

FOR AN APPROACH TO THE
IMAGINARY «DOUBLE»¹
GABRIELLA ARMENISE*

Abstract: The aim of this article is to bring to light the educational value of narrative imagination to reveal how the emotions aroused through reading open avenues for redefining one's own existence. To this end, Mary Shelley's text *Frankenstein or the modern Prometheus* has been taken as an exemplary investigation of the imagination of the opposite.

Keywords: imagination of the opposite, narrative, Mary Shelley, existence, educational.

Foreword

Mary Shelley (1797-1851)² with *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus* (1818)³ does not write a story that can be categorised, due to the vastness of

* Docente di Storia della Pedagogia – Università del Salento.

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² Mary Godwin Shelley, who married Percy Bysshe Shelley, is a well-known author of narrative texts from the early 19th century. Cfr. Elizabeth Nichie, *Mary Shelley, author of Frankenstein*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick 1953; Eileen Bigland, *The life of Mary Shelley*, Cassell, London 1959; Adriana Corrado, *Mary Shelley donna e scrittrice. Una rilettura*, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, Napoli 2000; Carla Sanguineti, *Figlia dell'amore e della luce. Mary Godwin Shelley nel golfo dei poeti*, Sagep, Genova 2000; Muriel Spark, *Mary Shelley*, Le Lettere, Firenze 2001 [formerly Sphere-Penguin, London, 1987].

³ The 2nd edition is from 1831. Cfr. Donald F. Glut, *The Frankenstein legend*, Methuen, New Jersey 1973; David Ketterer, *Frankenstein's creation: the book, the monster and human*

the themes treated, exclusively in the gothic or science fiction genre, even though the structural apparatus and the setting fully fall within the gothic genre, characterised by terrifying atmospheres⁴, and anticipates the science fiction genre.

The novel, in fact, is directed at outlining the fears that tear mankind apart in the depths and is a story open to multiple interpretations and meanings that affect the human soul about the value of existence, the concept of creation and the “substance of the soul”, the diversity and multiplicity of human passions, and, again, the idea of renunciation and infringement beyond time or ideological-cultural transformations.

The text is praiseworthy for the richness of its contents, which open the readers' minds and consciences to new, original, and always topical points of reflection, stimulating the maturation of the critical spirit. The transversal ethical theme that characterises the entire work, that is, what is the insurmountable limit beyond which the scientist cannot go, is the same one that is proposed to the scientists of our time, in relation to issues such as cloning, artificial insemination, the possible creation of new life forms in the laboratory and euthanasia.

The ethical aspect, which spans all times, encompasses every field of knowledge and the social sphere, where ethical relativism clashes with profound reflections drawn from philosophy, science, and politics, not unrelated to anthropological and philosophical elements⁵. Science for Godwin Shelley cannot go beyond what nature and human limits are, otherwise, the imbalance of the natural order would occur.

In the period in which the author lived⁶, criticism of the principles of the Enlightenment led to the rise of Romanticism, partly as an overcoming of the previous historical-ideological period and partly as a reassessment of the

reality, University of Victoria, Canada 1979; Paolo Giulisiano, Annunziata Antonazzo, *Il destino di Frankenstein. Tra mito letterario e utopie scientifiche*, Ancora, Milano 2015.

⁴ Cfr. John V. Murphy, *The Dark Angel. Gothic elements in Shelley's Works*, Bucknell University Press, Lewisburg 1975; David Punter, *The literature of terror. A history of gothic fictions from 1765 on to the present day*, Longman Pearson education, Harlow (England) 1996.

⁵ Cfr. Peter D. Fleck, *M. Shelley's notes to Shelley's "poem" and "Frankenstein"*, in «Studies in Romanticism», IV, 4, 1967, pp. 108-135; Jane Dunn, *Moon in eclipse: a life of Mary Shelley*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 1978.

⁶For more on the author's life, cf. Muriel Spark, *Child of Light: A reassessment of Mary Shelley*, Tower Bridge Publications, Hadleigh 1951; Christopher Small, *Ariel Like and Harpy: Shelley, Mary and Frankenstein*, Tower Bridge Publication, London 1972; Martin Garrett, *Mary Shelley*, The British Library, London 2002.

importance of feelings and passions. She, partially educated in Enlightenment thought in her family environment, being the daughter of the philosopher-politician William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft (18th century philosopher and feminist, who died of septicaemia following the birth of her daughter)⁷, she approaches Romanticism in terms of themes and content with reference to the individual in the perspective of his passions, as a “romantic hero” (hence the use of the words “modern Prometheus” in the title of Shelley's work)⁸.

Frankenstein, as we note from the subtitle, is the modern Prometheus, but this only occurs in the initial phase of the novel until the appearance of the Monster, the “fruit” of his “transgression”. The Monster will become the “new Prometheus”, as much for the rebellion manifested against his creator, which clearly highlights his Promethean character, as for the condition of solitude to which he will be destined⁹.

The author, starting from a critique of Enlightenment thought in its scientific perspective, which analyses only objective elements and those linked to matter, moves on to an attentive view of other themes that are not negligible for her, such as death, the meaning of existence, the concept of dignity linked to life and, again, the search for family identity and “normality”. Also significant is the theme of the “unnatural act of creation of life” performed by man and not by God.

In carrying out a hermeneutic analysis of Shelley's text *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus*, one cannot help but notice that its epistolary structure is nothing more than a literary device to engage in a direct conversation with the reader. The novel is subdivided into a series of sequences and is characterised by the presence of three characters, who fulfil,

⁷ On the liberal education she received, and for more on Godwin Shelley's biography, cfr. Rosalie Glynn Grylls, *Mary Shelley: a biography*, University Press, Oxford 1953; William H. Lyles, *Mary Shelley: an annotated Bibliography*, Garland Publishing, New York 1975; Ellen Moers, *Literary Women*, Garden City, New Jersey 1976; Miranda Seymour, *Mary Shelley*, Grove Press, New York 2000; Betty T. Bennett, *Mary Shelley in her times*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 2003.

⁸ For a complete picture of the historical-ideological context and the figures who played a decisive role in the author's life, cfr. Bonnie H. Neumann, *The lonely Muse. A critical biography of M. Wollstonecraft Shelley*, Austria: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Salzburg 1979; Betty T. Bennett, *Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley: An introduction*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1988; William St. Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys: the biography of a family*, Faber & Faber, London 1989.

⁹ Cfr. Paolo Giulisiano, Annunziata Antonazzo, *Il destino di Frankenstein. Tra mito letterario e utopie scientifiche*, cit., p. 12.

respectively, the roles of mediator (Frankenstein), normative model (Walton) and repressed (Monster).

The plot is constructed, therefore, on the interweaving of three different destinies (Frankenstein, Walton and Monster) made alive and dynamic by the constant presence of a speaking ego. In fact, the main story begins with the epistolary correspondence between Robert Walton and his sister Margaret, using the stylistic technique of the first person, in order to inform her about the dynamics of his journey in search of new scientific knowledge. Suddenly, the figure of Frankenstein takes shape, narrating to Robert the events of his existence that occurred before their meeting at the North Pole. Each event is communicated in its entirety, and in great detail, by the latter to Margaret through correspondence. Later, the narrator's voice becomes that of the Monster¹⁰, but in the guise of a “confession” given to his “creator”.

Each character is linked to the other not only by the tragic nature of the vicissitudes that concern him or her in the first person, but also by the constant and common reference to their respective childhoods, the inevitable starting point for the start of a reflection on the deepest meaning of existence¹¹.

In addition to the theme of childhood, the sense of destiny, the fleeting nature of time, the unfathomable mystery of every destiny, diversity, human miseries, doubles, prejudice, the concern for lost values (such as the family), the vitalistic tension (despite the death of the protagonist), the sense of procreation by male line only and, finally, the theme of love are all relevant.

The structural mode of the narrative plot allows Godwin Shelley to dare with the founding elements of the Gothic genre¹², within which

¹⁰ Cfr. Enzo Funari (ed.), *Il Doppio tra patologia e necessità*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano 1986; Nadia Fusini, *Nomi*, Feltrinelli, Milano 1986; Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, tr. it. Maria Paola Saci e Fabio Troncarelli, Garzanti, Milano 1991, pp. XXI-XXII; Ead., *Frankenstein or the modern Prometheus*, Oxford University press, New York 1998.

¹¹ Cfr. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, cit., pp. XIX-XXIII; Ead., *Frankenstein or the modern Prometheus*, cit.

¹² Cfr. Malcolm Skey, *Il romanzo gotico: guida alla lettura e bibliografia ragionata*, Edizioni Theoria, Napoli 1984; Mirella Billi (ed.), *Il gotico inglese. Il romanzo del terrore 1764-1820*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1986; Federica Perazzini, *Nascita del romanzo gotico, le radici culturali della letteratura del terrore*, Nova Logos, Aprilia 2013; Ead., *Il Gotico a distanza, nuove prospettive nello studio dell'evoluzione dei generi del romanzo*, Nuova Cultura, Roma 2013.

imaginary/surreal and real are masterfully utilised, succeeding in capturing the interest of the text's user to the very last line.

Considerations on the most representative characters and themes

The characters are not only actors in the narrative, but are the narrative itself. In fact, in the description of the characters and the tragic events that affect their existence, there is all the author's narrative intentionality that makes the protagonists the creators of the story's innermost "meanings". Among the main characters we have Robert Walton and above all Victor Frankenstein and his "creature" (the Monster).

Walton is Victor's first confidant, whom the latter approaches by character and by a common destiny of being 'damned' (not unlike Ulysses, in his lust for knowledge and adventure). However, Victor Frankenstein's narration of his own ambitions and existence will save Robert Walton from his only temptation: a journey that will distance him from the rest of the world to satisfy his exclusive desire for knowledge. Robert Walton represents a return to existing natural laws, which are just because they do not upset the nature of things; he also represents a rational and objective, sometimes detached, narration of the events exposed by Victor.

More interesting is the figure of Victor Frankenstein, a scientist, passionate about Galvanism, convinced of the possibility of being able to "create life" through electricity and with human body parts taken from corpses, subverting the natural order of "Creation".

This is where the drama begins, in that he is guilty of "hybris" because by opposing the divine will, the only one capable of achieving a "balanced" creation, he creates a Monster that he cannot control and which he will abandon to a fate of marginalisation and suffering. Thus he, by abandoning his offspring, denies his own paternity, "justifying" his son's hatred and desire for revenge. It is evident that the presence of this character alone gives consistency to the narrative plot.

Frankenstein also presents himself as a "positive hero", in that from the remorse arising from reflection on the events that happened to him, he achieves that redemption which comes from becoming aware of his own responsibilities, through a "dialectical process of expiation", which is the only means of redeeming his sins.

Victor, although apparently the main perpetrator of the crimes described, is the intermediary of the liberation of the "different". In fact, while he instructs Walton to eliminate the monstrous creature, after its death, he

precedes this request with assertions that appear to be clear signs of a desire to go back on his previously expressed will. The denial of the Monster's survival is essentially assertion, while the attraction to his creature becomes exaltation of it on the part of the father/creator.

Analysing the character of the Monster, he too offers many interesting cues for the hermeneutic analysis of the narrative plot. He is half artificial being and half man, tormented, for this reason, by a sense of inadequacy to coexist with men. He is, therefore, superhuman, mighty in evil and often amoral, aware of his own imperfection, manifested in his deformity, yet capable of human feelings (such as sympathy and love for his neighbour)¹³. The scenic greatness of this character lies in the complete absence of scruples, inconceivable for a scientist world resulting from the Enlightenment culture where, instead, reasoning and morality, which follows, dominate. He is “romantically” evil in the sense that he is free in his actions and emotional (in that he is hypersensitive, impressionable and easily succumbs to emotion). However, these elements make him human despite the monstrosity of his actions.

Following his abandonment soon after his creation by Victor, feeling lost, he searches for his father and the reasons for his existence. In the succession of narrative sequences, he becomes aware of himself and his own diversity. He is a being with his own dignity because he becomes aware of his condition and has human passions. Abandonment and a sense of loneliness are undoubtedly the elements that most characterise him. He seeks first a family and then a companion (promised but not created by Victor) and not obtaining them he chooses revenge against his creator/father. The Monster's search for a companion is not a request exclusive of love, but a demand for “normality”, which is realised in the family, as opposed to his condition of “diversity”, devoid of affectivity. The Monster hates his creator/father because, while Victor and Robert have chosen and can choose their destiny (and can also transgress, in the sense of freedom/diversity), he is bound to his “deformed” and unnatural fate. His inevitable diversity is a horrible and unacceptable condemnation.

Victor and the Monster, evidently, are two closely related figures since the former is in fact the “father” of the latter. Their chasing each other through the story is a continuous search for a missing relationship. Victor at the end of the story chases the Monster to the North Pole to avenge his

¹³ Cfr. Mario Praz, *La carne, la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica*, Sansoni, Firenze 1976 (IV ed.).

atrocities, but he is probably driven by a repressed paternal instinct. The story, in fact, does not end with a vengeance accomplished, but with the Monster weeping on his dead father's bed and deciding to kill himself in the fire, so that no one could ever rebuild from his remains another monstrous creature.

The Monster, by committing suicide, becomes his own punisher, because he is the only one who arrogates to himself the right to judge and condemn himself. He is not a man in his own right and that is why he does not align himself with the laws of a society that has not accepted him in his “diversity”.

The result is a series of reflections to which the reader may be implicitly or explicitly led. The Monster was “given birth”, unnaturally, without a mother¹⁴. This alone is a subversion of the natural order of things willed by God. These two figures (Victor Frankenstein and his creature) cannot do without each other in their duality, just like good and evil, *Thanatos and Bios*, a father and a son. There is no such thing as one separate from the other, nor can the attentive reader completely condemn the Monster's actions, for he did not ask to be brought into the world. The relationship between Victor and Monster, therefore, is a mirroring of tormented souls who in chasing each other yearn to annihilate each other, while their respective unity is only recomposed through death¹⁵. Moreover, the Monster cannot kill the father because, in essence, he does not intend to emancipate himself from his creator¹⁶; this would mean wiping out what little human there is in him and which is embodied in the father/son relationship.

In fact, Robert will find at Victor's bedside the Monster, who plans suicide as a form of self-punishment, since he partly feels responsible for the suffering and death of his “father”. Unconsciously, the Monster knows that

¹⁴ There is an obvious reference by the author to her biography, given that she suffers from the absence of a mother figure, as she became an orphan after childbirth, and the fact that her father was unable to make up for this. Cfr. Muriel Spark, *Child of Light: A reassessment of Mary Shelley*, Tower Bridge Publications, Hadleigh 1951; Christopher Small, *Ariel Like and Harpy: Shelley, Mary and Frankenstein*, Tower Bridge Publication, London 1972; Martin Garrett, *Mary Shelley*, The British Library, London 2002.

¹⁵ Cfr. Enzo Funari (ed.), *Il Doppio tra patologia e necessità*, Raffaello Cortina Milano 1986; Nadia Fusini, *Nomi*, Feltrinelli, Milano 1986; Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, cit., pp. XXI-XXII; Ead., *Frankenstein or the modern Prometheus*, cit.

¹⁶ In ancient mythologies, on the other hand, referring to the Greek mythology in particular, the sons get rid of their fathers; think, among many examples, of the struggle between Zeus and his father Cronus, in order to assume power among the gods and be at the head of the world (the narration of the facts is partially contained in Hesiod's *Theogony* and more extensively in the work entitled *Titanomachia* by Eumelo of Corinth, which has been lost).

revenge is unfeasible because there is an implicit identification between son and father, between creature and creator, and similarly between culprit and guilt or between different and error arising from the transgression of the natural order¹⁷.

Therefore, the relationship between Creator and Monster manifests itself in an “imperfect trinity”, within which the Father and the Son do not complete themselves with the Spirit, since the act of human creation, compared to the divine one, is an imperfect and partial realisation, and, consequently, inadmissible even by its own creature, who does not recognise himself in the spirit and will of his Creator. This impiety (*hybris*), in wanting to subvert the natural laws of death and life, constitutes the profound sense of the narrated drama.

A recurring *topos* is that of family affections in two different perspectives, one of veneration and preservation of them, the other of destruction and annihilation.

Victor has a sort of veneration for the members of his family, having had a happy childhood, while his “creature” (Monster) chases the unattainable dream of a family and, unable to obtain it, destroys Victor's family with a series of heinous crimes (such as the murder of the brother, his friend Henry Clerval and Elisabeth, his beloved, whose death consequently causes the grief-stricken death of Alphonse Frankenstein who was very fond of the girl). The Monster's hatred of the concept of family is due to the sense of abandonment he has suffered. He is in fact an “orphan”, whose values are all determined by his own will. It is he who consciously chooses which actions to take.

Walton's character is evidently the spokesman of the Romantic spirit: the search for inner wealth (coinciding with the complacency of his own “diversity”); the tendency towards isolation (which leads him to be “self-taught” even in his cultural education); the journey towards the unknown; exoticism (attraction towards unexplored lands); the approach to the divine dimension of nature, to be explored as a source of revelation. Only one sin of pride is present in him, namely the desire to make a journey (his only offence) beyond natural barriers (just like Dante's Ulysses), coinciding with an urge for power (present in the greatest characters of the Elizabethan theatre). All these factors clearly lead us back to the sense of spiritual independence and

¹⁷ Cfr. Martin Tropp, *Mary Shelley's Monster. The story of Frankenstein*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston 1976.

individualism that is properly Romantic, as well as to a taste for “transgression” with respect to everything that is codified.

The female figures (Margaret, Elisabeth, Justine) are marginal not because they have little presence in the narrative plot, but because the thread of the story is mainly given by the theme of the subversion of natural laws and the involuntary father (Victor)/son (Monster) relationship.

The author, by making certain narrative intuitions characteristic of her own century her own, also reconnecting with the culture of myth, allows the reader to embark on a conscious process of understanding existential issues, regardless of any religious or ideological orientation, always managing to stimulate in each reader, the sense of terror, as well as the process of identification with the characters and with the dramas that concern them in the first person, soliciting constructive reflection.

Conclusion

The historical period in which Godwin Shelley's work was written followed the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars. The ensuing prospect of socio-economic change certainly influenced the cultural circles to which the author belongs¹⁸. Shelley's work has many autobiographical elements and, at the same time, all the socio-cultural clashes typical of the English environment appear. The author wittily emphasises the relationship between the self and its double, using the specific tones of the dramatic genre. The literature on the double evidently arises from the exasperation of the relationship between perceived reality and subject. Godwin Shelley urges the reader to struggle against the Monster and all that it might represent, and, in equal measure, to realise that knowledge, of every order and nature, should always be reasonably utilised.

The subject of diversity and marginalisation, individual freedom, science and the ethical issues related to it, as well as the impassable limits beyond which man cannot go and the deepest mysteries of the human soul were discussed and reworked extensively by the intellectuals of the time.

Consequently, the author's work certainly fits, and fits well, into this historical-ideological context. In the following periods, other authors demonstrated the same sensitivity. One thinks of Victor Marie Hugo's *Les Misérables*, albeit with different themes and narrative plots.

¹⁸ Cfr. Kenneth Neill Cameron, Donald H. Reiman, *Shelley and his Circle*, 6 voll., Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1971-1973.

Returning to the examination of the temperament of the time between the 18th and 19th century, the process of industrialisation began, and the human soul no longer seemed to be central to the merely material interest, which also matured in the cultural circles of the time. Instead, in contrast, Godwin Shelley implicitly poses in *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus* the question as to what limits human science can go beyond, without neglecting ethical evaluations.

Victor has “created” life but has not provided his creature with a soul, in the sense of the concrete transmission of a heritage of ethical-moral and cultural values that a father passes on to his offspring. He is not a true Prometheus, because he has not offered his creature the tools for adequate moral emancipation and concrete emotional development.

Another reflection on Victor concerns his awareness of indirect responsibility for the crimes committed by the Monster and the motive behind them. The Monster is the means through which Victor Frankenstein's most unconfessed impulses take substance in his actions, while the Monster's actions decree the death of those who impose prohibitions, constraints, and behavioural rules on him.

The concept of diversity, as a synonym for transgression, manifests itself in every infraction committed by the Monster. He, feeling horror at the concept of diversity, according to this meaning, does not accept being placed in it. In the character, horror (outward ugliness) and beauty (i.e., the sense of goodness, civilisation, love, as well as the desire to escape from the destiny of being an unacceptable “scientific experiment”) coexist at the same time. We find the same elements in his double, Frankenstein. Only in these two characters, Frankenstein and his creature, the meaning of beauty never coincides with the exclusively physical. They are one a reflection of the other.

In *Frankenstein*, the action always starts from a “creation” and even the process of training or education is essentially the fruit of the effective combination of knowledge and sensations, as well as principles, even the most elementary, that can be safely assumed from physiology and the process of social training itself. In an attempt to control the phases of unpredictability to which any form of education usually subjects us, Frankenstein inflicts on himself far more demanding trials than a “traditional training” process,

generated by a constant struggle against adversity and the love/hate relationship inevitably established between creator and creature¹⁹.

The work has been a success among readers over time, becoming a true “classic” of literature aimed at adolescents. This is confirmed by the countless film versions and realisations, comic strips, complete or freely inspired. The depth and richness of the content has allowed for multiple interpretations, sometimes even far from the author's intention, but this is not a limitation. The same has happened with other world masterpieces of literature such as the *Odyssey* or the already mentioned *Les Misérables*.

The moral purpose of the epistolary novel, to guide in success and comfort in case of failure, is explicitly revealed in the words that the author has Victor (referred to in the story as “the stranger”) utter to Walton in the fourth letter²⁰, in which he explains how wisdom can be attained through knowledge of the dramatic events he narrates. The reader surrenders himself to the narration, and his sensibility allows him to perceive Shelley's state of mind as well; he is left free to interpret plot and meanings, regardless of the identity of the character he identifies with, activating his own creativity and stimulating, only if he wishes, a process of analysis directed at attributing a “broader meaning” to the story²¹.

The adolescent is totally taken by the text because he is offered an appreciable logical model, functional as much to the critical and morphological analysis of a precise literary genre, as to the interpretation of indispensable “psycho-analytical” presuppositions suitable to the understanding of the Self and the Other. The young reader, then, who reads mainly for pleasure and not necessarily to learn, is left free to put forward

¹⁹ Cfr. Paolo Giulisiano, Annarita Antonazzo, *Il destino di Frankenstein. Tra mito letterario e utopie scientifiche*, cit., p. 12; Kenneth Neill Cameron, Donald H. Reiman, *Shelley and his Circle*, 6 voll., cit.

²⁰ Cfr. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, cit., p. 29; Ead., *Frankenstein or the modern Prometheus*, cit.

²¹ For more on the issues addressed in the contribution, in addition to the other texts already mentioned, cfr. Chris Baldick, In *Frankenstein's shadow: myth, monstrosity and nineteenth-century writing*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1990; Steven Earl Forry, *Hydeous progenies: dramatizations of Frankenstein from Mary Shelley to the present*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 1990; Roberto Massari, *Frankenstein: dal mito romantico alle origini della fantascienza*, Erre Emme, Roma 1992; Fabio Giovannini, Marco Zatterin, *Frankenstein: il mito*, Polistampa, Firenze 1994; Tim Marshall, *Murdering to dissect: Grave-Robbing, Frankenstein and the Anatomy literature*, Manchester University Press, New York 1995; Radu R. Florescu, *In search of Frankenstein: exploring the myths behind Mary Shelley's monster*, Robson Books, London 1996.

hypotheses on plot and meanings. The novel remains highly topical mainly due to the theme of the “different” and the prejudices connected with it, dictated by the fear of all that is unknown and cannot be assimilated into the known.

If we analyse the film adaptations of *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus*, leaving aside the versions that misrepresent its contents and trespass into horror, i.e. considering those that are most faithful to the full text, despite the differences, we can see how certain themes of the plot are selected. One thinks, for example, for reference to themes such as the father-creator/son-creature relationship or abandonment, of the 1994 film adaptation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (directed by Kenneth Branagh).

The Monster, which often recurs in world literature in various forms and not always in the guise of a “monster” (think again of the protagonist Jean Valjean in *Les Misérables*) essentially represents the non-acceptance of conventions and rules in society, and the consequent condemnation of everything that departs from it. The Monster, therefore, is the reflection of an 'unresolved problem', just like the presence of orphans in Dickens' stories or the representation of the degradation of the poor and social marginalisation in Hugo's work. Jean Valjean, the protagonist of *Les Misérables*, is to some extent a reinterpretation of the character of the Monster, since he is condemned and persecuted unjustly, but he is a “different” who manages to integrate himself into society. Jean Valjean is a character who has the possibility and even the strength to redeem himself, whereas the Monster of *Frankenstein* is irredeemably damned. While Hugo succeeds in directly communicating to the world the meaning of the value of redemption and integration through the actions of his characters, Godwin Shelley does not do so directly. She does, however, allow the reader to empathise with the dramas of the characters that interest him or her, and in doing so, urges his or her reflection on an ongoing basis, including on the role he or she plays.

The Monster, specifically, embodies the emergence of the repressed hidden under the “reassuring” guise of wickedness and everything can be attributed to him: the killing of the Oedipal mother figure, the erasure of the repressive pre-Victorian female model, imprisonment.

Robert introduces the reader to the theme of the desire for the demolition of rational walls and reveals himself as a normative “model”, while Victor rises to the role of “mediator”, since it is left to him to liberate/repress any primordial instinctually.

The educational value of the text, which responds perfectly to the moral feeling of Godwin Shelley, repository of a “return of the epochally

repressed” and effective transmitter of the “cryptic” communication of a desire for the “different”, is addressed indiscriminately to adolescents and adults.

Obviously, if the adult's reading is more detached and critical, often conditioned by experience and prior knowledge, that of the adolescent, on the other hand, is fundamentally based on immediacy. The inclination to read *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus* is, therefore, instinctive, directed towards evasion from reality, to be analysed based on principles that look at the decomposition/recomposition of certain sequences of the narrative plot. The sequences, even if taken individually, allow the young reader to grow, however, because through the process of identification he is accompanied by the different characters through different stages: transgression, pride, punishment.