagh, Peter Cushing, Christopher Lee, Robert de Niro... are unforgettable names, but none of them can be recalled as the first.

The reality, showed by its replica in the mirror, triggers the behaviour change in the plot, but, above all, legitimizes this same change, reinforced by the smallness and intimacy of the room space, away from all the looks and criticism, only close to the consciousness of the individual himself. As Goya puts it, and yet in another context, «the sleep of reason produces monsters». In fact, throughout the entire story we see the allusions to the criminal act of breaking natural rules. This recognition of the monstrous side of the human being leads to an even more frightening view of human nature itself. If this fact were to provoke horror in the narrator, the truth is that he comes to live well with his other, his brutal and animalistic side, without even a place of remorse or guilt.

Additionally, the transformation of the domestic environment (*locus amoenus*) into a *locus horribilis* raises the appearance of the supernatural element, or rather the psychic, animalistic facet of the human being. The transformation of this scenario into a ghostly environment is marked using vocabulary, images and descriptions like the scenarios consolidated by Gothic literature whose topography has left behind recurrent images in literature, cinema and other media.

Thus, as stated before, one of the outstanding features of this early film is the concern with such an actual concept as visuality, as well as spectatorship, and mirrors. In one particularly memorable shot, Victor sits with a mirror before him that we, spectators, can also see. In that very moment, metaphorically, he also turns into a spectator watching a 'screen'. The monster enters the room, appearing first as a reflection in the mirror: it faces Victor, but stops when it sees its reflection, becoming a real double, a presence facing itself. This shot will be watched again later at the film's climax. The mirror takes up almost half the screen; the monster gets close and stares at its own image, reacting wildly, beastly, and then disappears.²⁶ When Frankenstein enters the scene (in another masterful shot) he finds only the monster's mirror image, not its body. Victor looks at the mirror and sees the monster's image reflected; then this image of the monster disappears, and we see again Victor's own reflection. Spectators are relieved because reality is restored.

Not surprisingly, this small passage in the original novel becomes a key scene in the film we are dealing with. We are watching the pass from *writing* to the *visual* age.²⁷ According to Hefernan (1997, 136), by forcing us to face the monster's physical repulsiveness, which he can never deny or escape... film versions of *Frankenstein* prompt us to rethink its monstrosity in terms of visualization: how do we see the monster? What does he see? And how does he want to be seen?

Anyway, it is curious that the presence of a mirror triggers the recognition of itself by the creature and that, after disappearing, there is a brief second in which, before the mirror, it is Frankenstein that he sees, on the other side of the mirror, the figure of the monster, revealing this duality of being, creator / creature, beautiful / monstrous, narcissistic / scary.

So, the mirror scenes in the Edison film satisfy the human desire to 'see' the monster, something so used in horror films, where the criminal causes repulsion but no spectator leaves the cinema.

Conclusions

We can conclude that the most interesting thing about this version is that Dawley's version seems to have more points in common with the original work than the theatre adaptations

²⁶ These mirror scenes remind viewers of an important moment in Shelley's novel. When the monster, made and abandoned, wanders in the forest, it views its reflection in a pool of water and discovers its own monstrosity: «How was I terrified when I viewed myself in a transparent pool! At first I stared back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations... » (Shelley 1993, 88) In fact, this moment has been masterfully understood and showed by cinema (Mulvey 1989).

²⁷ It is assumed that Dawley wrote himself the scenario for the film.

and the subsequent film by James Whale. Dawley's *Frankenstein* focuses on the story's climax –Frankenstein creates his creature that haunts the scientist until his wedding night.

The film starts from the same premise as the novel with some small modifications (for example, the creation of the monster seems to respond more to a chemical experiment) and understands the creature clearly as a *Doppelgänger* of the main character. Not only does the monster recover the ability of talking, but his relationship with Victor may even suggest that it is a product of his imagination or that only its creator can see it (the only exception occurs when Victor's fiancée sees it on the wedding night and faints). The crux of the film lies in a series of scenes in which, as in the book, Frankenstein tries to resume his normal life by leaving his creation forgotten, although he is continuously interrupted by the persistent presence of the monster, which appears once and again as a reminder of the error that he made.

The most interesting scene is curiously the one that goes the farthest from the novel: the end. The monster is horrified when contemplating the reflection of its own appearance, but what happens next is the most striking: faced with its own image, the creature disappears, but not its reflection. Once Victor enters the room, he discovers that the reflection of the mirror is the monster's, but after a while it disappears and the image that he can see is his.

It is a scene that draws attention not only by the use of very ingenious tricks for the time but because it goes deeper than the novel on the theme of the *Doppelgänger*: when Victor looks at himself in the mirror and sees the image of the monster, we are being directly informed that his creature is the representation of a dark and evil part of himself.

This type of adaptations of great literary works of literature that were made in the first decades of the cinema had to deal with the problem of transferring quite extensive texts to no more than 15 or 20 minutes, so they used to film only the most essential and representative aspects of them. In our case, in general terms, all the scenes have a direct correspondence with the book. That is why it is so interesting that the only scene that is different is one that makes even more explicit the idea of the *Doppelgänger*. J. Searle Dawley captured perfectly that feature of the book and decided to take it as reference for the only artistic license that was allowed with respect to the original. In other words, instead of separating from the book to emphasize the terrifying aspect of it, he went straight to the grounds of the *Doppelgänger*. However, this version of Frankenstein did not get enough relevance. In this way, Edison's film failed to develop as a cinematographic reference of the history of Shelley's progeny.

All in all, a sense of the uncanny is crucial to the Frankenstein tale: we doubt whether it is a body brought to life being a lifeless object, or a lifeless object turned into a body/object. One of the key thoughts would be to decide what is human, what is alive, and what is to have a body. We cannot doubt, anyway, that the monster in the Edison film is an uncanny entity. Following Hawley (2011, 85), we can consequently watch the film pondering the cinema's power to turn the body into something familiar-yet-unfamiliar, something alive-yet-not-alive, something supernatural and only dubiously present.

As a result, the film offers an image of cinema and its powers of animation in their most magical, supernatural, and uncanny sense. Furthermore, the monster in this film is *other* and inhuman but not mechanical (as later revisions will show): it is more ghostly, especially in the moment of his creation. Its appearance may remind viewers of the ghostly apparitions captured in spirit photography in the nineteenth century. Opposed to this vision, later films would depict both the monster and its scene of creation in more mechanical terms.

Just as we have shown throughout these pages, we strongly believe that both productions retain a great interest. Looking at the two of them in the 21st century, some of the aspects that they raise maintain their value and we can learn from them. Such is its actuality that *Science* published a series of articles earlier in 2018. Even the Massachusetts Institute of Technology published in 2017 a commented edition of the work.²⁸

28 Guston, Finn and Robert 2017.

It is very likely that the aforementioned considerations were not in Mary Shelley's mind when she started writing her work in Villa Diodati, a disagreeable summer of 1816. Nevertheless, mastery works hold that condition because they surpass their authors' intentions and we enjoy them years –or even centuries– later not as a historical product, but as a text full of principles that we still see reflected in our daily life.

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