

Part Two: Coda

Penny Dreadful's as well as *Bride of Frankenstein's* reconfigurations of 'conventional' ontological directions depend, ultimately, on (fictional) narrative's existential, as opposed to 'only' formal, relation to repetition. The series makes thorough use in particular of the ambivalent or oscillating relation between characters and their temporalities: is it the characters granting access to multiple temporalities (Vanessa, whose biography we learn of bit by bit, is readable in terms of this functionality) or does the concrescence of different points in time generate the characters (Lily being the paradigm case here)? That this question can even be asked is, not least, a result of the fact that we follow (in Latour's words, we "prolong") beings of fiction along their "path of life" (*Inquiry* 242).

But *who* is doing the following here? To understand stories as (among other things) expressions of non-categorical difference and complex repetition is not to say that there are no human agents, no authors involved in making stories. It means, however, that human agents don't and can't tell stories on their own but only in cooperation with other beings, other things, and other processes; and that human agents achieve this because they are part of a differential universe that also enables – alongside humans, stones, computers, and friendships – narrative transformations-and-successions (being, after all, being univocal).¹ What these human

1 As Deleuze puts it: "In effect, the essential in univocity is not that Being is said in a single and same sense, but that it is said, in a single and same sense, of all its individuating differences or intrinsic modalities. Being is the same for all these modalities, but these modalities are not the same. [...] It is said of all in a single sense, but they themselves do not have the same sense. *The essence*

agents can do, then, is foster those circumstances of difference to the point where they acquire an undeniable solidity, sometimes to an astonishing degree, such as we see it in the *Frankenstein* complex.²

However, that the world is itself only in not being itself and that it is this break (*différance*, in Derridean terminology, difference in Deleuze's, and "hiatus" in Latour's idiom throughout the *Inquiry*) which supports the production of meaning, including stories, is in equal parts a liberating and a scary idea. Latour, for his part, works with the notion of a "mini-transcendence," a narrowing of the (alleged) gap between symbol and world that meaning has to cross. He emphasises the role of material cycles of translation, "the predecessors and the successors of any course of action," "the path that has to be navigated in order for something to persist in being," "what must be added in order to translate [an existent], to take it up again, to grasp it anew, to interpret it" (*Inquiry* 236–37). Latour's point is that the gap of this mini-transcendence can only be crossed in cooperation – which is both an important point and, possibly, not quite enough said. This becomes evident in a remark of his on the (non-)arbitrariness of the sign. It doesn't seem quite as certain as Latour claims that the sign is arbitrary *only* "for those who, having agreed to lose the experience of relations, try to reinject relations on the basis of the 'human mind' into a 'material world' that has been emptied in advance of all articulations," as Latour claims (*Inquiry* 256). Of course, Latour is being purposefully polemical when he points out, exasperated, "Yes, of course, *cheval* in French is 'horse' in English! What conclusions are we to draw from this, except that there are many ways for a large number of horses galloping on the plains to enter into relation with many tribes garbling French and English?" (*Inquiry* 256) – and yet, isn't the notion of relation thrown in here in a slightly too off-hand manner, in the assumption that if only enough tribesmen and -women have related to

of univocal being is to include individuating differences, while these differences do not have the same essence" (*Difference and Repetition* 46 [my emphasis]).

- 2 I use the term 'foster' here thinking of Isabelle Stenger's "Ecology of Practices" (where she points out that 'fostering' is, in contrast to 'empowering,' the less normative tactics).

horses, and related to each other, a functioning semiotic system will be a natural and quite unremarkable consequence? Isn't relation, besides being a glue to repair the rift between mind and world, also a space, if not of arbitrariness, then at least of contingency? Latour's "mini-transcendence" is still a transcendence. Whatever gap there is cannot, or can only rarely, be crossed seamlessly. Whether the capacity of the world to go beyond itself in differing from itself is arbitrary, whether or not it is immanent, it is certainly not entirely containable.

All this means that matters are in any case more complicated than any simplistic version of reception aesthetics or reader-response criticism can account for. A simplistic version of reception aesthetics might in fact mean, as Latour claims, "imagining social beings already in place, as it were: beings whose existence could not be in doubt, who would lend their subjectivity to something that had no solidity in itself" ("Reflections on Souriau" 325). The principle of instauration that Latour advocates for – he borrows it from Étienne Souriau – shifts the terms of what it means to bring fiction about:

To say, for example, that a fact is 'constructed' is inevitably [...] to designate the knowing subject as the origin of the vector, as in the image of God the potter. But the opposite move, of saying of a work of art that it results from an instauration, is to get oneself ready to see the potter as one who welcomes, gathers, prepares, explores, and invents the form of the work, just as one discovers or 'invents' a treasure. ("Reflections" 311)

This kind of in-ventive work implies forms of cooperation, relation, and shared agency which are not themselves without risks. For arguably, singular agents do not settle completely, without resistance or protest or, for that matter, pain, into joyfully fiddling about in cooperative processes – but neither can they exist without them. If we aren't God the potter but neither are we mere "catalysts" ("Reflections" 311) for the works we encounter, how can we conceive of the individual and multiple selves involved in such acts of following?

