Part One: Figures

Frankenstein seems an apt example to illustrate that modern narratives, as Peter Brooks claims – 'modern,' in his definition, "starting sometime in the eighteenth century" – "appear to produce a semioticization of the body which is matched by a somatization of story: a claim that the body must be a source and a locus of meanings, and that stories cannot be told without making the body a prime vehicle of signification" (*Body Work* xii). Indeed, *Frankenstein* depends on the body to an extraordinary degree: the creature's body is the pivotal element of the story, in whichever version; generating, directly or indirectly, most of the other plot incidents, thus being the crucial factor in generating narrative interest. It is through its marked-ness, more specifically, that the creature's body is able to generate this interest: whether it is that the creature is imagined as having actual scars or some other kind of lesion, or whether it is made clear in other ways that there is 'something wrong with him,' he does stand out, is marked – quite literally and physically – as exceptional. It is as if we are dealing with an inherently narrative body, which through an either very obvious or sometimes also a subtle marked-ness (often for female creatures) makes evident and tangible that 'there is a story to tell here' – the second most common reaction after immediate and outright rejection that the create receives, it seems, consists in attempts at causal explanation: factory accident (*Penny Dreadful*), burn victim (Roszak), "the wars" (Dear's screenplay for the National Theatre).

While *Frankenstein* is among the examples that Brooks investigates to develop his claims, there is a peculiarity to it that does not quite seem to

receive the specific attention that it deserves from Brooks, and this peculiarity is connected to the fact that the creature's corporeality and its role for the story cannot sufficiently be accounted for by the mechanisms of signification. If Brooks's "subject is the nexus of desire, the body, the drive to know, and narrative: those stories we tell about the body in the effort to know and to have it" (*Body Work* 5), then the – marked – body that is the "source and [the] locus of meanings" for story can, in his view, have only the elusive absence-presence of an ever-receding object of desire for narrative. Frankenstein's creature, however, whose body provokes and keeps provoking so much storytelling, counteracts such ghostly flatness or insubstantiality. Victor's creative practice is, after all, first and foremost re-creative: the problem of life poses itself to him first and foremost as the problem of death, the question of creation turns into a consequence, a sequel, almost, of discarding, dissolution, of becoming-useless. Victor is literally confronted with a 'difficult' material, both hard to source and hard to manage, the processing of which costs him severe effort precisely because this material has a life and a history of its own. The marked-ness of the finished creature incorporates these dimensions of history and labour, which lend a depth to whatever concrete mark(s) the creature bears on his body that goes beyond a logic of signification as indication. It is not only that "the body ha[s] been marked with a special *sign*, which looks suspiciously like a linguistic *signifier*" (*Body Work* 3 [my emphasis]), but that these marks provide a plastic, tangible *remnant* of the process of its creation, which not only indicates but in some sense *is* itself the creation process, or part of it. In this, these marks apparently function differently from the paradigm cases cited by Brooks such as the ominous birthmarks, scars or tokens which betray a protagonist's ancestry but which matter only in their shape and indexical function, not in their substance.[22]

22 They are therefore more substantial than "the notorious *croix de ma mère* of melodrama" that Brooks cites, "the token affixed to or engraved on the abandoned orphan which at last enables the establishment of identity" (*Body Work* 3).

The *Frankenstein* complex keeps signifying, compulsively, the body it centres on, as Brooks claims; but at the same time it is intimately, existentially connected to this body or rather, to this body's thickness, its depth – a connection that is well reflected in the fact that the protagonists tend to perceive this body as too near, too present rather than as a mysterious, elusive apparition; a being that needs to be chased away rather than captured. The creature's marked-ness thus creates a space in which matter and form do not come together in any casual way but in which they keep open between them a field of tension, manifested in the creature's body. There is a space of divergence that makes sure that no matter which surroundings – in terms of natural environments, societies, or literary adaptations – the creature appears in, he will always be 'different,' 'other,' 'unlike,' or, in one word, a 'monster.'[23] It is precisely this space of divergence surrounding the creature, resulting from the re-working process, from which he speaks and ultimately, from which the story emerges and sources its dynamic. There is a thickness to the monster's flesh, more specifically to its marked-ness that accommodates this space of divergence, this history, this work, as well as the arabesque, as Brooks calls it, of plot.

In such a combined interest in and dependence on corporeal space, narrative fiction refuses to dismiss bodiliness. (It is thus little surprising that the creature can usually not be given a proper name, or if so, only a mythical or stage name, a pseudo- rather than a proper name of its own: Adam, Caliban, Lily – as if he denied the distance necessary to give him proper linguistic packaging.) Whatever the body is, precisely – Brooks

23 Michel Foucault points out that this is what gives monstrosity its tautological quality: "the characteristic feature of the monster is to express itself as, precisely, monstrous, to be the explanation of every little deviation that may derive from it, but to be unintelligible itself. Thus, it is this tautological intelligibility, this principle of explanation that refers only to itself that lies at the heart of analyses of abnormality" (*Abnormal* 57). Adaptations of *Frankenstein* often preserve this 'being different' to the point of nonsense, for instance in Lily in *Penny Dreadful*, who fits all mainstream demands on appearance but who is still shown to be perceived as 'somehow different' by people, because of her exceptionally cold touch, her extraordinary beauty, etc.

for one emphasises that by 'body' he does not mean a seemingly simple biological unit but rather the conglomerate of 'real-world' phenomena, subjective desires, and cultural constraints condensed in it – for stories, it never vanishes entirely behind the meaning that it helps produce.[24]

Part One aims to investigate the seemingly obvious role of the body for the *Frankenstein* complex and relate it to the role which the body, in its dynamic materiality, plays for the production of stories. For in a very basic and general sense, fiction is characterised by its ability to put us in a shifting, mobile relation to our material surroundings, presenting occurrences that both derive from and transcend tangible 'realities'; in fiction, as Latour puts it, "*raw materials* – unrelated, let us recall, to the idealism of 'matter' – seem capable of also producing forms or, better, *figures* [my emphasis]" (*Inquiry* 243). In calling these "fragile vibration[s]" of "disturbed materials" (*Inquiry* 245) 'figures' and occasionally, 'figurations,' Latour picks up a long tradition of naming the encounter between form and matter, and anything pertaining to or resulting from such an encounter. The most adequate translation of Latin *figura*, Erich Auerbach claims, is 'plastic form'; and in addition to the crossings of matter and form, it has often come to denote the elements that stay stable in any given transformation, as well as – once 'figure' comes to be a technical term for rhetorics – ornament, design, the non-literal, that is, anything that exceeds a description of the 'pure facts of the matter' ("Figura"). (Roland Barthes, incidentally, refers to the figure as "what in the straining body can be immobilized" [*Lover's Discourse* 4]). The concept of the figure is, admittedly, a "hackneyed theme" (as Latour calls it [*Inquiry* 243]) the history

24 "I address the question of the body in different modes," Brooks says, "allowing a broad semantic range for 'body' – biological entity, psycho-sexual construction, cultural product – since I believe that it is all of these, often all at once, to writers and readers" (*Body Work* xii). In the context at hand, the more abstract term 'corporeality' seems as appropriate as the simple word 'body' – the former because bodies are hardly objective givens but rather existential circumstances when it comes to *Frankenstein*; and the latter for the sake of the personal relevance and intimacy it suggests. I therefore use both in the following. Nowhere, however, is the personal relevance and intimacy of 'body' supposed to imply any such thing as self-evidence, simplicity, or transparency.

of which I will not be able to do justice in this context but which I will nevertheless appropriate in order to capture the peculiar capacity to relate to and transcend given material environments in one complex move. Fiction (as Latour argues) relates to other ways of being in the world through a particular interaction with materiality – given circumstances become marked as being significant beyond the way in which they immediately present themselves – as when lines drawn on paper become something more than charcoal and cellulose. The 'imitation of nature,' the 'intention of the artist,' and related aspects might be factors in the process, but they do not bring fiction about all on their own. Fiction lives off the capacity of existents to transcend themselves through the interaction with other existents. From the interaction between pen, paper, idea (or intention), and line (or form), a new being emerges; and at the same time, pen, paper, intention, and form are requirements this new being makes to hold itself in existence. (The temporality of this occurrence is complex; as is the solidarity required. Parts Two and Three will investigate them.)

Intuitively plausible as this might be for such a straightforward case as a 'simple' drawing: how does it work for narrative fiction? For stories, the manipulation of 'what is,' of given circumstances, happens through the intermediary of enunciation – stories have the quality of being-told. This quality goes beyond the question of the materiality of language and exposes the body's place (or struggle for place) in discourse. *Frankenstein* leads us right to this problem: in *Frankenstein*, the body works, so to speak, as the marked canvas – the domain of what Latour calls "figure" – that holds and produces the sense of fiction. It refuses to be relegated to the position of passive object of interest or that of silent matter, of mere carrier of meaning generated (supposedly) elsewhere, in language or institutions (the body here thus pre-empts what Latour refers to as "double-click" gestures throughout his *Inquiry*). In the creature's body specifically, in the way it sits at the very heart of the story, the condition of the story being produced, being told, becomes entangled with the story's content – all the more so since the creature ends up quite frequently in the position of narrator.

That telling a story and being listened to while you are doing it is something of a high-wire act for the creature exposes both the mecha-

nisms of ideology in their stubbornness, and why stories have the potential to nevertheless subvert them. Where one cannot dismiss corporeal marked-ness, where one cannot separate the body from the story, objective regimes of standardisation are precluded. That the monster's body refuses to acquire properly the quality of an object for its own story thus has implications for a critique of ideology in and through *Frankenstein* – implications that go beyond the thematic level. It has actually been argued that the thematic level is the only level on which (Shelley's) *Frankenstein* operates anti-ideologically: on the level of form, the narrative layering effects a constant distancing from ideological content that then itself actually propagates a (Romantic) ideology of transcendence (Comitini, "Limits of Discourse"). I would argue, however, that because of the double function of the creature's body as object-and-engine of narration, it is precisely *not* the case that the story projects anything beyond itself which would finally be universal rather than particular. The form of the novel, its existence as narrative work, depends not only on the creature's body but on this body's living transformation. The creature is, besides being a character, also the (dynamic) physical space in which the story 'founds itself'; he never only speaks, he can only ever speak-and-be and therefore cannot serve as grounds outside of the story on which this story could secure any claim to transcendence. To give a spatial metaphor, the creature 'draws us back in' rather than 'propelling us beyond.' In this dependence on and entanglement with dynamic materiality, *Frankenstein* complicates the idea of a discourse that speaks itself so drastically that not only is ideology refused, it begins to appear inconsequential.

In significant ways, *Frankenstein* supports Jean-François Lyotard's claim that meaningfulness has roots in a specifically figural depth that we do not always admit into our understanding of how signification works. Most of its (re)writings, admittedly, present more or less linear narratives and more or less conventional discursive structures. But even so, *Frankenstein* does develop disruptive or subversive force in its own particular way, it gains momentum to upset the orders of signification because the creature is both extremely textual *and* extremely corporeal – he refuses to cater to any easy separation of the material from the symbolic as he is both the story's motor or basis, and its invention; he is,

as Lyotard says about the figure in relation to language, "both without and within" (7). *Frankenstein*'s subversive potential can thus really only be measured if its manifest form and content are looked at together with the conditions of its existence as a work of narrative fiction.[25]

Frankenstein thus advances with considerable force the "revolution" that Julia Kristeva detects "in poetic language," and not only in poetic language, but in poetic mimesis, that is, in fiction – a revolution which she claims to be decidedly connected to the spatial and more specifically, the corporeal dimension of language. The figural (Lyotard) or somatic (Kristeva) level of meaning is not a supplement to discourse, language, or signification but *inhabits* these structures. In much the same way, Frankenstein's creature inhabits his story: the conditions of the body as material – rather than as ontological unit – that both requires and defies work, that due to this tension is eternally caught in processes of formation, confronts what Michel de Certeau calls the "lust to be a viewpoint, and nothing more" (92). Viewpoints which are *nothing but* viewpoints reveal themselves as the phantasms they are; an objective core of a given story – the true skeleton story of, say, *Frankenstein* – seems hard to define, for precisely this reason.[26] In this sense, the *Frankenstein* complex clearly capitalises on the anti-ideological potential of the figural – even where it caters to popular taste; and this capacity is rooted not only in *Frankenstein*'s subject matter, but in its fictionality and narrativity, as well.

In many of its versions, *Frankenstein* presents itself as a staging of the (im-)possibilities of enunciation; as a dramatization of the fact that, as Émile Benveniste puts it, "*I* and *you* cannot exist as potentialities; they exist only insofar as they are actualized in the instance of discourse, in which, by each of their own instances, they mark the process of appropriation by the speaker" (220). Shelley's 1818 novel has its own specific,

25 Arne de Boever has called storytelling, quite fittingly, "a practice that would resist, precisely, the governance in which storytelling *also* participates" (7).

26 It thus appears doubtful whether the "myth" of *Frankenstein* carries – as it does according to Chris Baldick – "a skeleton story which requires only two sentences: (a) Frankenstein makes a living creature out of bits of corpses. (b) The Creature turns against him and runs amok" (3).

but indirect way of thematising the relation between 'flat' signification and 'thick' corporeality, emphasising the latter as condition of the former even while hiding it, to some degree, from view through elaborate narrative packaging. Bernard Rose's 2015 film *Frankenstein* reveals more directly narrative fiction's capacity to lay bare the conditions of enunciation, as Chapter Two will elaborate. In presenting de-naturalised enunciatory situations, where we hear a speaker uttering what he can't possibly be saying in terms of diegetic settings, the film establishes a logical gap between the creature's corporeal circumstances and the words he utters that points to the labour, and also the violence, with which the body is inserted into the logic of signification, the logic of cultural legibility; and emphasises how this process is anything but trivial, and not to be taken for granted. In Rose's film, the monster not only struggles with the tension between corporeal circumstances and the conventions of signification. He literally becomes equivalent to this very tension, he *is* this tension because he serves as narrator to the story and subjective source of filmic images even where the plot seems to say that he can't.