# Sequels: Going Forward, Looking Back
## James Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) and John Logan's *Penny Dreadful* (2014–16)

### That Was Not the End At All

James Whale's sequel to his 1931 film version of *Frankenstein*, *Bride of Frankenstein* (produced in 1935 for Universal Studios), performs the backward-forward-impulse of narrative repetition with particular emphasis, gesturing towards something that has (supposedly) happened before the story is told while at the same time exploiting the generative, forward-moving potential narrative gains by way of this backward orientation. The sequel does not start directly where the previous film leaves off – with the burning mill in which the creature, supposedly, finds its end – but inserts a framing device between the two films which shows Mary Shelley, Percy Shelley and Lord Byron spending a stormy night in a cozy living room, talking about Mary's story. Domestic serenity is emphasised (or mocked?) by cheerful violin music and Mary doing needlework. As the scene proceeds, it involves us in a swivelling of orientations: are we looking back on or forward towards something? A remark from Byron refreshes everybody's memory: "Can you believe that bland and lovely brow conceived of *Frankenstein*? A monster created from cadavers out of rifled graves? Isn't it astonishing?" (00:03:03-03:13). Mary's answer is ambiguous in reference when she points out that "such an audience needs something stronger than a pretty little love story" (00:03:16-03:19) – "such an audience" potentially referring to the earlier

film's audience, to the present film's audience, or to a potential reading public which, speaking from her point in time, she has not been able to reach yet because, as Byron explains, "Murray's refused to publish the book. He says his reading public would be too shocked" (a fact which leaves Mary unperturbed: "It will be published, *I* think," she assures us [00:03:23-03:28]).

Does the tale already exist at this point? The fact that the answer is both yes and no quite appropriately reflects stories' re-generative capacity: a 1935 film, going back in time to some point between 1816 and 1818 and simultaneously to four years earlier, 1931, when Universal released its first *Frankenstein* film; but also projecting into the very near future – that is, to the remaining 67 minutes of the current film – all these points in time assuming meaning and hence appearing properly only by virtue of this frame story, which creates their significance in the first place. The frame story then turns 'properly' repetitive when Byron sums up the plot of the earlier film while the according images appear on screen:

> What a setting in that churchyard to begin with! The sobbing women, the first clod of earth on the coffin. That was a pretty chill. Frankenstein and the dwarf stealing the body out of its new-made grave. Cutting the hanged man down from the gallows, where he swung creaking in the wind. The cunning of Frankenstein in his mountain laboratory, picking dead men apart and building up a human monster so fearful and so horrible that only a half-crazed brain could have devised. And then the murders, the little child who drowned. Henry Frankenstein himself thrown from the top of the burning mill by the very monster he had created.[1]

The scenery switches back to the living room, and Byron concludes, approaching Mary and her needlework: "And it was these fragile white

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1    Byron's remark about half-crazed brains has a rather nasty undertone, considering how he has just referred to the mystery of Mary's "bland and lovely brow" conceiving of a monster "created from cadavers." The protagonist's (Victor Frankenstein's, that is) and the author's (the fictional Mary Shelley's, that is) minds are thus doubled and repeated in each other.

fingers that penned the nightmare" (00:03:53-04:38). Besides being an allusion to the origin Mary Shelley herself suggests in the Introduction to the 1831 edition of her novel – where she claims to have dreamed the key scene in which a "student of the unhallowed arts" sits next to a cadaverous being of his own making (9) – Byron's concluding phrase marks the story of *Frankenstein* as an entity of quasi-independent pre-existence that needs capturing, but at the same time it foregrounds the story's madeness, its roots in a generative flow of creation (which is steered by Mary's fingers). "These fragile white fingers" become the pivot of backwards-and-forwards, or recursive-progressive movement because through them and, as Byron argues implicitly, only because of them, we can access the various points in time which come together and exhibit their generative connection in this sequel film's frame episode.

The frame thus accomplishes an iterative assemblage of heterogeneous moments in time. Mary then asks her companions (and her "audience") whether they want to learn more about the creature's fate. Looking teasingly at Byron, she asks: "That wasn't the end at all. Would you like to hear what happened after that? I feel like telling it." And while the three of them sit down on the sofa, she explains: "It's a perfect night for mystery and horror. The air itself is filled with monsters" (00:04:50-05:03).[2] Her question – "would you like to hear what happened after that" – 'disguises' or clothes what is only now unfolding, or going to unfold in a minute, as having been (always) already there. "What happened after that" is marked – in good storytelling fashion – as something already existent which the story then only needs to transmit, but at the same time "what happened after that" unfolds as moving image in the present and into the future (and since we are dealing, in the main body of the film, with a 'fictive fiction' rather than a direct adaptation of Shelley's novel, we might not even *really* rely on her text as factual precedent).

Still, having Mary gesture towards "what happened after that" is more than simply a ruse: the story *is* quite able to bring forth its future

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2    On the gendered/sexualised dynamics of the Percy-Mary-Byron triangle, and how it anticipates the monster-mate-Victor triangle later in the film, see Young 408–09.

as its past. As Latour remarks, it is "not for nothing that works 'make up whole worlds': [...] Nothing precedes them, because they can make anything exist, as it were, 'from scratch.' Put a placard on stage staying 'Asia begins here' – and there you have it, Asia begins. This is a rather odd way to *make existence*" (*Inquiry* 247). If we do not stumble over the offhand claim that 'Asia begins here' – or that "that was not the end at all" even though to our knowledge, the monster is resurrected only once, and that is on the occasion of his birth – it is precisely because fiction, to fulfil the requirements of its own particular mode of existence, depends not on accurate representation but rather on its capacity to motivate its audiences' investment and participation (which is, in a way, the whole point of Latour's argument concerning "beings of fiction"). This does not simply mean, as a commonplace version of this argument would have it, that 'the audience needs to imagine what the story is saying and then it is as if Asia began 'there'' – for one because, in this Latourian framework, ontological hierarchies are flattened out and authors become quasi-readers of their own work, making reception a more complex process than an explanation of this kind can indicate (an aspect which Part Three will return to); but also because this flattening of ontological hierarchies results, in the first place, from the abolishment of the distinction, underlying these ontological hierarchies, between 'real' and 'symbolic,' an abolishment which upsets conventional concepts of 'imagination.' If there is a "what happened after that" already existent, it is because the story's future *becomes* the story's past once the story claims it to do so – and thus genuinely makes it so. James Whale's Mary Shelley continues: "Well then. Imagine yourselves standing by the wreckage of the mill. The fire is dying down." The camera zooms out of the living room and blends over into a picture of the burning mill where the creature found its end in the first film. Mary continues in voice-over: "Soon the bare skeleton of the building rolls over, the gaunt rafters against the sky" (00:05:10-05:24). Precisely *what* Mary describes happens to the mill precisely *as* she describes it, creating a present concurrence of description and 'reality' which also works as an iteration, or differential repetition, that re-presents or elicits the audience's memory – and simultaneously projects into the future as promise of 'more to come' (for this was in-

deed not the end at all!). The scene then switches to the screaming mob surrounding the mill and we are 'inside' the story that Mary is telling to Percy and Byron on the sofa.

## A Resurrection in Three Parts

The film proper then begins with a veritable exploitation of the idea of resurrection, drawing out the monster's return, raising it bit by bit from the dead – and even here, we find an equivalence of repetition and creation because this bringing back corresponds precisely to the way in which the monster was created in the first place, which was in itself an act of triggering progression by going backwards: creating life from dead body parts. *Bride of Frankenstein* re-introduces the creature in pieces both in terms of discursive allusions and in terms of the successive presentation of body parts. While the mob looks on as the mill burns down, there are repeated allusions to the creature being not actually dead. "There's more yet," is one ominous remark by onlookers as the flames flare up in one particularly violent burst, "that's his insides caught at last." "Isn't the monster dead yet?" one woman asks anxiously, and another tries to get her husband home, who sticks around after the crowd has dispersed (they are the parents of the girl Maria, in fact, who the creature drowned accidentally in the earlier film): "Come home, Hans. The monster is dead now. Nothing *could* be left alive in that furnace. Why do you stay here?" The husband insists: "I want to see it with my own eyes." The couple's exchange clearly establishes a link to the audience's expectations, who must have known from the moment they entered the movie theatre that the monster would reappear, and who are now waiting themselves to see it with *their* "own eyes." With an appropriate overemphasis on modal verbs suggesting that she is quite wrong about what is and is not possible, the wife assures her husband: "Oh, Hans, he *must* be dead. And dead or alive, nothing can bring our little Maria back to us," but her husband will not be held back. In his search for the creature's "blackened bones," a visual proof to enable him to "sleep at

night," he crashes through a pile of burned wood into the millpond, leaving his wife swooning outside.

In the back-and-forth between the husband's suspicions and his wife's assurances, the creature's survival is indirectly confirmed even before it becomes evident. This fragmentation of revelation, its being drawn out over time, its logic of addition – adding hint to hint – is then continued in the corporeal presentation of the creature, making it appear, literally, in instalments – in, as it were, serial fashion. The scene switches to the millpond, where we see the arm and hand of the creature rise ominously from the waters while Hans is splashing helplessly around. Bit by bit, the torso and hand of the creature, quite alive, turn up from behind a corner, followed by a closeup on Karloff's iconic face. The staging techniques mirror quite closely the famous presentation of the finished creature in the first film, with its stashing of three ever-closer close-ups, so that here, too, we find an instance of differential repetition: same creature, same actor, same makeup, same technical principle, and yet the overall scene is different from its predecessor. The creature then approaches Hans with his typically inarticulate growls and screeches and drowns him. The moment of successive corporeal (re)appearance is repeated when the creature then proceeds to climb from the destroyed mill. Outside, Hans's wife, recovering from unconsciousness, reaches a hand into the rubble, thinking her husband is making his way out. Again, the creature's body reappears bit by bit from its covers, hand first; then gets a hold of Hans's wife and throws her into the millpond, too (00:06:21-09:08). Each death, paradoxically, propels the monster forward – the victims' 'way into' the mill which kills them and thus makes them creatures of the past is at the same time the creature's 'way out,' back into life and back into the future of the film.

The body of Frankenstein's creature – of most Frankenstein creatures, as most of them struggle with bodily marked-ness in crucial ways – showcases the depth of signification, as Part One has argued at length. The question that presents itself at this point, then, is, what happens when this 'meaningful mark' stretches – horizontally, as it were – along a full-blown narrative arc? This is, after all, what the beginning of *Bride*, with its frame episode, highlights: that the creature's meaningfulness,

unique as it is, is expandable in time and variable in essence. The act of zooming in that is suggested by the filmic arrangement – in the filmic framing, in the step-by-step fashion in which the creature is re-introduced – is presented as the hinge between story and sequel: what Mary Shelley says, effectively, when she says "this was not the end at all," is that we're going to look both closer into as well as beyond the story that we already know. We are going to fill up a gap or rather – and it is significant that this is precisely the direction in which this filmic Mary Shelley's rhetoric points – we are going to in-vent, create as we discover, what this gap has been filled with *all along*.

If the thickness of the creature's marked body thus interacts with a significance stretched out over time, the two are only seemingly of different orders – one of presence, one of absence; one vertical, one horizontal; one physical, one textual. In one of the more recent attempts to reconcile the efforts of new materialism with the thought of deconstruction, Vicki Kirby asks: "What happens [...] if the very stuff of 'matter'" is acknowledged as "ubiquitous and chameleon and 'the natural order'" as "essentially sociological, errant, and always 'out of place', or 'out of sync' with itself?" ("Foreword" x). Indeed, as Kirby argues, to oppose the stasis of matter to the progression of text in any radical sense is quite misleading. She brings up the example of cryptography: on the one hand, a cipher code "involves pure reference: every sign conjures another, and another, and another, sliding along a chain of associational possibilities"; on the other hand, "the very process of this sliding transformativity that appears straightforwardly linear is at the same time a punctum, wherein radical alterity (another language in this case) is already 'present' in the point of departure and arrival" ("Matter out of Place" 13). There is materiality involved in the realm of signification, and signification involved in the realm of materiality. Iteration and difference (*différance*, in Derridean terminology) are more universally relevant then 'just' along a chain of signifiers; and, as Kirby indicates with her "punctum," there's a certain locality, and with that a certain thickness and depth, to signifiers, too.[3] It

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3    In fact, Derrida himself points out how writing cannot be contained in the framework of '(human) symbolic technology': "Of course, if one defines lan-

is therefore not enough to say that *Frankenstein* stories simply happen to speak about a particularly conspicuous kind of body – or rather, 'speaking about' is not as simple an activity as it might seem. This is not only because, as Part One has insisted, enunciation is always a situated activity, a spatial practice which requires me to position myself in non-self-evident ways. It is also because such acts of signification involve a complex temporal creativity (and *Bride of Frankenstein* highlights this).

Indeed, it is because in deconstructivist thought every existent is assumed to be fundamentally displaced that it becomes useful in figuring out what happens when Whale's *Frankenstein* sequel upsets the division between future, present, and past in such a curious way. Mary Shelley's storytelling gestures, her and the film's resurrection of the creature, direct us forward into the past by way of numerous little nudges. This appears as an impossible thing to do only as long as we insist that any original event precedes its iteration, absolutely and necessarily. If, however, we allow the reverse thought that iterability and iteration in fact condition recognisability and identity, then what might seem like quirky screenwriting suddenly appears far less extraordinary. It is after all only because we can detach ("wean," as Derrida puts it [*Limited Inc* 10]) something from its context that it comes to appear as both unique, identifiable as itself, *and* repeatable – and only if something is flexibly repeatable can we detach it from its context and make it appear elsewhere. There is thus some kind of break implicit in every thing and, equally, every sign; even as something closes in on itself, it can do so only on the condition of its capacity to open up to and connect with, even turn into, what it is not ("And if a certain 'break' is always possible, that with which it breaks must necessarily bear the mark of this possibility inscribed in

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guage in such a way that it is reserved for what we call man, what is there to say? But if one reinscribes language in a network of possibilities that do not merely encompass it but mark it irreducibly from the inside, everything changes. I am thinking in particular of the mark in general, of the trace, of *différance*. These possibilities or necessities, without which there would be no language, *are themselves not only human*" ("Eating Well" 116). In other words, writing, in the conventional sense, might be human, might be symbolic; its possibility is not.

its structure" [Derrida, *Limited Inc* 64]).[4] This break, however, this out-of-placeness, is not to be thought of as the flat kind of negativity; a dysfunctionality or desubstantialisation. In fact, the Derridean metaphor of dehiscence counters precisely this conclusion: "The iteration structuring [the utterance] a priori introduces into it a dehiscence and a cleft [*brisure*] which are essential," he claims in "Signature Event Context" (18). "As in the realm of botany, from which [dehiscence] draws it metaphorical value," he explains later in *Limited Inc*, "this word marks emphatically that the divided opening, in the growth of a plant, is also what, in a positive sense, makes production, reproduction, development possible" (59). And indeed, "divided opening" seems quite the right metaphor to capture the logic and effect of Mary Shelley's physical and rhetorical gesture, such as the film's frame presents it.

## Generation without Origin

"Everything begins with reproduction," that is what Derrida says about the trace, memory, and meaning in "Freud and the Scene of Writing" (211). Intuitively, this almost reads like a motto for the *Frankenstein* complex where everything does, indeed, begin with reproduction in one way or another. The creature, in particular, made from the dead as it is, seems like a walking embodiment of the "always already" that Derrida insists on (for instance, "Scene" 211). The curious temporality of the gap and the projection at the beginning of *Bride* is indicative of a fundamental relevance of iteration for stories: if marks or traces, according to the logic of *différance*, project back to an origin that never was because they in-vent

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4    This concerns in particular the identity and meaning of marks and signs, but not exclusively so. The features of iteration and iterability, Derrida argues, are to be found "in the totality of 'experience' insofar as it is inseparable from th[e] field of the mark, which is to say, from the network of effacement and of difference, of units of iterability, which are separable from their internal and external context and also from themselves, inasmuch as the very iterability which constituted their identity does not permit them ever to be a unity that is identical to itself" (*Limited Inc* 10).

it as they refer to it, then Mary Shelley's storytelling gesture in *Bride* is, in many ways, an instance of such tracing – and so, arguably, are many other instances of storytelling which create the past that they tell about. Shelley's gesture and remark – "that was not the end at all" – mark a beginning that is an ending that is a beginning. They present a trace which produces a gap that is thick with meaning, fed by the power of differentiation inherent in the existent. In that sense, *Frankenstein* (in *Bride* and elsewhere) exposes with particular clarity how stories are entwined with the force of singularity, both with existents' ontological capacity to differentiate themselves, and with our capacity to process such singularity. Isn't this what lies beneath our impression, when looking at the monster and its marked-ness, that 'something must have happened to it,' that 'there's something wrong with it,' that 'this is peculiar'? (It doesn't seem to matter too much, in this regard, whether we're dealing with an obviously marked monster like the one impersonated by Boris Karloff, or whether we have a more 'rhetorically marked' monster like *Penny Dreadful*'s Lily, where the marks which her body lacks are sustained in other people's reaction to her, which keep emphasising her 'extraordinary' nature.)

Derrida's engagement with Freud, memory and the trace is interesting because it ultimately figures being as inscription – and vice versa, as Kirby insists, inscription as being. This allows for a productivity or creativity, a generation without origin which, even though it is condemned to 'lag behind,' is not therefore mere replication. Rather, the inscribed produces itself as inscription of something – which is exactly what narrative does in its paradoxical 'aboutness.' Essentially, what this concept of inscription or tracing relieves narrative off is the subordinate status that is routinely derived from its representational capacities: the assumption that because the narration of an event comes *after* it is necessarily secondary *to* the event; that narrative is good at depicting things but not at making them; that it is, existentially speaking, barren, a dead end, because even if consecutive narratives follow on a given story, their *raison d'être* derives again from the originary event, not the story of it.

The temporal structure that Derrida, inspired by Freud, ascribes to the trace is that of belatedness, of *Nachträglichkeit*: "Everything begins with reproduction. Always already: repositories of a meaning which was never present, whose signified presence is always reconstituted by deferral, *nachträglich*, belatedly, *supplementarily*." However, "the transition to consciousness is *not* a derivative or repetitive writing [my emphasis], a transcription duplicating an unconscious writing, it occurs in an original manner and, in its very secondariness, is originary and irreducible." This is because "consciousness for Freud is a surface exposed to the external world" – not merely a place of storage, that is, but quite literally a site where the individual opens towards experience. It is thus "that instead of reading through the metaphor in the usual sense, we must, on the contrary, understand the possibility of a writing advanced as conscious and as acting in the world" ("Scene" 211–12). In that sense, then, "we perhaps should think that what we are describing here as the labor of writing erases the transcendental distinction between the origin of the world and Being-in-the-world" ("Scene" 212).[5]

## Traces, Path-Breakers

In other words, Freud's conception of memory as the result of breaching reveals, in Derrida's reading, an understanding of consciousness as converter of present and past, space and time, meaning and matter. It is not

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5    On the matter of negativity and presence/absence, there is maybe some degree of ambivalence in Derrida – as for instance when he talks about how the primacy of the supplement "*hollows out* […] the present" ("Scene 212" [my emphasis]). Whether a new materialist reading such as it is suggested for instance by Kirby is tendentious is a question that I will take the freedom to circumvent here. Generally speaking, to my mind, much of what Derrida says at least allows a stronger shift towards productivity and vitality than is traditionally associated with deconstruction. Francesco Vitale's *Biodeconstruction* is a very detailed examination of Derrida's texts in this regard. On Derrida and the life sciences, see further also Basile.

simply that impressions leave a trace and thus a 'memory.' Memory de-
pends on traces which in turn are fundamentally dependent on, not the
force which leaves a trace, nor the resistance of matter where no force can
leave a trace, but on the difference between trace and no-trace: "An equal-
ity of resistance to breaching, or an equivalence of the breaching forces,
would eliminate any *preference* in the choice of itinerary. Memory would
be paralyzed. It is the difference between breaches which is the true ori-
gin of memory, and thus of the psyche." Ultimately, therefore, psychic
life "is neither the transparency of meaning nor the opacity of force but
the difference within the exertion of forces" ("Scene" 201). Difference – in
the force of the traces as well as in the forces of resistance that they meet
– affords the transformation of 'the material world' into 'symbolic con-
sciousness.' A conventional sequence of memory following event, repre-
sentation following represented item conveys little of this dynamic.

Traces are thus less a matter of leftovers but rather of path-break-
ing, a spatial and temporal jarring that constitutes a past through the
forward breach that it effects. Freud's understanding of "the work of the
memory-trace" presents, Derrida says, the

> *itinerant* work of the trace, producing and following its route, the trace
> which traces, the trace which breaks open its own path. The metaphor
> of path-breaking, so frequently used in Freud's descriptions, is always
> in communication with the theme of the *supplementary delay* and
> with the reconstitution of meaning through deferral, after a mole-
> like progression, after the subterranean toil of an impression. [...] The
> postscript which constitutes the past present as such is not satisfied
> [...] with reawakening or revealing the present past in its truth. It
> *produces the present past* [my emphasis]. ("Scene" 214)

In other words: tracing unites life and writing and it constitutes both in
the mode of belatedness. The trace constitutes itself as trace and thus dis-
allows distinctions of origin and consequence, creation and replication.
A difference that is a punctum that comes too late that pro-duces a gap in
reaching back to an origin that is only produced through the reach itself
– what else is it to say that "that was not the end at all," and thus launch
a sequel to an existing story? Narrative here shows itself to be a form of

tracing, too, which finds perfect creaturely resonance in Frankenstein's monster, with his marked body made from the dead. Traces have a double value: the trace is both what comes after, but also what brings forth. Traces open up a gap that is by no means a void but rather a meaningful space – and so do stories, which "break open [their] own path," too, constituting themselves as reports of what they themselves invent; thus, in their curiously dependent autonomy, creating their subject through the very distance which they take from it. This *différance* is temporal as well as spatial: the trace depends for its existence on the difference in resistance that it meets. It happens, therefore, between matter and form ("difference is the articulation of space and time" ["Scene" 219]). This very logic of the trace is instantiated as the logic of story by *Bride of Frankenstein*, and particularly by the film's beginning.

Incidentally, this also effects a shift in perspective when it comes to language and the inter- or transmediality of narrative – the general assumption being that while the 'go-to medium' for narrative would be language, other media likewise have the capacity to express narrative (or narrativity), with varying 'talent' for this or that kind of content.[6] To relate narrative more systematically to an idea of tracing, however, both complicates and fleshes out the notion of 'content expressed in a story.' Mary Shelley's ominous remark, in *Bride*, that "that was not the end at all" doesn't so much express something pre-given as it carves out room for the story, to begin with, making *and* referring to it at the same time. Neither language nor any other medium are in that sense a channel that content is, as it were, poured into with a greater or lesser amount of spillage. Rather, the story and the means of its transmission evolve in tandem and generate each other, a sense of distinction between the telling and the told emerging only through the process itself. (And this is, by the way, how new materialism envisions language to work, generally – for stories and elsewhere: that "the world is articulated and [...] this is why we sometimes manage to take up certain of its articulations through the intermediary of expressions." The productive, material, historical chain of the use and translation of sounds and signs is thus seen to interact with

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6    See for instance Ryan, "Theoretical Foundations of Transmedial Narratology."

the inherent abilities of that sound-matter to carry, receive or even produce difference. "Everything flows, everything creeps in the same *sense*, in the same direction: the world and words alike. In short, beings utter themselves, and this is why, from time to time, we are capable of speaking truthfully about something, provided that we go at it over and over" [Latour, *Inquiry* 256–57]).[7]

## Begin and End

That there is a certain belatedness to meaning in narrative has long been pointed out. Brooks quotes Russian formalist Boris Tomashevsky's witticism that "if a character in a play hammers a nail into the wall in Act I, then he or another character will have to hang himself from it in Act III" (*Reading* 14), that is to say, the anticipation of relevance is something we routinely perform on the elements of narrative plot. However, this kind of belated meaningfulness is generally understood to be specific and, for the most part, limited to narrative; it is thus seen as a veneer of meaning semiotically constructed and, at most, effectively borrowed to gloss over the contingencies of 'real' life. 'We read life *as if* it were a story in order to come up with a comprehensive representation,' is how the argument often goes (systematically articulated, for instance, in Jerome Bruner's work).[8] This is not too helpful in putting Derrida's notion of a 'worldly

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7    That "the world is articulated" does not, however, comprehensively explain how exactly it articulates itself in language. See further the chapter on "Circulating Reference" in Latour's *Pandora's Hope* for an example on how he envisions material-symbolic chains to work. Maniglier goes as far as to include language into Latour's "fiction" as mode of existence: "the poem is a second-degree fiction, since it is made from first-degree fictions, i.e., forms of language. […] Language is a fiction, but it is undoubtedly useful for many things" (433).

8    Compare Bruner's offhand dismissal of metaphysics and concurrent confidence in the powers of psychological explanation: "The philosopher W.T. Stace proposed two philosophical generations ago that the only recourse we have against solipsism (the unassailable view that argues that we cannot prove the existence of a real world, since all we can know is our own experience) is that human minds are alike and, more important, that they 'labor in common to-

writing' ("a writing advanced as conscious and as acting in the world") that disables the distinction between being and its iteration ("the labor of writing erases the transcendental distinction between the origin of the world and Being-in-the-world") to use for narrative fiction. This is where I would like to turn to the television series *Penny Dreadful*. The show is interesting not because it has a particularly challenging aesthetic programme – for the most part, *Penny Dreadful* does what television series, on average, do (if with a comparatively large budget). But on close inspection – and not least because Frankenstein's creature is involved – the series helps to reveal the general creative force of narrative iteration, which cannot adequately be captured by reducing it to a cognitive contrivance.

In a very straightforward sense, repetition is everywhere in *Penny Dreadful*: John Logan's show is not only a serial story but moreover makes Frankenstein's creature into a properly serial creature. Here, Victor resurrects not one, but three beings in total. Produced for Showtime, the series ran in three seasons from 2014 to 2016. *Penny Dreadful* uses *Frankenstein* as one among several canonical literary resources (the two other main texts the series uses are Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*) and assembles them together with original figures and plots into one large narrative. The series presents Victor as a penniless young doctor, haunted by the early death of his mother as well as a serious drug habit, insecure among human company (female company, in particular), yet quite self-assured where medical matters are concerned. His first attempt at reanimation proceeds as disastrously as it does in Shelley's novel, producing a creature (called, first, by no proper

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gether.' One of the principal ways in which we work 'mentally' in common, I would want to argue, is by the process of joint narrative accrual. Even our individual biographies […] depend on being placed within a continuity provided by a constructed and shared social history in which we locate our Selves and our individual continuities. It is a sense of belonging to this canonical past that permits us to form our own narratives of deviation while maintaining complicity with the canon. Perhaps Stace was too concerned with metaphysics when he invoked this process as a defense against solipsism. We would more likely say today that it must surely be a major prophylactic against alienation" (20).

name, then Caliban, then, in the later instalments, John Clare) which is intelligent and literate, yet isolated and mistreated and, in consequence, quite vengeful. Contrary to the novel, however, during the time that the creature is absent from Victor's place and on its own, Victor embarks on a second attempt at creation – this one more successful than the first in that the second creature looks like a perfectly average young man and also because Victor, rather than abandoning, assumes responsibility for him (this one called Proteus). The 'raising' of Proteus is interrupted when the first creature returns to Frankenstein's laboratory and kills his successor in order to lend further emphasis to his own notorious demand for a female companion. Victor finally complies with his creature's demands and – the third time in his series of reanimation – kills the fatally ill prostitute Brona, a passing acquaintance of his, to create Lily. (Lily, obviously intended by Victor to become a docile 'angel in the house,' turns out to develop in unforeseen directions and will keep Victor and his first creature – as well as Dorian Gray – busy for both Season Two and Three.)

This evident iterative quality – serial format, recycling of literary classics, serial production of creatures – culminates in the series' ending in interesting ways. There is, for *Penny Dreadful*, a double obligation to negotiate the problem of endings and beginnings – in other words, to manage iteration in the sense of deciding when (not) to go for another one. The show has to do so both in its capacity as serial narrative, and as story about immortal creatures. Serial endings are interesting endings because they cannot, as it were, rest comfortably in themselves but must afford, more so than 'regular' narrative endings, the opportunity of new beginnings – and conversely, are under double pressure of justifying themselves when they don't (note the controversy that the finales of popular series tend to spark). This is in itself challenge enough but becomes even more pressing an affair if the subject of the series in question is Frankenstein's creature. What results is a curiously layered and often contradictory way of 'ending things.'

*Penny Dreadful* finishes its three-season run with the image of Frankenstein's creature – kneeling, ironically, at a grave. This is ironic not only because the creature itself will, even though it is made from the dead, never be dead itself (the series implies in several instances that

Frankensteinian creatures are, in terms of physical design, practically immortal). It is ironic also because here, the confirmation of resurrection meets its rejection, both in narrative as well as in existential terms. In some ways, the series finds an absolute ending, for instance in the death of its main protagonist, Vanessa Ives (she is the one whose grave the creature is mourning over). This, however, stands in contrast to the 'endlessness' of some of its characters – not only is it quite obvious that this is not the last we have seen of Frankenstein's creature generally, in whatever incarnation. Theoretically, it would also be possible that we see more of *Penny Dreadful*'s third Frankenstein creature, Lily; for she is presented, in the season finale, as standing not only at the end of several developments and transformations she has undergone, but at the beginning of new ones. It is certainly a curious constellation to have an undead-and-hence-immortal creature kneel at a graveside, reciting (in 'ghostly' voiceover) Wordsworth's ode to immortality, of all texts, right before "The End" appears on the blackened screen – and all this in a story which is even more challenged than others to negotiate the contingency of its ending because it is a *serial* story, and thus faced, by definition, with the possibility of its own endlessness.

This constellation is made all the more poignant by the fact that seconds earlier, we have seen the creature – the first creature, Caliban/John Clare, that is, the one who is now mourning over the grave – bury his son Jack. John Clare has managed, in Season Three, to find his former family, from the time before he became material for Victor's efforts as creator of 'new' life: a wife, Marjorie, and a little son, Jack, who suffers from tuberculosis. He dies of this illness just as the three are getting re-acquainted. Marjorie demands that Clare ask Victor to resurrect their son. When Clare, taken aback by this demand, begs her not to ask this of him, Marjorie becomes only more determined: "Return with him alive, or don't return at all" (Season 3 Episode 9, 00:23:49-26:10). In spite of this blackmailing, one of the last scenes of the series sees Clare bury his son Jack in the Thames, deliberately rejecting immortality. The negotiation of this death and the series' ending share the same premise: both Jack's life and the series *could* go on, but won't. There are different orientations of reproduction in effect, then: backwards *re*production and forward re*pro-*

*duction*, so to speak, their combination leading to a negotiability of survival which emerges only because they occur in and with a story. While the series' own continued existence might itself be negotiated only implicitly, this debate is mirrored in the explicit negotiation of the continued existence of its protagonists, who are the site of precisely those contrasting impulses concerning continuance, resurrection and procreation vs. closure, cessation, and resignation.

For John Clare is not the only protagonist to end up at these crossroads. In the last episode of the series we also see Lily return to her lover Dorian's house after a time of absence, where she has set up her centre of command, recruiting like-minded women from her own former profession to embark with her on her project of revenge. Dorian has thrown everybody out after delivering Lily into Victor's hands with a trick, so that Victor could attempt to 're-programme' her into the docile young woman she appeared as right after her creation. Now, after having convinced Victor to set her free, Lily comes to say goodbye to Dorian. The dead body of the first prostitute Lily has recruited, young Justine, is all that is left of Lily's 'squad.' Lily mourns her passing. "So my great enterprise comes to no more than this," she says. "One more dead child." Her regret prompts a programmatic speech from Dorian: "Do you not yet comprehend the wicked secret of the immortal? All age and die, save you. All rot and fall to dust, save you. Any child you bear becomes a crone and perishes before your eyes. Any lover withers and shrinks into incontinence and bent, toothless senility. While you, only you, never age. Never tire. Never fade. [...] And one day, you'll realize you've become like them," and here the camera wanders over the countless portraits hanging on the walls of Dorian's ballroom: "beautiful and dead. You have become a perfect, unchanging portrait of yourself." He continues: "Small price to pay for such immortal perfection, isn't it?" Lily takes this as cue to say her goodbyes and walks out of the room. "You'll be back," Dorian tells her, but Lily does not turn around and only switches on Dorian's gramophone on her way out as if indicating that if he cares so little for connection, he might as well have his waltzes alone. "And I'll be here," Dorian finishes his sentence to the empty room. "I'll always be here," he repeats, as if in spite of his earlier programmatic declaration of the secret of immortal-

ity, he only just really discovered the meaning of the phrase, after all (3.9, 00:13:52-18:10).

This is the last we see of Lily. Dorian and Lily might have been partners in crime, two of a kind, but what becomes obvious here is that they embody two different versions of infinitude: as the references to the portraits indicate, as well as the way the two move about the room (in fact, nothing and no one moves in this scene except Lily), Dorian's static 'foreverness' literally exhausts itself, is evened out in the equilibrium of "immortal perfection," as he himself calls it. His last phrase – "I'll always be here" – also implies, in a sense, that there is no more story to tell about him. Lily, on the other hand, is literally 'moving on' when she walks out of the room – her silent rejection of Dorian's ideas is a rejection of stasis and an affirmation of transformativity.

## Operation in Two Directions

The characters of Marjorie and John Clare, Lily and Dorian Gray thus negotiate the conditions of immortality. Lily's refusal of Dorian's version of immortality clears space for alternatives – which, however, remain unspecified at the end of the series. The 'open future' that Lily seems to be walking towards when she leaves Dorian's ballroom contrasts sharply with the image of the first creature, Clare, hunched over a grave, mourning his friend and his son, deliberately refusing the option of resurrection. Lily, herself the result of repetition (of Victor repeating his operations, to be precise), appears as the progressive counterpoint to Clare's 'static cyclicity' – or rather, his *expectations* of the endless reappearance of the very same circumstances, which is precisely what he feels he renounces in renouncing resurrection. Whereas Clare seems to assume that 'doing things again' will lead to more of the same – "And make him suffer like I did?!" he asks his wife Marjorie when she sends him to make Victor reanimate little Jack – Lily's development demonstrates that 'doing things again' might lead to difference, after all. Retaining the past – as re-animated creature, who, as it turns out in the course of the series, furthermore deliberately holds on to memories of her old life – she nev-

ertheless moves towards the 'something else' that a future might hold. Clare's hell of unchangeability contrasts with the difference-in-repetition of Lily's future. Dorian, in a sense, presents another variation on this theme: the 'option' of static linearity, of an infinity of linear succession in which one thing does come after another, but only to 'crash' on the immortal subject's unchangeability. Transformation, succession, repetition: *Penny Dreadful* 'sources out' or 'copies' its own rhythms and patterns of narrative repetition into the existential struggles of its characters, which are related precisely to these characters' capacities for immortality and resurrection, to their respective repetitions and repeatabilities – the characters recommending themselves as sites for these negotiations not least because many of them are Frankensteinian creatures (or, as Dorian Gray, otherwise immortal). It is precisely their extraordinary capacity for reappearance and/or persistence that makes them privileged channels for expressing the nuances of repetition.

Reading *Penny Dreadful* from the end in this way helps to explore the convoluted temporality of narrative in concrete detail because it combines opposing forces, juxtaposing, in several instances, forward opportunity with a cessation of development. It is because of this equivocality that *Penny Dreadful*'s ending is – narratologically speaking, if not necessarily stylistically – more interesting than its beginning. Put simply, what the ambiguities inherent in *Penny Dreadful*'s narrative-creaturely endings suggest is that narrative endings are never pure closures. This is easy enough to overlook – we read stories linearly, from first page (or minute, or scene) to last, an experience that suggests a straightforward distinction and temporal hierarchy between beginning and end. But not only does serial narrative, as special case, make such distinctions difficult to apply, upsetting linear models of reading with its more rhythmic progress. It also suggests a more comprehensive existential relevance of stories; one that, rather than claiming that narrative helps to order life in reflection and leave it at that, allows for a genuine connection between life and story – derived, precisely, from the principle of 'original repetition.' Brooks's vital narratology and model of the Freudian masterplot supports this argument. In applying the Freudian improvisations on the theme of life and death in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to narrative, Brooks

helps to translate Derrida's claims on the involvement of writing with being and being with writing into their more specifically narratological relevance.

In some ways, Brooks argues, reading stories from the end is what we always do. This is one of the core arguments in his *Reading for the Plot*: that our activity of following a plot is crucially determined by our interest in the end it leads to. This – some would say, obvious – circumstance is curious, on closer inspection, because it involves quite contradictory patterns of "narrative desire" (*Reading* 37): we want to find out how the story ends, but we also want to go on reading (or watching), which ultimately consigns narrative plot to working as a delay: postponing the ending without letting go of it, keeping it in sight without revealing it. The directionality of narrative interest and desire is thus layered and complex, its forward urge towards development, continuance, change is permeated by an urge to 'get it over with,' to find out what happens at the end and be done with the whole thing, to return to a state of things identical, or nearly so, to the state of things before the story started. This idea in some ways radicalises a claim made by Paul Ricœur on the explicit re-telling of existing stories: "the repetition of a story" that has already been told, "governed as a whole by its way of ending, constitutes an alternative to the representation of time as flowing from the past toward the future, following the well-known metaphor of the 'arrow of time'," Ricœur suggests. "It is as though recollection inverted the so-called 'natural' order of time. In reading the ending in the beginning and the beginning in the ending, we also learn to read time itself backwards, as the recapitulation of the initial conditions of a course of action in its terminal consequences" (*Time and Narrative I* 67–68). But repetition concerns not only this special case of narration. It is a structural element but also a general programme of all stories – retold or not – and thus more primary than the concept of '(re)activation by the reader' can account for on its own. Telling and re-telling are, categorically speaking, not altogether different.

Narrative interest is directed by the end of the story at least as much as by the beginning; it seems, even, as if the end point confers meaning on the beginning, in the first place. "We might say," Brooks says,

> that we are able to read present moments – in literature and, by ex-
> tension, in life – as endowed with narrative meaning only because we
> read them in anticipation of the structuring power of those endings
> that will retrospectively give them the order and significance of plot.
> To say 'I have begun …' (whatever it may be) acquires meaning only
> through postulation of a narrative begun, and that beginning depends
> on its ending. (*Reading* 94).

We can connect this meaning-making effect of the ending and the back-
and-forth, the density of contradictory desires it involves us in, to the
temporality and productivity of the trace such as Derrida envisions it.
For what we seem to have, in what Brooks calls "reading for the plot," is
a belated production of meaning – belated, however, not in the sense of
'too late' or 'merely retrospective' but in the sense of a belatedness that
is constitutive, originary, productive. The difference that the beginning
of a story makes is simultaneously the significance of its ending; and
this is quite similar to the way in which the trace, in referring back to an
origin that it 'only' projects, creates a space of meaningfulness. Brooks
idea of plot is "a dynamic model that structures ends (death, quiescence,
nonnarratability) against beginnings (Eros, stimulation into tension, the
desire of narrative) in a manner that necessitates the middle as detour,
as struggle toward the end under the compulsion of imposed delay, an
arabesque in the dilatory space of the text" (*Reading* 107–08). This "dila-
tory space" is dense, meaningful, complex – the middle between begin-
ning and end becomes, in Brooks's conception, a "field of force" (*Reading*
47) – as is, arguably, the gap opened up by the Derridean trace.

   Brooks's concept of narrative is energetical – the elements of his the-
ory are psychic energies, force is at least as important as form. He voices
– garnering explicit support, actually, from Derrida – a "dissatisfaction"
with "the static models of much formalism" and aims for "models that
would be more adequate to our experience of reading narrative as a dy-
namic operation," arguing that we would "do well to recognize the exis-
tence of textual *force*" alongside textual *form* (*Reading* 47 [my emphasis]).
He emphasises, further, the fundamental role that repetition plays not
only for but also within narrative: it builds structures and binds ener-

gies. "Repetition, repeat, recall, symmetry, all these journeys back in the
text, returns to and returns of, that allow us to bind one textual moment
to another" (Brooks, *Reading* 101) are what gives us 'the story' – the story
as a whole, that is, the 'thing' that we like and dislike, remember and com-
pare. "Narrative [...] must ever present itself as a repetition of events that
have already happened, and within this postulate of a generalized rep-
etition it must make use of specific, perceptible repetitions in order to
create plot, that is, to show us a significant interconnection of events"
(*Reading* 99): the 'ordered whole' that we can recognise the story as is se-
cured, not least, by the story creating echoes within itself. These "bind-
ings" help to consolidate the complex directionality of stories; as Brooks
puts it, "these bindings are a system of repetitions which are returns to
and returns of" (*Reading* 108).

   In fact – as Brooks takes care to emphasise, too – narratology has
long acknowledged that narrative is a matter of back-and-forth depen-
dent on a dynamics of variation and sameness, of transformation: "The
simple relation of successive facts does not constitute a narrative: these
facts must be organized, which is to say, ultimately, that they must have
elements in common. But if all the elements are in common, there is no
longer a narrative, for there is no longer anything to recount," this is how
Tzvetan Todorov underlines the key status of transformation. "Rather
than a 'two-sided unit,'" he explains, transformation "is *an operation in
two directions*: it asserts both resemblance and difference; it engages and
suspends time, in a single movement" (*Poetics of Prose* 233 [my emphasis])
– or, as Todorov puts it elsewhere, not *all* interest in narrative "stem[s]
from the question 'what happens afterward?'" It is "not true that the only
relationship between the units [of a narrative] is one of *succession*; we can
say that the relationship of the units must also be one of *transformation*"
("Two Principles" 39–40).

   However, adding to this Derrida's account of difference, trace, and
meaning helps to explain *why* repetition is able to fulfil this structuring
role. Todorov, identifying succession and transformation as the specific
principles of narrative, doesn't aim at questioning our ability to process
the two, and, crucially, what this ability feeds off, beyond any alleged
psychological necessities. Implicitly, Todorov's principles 'simply' rely on

our capacities of memory and recognition – which is precisely the capacity which Derrida sets out to examine with the help of Freud, and which Brooks endows with psychical energy deriving from drives which traverse individual consciousness much more than they originate from it. In fact, in the light of Derridean ideas of tracing and *différance*, succession and transformation appear as one principle rather than two. The trace interconnects space and time – the origin it projects is situated both 'out there' and 'back then' – as much as it interconnects psyche and text through the inscriptions of memory. Brooks provides the aspect of narrative, and Derrida that of iteration in this attempt to reconceive the creative capacities of an apparently replicative practice.

Reading *Penny Dreadful* from the end, then, only makes explicit an operation that is implicit in narrative anyway, an operation that is a good indicator of how repetition, as existential force, is at work in stories. Stories are neither brute succession, nor brute recapitulation, but express the differential process itself – particularly so when they are serial. *Penny Dreadful* brings together the question of narrative ending and that of creaturely ending, as if asking, for both cases, the question of 'how (much of) repetition is bearable?'. As seems appropriate for a story that is both told in serial format, and tells of Frankensteinian, quasi-immortal creatures, the prospect looming ahead is not so much that of death but of monotony, of too-much-of-the-same. And yet, this "quiescence" (Brooks) must have been decisive for the narrative dynamics from the start – if we follow Brooks. It must have acted as the resistance which enables the trace of narrative beginnings to leave its mark, to project meaning, in much the same manner that lifeless flesh enables the scandalously intriguing bodies of the creatures to take shape. Unruly forms of not-quite-repetition seem to inhabit the space of story as much as that of creaturely existence. Derrida and Brooks help to legitimate a notion of narrative repetition as vital process and to deactivate the temporal and ontological hierarchies between events and their representation, between beginnings and endings, allowing for productive force at both ends of those binary oppositions. But in what, precisely, does this productive force consist?