

19. Russell Hoban, *Riddley Walker* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1980), p. 120.
20. Peter Schwenger, *Letter Bomb: Nuclear Holocaust and the Exploding Word* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), pp. 37-40.
21. Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Wild Shore* (London: Macdonald, 1986), p.370.
22. Denis Johnson, *Fiskadoro* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1985), p. 11.

In Mary Shelley's Loving Arms: Brian Aldiss's *Frankenstein Unbound* and its Film Adaptation by Roger Corman

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In 1973 Brian Aldiss published two books with remarkable ties. One is his well-known history of science fiction *Billion Year Spree*; the other, a perhaps less popular volume, the novel *Frankenstein Unbound*. Both books coincide not only in their year of publication but also in presenting Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818, 1831) as the origin of modern science fiction. *Billion Year Spree* announces this central thesis in its "Introduction", where Aldiss explains that Mary Shelley's generation was "the first to enjoy that enlarged vision of time – to this day still expanding – without which science fiction is perspectiveless, and less itself".¹ Aldiss devotes the first chapter of *Billion Year Spree*, "The Origins of the Species: Mary Shelley", not only to analysing her seminal masterpiece but also to exploring the links between the original gothic and the post-gothic moulds in which, according to him, science fiction is cast. *Frankenstein* is for Aldiss the text that best articulates the links between the notion of the haunting past introduced by gothic fiction and the notion of the haunted, indeed haunting, future introduced by science fiction. Joseph Bodenland, the main character and narrator of *Frankenstein Unbound*² also claims in 2020 that "whatever previous generations made of it, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was regarded by the twenty-first century as the first novel of the Scientific Revolution and, incidentally, as the first novel of science-fiction" (p. 67).³

Both *Billion Year Spree* and *Frankenstein Unbound* are certainly significant

contributions to the growing interest in Mary Shelley's work and personality in the twentieth century. Through his essay and his novel Aldiss neatly links one of the most relevant contemporary popular genres with its parent genre, gothic fiction, and this with the important heritage of Romanticism. Aldiss occupies, thus, quite a prominent place among those who have been promoting since the 1970s the idea – now fully accepted – that Mary Shelley should be regarded as a leading literary personality in her own right and not simply as a reflector of the literary talent of her famous poet husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley, or her illustrious father (the philosopher William Godwin) and mother (the feminist writer Mary Wollstonecraft). Aldiss's thesis regarding Mary Shelley's contribution to the history of modern science fiction has, however, received perhaps less attention than it deserves in the scholarly work devoted to her, for two reasons: first, Aldiss is a man and as such his appreciation of Mary Shelley's work is suspect for her main academic champions, mostly feminist scholars and critics; second, for them, Mary Shelley's positioning in the history of science fiction is still today less relevant than her alleged critique of the patriarchal attitudes implicit in Romanticism, a critique of which *Frankenstein* is supposed to be the main instance.

In *Billion Year Spree*, Aldiss acknowledges as sources for his portrait of Mary Shelley the biography by R. Glynn Grills, *Mary Shelley: A Biography* (1938) and Eileen Bigland's book *Mary Shelley* (1959), apart from the memoirs of the notorious Captain Edward Trelawney, an occasional member of Mary Shelley's circle of friends. Among the academic monographs devoted to Mary Shelley, Aldiss quotes from Christopher Small's *Ariel like a Harpy: Shelley, Mary and Frankenstein* (1972) in relation to Small's thesis that Victor Frankenstein is a portrait of Percy B. Shelley's light and dark sides. Strangely enough, Aldiss does not mention Muriel Spark's *Children of Light: A Reassessment of Mary Shelley* (1951), a well-known, solid study by a respected novelist, nor other possible sources published in the 1960s and early 1970s, such as William Walling's *Mary Shelley* (1972).

The entry of feminism in the academic study of Mary Shelley is, in any case, subsequent to the publication of Aldiss's books, beginning arguably with the discussion of her work in Ellen Moers' *Literary Women* (1976). Robert Scholes and Eric S. Rabkin continued, nonetheless, in *Science Fiction: History, Science, Vision* (1977) the argument introduced by Aldiss, furthered in the miscellaneous volume edited by George Levine and U.C. Knoepfelmacher, *The Endurance of Frankenstein* (1979). The feminist tide, however, swept Mary Shelley away from this current with the chapter devoted to *Frankenstein* in Susan Gilbert and Sandra Gubar's seminal account of women's nineteenth century writing, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) and the attention paid to Mary and her mother in the book by Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (1984). The 1980s brought a host of academic publications on Mary Shelley, among which Anne K. Mellor's *Mary Shelley: Her Life, her Fiction, her Monsters* (1988) and Chris Baldick's *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-century Writing* (1987) are the best known.

Significantly, Mellor mentions Aldiss's *Billion Year Spree* only in a note which she uses simultaneously to credit him, Scholes, and Rabkin with the acknowledgement of Mary's pioneering efforts in the field of science fiction and to dismiss men's interpretations of *Frankenstein* as misreadings.⁴ Debra Benita Shaw's *Women, Science and Fiction: The Frankenstein Inheritance* (2000) is among the most recent skirmishes in the war between women feminists and male critics and authors working outside feminism for the appropriation of Mary Shelley's figure. Aldiss occupies quite a peculiar place in the battlefield, having suggested a successful line of reevaluation followed, as can be seen, even by some feminists who, nevertheless, must be certainly appalled by his novel *Frankenstein Unbound*. In this work, as we will see, Aldiss pays homage to Mary Shelley by involving her fictional equivalent in a quite candid sexual fantasy with his own surrogate in the text, Dr Bodenland. To gall feminists even more, while Aldiss has at least the excuse that the novel was published before the academic feminist vindication of *Frankenstein*, the corresponding film adaptation by Roger Corman can invoke no such alibi, having been made in 1990 with total disregard of the many feminist studies of Mary Shelley's work. Whereas scholars and critics are mainly interested by Mary Shelley as a woman writer, novelists and filmmakers are far more interested, even in Aldiss's case, by the masculine identity of Victor Frankenstein and his monster, hence their disregard of feminist scholarship, caused, besides, by the manifest distance between the academic world and the authors outside it.

Attracted like many readers and students of Romanticism by the events of the summer of 1816 at Villa Diodati, near Geneva, Aldiss develops in *Frankenstein Unbound* a fantasy that many have entertained: wouldn't it be thrilling to have the chance to meet Byron, Shelley and Mary Shelley in the very place and time when she gave birth to her novel? Another novel – Anne Edwards's *Haunted Summer* (1972, filmed in 1988) – had approached the same episode of literary history a year before Aldiss, and so have in the 1980s films such as Ken Russell's bizarre *Gothic* (1986) and Gonzalo Suárez's still undervalued, beautifully Romantic *Remando al Viento* (*Rowing in the Wind*, 1988). In *Frankenstein Unbound* two whole chapters out of twenty seven (7 and 8) are exclusively devoted to Bodenland's visit to Villa Diodati, where he meets indeed Byron and Shelley in addition to Mary Shelley. Another participant, Dr Polidori, Byron's personal physician and author of the first vampire tale in English – "The Vampyre" (1819) inspired by Polidori's hatred of Byron – is portrayed as a madman fond of strange antics, which include threatening Bodenland's life with a gun just for the sake of a cheap thrill. Claire Clairmont – Mary Shelley's stepsister and Byron's pregnant mistress – receives hardly any attention, and her presence is just cursorily acknowledged.

Bodenland is tempted to introduce himself as a fellow American poet, but cannot think then of a single illustrious name, recalling that Poe was but a child in 1816.⁵ Aware of Christopher Small's discussion of the parallelisms between Mary Shelley's husband and her main character, Aldiss has Bodenland notice the remarkable affinities between Shelley's looks and behaviour and Victor Frankenstein's: "I could see in Shelley some of Victor's nervous mannerisms. Shelley looked like a haunted man" (p.

79). The conversation – a real *tour de force* recreating a plausible evening at Villa Diodati – reveals Byron's jaded cynicism and patronising attitude towards Mary and Percy Shelley's optimistic view of a socialist, vegetarian future. Knowing the grim truth about the future Shelley envisions, Bodenland sadly reflects on the disappointment of the poet's hopes as he shirks answering the compromising questions his hosts ask him about his view of the future. Mary Shelley, curiously enough, has little to say throughout this very intellectual dinner at Villa Diodati, but, then, this agrees with her own diary about the days at Byron's place.

Aldiss does not give a clear justification for Bodenland's journey to 1816 Switzerland. The implicit justification is much better sustained in Roger Corman's 1990 film version, in which a correspondence is cleverly traced between Frankenstein and Bodenland (renamed Buchanan), here presented as the creator of the laser-beam weapon whose implosions are causing the upsetting time slips disrupting life in the early twenty-first century. Bodenland seems far more concerned with the idea of how his meeting with Mary forces him to consider the nature of time and his own nature. The timeslips have disturbed not only his own life but also mankind's sense of time, threatening to strand unsuspecting citizens into an unknown life they might not be able to escape. "It had come to the stage in 2020", he tells the recording device through which his narrative reaches us, "when anyone who regarded Time as other than something that could be measured precisely by chronometer was shunned as an eccentric" (p. 81). But, linking his two favourite subjects, Bodenland realises in this mock 1816 that time is "like the growth of Mary's reputation, devious and ambiguous" rather than "the straight line, moving remorselessly forward, which Western thought has forced it to prefigure" (p. 80).

As is well known, time travel became a topical subject in science fiction with H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), a pessimistic account of a dystopian future for Earth. Unlike his British counterpart, the American Bodenland is thrilled to travel into the past rather than the future: "How much nicer to go back. The past was safe! I was back in history!" (p. 34), he chants enraptured after recalling the grim visions of Wells's traveller. And he is certainly right to fear a distant future, since when he finally reaches it through another timeslip he discovers like Wells's traveller the horror that awaits mankind. Aldiss's wintry, post-nuclear-holocaust vision of a possible future places *Frankenstein Unbound* both within the technophobic tradition inaugurated by Mary Shelley herself and the dystopian tradition established by Wells.

The authors of dystopian novels tend to be anti-scientific rather than technophobic. "They", Alexandra Aldridge writes, "have been watchful over the intrusion of scientific values – objectivity, neutrality, instrumentalism – into the social imagination. They have criticised the replacement of a humanist ethos with a scientific/technological one; their fiction assails the scientising of society."⁶ *Frankenstein Unbound* has very little to do with the celebration of technology in so-called hard science fiction. It is, rather, a classical example of soft science fiction in its technophobia and in its use of technology merely to provide an excuse for a fantasy

meant ultimately to defend a humanist point of view. The timeslip caused by nuclear warfare might as well be caused by magic, but it effectively allows for the slippage of Mary Shelley's historical time into Frankenstein's fictional time and of both into Bodenland's future – or vice versa.

Postmodern fiction and thought have been addressing the question of whether history is, after all, just another text, another fiction since the publication of Hayden White's *Metahistory* in 1973, the same year Aldiss published his novel. As White wrote in this volume:

It is sometimes said that the aim of the historian is to explain the past by 'finding,' 'identifying,' or 'uncovering' the 'stories' that lie buried in chronicles; and that the difference between 'history' and 'fiction' resides in the fact that the historian 'finds' his stories, whereas the fiction writer 'invents' his. This conception of the historian's task, however, obscures the extent to which 'invention' also plays a part on the historian's operations.⁷

The beginnings of postmodernism, whether in fiction or a number of philosophical and even architectural trends, cannot be dated with precision; it can be said, though, that this uncertainty White identified in the early 1970s is a clear sign of the postmodern. "Postmodernism is defined by the following terms", Norman K. Denzin writes: "a nostalgic, conservative longing for the past, coupled with an erasure of the boundaries between the past and the present; an intense preoccupation with the real and its representations; a pornography of the visible; the commodification of sexuality and desire; intense emotional experiences shaped by anxiety, alienation, resentment, and a detachment from others".⁸ All this is present in Aldiss's fantasy of time travel.

Why this moment of western history triggers this massive hesitation as regards our concepts of truth and time, that is to say, positivist history, has possibly much to do with a sense of our troubled relation with technology. This has fulfilled its mission of bringing constant progress, as imagined in the nineteenth century, only at an enormous cost for the planet. The early 1970s, marked by the important oil crisis originating in the Middle East, made western society aware of its dependence on destructive technology, hence the appeal of the *Frankenstein* cautionary myth. Yet, writing about other 1980s dystopian fictions set in the near future such as the films *Road Warrior* or *Blade Runner*, the main theorist of postmodernism, Fredric Jameson argues that :

what films like these 'mean' (not, perhaps, the best word for it) is not the breakdown of high technology in a future time of troubles, but its conquest in the first place... But what such films actually give us to consume are not those flimsy prognoses and dystopian meteorological bulletins but rather high technology itself and its own special effects. J.G. Ballard, himself one of the greatest postcontemporary dystopians, has found a stunning formulation for such aesthetic projections: they have reached, he tells us, a level of technology advanced enough to depict advance technology in decline.⁹

Earlier in the same volume Jameson argues that what is at stake in dystopian near-future science fiction is not quite White's identification of fiction with history but our inability to "imagine the future at all, under any form – Utopian or catastrophic."¹⁰

This is why he further argues that science fiction and historical fiction are in a dialectical relationship, as one corresponds to the rise of the eighteenth-century notion of historicity, or the belief in the idea that the truth of history can be captured, and the other to the twentieth-century notion of its collapse. Needless to say, the first novel genre to imagine the past, in this case the Middle Ages, was Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), famous for being the originator of gothic fiction. In short, the historical novel and science fiction are, as Jameson argues, in touch with each other because, plainly, they are both instances of the gothic narrative mode. This flourishes in times when the conceptual paradigms associated to history change and also when the dominating culture that produces it comes to a crossroads in its historical development, such as the early 1970s were for the Western world, especially the Anglo-American culture from which Aldiss's novel springs.

Frankenstein Unbound is, seen from a Jamesian perspective, a truly postmodern gothic novel, with its fusion of fictionalised history and historised science fiction, to which Aldiss adds the idea that all fiction about the past, in this case the Romantic period, is implicitly time travel. This novel, and its corresponding film adaptation, are used as vehicles to revisit a place and time stranded now between history and fiction thanks to the increasing popularity of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. There are, thus, twin journeys in time in *Frankenstein Unbound*: Aldiss's journey into Bodenland's 2020 future and Aldiss-Bodenland's journey into Mary Shelley's 1816. The former is dystopian; the latter considers the time at which science chose between the forking paths of utopia and dystopia. In addition, this journey to the past further breaks the boundaries between history and fiction, as if Aldiss followed White's ideas, by refusing to make an ontological distinction between Mary and her fictional creatures: as far as Aldiss is concerned, they are all part of the same past. She, in fact, is not even aware of the parallel existence of the monsters she is soon going to write about. This, after all, is Bodenland's (that is, Aldiss's) fantasy and he is in control.

As Chris Baldick has noted, "the story of Frankenstein and his monster enjoys a status which appears to literary criticism as an anomaly, a scandal: it is a modern myth".¹¹ When Bodenland comes across the good doctor and his creature his impression is that he's entering myth: "I felt myself in the presence of myth and, by association, *accepted myself as mythical!*" (p. 40; original italics). According to *Frankenstein Unbound*, Mary herself has become part of the myth of Frankenstein whereas *Frankenstein* has become an essential part of the mythicised lives of the members of the Romantic circle at Villa Diodati. The additional difficulty of having Mary Shelley and Victor Frankenstein coexist in the same time and place is justified by Bodenland as a matter of suspension of disbelief or, rather, of belief in myth: "I had accepted the equal reality of Mary Shelley and her creation, Victor Frankenstein, just as I had accepted the equal reality of Victor and his monster. In my position, there was no difficulty in so doing; for they accepted my reality, and I was as much a mythical creature in their world as they would have been in mine" (p. 94).

Mary Shelley's original Frankenstein lives presumably in the late eighteenth

century; she was following here the Gothic convention of placing narratives in the more or less distant past rather than the immediate present of the author. He is much more mobile geographically than Bodenland's Geneva-based doctor: his female monster, it must be noted, is manufactured on a Scottish island and not in a Swiss laboratory as happens in Aldiss's novel. These deviations from Mary Shelley's novel are irrelevant here, though, for the timeslip seems to have disrupted not only time but also Mary's hold on her own creation. What Aldiss is implying here is that *both* Mary Shelley and Victor Frankenstein are for modern readers fictional entities placed at the same literary and mythical level: this appears to be the most enjoyable dimension of *Frankenstein* for him as a reader. Mary Shelley has slowly gained reputation and popularity and her own Romantic and romantic life has made her a heroine for many enthusiastic readers. Victor, long disconnected from Mary by the many film adaptations that hardly contributed to popularising her name, has become a legend himself. As for the monster, he is one of the most enduring images of twentieth-century Western culture. The characters have led a life of their own in many others texts that have separated them from Mary; it makes sense, therefore, that she is powerless to help Bodenland in his mission to stop Frankenstein, for her creation is a completely autonomous being she can control as little as Victor himself can control his monster.

The brief affair between Bodenland and Mary Shelley arises thus from her perception of this man as yet another mythical, autonomous creature from a strange area of the imagination: the future. Aldiss has us believe that Mary Shelley accepts Bodenland's advances not in the name of free love, as she does in Corman's film version, but because she is attracted by the idea of having sex with a creature as fantastic as Bodenland is to her. Actually, the episode is a rather unembarrassed sexual fantasy that, it is suspected, pleases Aldiss even more than it pleases happy Bodenland. Aldiss's odd choice of middle-aged Bodenland as his hero makes the sexual encounter between him and 18-year-old Mary Shelley suspect, to say the least. Aldiss himself was 48 at the time the novel was published and, given his own admiration for Mary Shelley, it is easy to conclude that he realises through Bodenland a cherished fan fantasy. We can accept this, but the problem is that Bodenland's own account of the affair is quite trite and it is unclear whether this is to be blamed on the character's limitations – after all, he is narrating his odyssey orally into a recording device – or on the writer's. The language Bodenland uses to describe the budding attraction between him and Mary Shelley is full of romantic (rather than Romantic) clichés: "There was a union, a chemical bond, between us, which nature seemed to acknowledge and conspire with, for the wind dropped and the sun blazed forth, and the great hills with their snowy caps shone forth in magnificence. Without conscious intention, I took her in my arms and kissed her" (p. 100). In Corman's film version, the image of the exquisitely wrinkled face of British actor John Hurt (Buchanan) next to the lovely, smooth, young face of Bridget Fonda (Mary) strengthens rather than dispels the impression that this is not a wholly well-managed sexual fantasy.

Despite his passion for Mary Shelley Bodenland is, ironically, a very poor reader of

Frankenstein. He has difficulties to recall the plot of the novel, which he claims to have read as a child. "Such recollection of it as I had," he says "was obscured by the travesties of it I had watched in 4-D on film, TV, and CircC" (p. 57). Corman's Buchanan is, in contrast, a reader as passionate as Aldiss. He even uses his high-tech car computer to offer Mary Shelley a complete version of her still unfinished novel, though this is a questionable time loop suggesting that Buchanan tells Mary Shelley how to finish her novel and so shares – or overshadows – her authorship. No wonder feminist critics resent male interpretations and fantasies of appropriation of Mary's creativity.

Post-coital conversation between the couple drifts to the topic of where Mary has drawn her inspiration for the novel. Mary Shelley tells Bodenland, presumably for the benefit of the uninformed reader of *Frankenstein Unbound* who may be puzzled by the presence of the Romantics in Geneva and in this novel, the now famous anecdote of the literary competition between Mary Shelley, Polidori, Byron and Percy Shelley which began a rainy evening in 1816 when they were reading together German horror stories and dared each other to write a spooky tale. Her sources for *Frankenstein* are practically the same ones Aldiss mentions in *Billion Year Spree*, above all, the work of the scientist Erasmus Darwin in *Zoonomia*, that of the philosopher and novelist William Godwin, Mary Shelley's father, in *Caleb Williams* and her own nightmares. Mary, incidentally, corroborates Aldiss's theses in *Billion Year Spree* by noting her passion for gothic fiction.

There are echoes of *Caleb Williams*, a novel about persecution and injustice, in *Frankenstein Unbound*, too, especially in the chapter in which, after leaving Mary Shelley, Bodenland is imprisoned under the accusation of having killed Frankenstein, gone missing after Justine's execution. As he knows, the scientist has disappeared because he is making the monster's female mate; yet, Bodenland must still stay in prison and receive no help from Victor. From there, he writes Mary Shelley a long letter in which he reconsiders his technophobia, and hers, finally acknowledging that social improvements, above all the establishment of basic human rights, are the result of a general moral re-education and of "the growth of social conscience in the general mass of people" (p. 122). He vindicates the role of novelists like Mary Shelley herself and, above all, of Charles Dickens in pointing out the defects of the system: they are the true legislators of the world, not the poets as Percy Shelley once claimed in his *Defense of Poetry* (1821). He accepts, though, that many positive changes have taken place thanks to the economic surplus created by the use of technology. Somewhat more optimistic than usual about the future given the appalling conditions of the Geneva prison where he is practically buried alive, Bodenland concludes his letter to Mary Shelley thus: "Thanks to the work of your moral forces, powered by the social change which always and only emerges through technological innovation, the future from which I come is not entirely uninhabitable" (p. 124).

Bodenland's troubled relationship with Frankenstein and his monster reflects Aldiss's own reading of Mary Shelley's novel and, possibly, his wish to make the story his own. In this version, Bodenland ends up killing Frankenstein when he realises that not only is he indifferent to Justine's unfair trial and death, but also that he is callous

enough to use her body to make his monster's bride. The subject of the making of female monster is central in *Frankenstein Unbound*, for when Bodenland meets Frankenstein the monster has already killed Victor's brother William and demanded a mate from his creator. Frankenstein's motivation for creating new life is attributed to his wish to halt the ravages of time and death on man. An atheist firmly convinced that there is no God, he feels neither remorse nor a sense of sin. Yet, he is haunted by feelings of guilt, which he associates with sexuality. This is so, he tells Bodenland "because that intense pleasure which procreation gives is the moment when human beings shed their humanity and become as the animals, mindless, sniffing, licking, grunting, copulating ... My new creation was to be free of all that. No animal origins; no guilt..." (p. 60). This explains not only why he makes the monster, but also why he is so distant from his bride-to-be Elizabeth, here a cold, unsympathetic woman courted by a concerned Henry Clerval.

In Bodenland's view, Frankenstein's creation prefigures his own society: "I saw the technological society into which I had been born as a Frankenstein body from which the spirit was missing" (p. 167). Far from replacing religion in the spiritual needs of mankind, "organised science had allied itself with Big Business and Government; it had no interest in the individual – its meat was statistics! It was death to the spirit" (p. 167). In the Preface to *Jurassic Park*, another heir of Mary Shelley's masterpiece, Michael Crichton sides with Aldiss in criticising the Frankenstein view of science by which first, whatever can be done by scientists will be done no matter the consequences and, second, "much of the research is thoughtless or frivolous".¹² Frankenstein's research has indeed little justification, despite his claims that he is contributing much to the progress of science, except the pleasure he finds in his work. A proof of this is that he is bent on creating the mate for his monster not so much to please him but to create a second, perfected version of his masterpiece, that is to say, to test his own scientific skills to the utmost limits.

The idea that woman is an improved version of man and, thus, Frankenstein's/God's real masterpiece, is ignored by Mary Shelley; Victor never gives life to his half-made Eve, though artificial woman lives in other works. She was born as the accomplished automaton Coppelia of E.T.A. Hoffman's tale in *Das Elixiere des Teufels* (1815) and popularised as the even more sophisticated Hadali, another automaton, in Villiers de L'Isle Adam's *LEve Future* (1885). The years between the publication of Hoffman's gothic tales and the no less gothic fiction of the end of the century see the transformation of the angelic virtuous woman into an idol of perversion. This is the phrase used by Bram Dijkstra as title for the book (1986) in which he discusses, as Mario Praz also did in *The Romantic Agony* (1933), the transition from early to late sexual fantasies as expressed in European art and fiction of the nineteenth century. Initially, art and fiction express a fantasy of mastery over woman through the erotic power of the Romantic fallen man of Byronic origin, of which Victor is in fact an example. By the late nineteenth century this fantasy of mastery presents man as the innocent victim of a monstrous, vampiric woman who must be destroyed, reflecting

thus men's fears of the New Woman's claim for independence.¹³ Following these models, while in *Frankenstein*, the virtuous, domestic woman is a victim of man's irresponsible use of science – Elizabeth, Victor's bride, is killed and probably raped by the monster – in *LEve Future* Hadali victimises men with her tantalizing sexuality, which is why she must be destroyed.

The twin images of woman as angel and demon join the mad doctor heir to Frankenstein in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1926), written by his wife Thea von Harbou. In this silent film, as is well known, a sinister female robot is manufactured by a scientist on the payroll of an exploitative capitalist who uses her to control his workers. This metallic woman has been actually made by replicating the image of the angelic girl Maria, who devotes her energies to counteracting the havoc her twin spreads. As regards more direct film adaptations of Mary Shelley's novel, the popular film *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) by James Whale – author of the film *Frankenstein* (1931) – was the first to bring the bride back into Mary Shelley's narrative. Significantly Elsa Lanchester plays both Mary Shelley, in the prologue where she tells Byron and Shelley that the story of the monster did not end with his death, and the bride. In Whale's film, the bride, a much prettier sight than her intended mate, screams as soon she sees him, seemingly preferring Frankenstein's attentions and apparently refusing to consider her own monstrosity. In more recent films, such as Frank Roddam's unsatisfactory *The Bride* (1985) and Ridley Scott's superb *Blade Runner* (1982), the new Eve is far superior to the new Adam – she might be even immortal, as Scott's film hints. Writing about the beautiful yet artificial replicant Rachel, the heroine of *Blade Runner*, William Slade comments that "the reason we both adore and fear technology is that it is at least as humanising as it is dehumanising, that we find our humanity not just in rebelling against the control systems we have created but also in accepting our oneness with what we have created, that all that is best in us is as much the product of artifice as it is of nature".¹⁴ Woman as artificial beauty sums up for him the conflict between nature and technology far better than man as artificial monster, for she can be both loved and hated but he can only be hated.

Disregarding the growing interest in exploring the frontier between beauty and the monstrosity of artifice in the bride, in *Frankenstein Unbound* Victor's second creation is even more monstrous than the first. To begin with, Bodenland corrects Mary by claiming that she was wrong to describe the monster in such horrific fashion. When he confronts the monster in Victor's laboratory, Bodenland sees that:

In his anger, he was beautiful. I use the word beautiful knowing it to be inaccurate, yet not knowing how else to counteract the myth that has circulated for two centuries that Frankenstein's monster's face was a hideous conglomeration of second-hand features.

It was not so. Perhaps the lie drew its life from a human longing for those chills of horror which are depraved forms of religious awe. And I must admit that Mary Shelley began the rumour; but she had to make her impression on an untutored audience. I can only declare that the face before me had a terrible beauty (p. 167).

In contrast, the female is an ogress. The bride is made mainly out of the dead body of the servant Justine, unfairly executed for the death of Victor's young brother William, but receives from Frankenstein new 'improvements': she may breath through orifices placed behind the ears, and has a thick skin or rather hide to resist low temperatures. Intriguingly, Bodenland notes that "the vaginal area served purely for purposes of procreation; a sort of vestigial mock-penis was provided on the thigh, from which urine could be expelled" (p. 161). The new Eve has muscled, hairy legs, and an "enormous rib-cage, topped by gigantic if flaccid breasts, powerful enough to suckle a whole brood of infant monsters" (p. 167). All this, Bodenland notes, says much about Victor's abnormal sexuality.

Voyeurism reaches a peak in the novel and in the Frankenstein myth when Bodenland witnesses the "brief and brutal mating" (p. 186) of the couple of monsters. Contradicting Frankenstein's absurd idea that his creations would not be contaminated by sexual activity and its ensuing sense of guilt, which is how he sees intercourse, the monster and his new companion make love as soon as she is in command of her limbs. The fantasy of sex with Mary Shelley has thus a corresponding dark side: the fantasy of seeing these two gigantic beings mate – a primal scene that holds Bodenland spellbound. This is the moment of true horror that the first novel circumvented when Mary Shelley had a disgusted Victor destroy his still unborn – or stillborn – Eve. This is, in my view, the main gap if not chasm in the plot of the original novel and not only for Mary Shelley's implicit misogyny. Victor is distraught by the idea that his monsters might breed a whole new race, which is why he destroys the female, but he could have easily made a female unable to bear children and thus please his monster. He simply wants a companion and never claims his right to reproduce. Instead, by disappointing his creature Victor brings down on himself, Elizabeth and his family the monster's rage at the prospect of unrelieved loneliness.

The post-apocalyptic scenario at the end of *Frankenstein Unbound* is its least convincing aspect, though Aldiss makes here interesting comments on the matter of the birth of a race superior to man originating in the monsters. After killing Frankenstein and burning his lab, not without saving his precious research diary, Bodenland assumes the role of stalker in a chase that the monsters paradoxically lead. By the time this begins, large sections of 1816 Europe seem to have been already destroyed by mysterious floods. This and his murder of Frankenstein leads Bodenland to the conclusion that:

Somewhere, there might be a 2020 in which I existed merely as a character in a novel about Frankenstein and Mary.

I had altered no future, no past, I had merely diffused myself over a number of cloud-patch times.

There was no future, no past. Only the cloud-sky of infinite present states (p. 194).

As has been noted, the monsters lead Bodenland to a vast ice extension where a futuristic city looms large. The buildings, Bodenland notes, were imposing, "but

dystopian visions of buildings come so close to celestial visions that I hardly knew whether the sight of them filled me with comfort or foreboding" (p. 212). The city is inhabited, Bodenland suspects, by the likes of the monsters who may have triumphed over mankind after a self-inflicted nuclear holocaust. Still, Bodenland kills both creatures among protestations by the male that Bodenland hates the similarities rather than the differences between mankind and Frankenstein's new breed. As Marie-Hélène Huet writes, "the genesis of Victor's monster offers no radically new vision either of imagination or of progeny but the question of resemblance assumes new urgency as the novel demonstrates that similarities, rather than differences, disclose the greatest monstrosity".¹⁵

Roger Corman's film version of *Frankenstein Unbound* (1990), the only adaptation of a novel by Aldiss, is a rather free adaptation of Aldiss's text. The film has enough merits of its own to be placed at the same level and even above Aldiss's novel. It also marks a turning point in Corman's career, for he returned to directing with this film after a lapse of almost twenty years devoted to running his studio New World Pictures. Budgeted at \$9 million, the film is lavish for Corman standards. It was made at the insistence of Universal Studios, who, on the strength of certainly questionable market research thought that a new Frankenstein film by Corman might be a good box office success. Corman had no interest in making a new version of *Frankenstein*, despite his love of James Whale's 1931 adaptation. "I liked particularly", Corman has declared "that he brought a humanity to the monster. You saw the monster doing these terrible things, yet you also understood the torment within the monster."¹⁶ Apparently, Corman finally accepted Universal's offer for money and on condition that he could give a new turn of the screw to the topic of Frankenstein and his monster. "I remembered dimly a novel from Brian Aldiss called *Frankenstein Unbound*", Corman explains "and I said that is an original viewpoint, at least, so it can be a little different. And so I took the assignment on that basis".¹⁷ Like its successor *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994), *Frankenstein Unbound* failed to attract the expected large audiences but, ultimately, this film was better received by many reviewers and film festivals than Branagh's.

The box-office failure of *Frankenstein Unbound* was probably conditioned by the lack of definition of the film, which fails to clearly address either the multiplex pop-corn eating audience or a smaller cult following. The screenplay by Corman himself and FX. Feeney deviates from the novel in two crucial aspects which give the film an added interest. On one hand, as has been noted, Bodenland/Buchanan is the scientist whose laser-beam weapons, similar in power to small black holes, cause the timeslips and, eventually, the final holocaust that destroys human life on Earth. The parallelism between Buchanan and Frankenstein is interesting, as it strengthens the links between the technoscience of the present and the immediate future with that of the past arising from the Industrial Revolution. On the other hand, the monster's bride is fashioned out of the dead body of Frankenstein's bride Elizabeth rather than from Justine's. Corman's version lacks, though, an equivalent of the brilliant chapters in Aldiss's novel narrating his meeting with the poets at Villa Diodati. Byron and Shelley play very small,

perfunctory roles that fail to define their role in Mary's life.

There are slight but interesting variations regarding the novel in the presentation of Mary Shelley. Victor Frankenstein deviates much more from Aldiss's interpretation. Buchanan introduces himself to Mary Shelley at Justine's trial, which she does not attend in the novel. As happens, the timeslip that engulfs Bodenland also engulfs his sophisticated car. In the film, the car computer informs Buchanan that Mary Shelley is the mistress of both Shelley and Byron, though there is no proven evidence of this *menage à trois* nor its suggestion in the novel. Buchanan approaches Mary to help him try to save Justine, who is about to be declared guilty of William's death. This chivalrous but failed endeavour eventually costs Buchanan a severe beating by an angry Genevise mob which seems to spring out of Whale's *Frankenstein*. The love scene is presented as an illustration of the Romantics' notion of free love – Mary Shelley tells Buchanan that Byron and Shelley preach it, but that she practises, unlike what apparently happened in reality. Sex, however, seems to derive, above all, from Mary's admiration of Buchanan's fair sense of justice towards Justine. A very enjoyable car ride in Buchanan's spectacular futuristic vehicle convinces her of Buchanan's claim that he comes from the future. She is perceptive enough to tell him that he's attempting to stop Frankenstein in order to stop himself from eventually destroying the world but there is no metafictional discussion of the possibilities of myth and intertextuality in Corman's film.

Buchanan, ascribed to the Hawkins Institute in the New Los Angeles of 2031, introduces himself to Victor as a fellow American scientist hoping to form a bond on the basis of their brotherhood as scientists. Corman's Frankenstein (played by Raul Julia) has very little to do with Aldiss' Shellyan 25-year-old. He is older yet even more centred on his work; he lacks the passion of youth but has the determination of the well-established scientist. He has made his creature to free man "from a cruel and fictitious God" and thinks that he is free from sin not only because he is an atheist but also because he is a scientist. The impression throughout the film and especially in the scenes of the bride's creation is that Corman's Frankenstein is closer to the Frankenstein of film – the mad doctor of Whale's film – than to Aldiss's more Romantic character. This is, perhaps, the film's main weakness.

The main difference between Aldiss's and Corman's male monster lies in the make-up by Nick Dudman for the film and on Corman's insistence in visualising in detail the violence the monster causes. Dudman's outstanding work is based on a comment in Aldiss's novel by which Bodenland notes that the monster's face seems to be a bone sculpture. Dudman's male monster has prominent cheekbones and cartilaginous cheeks; the forehead and the sides of the head suggest that Frankenstein has grafted the thick skin onto the skull thanks to curved pieces of metal. These pieces, protruding at the sides of the head, give the monster's face indeed the appearance of a futuristic sculptured mask. The female monster sports similar pieces of metal in her temples, but her face is less disfigured than the male monster's. Dudman's work also contributes significantly to Corman's display of violence, very much in touch with trends current in 1990s Hollywood cinema even beyond the genre of horror. The film includes a

particularly gruesome moment showing how Elizabeth is killed by the monster, who rips her body open. It must be noted that Kenneth Branagh used a suspiciously similar scene for Elizabeth's death in his film *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994); in that case, the monster rips her open to tear off her heart. The monster's callousness towards the human body is partly justified by his confusion about natural birth; he seemingly believes that Frankenstein has made all the bodies he comes across and has great difficulties to understand the harm he causes and what Buchanan means when he claims that God and not Victor made him.

Corman's film suggests that neither the writing of Mary Shelley's novel nor the making of the bride would be possible without Buchanan's intervention, more precisely that of his car. The future intrudes in the past through the copy of *Frankenstein* he gives Mary, and also through the use Frankenstein makes of the car's powerful nuclear engine to awaken the bride to new life. The car is a distant relative of the Felder of Aldiss's novel but seems closer to the De Lorean of Robert Zemeckis's film trilogy *Back to the Future*, the most popular time travel narrative in recent years. Iconographically, Buchanan's car – a sleek silver beauty designed by Italian top artist Giorgetto Giugiaro – competes for the attention of the spectator with the monsters and indirectly shows that Victor's main shortcoming is that he has no aesthetic sense. The engineers of the future that have made Buchanan's car seem to understand much better than Frankenstein that science and technology are also sold through the powerful image of the products they create. After all, Mary Shelley's novel would have a completely different meaning had she imagined Frankenstein as an accomplished artist and scientist capable of creating a beautiful creature.

As Marie-Hélène Huet observes, in her version of the myth of the Romantic artist as "as lone genitor in awe of his own creation" Mary Shelley reinterprets "art as teratology", that is to say, as monster-making.¹⁸ For Mary Shelley, art is a masculine domain that opposes and challenges the feminine domain of natural creation; while for the male artist, woman's capacity to bear babies has no particular merit, hence his need to create life on his own, for woman man's attempt at sole fatherhood is an aberration. This is quite a new view, as woman were thought to play no other role in reproduction than copying from nature, mainly from the father's seed, to the extent that baby girls were regarded as errors in this process of replicating man. Likewise, monstrous children – terata – were thought to be the product of the mother's unbounded imagination or of the impact on it of accidents such as fright caused by a strange sight. Mary Shelley shows her unconventional views by suggesting that the artist's own unbounded imagination also produces monsters. Victor's case implies that, in Mary Shelley's view, the male artistic imagination should be bounded and controlled; Victor's aesthetic clumsiness, however, could also be read as woman's fear that man's artificial children might turn out to be superior to the children of their wombs. If that were the case, woman would lose her only advantage over man and sex would become an end in itself, something which would place the human race outside nature.

The commodification and sexualisation of woman's body is evident in recent

versions of *Frankenstein* in which the use of Elizabeth's body to create the female monster turns Victor and his monster into competitors for the love of the 'same' woman. In both *Frankenstein Unbound* and Branagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* the monster kills Elizabeth in practically the same way, as has been noted, and for the same reasons, namely, to hurt Frankenstein where he is more vulnerable. Frankenstein reanimates then his lost bride for himself with the opposition of the creature, who understands that this new monstrous woman must be his own bride. Both Helena Bonham-Carter in Branagh's film and Catherine Rabbet in Corman's play the new female monster as a living doll in deep pain, though Rabbet's pseudo-Elizabeth precedes Bonham-Carter's in her realisation that her new monstrosity can only lead to her sacrifice. Rabbet's Elizabeth pretends that she is ready to leave the monster and return to Frankenstein's arms only to put herself in the way of the bullet Victor had destined for the monster. Realising she is no longer Elizabeth, but a monstrous travesty of her own self, she chooses death as her groom, rejecting both Frankenstein and the monster. On her side, practically torn apart in the struggle between the monster and Frankenstein for her body, Bonham-Carter's Elizabeth sets herself ablaze and dies a terrible death rather than endure life as a monster.

The violent death of the bride echoes Mary Shelley's original plot, except of course, for the manipulation of Elizabeth's body. This might signify Victor's wish to silence and control her, especially in Branagh's film in which Elizabeth constantly complains against his selfishness and puritanical devotion to work. The use of Justine's body also introduces a disturbing element, which was perhaps made explicit in Terence Fisher's *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957). In this version Victor kills his servant and lover Justine when she becomes pregnant and answers his bride Elizabeth's offer of help with an intense perusal of her face clearly suggesting that she will indeed be part of his work but not in the way she imagines. The hatred of the female body and the indifference towards woman as an individual are, thus, clear features of the misogynistic treatment of the bride in the versions by Aldiss, Corman, Fisher and Branagh.

In Corman's version, Buchanan finally takes Frankenstein's place when the monster, enraged by the bride's death, kills his creator. This death takes place in a different time, for, afraid of the consequences of the birth of the monster's bride, Buchanan makes it coincide with the onset of another timeslip. Creator, monsters and witness find themselves in a barren winter land surrounded by the ruins of Frankenstein's workshop of filthy creation. Instead of Aldiss's city, the monster and Buchanan meet for a final showdown in what appears to be the remains of Buchanan's own laboratory. There, the monster taunts Buchanan with a truth he will not admit. "This world you made", the monster says, "is better than Victor's. It is barren as I am barren. Lonely as I am alone." Angered by these words, Buchanan completes his assimilation of Frankenstein's personality and kills the monster:

Cr. 'What am I that you must destroy me?'

Bu. 'An abomination in the eyes of God'

Cr. 'What are you?'

Bu. 'I am Frankenstein.'

His victory, though, is Pyrrhic. As the monster says, death makes him both unbound and unbounded for ever. He will survive in Buchanan's record of his experiences and in his memories as he has already survived in Mary Shelley's novel and in all the narratives inspired by it.

Brian Aldiss's *Frankenstein Unbound* and Roger Corman's film version fuse together Romanticism and science fiction by making Mary Shelley and the Romantic circle at Villa Diodati coexist with Mary Shelley's own fictional characters in *Frankenstein*. Propounding the thesis that *Frankenstein* is the origin of modern science fiction, Aldiss constructs his novel as an homage to the figure of Mary Shelley; this homage is mirrored by his history of science fiction *Billion Year Spree*. While Aldiss's novel is at its best in the chapters devoted to Bodenland's meeting of Byron, Shelley and Mary Shelley at Villa Diodati, Corman's version explores new issues. In the film, the destructive, apocalyptic work of Bodenland/Buchanan as a scientist appears to be a direct consequence of the triumph of what Aldiss calls the Frankenstein mentality, that is to say, the commercial exploitation of irresponsible science. Instead of Aldiss's odd portrait of the monster's bride and his voyeuristic approach to the monsters' newly discovered sexuality, Corman considers the links between Elizabeth and the monster's bride, though both produce misogynistic readings of Mary's novel. Together, novel and film offer interesting insights into the way Romanticism has become itself the source for modern fantasy fiction, especially science fiction, which Romantic writers like Mary Shelley herself originated. Writer and character live on in a postmodern domain where literature and cinema, history and fiction, the popular and the minority, the past and the future, Romanticism and science fiction subsist together.

Notes

1. Brian Aldiss, *Billion Year Spree* (London: Corgi, 1973 (1975)), p. 3.
2. In *Frankenstein Unbound* a timeslip sends retired presidential advisor Joseph Bodenland back to the Switzerland of 1816 from his 2020 American New Houston. The timeslip, one among many altering life on Earth, is caused by the rupture of the time/space barrier. This is a side effect of the use of nuclear weapons in a devastating war between the three racial groups fighting for supremacy in an overpopulated Earth: Western, South American and Third World. Unexpectedly, Bodenland's old Switzerland contains both Mary Shelley and Victor Frankenstein, who have never met. Soon coming across creature and creator, Bodenland seeks Mary's help – she's then writing *Frankenstein* – to prevent Victor from creating a female mate for the monster. When he realises Mary is powerless to aid him, he decides to confront Frankenstein on his own and try to kill his monsters.
3. Brian Aldiss, *Frankenstein Unbound* (Sevenoaks: Hodder and Stoughton – New English Library, 1973 (1995)).
4. Anne K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, her Fiction, Her Monsters* (New York, London: Routledge, 1988), p. 241. Mellor cites as an alternative an article by Judith A. Spector, "Science Fiction and the Sex War: A Womb of One's Own" (1981).
5. It is tempting to think that his hesitation might have been the seed for the birth of William

Science Fiction, Globalisation, and the People's Republic of China

Lavie Tidhar

Science fiction, as Thomas M. Disch argues, is "one of the few American industries that has never been transplanted abroad with any success."¹ Yet, as Kurt Vonnegut gently points out in *Slaughterhouse Five*, "practically nobody on Earth is an American."² In order to understand the emergence of sf as a global social movement, therefore, and the interplay between the world of science fiction and globalisation, we may do well to study China as a case in point.

Science fiction, says Han Song, "was imported from the West early in this century by some Chinese elites who believed that the genre could help people become intelligent and thereby the country could get modernized. *We may say that from the very beginning there was a lack of industrial background in China to enable sci-fi to prosper*".³ Han points accurately to industrialization as a required foundation for the evolution of sf. And as a corollary, as Malcolm Edwards remarked,⁴ wherever you find urbanisation you are also likely to find science fiction.

Sf, as a literature of development, was thus treated in varying ways in various times by the Chinese political machine. "Boosted for a period of time by the Chinese Communist Party in the 1950s [when] China was ready to achieve a socialist industrialization" it "came to a halt" during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), which, Han dryly suggests has "brought a catastrophe to all kinds of literature."⁵ Author Zheng Wenguang suffered personally in that period: "I had to give up my pen and go to the countryside in Guangdong province. I worked as a peasant. I grew rice and fed livestock."⁶ Sf was again promoted with the rise of Deng Xiaoping to power, exemplified by his statement "Science and technology is the No. 1 productive force."⁷ As we can see, sf was considered variously positive or negative (or productive and counter-productive) for the nation, depending on the politics of the time. After a short burst of activity sf was again banned in China during the 1980s and only re-emerged towards the 1990s. So that while Chinese scholars identify three main "waves" of sf in China, it is only since the late 1980s that Chinese sf has truly blossomed. I suggest the reason can be attributed to the process of globalisation.

In his article, "The Social Environment of Chinese Science Fiction", in a sub-title suggestively headed "Golden Age", Han Song glories in the expansion of sf: "The genre is entering another booming stage... Increased numbers of book titles on the shelves of

Ashbless, the Romantic poet of Tim Powers's brilliant fantasy novel *The Anubis Gates* (1983) in which the Romantic poets Lord Byron and Samuel Coleridge also play an important role. Powers's magnetic vampire novel *The Stress of her Regard* (1989) also includes among its cast of main characters Shelley and Mary Shelley, Byron and John Keats.

6. Alexandra Aldridge, *The Scientific World View in Dystopia* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1978 (1984)), p. ix.
7. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), p. 342.
8. Norman K. Denzin, *Images of Postmodern Society: Social Theory and Contemporary Cinema* (London, Newbury Park, New Delhi: Sage, 1991), p. vii; original italics.
9. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 384.
10. Jameson, op. cit., 284.
11. Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 1.
12. Michael Crichton, "Introduction" to *Jurassic Park* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991), pp. ix-xii, at p. ix.
13. See Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siecle Culture* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) and Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (1933) translated by Angus Davidson (London: Oxford University Press, 1978).
14. Joseph W. Slade, "Romanticizing Cybernetics in Ridley Scott's Blade Runner", *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 18:1 (1990), pp. 11-18, at p. 17.
15. Marie-Hélène Huet, *Monstrous Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 130.
16. In FX. Feeney, "Talking with the Master of Scare-Monies", *American Movie Classics - MonsterFest!: Master of Scare-Monies!*, at <http://amctv.com/monsterfest/corman/interview1.html> (Accessed November 1999).
17. In Ron Silverman, (moderator), "Harold Lloyd Master Seminar: Roger Corman." *American Film Institute on Line* (January 18 1995), at <http://www.afionline.org/haroldlloyd/corman/script.5.html> (Accessed November 1999)
18. Huet, op. cit., p. 8.