

Repeating Repetition: Series and Singularity

Penny Dreadful, the Second

Series and Adaptations

For narrative fiction, identity or imitation are as important as they are problematic. As Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan sums up “The Paradoxical Status of Repetition” for prose fiction: not only does it seem that repetition always drags along differences and that we only seem to be able to value repetition aesthetically when it does precisely that. Also, in “mimetic theories of different kinds and degrees, narration is seen as a repetition of an antecedent presence, be it reality, fictional reality, *fabula*, or *histoire*”; and yet “narrative also makes the opposite claim. [...] Narrative, we can argue, also repeats by creating, and what it repeats is the absence from which it springs and which it renders present through its creation. It is in and through narration that ‘reality’ exists, and the only true reality in narrative is that of the narration itself” (157). Whale’s *Bride of Frankenstein* puts precisely this paradoxical capacity of narrative to use, in the frame story that works as a bridge between the first, 1931 film and its 1935 sequel. Which further aspects of narrative repetition does seriality – as, if you will, ‘generified’ sequel – reveal, with its constant negotiation of ending versus going-on such as we see it exemplified in *Penny Dreadful*? How is the continuation and variation of specific, already existing stories connected to stories’ general repetitive quality? And does this, incidentally, offer an alternative view on adaptation, one that doesn’t content itself with understanding adaptation as a form of

cultural industry (in which ‘we’ tell ourselves stories about ourselves to come to terms with ourselves)?

Frankenstein, the *Frankenstein* complex, *Penny Dreadful*: they all encircle the question of what can, or cannot, be done *again*, and how. *Penny Dreadful* stands out because it is explicitly laid out as a *serial* story – and, what is more, as *serial adaptation*. Certainly, a set of films such as the Universal franchise from 1931 to 1948 has something serial to it; maybe the *Frankenstein* complex as a whole does – in particular because seriality is a fuzzy concept to begin with, and has become even more so in recent years, during which we have come a long way from the weekly instalments of 1990s commercial television.¹ *Penny Dreadful*, however, still followed traditional patterns when it was originally aired, with one episode being released per week and a longer break of one year between seasons. Seriality – an unruly concept, in part, as Sabine Sielke suggests, because it resists visualization (“Network” 31) – relates to “objects or phenomena [that] are arranged as or come in a succession or sequence; they are joined by recurring elements whose very interrelations – causality, temporality, logic, or pattern – are part of an ongoing debate” (“Significance of Seriality” 38). Sielke emphasises recursion as *the* characteristic of series: a series is a “string, chain, or succession that works recursively, not linearly” (“Significance of Seriality” 45). However, for all its non-linearity, seriality, as a framework that “favor[s] emergence and becoming” (“Network” 81), still implies *some* kind of progression. Quite often, seriality is associated with the interplay between “continuity-creating repetition and uncertainty-fostering innovation,” with an “aesthetics [...] based on a to and fro between repetition and innovation, between those moments, on the one hand, that reinforce recipients’ memory by connecting the series’ present to the series’ past and, on the other hand, those

1 Denson, in fact, has suggested that there are good reasons to conceive of the *Frankenstein* complex in general as a series (*Postnaturalism* 332). If there is in fact an existential dynamic of differential repetition governing narrative in general, as I will try to make plausible in the following, there is all the more reason to do so.

unexpected turns of event that prevent recipients from imagining that they know what's coming next" (Denson 338).

Can we then employ this oscillation between surprise and the reinforcement of memory as defining feature of serial narrative, seeing how narrative as such is regarded as 'bidirectionally transformative' (for instance by Todorov), seeing how it is said to always include repetitive bindings (Brooks) – or is serial narrative essentially nothing but a 'mega-story,' different in degree but not in kind from 'regular' plotted narrative? It is, admittedly, not easy to hold up a strong concept of seriality especially in the face of recent developments in popular fiction and its distribution, where the lines between serial narration proper and extensive narrative arcs in general become blurred. At the same time, the concept is undeniably *en vogue* both in criticism and popular culture. Elusive yet omnipresent, seriality exerts its attraction unperturbedly in spite of our difficulties in pinning it down as cultural category. Quite frequently, it seems, it is more important for a narrative to be labelled as serial – or to appear on the appropriate distribution channels – than to actually proceed according to serial logic. The series seems to literally generate itself, even as concept: in the quasi-organic processes of "non-directional evolution" that Sielke ascribes to it ("Significance of Seriality" 47), but also in the way the series exploits the category of popular culture that it works itself to maintain. If anything, it is maybe this tendency that we can single out as a peculiarity of serial narrative, as opposed to narrative in general: the tendency to flaunt, as opposed to only imply, its own potential endlessness (regardless of whether the series is actually meant to run as long as possible, or whether a specific length is targeted from the beginning), which is in turn precisely what obliges the series to a more complicated negotiation of its own ending vs. continuance than non-serial stories are obliged to conduct.² It is because of these characteristics that series, in

2 As Michael Newman puts it in a discussion on the disdain sequels often face, "[e]ndings are always, to an extent, arbitrary. Sequels exploit the affordance of narrative to continue" (Bordwell and Thompson 13). Jason Mittell, in the same discussion, points out: "Continuity of a narrative world is a core part of nearly every storytelling form, but the language of 'sequel' is applied predominantly

particular, reveal some of the more radical aspects of narrative repetition.

Serial narration, in a way, strengthens the paradoxical power of repetition which, through (seemingly) going backwards, achieves generation and therefore forward movement. This principle is at work both for the story, *Penny Dreadful*, as cultural artefact and for its protagonists: the successive production of creatures, three in total, by Victor Frankenstein establishes an absolute repeatability – an ‘exponential repetition,’ repetition to the *n*th time – which makes what-has-been-before and what-is-yet-to-come coincide in each creature, making them both emphatically present and never unconditionally congruent with themselves. In much the same manner, the story can furthermore also be said to ‘write the story’s story,’ with the same ambivalence between ‘over-presence’ and elusiveness: the story – the *Frankenstein* story, that is – has been told before, but has it been this story? With every *Frankenstein*-related turn of plot that *Penny Dreadful* presents, its context – the bizarre formation consisting of (more than) the sum of the individual adaptations and variations that it is made of – is both invoked and left behind. In the paradoxical orientation of recursion that Frankenstein’s creatures, the host of more or less loosely connected stories they appear in, and fictional narrativity in general share, futurity and generativity are a result of backward orientation, though not of an actual backward ontology. If this sprawling complex cannot be reduced to the conscious (or unconscious) decisions of producer- or receiver-individuals – as a certain logic of ‘adaptation’ would have it – what else is it possibly grounded in? The productivity of traces, of an “always already” as it becomes visible with *Bride of Frankenstein* is one aspect. But what to make of the hyper-replicative quality that *Penny Dreadful* so candidly exhibits?

to film. ‘Series’ seems a more respectable term, as it suggests an organic continuity rather than a reactive stance of ‘Hey, let’s do that again!’” (18).

Repetition Unbound

Penny Dreadful invents no origin stories, after all – as *Bride*, albeit ironically, does. It presents itself unashamedly as ‘mere’ variation (in, if you will, postmodern fashion). In *Penny Dreadful*, we are alerted to the radical potential of repetition because with its three serially-produced ‘monsters,’ the series exhibits not only repetitive narrative structures, but also scandalously repetitive narrative creatures. The serial production of creatures in *Penny Dreadful* proceeds from probing the potential of repetition to exploiting its generative capacities, thus in a way recursively incorporating recursive progression itself (which is, of course, what recursive progression always does). Where the sequel, such as *Bride of Frankenstein*, presents something *again* in order to modify it in continuation, the series presents something again *and again*, to the same end, thus demonstrating the emancipation of reproduction from any remaining confines of a model-copy-relation. Limitless repeatability as the series implies it will necessarily liberate itself at some point from essential correspondences, relegating identity to a surface effect, albeit a powerful one.

Adding a second and a third to a first time, as Gilles Deleuze points out, carries repetition beyond itself by demonstrating not only repeatability, but absolute repeatability. It carries “the first time to the ‘nth’ power” (*Difference and Repetition* 2) by demonstrating that whatever it is can be done again, and again, and again. It puts singular instances of repetition – the individual story, episode or, in fact, creature – up against a background of countless of their kind – somehow all the same, somehow all different. A picture of futuristic excess results: “the third repetition,” in particular, “this time by excess,” constitutes “a universal ungrounding which turns upon itself and causes only the yet-to-come to return” (again *and again* and ...) (*Difference and Repetition* 117–18). It is thus the third time of something, in particular, which seems to set off the step from ‘linear’ to ‘exponential’ repetition, from a *negotiation of repeatability* to a *demonstration of its boundlessness* – and thus its unrestricted productivity. To speak with Deleuze, the third time “ensures [...] the totality of the series”: “It is repetition by excess which leaves intact nothing of the

default or the becoming-equal. It is itself the new, complete novelty. It is by itself the third time in the series, the future as such" (*Difference* 122, 118).

Brooks sees narrative as well as memory perform an operation of struggle against temporal progress, extracting meaningful figurations from a passing stream: "Repetition, remembering, re-enactment are the ways in which we replay time, so that it may not be lost. We are thus always trying to work back through time to that transcendent home, knowing, of course, that we cannot. All we can do is subvert or, perhaps better, pervert time: which is what narrative does" (*Reading* 111). This sees narrative as temporally complex, and yet otherwise assumes time to be linear, progressing steadily onwards, unperturbed by what happens in it. Deleuzian ontology, however, presents a reversion of this to the effect that it is not so much that processes of becoming take place in time but that time is the effect of processes of becoming taking place. If narrative, then, is tuned in to process (if it "asserts both resemblance and difference," as Todorov says), it generates temporal structure just as these processes do. Narrative, then, is not a perversion of time; rather, linear time is a perversion of narrative.³ Serial narratives, with their recursive pro-

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- 3 As James Williams puts it: "Time for Deleuze is therefore not only irreducibly multiple at the level of types of time: present, present as dimension of the past, future as dimension of the present, future, and so on. It is also irreducibly complex insofar as each one of those types can only be said to be fully given when it is associated with singular events, which are themselves determined in accordance with series of singularities or singular processes drawing events together as processes of becoming that make times" (5). A proper mapping of Deleuze's philosophy of time onto the temporal qualities of narrative would surpass the scope of this investigation; but it does appear to be the case that both are founded on the processual quality of being, therefore both crucially dependent on singularity. It is in this light hard to argue for time as the superior order, which would then be replicated and twisted – "perverted" – in narrative. Time, arguably, is in itself already rather perverse in the Deleuzian conception. – Essentially, what I am presenting in the following much confirms Askin's diagnosis that "the futurity of the future past is that of fictional narrative, which combines fiction-making, the future-oriented act of creation (what will be), with narrative retrospection (what was). [...] [F]rom the point of view

ductivity that can so poorly be inserted into linear time, seem a case in point. Other than non-serial narration, series cannot even be smoothed into a linear model of time by way of consumption. After all, no matter how complex the temporal arrangements that, say, a film presents, we can still watch it in one sitting. Strictly speaking, this does not work for a properly serial narrative; and the by-now standard compression of serial stories into instantly available ‘hyperstories’ might just amount to a containment of precisely this intractability of serial narratives.

In the Deleuzian sense, series constitute a relation of differences to each other, and their nebulous quality is cleared up precisely through the “third time in the series, the future as such,” that is, an element that has no identity *but* that which consists in ordering the series (that is, the other differences) when it arrives. James Williams gives the useful example of the culprit in a criminal investigation: the culprit is of interest only as the element that shifts, relates and orders the other elements of the crime (victim, crime scene, ...); the identity of culprit is exactly, and nothing but, their function as culprit, as element added to a series of differences (127–28). This logic of development, besides linking serial stories to a rhythm of existence, suggests that there is more to the process of ‘adaptation’ than much of adaptation studies suggests. The play of similarities and differences that characterises *Frankenstein* is not an expression of cultural or personal specificities only. Rather, it indicates a more general existential dynamic that the growth of stories is entangled with. It allows us to think of the again-and-again rhythms of adaptation as a pattern, not only of (pop-)cultural phenomena such as the *Frankenstein* complex but more generally, of being as such. For what Deleuze describes for the “third time in the series” is something that we regularly

of *metaphysics* – that is, from the perspective of the unfolding of time itself, fiction marks the act of creation unfolding, the virtuality of a future to come, and narrative – in this narrow traditional sense – its recursive capturing” (131). The *Frankenstein* complex presents to this, however, the additional challenge of conceptualising repetition and its temporality not only in narrative, but also across several particular instances of narrative, which introduces the additional question of the recognisability of individuals and thus a specifically creaturely or, if you will, personal dimension of “creation unfolding.”

find in cultural adaptation: ‘new’ elements that relate to ‘old’ elements – sometimes with few definable similarities – each with its arrival introducing a different order into the string or set of already existing versions. The point is, not least, that any ordering elements are inherently ‘futuristic,’ always yet-to-come since there is no essential place that they could be assigned – which is why the *Frankenstein* complex cannot be delineated, that is, its elements can never be exhaustively enumerated or anticipated, nor can there be a definitive list of traits that we can tick off to identify a ‘*Frankenstein* story.’ The relationality of the existential, as well as the narrative, series is an open one. The specificities of adaptation therefore can and should be viewed in the context of the general productive capacities of fiction.

Creature No. 3

The third repetition, Deleuze says, “constitutes the autonomy of the product, the independence of the work” because it leaves all identities behind (*Difference and Repetition* 118). The third time in the series is not obliged to any essence, it is future, novelty, and yet it relates to something that has gone before. Much of this is embodied in *Penny Dreadful*’s Lily, the third creature that Victor makes after Proteus and Caliban-Clare. Nothing definitively decides whether she essentially belongs to the *Frankenstein* complex. Is she too beautiful? Too much at ease in a crowd? Or does her resurrection during a thunderstorm suffice? But isn’t the thunderstorm Universal picture’s invention, not Shelley’s? Where would we then ‘anchor’ Lily’s identity as *Frankenstein*’s creature? Lily recursively embodies seriality as her own narrative principle of existence. As ‘third time’ – Victor’s third ‘product’ – she is the free element-to-come that orders the series as well as proving its continuability. The beauty and self-assurance the series ascribes to her make her the unlikeliest of *Frankenstein* creatures, and yet that is what she is and what we understand her as. She has no ‘true’ identity beyond and beneath this. She is a conglomeration of past and future and thus embodies the linearly unsolvable rhythm of repetition; and among the three creatures

Victor makes in the series, she is the one to become most independent. Where Proteus, the second creature, is a negotiation of repeatability – a failed one, due to the lack of cooperation on the part of the first creature – Lily-Brona demonstrates the boundlessness of repetition. Her development over the three seasons of the series instantiates the “nonlinear temporality and the futurity involved in varied repetitions of evolving forms” (Sielke, “Network” 92) that is the recursive-progressive principle of serial cohesion. Her character *appears* in the first season (as street-smart prostitute Brona), *returns* in the second (as vengeful Lily), and *walks away* in the third, to a future beyond the narrative.

We are reminded, by Lily-Brona’s fate as the series presents it to us, of Deleuze’s conceptualisation of destiny as made up of “non-localisable connections” rather than “step-by-step” relations between “successive presents”; in which “actions at a distance, systems of replay, resonance and echoes, objective chances, signs, signals and roles which transcend spatial locations and temporal successions” (*Difference and Repetition* 109) make up the overall construct. It is a connectivity of this kind – rather than a linear one – which holds Lily-Brona’s story together. The successive transformations of her fashioned body (19th century street prostitute, well-mannered *fin de siècle* debutante, self-assured new woman in femme fatale outfit) correlate with other inner and outer transformations and re-transformations and the manner in which these are revealed by the narrative: the playback and restart of Brona’s doomed existence when Victor suffocates and reanimates her; details of Brona’s life ‘before the story began’ revealed only as Lily has already stepped into a new existence; the question – kept open for quite some time – of whether Lily retains or regains Brona’s memories and the final confirmation that she does. While this connectivity applies to most characters in the story – one of the dominant themes is the haunting reappearance of people’s past transgressions – we do not become witness to it in the same degree. Most characters’ pasts we experience in flashbacks; Lily-Brona’s development plays itself out before our eyes. As this connectivity unfolds, Lily-Brona – being the third creature – all

the while embodies the serial principle quite literally, the limitlessness of repetition demonstrated by the repetition of repetition itself.⁴

Penny Dreadful introduces Brona at the beginning of the first season as a young prostitute with a shrewd sense of humour who ended up as a London streetwalker because she lost her job in a weaving mill, due to increased automatisations. It is not so much the early link between industrial developments and what is to become a Frankenstein creature that is of interest here (while industrial developments are a recurring issue in the series, they are not treated in a substantial matter, but rather serve as a historical-discursive formation that the series keeps alluding to more or less in passing). What matters is rather the way in which Brona foreshadows, 'reversely echoes' her later transformation when she explains: "we were all replaced by better new machines" – the syntax marking her as machine even now (if she is replaced by a *better* machine that implies that she *is* a machine), in the moment of speaking, long before this becomes a plausible category to put her in. That is, not only are further developments of this protagonist foreshadowed in her first appearance (as is, arguably, quite the standard introduction for a fictional character) but she is presented, from the start, as already being the result of what has yet to happen to her: machinic reproduction. The series is silent on the actual mechanisms of Victor's methods but here and elsewhere clearly aims at the general idea of opposing technical to biological reproduction. Lily-Brona is from the start a conrescence or assemblage of multiple temporalities and ontologies, a dispersed individual always partly ahead of, partly lagging behind herself. Which might just be the reason why she assures us: "Not much surprises me" (Season 1 Episode 2, 00:10:13–10:46).

She is also, quite fittingly, representative of *Penny Dreadful*'s mashup of sex and death, of (non-)procreation and repetition. Dorian Gray is

4 And here, whether *Penny Dreadful* knows it or not, the series makes a feminist case that is more complex than any slogan of the 'the future is female'-kind (which we might read from the constellation described), on the face of it, indicates: in Lily, the series presents its own case of becoming-woman, in that it unties the female creature among the three from the fetters of 'identity': At least temporarily so.

introduced to the series in a scene in which he has sex with Brona in order to have the two of them photographed. As they perform for the camera, Brona – who, as we have already learned, suffers from tuberculosis – starts coughing up blood. Fascinated – for reasons that are, at that point, obvious only for those familiar with the story of Wilde’s *Dorian Gray* – Dorian tells her, “I’ve never fucked a dying creature before” (1.2, 00:20:41-42). Similarly, some episodes later, Brona rejects her lover Ethan by telling him: “It’s a sad spectacle, Ethan, why don’t we just admit it. [...] You’re fucking a skeleton every night, for Christ’s sake. There’s no goddamn future in it for either of us” (1.4, 00:40:05-40:16). When it comes to (Lily-)Brona, sex is death, but death – in a redirection rather than, as is commonly associated with *Frankenstein*, a circumvention of biological procreation – is the threshold to immortality. When Victor Frankenstein finds himself, in his capacity as medical doctor, alone with dying Brona and uses the opportunity to hurry her death, he does not simply kill her. In fact, he announces her own resurrection to her – letting her *decide*, almost, for resurrection, for Brona nods ever so slightly to what he is saying and does not put up a fight when he puts a pillow over her face: “I believe in a place between heaven and hell, between the living and the dead, a glorious place of everlasting rebirth, perhaps even salvation. Do you believe in such a place? Now there is a price to pay for such a passage, as there is with all things. I know that you’ll pay it easily” (1.8, 00:29:39-30:17).

Procreation as repetition (that is, as resurrection) substitutes procreation as an instantiation of linearly progressive temporality. “Everlasting rebirth” is offered where ‘regular’ organic reproduction is denied. In some ways, this is not a surprising issue for a *Frankenstein* story to bring up – but the motif acquires heightened significance in the context of the infinite repeatability that *serial* narration rehearses (if never actually achieves: even the longest-running series are cancelled at some point). Lily’s transformation from angel in the house, taking care of domestic chores for Victor, to vengeful femme fatale takes place – or at least becomes perceptible – in this very field of tension between sex, death, and procreation: namely when she seduces and then kills her first victim, a stranger who she picks up in a pub and then strangles while having sex

with him (2.7, 00:041:10-43:42). It is during the act that Lily loses the air of innocent curiosity about her – or that her innocent curiosity is twisted into an uncanny impulse. It is (at least at that moment, and the matter is not entirely resolved later on) quite unclear whether Lily commits her first murder on a whim, whether she is acting purposefully, or whether she might even be driven by an occult form of memory, as a habitual way of acting from her former life as prostitute (picking up a stranger to sleep with him) manifests as a compulsion to repeat, and then transforms itself under the influence of Lily's new forcefulness.

Lily spends some time caressing the dead body of her victim, telling him: "How sad that boys feel they must grow up. You'll never grow up now" (2.8, 00:01:48-02:00). Infantilising him through killing him, Lily turns the perpetrator into a dead child and thus creates another one of those stunted beginnings that haunt the protagonists in *Penny Dreadful*. Her murderous act in fact appears as a reverse image of Victor's methods of bringing her to life. His preparations for Lily's resurrection are framed in the terms of pregnancy, yet simultaneously presented as an (auto-)erotic exercise: Victor keeps Lily submerged in a large basin filled with unspecified fluid, apparently waiting for the next thunderstorm to happen so that he can source sufficient electric charge to work his machinery. Crouching next to her basin, he talks to her as if to an unborn child: "What will you make of this life, I wonder? I'll miss talking to you [...]. Who will you be?" Taking her hand, he asks: "Will this hand ever know love?". Victor is not only a protective, but also a transgressive father, though: reaching into the tank, he examines the scars from the surgery he has performed on Lily (or rather, Brona) earlier and – so it appears – cannot resist the temptation of touching her further. The camera shows us an underwater close-up of Lily's breast and Victor's fingers through cloudy liquid in a disturbingly twisted prenatal image. This move from the thoughtful ("Who will you be?") to the sentimental ("Will this hand ever know love?") to the tongue-in-cheek tasteless (fondling undead Brona) is a signature *Penny Dreadful* move. Putting it drastically, creature and creator are having sex in an externalised womb – this is a penny dreadful, after all – and what they bring forth is a life

story (what Lily will make of this life, whether her hand will ever know love, and so forth) (2.1, 00:29:00-30:28).

Making Memories

Lily – named after “the flower of resurrection and rebirth,” as Victor explains at one point (2.2, 00:13:12) – is actually the result of a creative collaboration between Victor and his first creature: Caliban-Clare works the ropes to lower the bier on which Brona’s lifeless body awaits resurrection into a tank of fluid, much like he works the ropes at the Grand Guignol theatre in the first season – and what he produces is, quite literally, a fiction in the same way that the theatre plays he helped stage were fiction, that is, it is both the result of concrete labour (of making), and existing beyond ‘reality.’⁵ In fact, Lily triggers both invention and recollection, or rather, her existence triggers memories *as* stories. Victor keeps the ‘new-born’ Lily in his home under the pretense that she is a cousin of his who has been in an accident and lost her memory. His first creature he introduces to her as her former fiancé. Both Victor and Clare end up putting the generative capacity of narration to use when they both invent a past for her in an act of phantasmatic wish-fulfilment all the more powerful because the (supposed) blank slate of Lily’s mind gives them the opportunity to inscribe as recollection what is really their own, momentary projection.⁶

“There were long summer afternoons and we were comrades in great adventures,” Victor tells Lily, adopting a storyteller’s bearing, when she asks him how he remembers her from their childhood. “Pirates on the Spanish Main or conquistadors exploring the New World. They were happy days, our youth. [...] When there were thunderstorms, you came

5 Lily is thus situated ‘between men’ as much as Mary is in *Bride of Frankenstein’s* frame episode.

6 Lily says as much later when she rejects Victor with the words: “Take your romance, and your memories, which are a most kind fiction, and go” (3.2, 00:47:26-47:32).

to my bed. We never slept. We clung together until the storms passed” (2.2, 00:32:24-32:52). Almost conveniently, Lily confirms this pseudo-factual account when she does come to Victor’s bed during a thunderstorm a while later (2.5; 00:49:25-52:37) – turning fiction into fact, ‘pseudo-repeating’ history and in the course of doing so also recreating her own electric birth when she sleeps with Victor. Not only does the thunderstorm – iconic as it has certainly become for the *Frankenstein* complex – clearly allude to the moment of Lily’s creation, and their intimacy to Victor’s interactions with unborn Lily. Also, in repeating an invented past, Lily’s actions turn Victor’s invented account into quasi-history.

The first creature, Clare, has no such luck, even though he, too, invents a blueprint to be ‘repeated.’ In the same manner as Victor, he projects a shared past for Lily, whose favour he hopes to win: “Ours is an exceptional history. We were friends once and that friendship grew between us. [...] I remember one night we were walking through the village, and we came across some men outside a tavern, drunken they were. And they saw me with you and they laughed and pointed and said, ‘How could the likes of her be with the likes of him?’ [...] You took my hand, and you held it” (2.5, 00:20:22-21:17). This history, however, is determined to remain fiction. Whether and how much Lily remembers from her life as Brona is, from the start, an issue much discussed between Victor and his first creature. Lily will claim later on that she has been in the know from the beginning, but apart from her own words, the audience receives no independent and unambiguous confirmation for that. Yet while Victor and Clare worry about Lily’s capacity of memory, Lily actually becomes herself a challenge to the memory of others. When Dorian Gray hosts a ball, Lily returns to the very room she has visited before, as prostitute Brona hired by Dorian for his pornographic productions. “I have the strangest sense we’ve met before,” Dorian tells her. “I have the funniest feeling that I’ve been in this room before,” Lily says (2.6, 00:38:06, 00:36:07). Whether or not Dorian and Lily have or have not, at this point, actually figured out the mystery – the show’s audience certainly picks up the reference to the the respective scenes in the first season. Apart from the fact that repetition is here organising, as it commonly does, narrative

plot, it is, again, quite striking that this narrative *principle* is embodied in a narrative *creature*: Lily is literally a transformative character in the sense that she is not only living through change, as protagonists generally do, but that she *is* living change herself.

The further the series proceeds, the more the aspect of concurrence is emphasised over that of sequential transformation in Lily's development. Towards the end of Season Two, a frustrated Clare confronts Lily, who has held him at a polite distance for a while but whose meek behaviour towards him he has begun to mistrust. In the exchange that follows, Lily drops her pretense, mocks Caliban's ideas of romance and rejects him as partner, only to approach him seconds later on her own erotic terms – explaining, as she goes along, her visions of revenge and a new age dawning. As she is speaking, the camera at some point switches from her face to a broken mirror in which it is reflected so that there are really a number of Lilys (five, to be exact) speaking to us – none of them 'the original.'⁷ Quite fittingly, Brona's Irish accent intermittently creeps back into her speech as she is recounting her painful experiences as street prostitute that motivate her current plans of action. Lily-Brona is here literally speaking as the iterative, hence multiple creature that she is. Sitting on Clare's lap, she explains to him how the two of them – being equals – could, after sleeping together, wait for Victor to come home, kill him and, in some rather unspecified way, 'take over' from him: "We were created to rule, my love. And the blood of mankind will water our garden. Us, and our kin, and our children, and our generations. We are the conquerors. We are the pure blood. We are steel and sinew both. We are the next thousand years. We are the dead." Kissing Clare, she promises him: "No being who ever was, or ever will be, shall love you like I do" (2.8, 00:37:37-45:05). The murder of Victor Frankenstein never comes to pass. How much of the rest of Lily's proposals does is hard to say; but the scene clearly establishes Lily as a being traversing

7 To be precise, Lily is shown as fragmented mirror image while she is quoting Clare's vision of their relationship – in which Lily lovingly defies people's rejection of the creature – back to him, so that the idea of Lily as 'mere' projection screen (now broken) for the creature's hopes is emphasised.

multiple temporal layers, or as an anchor of multiple both narrative and existential directions – being both “the next thousand years” and “the dead,” in her transformativity both propelling the narrative forward, promising further eventfulness, and providing the ties to earlier stages of the story, thus creating meaningfulness and organising plot. The episode in which this exchange occurs is, rather appropriately, titled “Memento mori” – referring to the act of thinking *back* to *future* endings.

Interestingly, the ending of Season Two foreshadows, in a minor key, the ending of Season Three as regards the negotiation of immortality and resurrection: in the closing scene of the second season, Vanessa takes the crucifix from her bedroom wall and burns it in the fireplace. Plot-wisely, this is a result of the ongoing struggle with demonic forces she is shown to be engaged in and a clear sign of the abandonment she feels by the God she believes in; symbolically, however, it is of course also the idea of resurrection and/or eternal life that is burnt to ashes when Vanessa delivers the figure of Christ to the flames. And as in Season Three, we can here also find a contrasting scene involving Lily which reads as an affirmation of immortality: a heartbroken Victor seeks out Lily at Dorian's house, where she seems to have moved in, and interrupts the two waltzing through Dorian's ballroom, dressed in white evening wear. Unsuccessfully pleading for Lily to come home but receiving only mockery, Victor shoots both Lily and Dorian. Neither of the two die. “Please, creator, you made me too well for that,” Lily scoffs. They decide to let Victor live and escape for now even though, as Dorian points out, killing someone is the most interesting experience he can think of: “I've experienced so many sensations over the years but never one precisely like this. Complete supremacy” (2.10, 00:32:25-34:45). Victor, overwhelmed, rushes out of the house and leaves the two of them to their extravagant scenery, bleeding from their gunshot wounds and obviously enjoying themselves, smearing the marble floor with blood as they resume the waltz they have interrupted for Victor's visit.

The symbolic density of the scene is quite hyperbolic (such as, for instance, the blood smearing the white ballgowns as a consequence of Lily taunting Victor about the “awkward virginity” that he lost with her); yet what stands out in the context at hand is how Lily's and Dorian's dance

of the undead conveys the idea of eternal life as unstoppable, yet recursive movement – not quite cyclic, more of a spiral – corresponding to the generations of (serial) narration. Actually, it is precisely the difference between cycles and spirals that will manifest in the ‘partner scene’ between Lily and Dorian in Season Three, that is, in the series’ finale, in which Lily parts from Dorian – and his portraits – in the very same ballroom, moving along while Dorian stays put. All the latter – who, as he points out earlier, has “lived through so many *revolutions*” that “it’s all so familiar” to him (3.7, 00:40:5540:41 [my emphasis]) – is left with are, quite fittingly, the rotations of his gramophone cylinders (of which he knows, as he says, “every groove” [1.4, 00:52:53]). For him, the story closes as a cycle and leaves him exactly in the place in which he started. Lily, on the other hand, might be entangled in a number of returns and repetitions, but ends up spirally displaced.

Tracing the Individual

What the frame story of *Bride of Frankenstein* with its peculiar directions of narrative production (going forward by going backwards, and going backwards in going forward) has suggested is that stories’ quality of ‘being-about’ something is a matter of tracing, where tracing constitutes a genuine productivity or creativity, yet without origin, or, to say it the other way round, an iteration without model. Such tracing is afforded *between* circumstances and their symbolic indication and does not have a predetermined direction. It constitutes an aboutness that cannot be reduced to a topical aboutness.⁸ Stories trace, that is, follow creatures or situations; but at the same time, creatures or situations also trace stories, that is, show marks of being extraordinary, peculiar, worth telling – in the case of Frankensteinian creatures in a very physical, literal way.

8 Arthur C. Danto has conceptualised aboutness as a critical characteristic of art, as opposed to things, though his concept of aboutness relies much more strongly on communities of interpretation than on material-semiotic dynamics (see his *Transfiguration of the Commonplace* and also “The Artworld”).

Penny Dreadful traces Lily – and Lily traces *Penny Dreadful* –, it is *about* Lily. Can more light be shed on this repetition in the sense of narrative aboutness and how it is afforded by a general capacity of singularity that is as essential for the progress of existence as for that of stories?

In one of the first examples that Gilles Deleuze brings up to initiate his investigation of *Difference and Repetition*, he points out that it is “not Federation Day which commemorates or represents the fall of the Bastille, but the fall of the Bastille which celebrates and repeats in advance all the federation days; or Monet’s first water lily which repeats all the others” (2). These examples articulate rather plausibly the idea that there must be something, some existential capacity or force or circumstance, that *enables* repetition, or even representation, and is more fundamental than it. Repetition, taken in a certain sense, is a matter of outward behaviour and secondary patterns, not of the inward being of any thing: “To repeat is to behave in a certain manner, but in relation to something unique or singular which has no equal or equivalent. And perhaps this repetition at the level of external conduct echoes, for its own part, a more secret vibration which animates it, a more profound, internal repetition within the singular” (*Difference* 2). Difference (this “secret vibration”) is the more fundamental force which causes existents to come into being as singular entities and to remain involved in an ongoing process of becoming – a dynamics well illustrated by the idea of Monet’s first water lily which, precisely by emerging in its singularity, sets the scene for all its variations. Difference itself (“[p]ure difference, the pure concept of difference, not difference mediated within the concept of the general”, *Difference* 75), in spite of or rather because of its fundamental character, cannot be described, depicted, or otherwise represented. Rather, it makes all categorisation, negation and thus representation and repetition possible, underlies and transcends it. It is, in Deleuze’s words, “a plastic, anarchic and nomadic principle, contemporaneous with the process of individuation, no less capable of dissolving and destroying individuals than of constituting them temporarily.” Things don’t start with identity, with an entity being identifiable as belonging to a set or a kind, but with the becoming of the singular entity, brought about by non-categorical difference: the “individuating is not the simple individual,” which

is why the task is to show “how individuation properly precedes matter and form, species and parts, and every other element of the constituted individual” (*Difference* 49).

“Everywhere, the depth of difference is primary” and therefore it “is not difference which presupposes opposition but opposition which presupposes difference” (*Difference* 64–65). This difference is not negative but rather affirmative and generative, so that negation, “like the ripples in a pond, is the effect of an affirmation which is too strong or too different” (68). It is “not the negative which is the motor. Rather, there are positive differential elements which determine the genesis of both the affirmation and the difference affirmed” (70). Categorising an entity or a being is ‘only’ the second step happening on a ground of differences beyond and before identities, a ground made up of the simple fact of difference as such happening, a ground of “difference in itself,” as Deleuze names it, not difference ‘in terms of’ one thing or another.

It is not difficult to see how hybrids and monsters such as Frankenstein’s creature – in most of its incarnations, anyway – confront us with this field of free differences that Deleuze tells us we should envision more often:

There is a crucial experience of difference and a corresponding experiment: every time we find ourselves confronted or bound by a limitation or an opposition, we should ask what such a situation presupposes. It presupposes a swarm of differences, a pluralism of free, wild or untamed differences; a properly differential and original space and time; all of which persist alongside the simplifications of limitation and opposition. A more profound real element must be defined in order for oppositions of forces or limitations of forms to be drawn, one which is determined as an abstract and potential multiplicity. (*Difference* 63–64)⁹

9 “Those formulae according to which ‘the object denies what it is not’, or ‘distinguishes itself from everything that it is not’, are logical monsters [...] in the service of identity,” Deleuze explains. “It is said that difference is negativity, that it extends or must extend to the point of contradiction once it is taken to the

Singularity, in this sense, is more important and more basic than identity.

To be more precise: certainly, there is such a thing as a justified impression of repetition. Two ‘similar’ or ‘identical’ objects appearing leave a different impression from two entirely distinct objects and can, moreover, conceptually be grouped together and thus do allow representation by the same term, and structures of representation in general. But underneath and inside these mechanisms – which we might otherwise be tempted to treat as the ground zero of all ontology – there’s more going on. Repetition is complex. Thus, Deleuze explains, it is “a question of knowing why repetition cannot be explained by the form of identity in concepts or representations; in what sense it demands a superior ‘positive’ principle” (*Difference* 23). After all, “it is no more possible to exchange one’s soul than it is to substitute real twins for one another” (*Difference* 1). Therefore, even though we are “right to speak of repetition when we find ourselves confronted by identical elements with exactly the same concept,” repetition turns out to be made up of “‘bare’ repetition,” or “repetition of the Same,” as well as of an inherent, “covered” repetition. “In every case, repetition is difference without a concept”: but where for bare repetition, difference comes from objects occupying distinct spaces and times, the more “secret” repetition within it is determined by singularity – by each being being only itself and irreducibly itself (*Difference* 28–29). In other words: where difference is fundamental for Being, repetition with its core of singularity shows us that we cannot, ultimately, govern this Being.

A Deleuzian reordering of hierarchies – such that singularity and difference are more fundamental than identity and sameness; such that repetition is complex rather than simple – can be of help with the curious habit of stories to “repeat by creating” (Rimmon-Kenan). For in an ontological framework where difference is primary and makes repetition (and identity, and representation) possible, narrative repetition suddenly appears far less paradoxical: repetition in this sense

limit. This is true only to the extent that difference is already placed on a path or along a thread laid out by identity” (*Difference and Repetition* 63).

is a surface effect or a gesture, borne by the capacity of differences to manifest themselves. The impression that stories repeat life even though it is obvious that they make up what they 're-port' is perplexing mostly when we reduce repetition, conceptually, to what Deleuze calls "bare repetition." The real 'madness' of narrative fiction (serial or not) lies in the way it incorporates, almost imbibes the ontological force of difference, the ontological circumstance of singularity. Grounded in the folded material, the "material-form vibrations" (Latour) of a line on canvas or a narrator's voice speaking, it draws from, and proceeds to manifest, the very core of difference as existential force: it draws from and manifests the *fold* in the material; the sense of 'something going on' and stirring the flow of life's events; the very *discriminability* of subjects, objects, circumstances (all factors which Frankenstein's creature suitably embodies); the impression that *this* protagonist's life is worthwhile following; or that it becomes worthwhile following from *that* very incident onward. Where other systems of representation content themselves with attaching themselves to and describing whatever singularities difference produces, stories delve deeper, in a sense, and get themselves entangled at the – differential – root of things. This helps to clear out any vestiges of 'identity' persisting in the idea that stories are *either* told about something which is special (in itself), *or* that stories make special what they tell about (when it would be unremarkable in itself). While neither of the two ideas is wholly inappropriate, it is really only their combination which helps to rid notions of noteworthiness or tellability from their exclusive dependence on subjective judgment. Beyond (or before) both the noteworthiness of existents and the means found, in authorial decision, to convey it, we have the very capacity of the world to become special. In that sense, stories express individuation (becoming-extraordinary, if you like) rather than 'extraordinary individuals' (or events).

And thus because difference is a differentiating agent, and processes of becoming are ultimately the engine of time, it is no surprise that narrative fiction, once it is underway, is filled with, as Todorov points out, transformation *and* succession. Stories are one way, among many others, in which singularity, differential repetition, processes of becoming may

express themselves – and also be expressed. *Penny Dreadful* is instructive in this regard because it interconnects in such an insistent way the creaturely movements of existence – creation, transformation, im/mortality – with the narrative movements of continuity, variation, cessation.

Repetition, High and Low

Is it wrong, then, to see in narrative a means of representation? Is narrative always associated with individuating novelty, exploding the categorical and the subjective in favour of differential becoming? Generally, representation has the effect of containing differences in identities (in fact, representation is this very effect). Once material repetition has become “an object of representation,” Deleuze says, “this repetition is subordinated to the identity of the elements or to the resemblance of the conserved and added cases” (*Difference and Repetition* 110). The similarity and identity that representation works with is a produced effect, not a primary circumstance. Representation thus “fails to capture the affirmed world of difference. [...] It mediates everything, but mobilises and moves nothing.” Not so, however, in the realm of art: “Difference must become the element [...]. Every object, everything, must see its own identity swallowed up in difference. Difference must be shown differing. We know that modern art tends to realise these conditions: in this sense it becomes a veritable *theatre* of metamorphoses and permutations” (*Difference* 71).

Deleuze seems to suggest that literature – just like “modern art” – is the system of representation interested, in contrast to other systems of representation, in capturing difference and singularity rather than effecting similarity, identity, and repetition: “To write is not to recount one’s memories and voyages, one’s loves and griefs, one’s dreams and phantasms,” Deleuze argues. Literature, he says, “exists only when it discovers beneath apparent persons the power of an impersonal – which is not a generality but a singularity at the highest point: a man, a woman, a beast, a stomach, a child” Therefore, it is “not the first two persons that function as the condition for literary enunciation; literature begins only when a third person is born in us that strips us

of the power to say ‘I’ (“Literature and Life” 227 [ellipsis in original]). ‘Stories’ are, I think, a more neutral category in this regard: ‘serious art’ and ‘trivial entertainment’ can equally fall under this heading, and therefore stories’ explicit interest may lie sometimes more in capturing difference, sometimes more in effecting identity, and sometimes in both in an ambivalent, oscillating fashion. Stories may be experiments in “becoming-imperceptible” (“Literature and Life” 225), but they may also recount “memories and voyages.” They may make the impersonal speak in singular fashion, but they may also be dominated by highly personal, determinate perspectives and point of views. And yet ultimately, no story can deny its radical dependence on difference, which makes for the “revolutionary” potential of not only poetic language, but also poetic mimesis (on poetry, mimesis, and revolution see Part One); just as repetition, however monotonous and “bare,” inevitably harbours singularity within it, and is thus always opposed to the law even where it is entangled with it: “If repetition is possible, it is due to miracle rather than to law. [...] If repetition can be found, even in nature, it is in the name of a power which affirms itself against the law, which works underneath laws, perhaps superior to laws. [...] It puts law into question, it denounces its nominal or general character in favour of a more profound and more artistic reality” (*Difference and Repetition* 3).

Penny Dreadful is instructive in this regard. Its representative aspects work everywhere in tandem with its differential narrative becoming. Lily, for instance, is the most stereotypical of femme fatales at the same time as she drives this category towards collapse in impersonating it just a little *too* pointedly, lending a hint of clumsiness or naivety to the depiction that counteracts the smooth professionalism of this big-budget production. Or, more casually put, on the whole, *Penny Dreadful* is always one Wordsworth quote away from becoming properly ridiculous. It is not exactly that because of this ambiguity, *Penny Dreadful* solves the entire tension between signification and becoming, trace and presence. (This is simultaneously a tension that one might perceive between two major theoretical reference points of this section, Derridean deconstruction and Deleuzian processual materialism: a tension between Deleuze’s “profound real element,” a field of “free, wild or untamed

differences; a properly differential and original space and time; all of which persist alongside the simplifications of limitation and opposition”; and Derridean ideas of iteration and tracing, where “everything begins with reproduction” and exists in the mode of an “always already,” where meaning is deferred, belated, and is productive and inventive precisely through this gap.) The ambiguity does, however, suggest that the solution cannot be to privilege one over the other; that any account of narrative becoming must simultaneously keep in view, wherever possible, narrative representation, and vice versa. In fact, Derrida acknowledges both principles when he talks about “the two empirical certainties by which we are constituted: infinite depth in the implication of meaning, in the unlimited envelopment of the present, and, simultaneously, the pellicular essence of being, the absolute absence of any foundation” (“Scene” 224). Generally speaking, Frankenstein’s creature is a case in point. In Frankenstein’s creature(s), negativity and plenty coincide. In fact, the creature’s marked body is a very good example for a trace that is *also* matter; for a mark that is productive singularity at the same time as it is scission, belated, beside itself. The creature’s body is, on the one hand, an ‘object’ become significant and signifying through different resistances that its matter has offered to tracing, retaining one trace but not another. And yet, the creature’s body is also mutable, plentiful and of an overwhelming singular *presence* in its ‘being-marked-by-traces.’¹⁰ And more specifically, as regards the text at hand, *Penny Dreadful* equally resonates with both ideas, in fact, its characteristic quality results from the symbiosis of both: the narrative dynamics of repetition (serial story, serial creatures) and the fundamentally quotational character of it all (remix of the literary canon that it is).

In this ambiguity, then, *Penny Dreadful* suggests that whatever a more vital, less cognitive understanding of narrative looks like, it should not

10 The creature, the creature’s body is, as it were, voice *and* writing, a writing which is a voice which is writing which is voice. In fact, many versions of the *Frankenstein* story – not least Shelley’s own – seem drawn to this issue in the way that they problematise the relation of the monster’s speech to the technologies and media securing its existence and transmission.

downplay representation all too drastically (not least because reversing the hierarchy between mind and matter does little to get rid of the dichotomy on which this hierarchy is based). Askin, too, relies on Deleuze's work on difference to make a case for "becoming, the dynamic and continuous process of selecting and gathering heterogenous elements to be expressed" to be regarded as "the ontologically primary virtual realm of any given actual narrative" (180). Through case studies in postmodernist and contemporary literature, which, he says, make the ontological ties of narrative particularly explicit (18–19), Askin shows that narrative expresses difference, thus expresses being as such, "the fundamental metaphysical processes of onto- and morphogenesis" (3). Ultimately, Askin claims that we find not only the "becoming of narrative" but also the "narrativity of becoming," so that narrative and narrativization name "the machinery of relation as such" (181–82). Narrative is being, the expression of being, but being is also narrative – a "narrative ontology" that, Askin concludes his investigations, "still awaits its invention" (187). The main idea against which Askin protests with his "differential narratology" (1) is the idea that narrative is an exclusively cognitive, exclusively human, exclusively ethical affair: canonical works such as Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*, which argue for "storytelling making experience intelligible, both to oneself and to others," undertake, he says, "an unjustified ethicisation of narrative." Against this, Askin's differential narratology, while granting that "narrative can and frequently does play out within the categories of human world, knowledge, and experience," insists that "the ground from which to extract a coherent concept of narrative has to be trans-experiential, unconscious, and non-human" (3).

Being and Being-About

In fact, the conclusion that stories are 'larger than us' is yielded both by a Deleuzian ontology of narrative as well as by a psychoanalytically based approach such as it is presented by Brooks – which, as I would argue, should nevertheless not mislead us into thinking that stories' conscious, representative aspect is some kind of by-product, negligible in compari-

son to their non-human ontogenesis. The claim that narrative isn't just a cognitive exercise is easily reconcilable with Brooks's energetics of narrative, modelled on the principles of drives (life drives and death drive) and their interaction. Drives, after all, aren't simply born from the individual's mind but rather traverse it ("it would be a mistake," as Joan Copjec puts it, "to confuse drive with will or whim, since drive does not appear to be at the disposal of the conscious subject; on the contrary, it exerts an unrelenting, internal pressure which mere will is unable to oppose and the body is unable to escape" [179]).¹¹ In that sense, while Brooks's Freudian masterplot does not theorise the affective aspect of narrative all too explicitly, it certainly includes and implies it. At the same time, it is maybe for good reason that Brooks speaks about "narrative desire" rather than "narrative drive," thus leaving quite unspecified where the attraction of narrative comes from – from within our minds, or from beyond our bodies.

"If narrative goes beyond human knowledge and experience, it cannot be representational," is what Askin claims (3). But Frankensteinian creatures and all the stories of *Frankenstein* produce, in fact, the distinct impression that topic and ontology, representation and matter, or politics and poetics (to use Askin's binary pair [41]) are certainly equally important, probably reciprocally productive, maybe properly co-original. *Penny Dreadful's* Lily-Brona, at least, is *represented* as differentially repetitive creature as much as she is *created* as one. There is a correspondence in the mode in which story and creature exist. This correspondence suggests that *being* (ontology, matter, poetics) and *being-about* (topic, representation, politics) are hard to disentangle. Isn't Lily's fate a narrative (or structural) as well as an existential one? Where would we draw a line between her reincarnations in fictional late Victorian London (Brona,

11 Or, in Kristeva's more convoluted phrasing: "Drives are material, but they are not solely biological since they both connect and differentiate the biological and symbolic within the dialectic of the signifying body invested in a practice. Neither inside nor outside, drives are neither the ideational interior of a subject of understanding, nor the exteriority of the Hegelian Force. Drives are, instead, the repeated scission of matter that generates signifiante" (*Revolution* 167).

the innocent country girl out of a job – Brona, the street-smart prostitute compromised by the city’s sinful ways – Lily, the vengeful immortal amazon – Lily, liberated survivor of the series’ tragic ending) one the one hand, and the recursive progression of serial episodes she appears in on the other? Does the story invent Lily or does Lily invent the story? Who is occasion for what?

Askin argues that the ‘is’ of narrative is prior to, or more fundamental than its ‘being-about’ (“before being *about* something it simply is something itself and [...] this *is* determines its aboutness” [6]). I would like to suggest that stories – not only as narratives, but as narrative *fiction*s – are more peculiar than that. To understand the role of difference, of becoming for narrative we need to follow, Askin argues, “the reverse movement of the speculative becoming-virtual of actual narratives as they crack open their representational surface and burrow ever deeper towards their conditioning differentials” (180). If that is the case, a glossy Netflix series like *Penny Dreadful*, which can hardly be said to “crack open” its representational surface, is probably the wrong place to look. Or is it? It might just be that it is precisely the series’ brushed-up surfaces that hold a certain subversive power, at the same time as they have a containing, conservative, representational effect. For it can be the singularity of surfaces that most effectively opposes the false promises of identity. This becomes visible, once again, in relation to the themes of death, resurrection, and immortality in *Penny Dreadful*.

Surfaces and Simulacra

There is something highly, almost clumsily serious and at the same time entirely irreverent in the manner in which the show approaches mortality. It is as if death, because it is in some ways optional in *Penny Dreadful*, develops all the more sentimental and structural impact whenever it does arrive – or is allowed. *Penny Dreadful*’s ending negotiates not only the continued existence of its characters in general and thus its own continuation as narrative but is also centred, more specifically, around the death of several children. For one, there is Justine, “one more dead

child,” which motivates the exchange between Lily and Dorian. In fact, Lily – or rather, Brona – has had another child to mourn before – as she tells Victor, who, in another experiment he takes up with a certain Dr. Jekyll, intends to turn Lily back into the harmless young woman she appeared to be right after her creation. As this experiment would include some kind of amnesia, Lily is forced to beg Victor not to rob her of her memories of her daughter Sarah. She thus reveals a secret from her past (3.8, 00:30:08-34:45): her little daughter Sarah froze to death because Brona was forced to go out working on a very cold night and, being struck unconscious by a violent customer, returns too late to the apartment to rekindle the fire. An earlier episode had her standing in front of the tombstone of Sarah Croft (3.7, 00:03:00-03:50), a counterpart to the scene in which Clare carries his son’s shrouded body into the river. It is this account of little Sarah’s death that makes Victor relent from his plan of fixing Lily in “immortal perfection,” letting her go instead (both physically and emotionally, we presume).

At the core of Lily’s futurity and transformativity we thus find a kernel of unchangeability and irreversibility, a death that pre-empts further developments. Coincidentally, this element of irreversibility also constitutes the end of the narrative, or at least of one of its plotlines (that of the romance between Victor and Lily), as if this serial story could only find its ending in the negation of procreation – the death of children. The series’ most prominent character, Vanessa Ives, is shot according to her own wish by her never-quite-lover Ethan – another instance where further procreation is pre-empted. Victor recognizes, after he has let Lily go: “There is no road ahead for me” (3.9, 00:19:31-19:32). The various attempts to overthrow finitude – not only by Victor Frankenstein or Clare’s wife Marjorie, but also that of the demonic forces who have been haunting Vanessa – are thwarted or seem undesirable, after all (as Dorian’s static existence). Plotlines die along with the characters they were focused on, providing the endings and finalities that even extensive serial narratives live on – the quasi-magnetic force that stories’ endings provide as they keep looming in the distance.

Or do these plotlines and characters die? Not only does the “quiescence” before and beyond narrative (Brooks) provide, for the narrative

franchises of popular culture and serial narration, material for spin-offs, sequels, prequels and the like – like a dormant space of difference. It is also in the nature of fictional characters in general that whatever fate befalls them, they can always reappear for another telling of the story – or, to speak with Deleuze, it is with *simulacra* that the order of repetition finally arrives: with beings that are not obligated to be truthful representatives of originals (on the origin of the term as Latin for ‘statue,’ ‘idol’ see Daniel Smith [89]). The simulacrum opens another perspective on the question of narrative continuation, of which we can see, as it were, a mild version in the sequel (*Bride*) and a strong version in the series (*Penny*). It captures the repeat-ability of narrative fiction in such a way that a certain lawlessness becomes obvious, where ‘doing it right’ has to step back, as concern, behind ‘doing it any way,’ that is, without too much respect for standards of quality, appropriateness, or sensibility. (Isn’t this the standard accusation for long-running series or franchises – that they didn’t know when to stop? But how would they have known? From which criteria?)

In a sense, all fictional beings function in some way as simulacra – which are really functionally equivalent to the aforementioned “third time in the series,” the element-to-come that cannot be defined in essence – yet not all of them confront us as blatantly as serial creatures do with the unexpectedly subversive power of appearances. This superficial yet non-trivial quality might even be what makes for the campy quality of both *Bride of Frankenstein* and *Penny Dreadful*; camp being, as Susan Sontag has defined it, more interested in surfaces, styles, and textures than in content, yet not therefore ‘bad’ or poorly done. It exaggerates, it “sees everything in quotation marks. It’s not a lamp but a ‘lamp’; not a woman but a ‘woman.’ To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theater” (9–10).¹²

12 *Penny Dreadful*, it seems to me, collapses into kitsch precisely whenever it tries too hard to add substance (and it does this ever more frequently the further the series proceeds).

Tellingly, Steven Shaviro uses Batman to illustrate Deleuze's idea of the simulacrum – he thus refers to a fictional creature with a similarly extensive network of adaptations and variations as Frankenstein's creature has. “No Gotham City and Batman can be privileged above the rest,” Shaviro explains, “not even Bob Kane's ‘original’ conception, which is just as much a particular, circumstantial actualization as are all the others” (117). The same can easily be formulated for Frankenstein and his creature – as well as for other personnel in *Penny Dreadful*, such as Dorian Gray, Dracula, and Dr. Jekyll:

In this sense, Batman [Frankenstein's creature] is a simulacrum. There is no Platonic Idea of Batman [Frankenstein's creature], no model that all the iterations of Batman [Frankenstein's creature] would conform to more or less, and in relation to which they could all be hierarchically ranked according to the degree of their resemblance. There is also no best of all possible Batmans [Frankenstein's creatures], no iteration that can be judged more perfect than all the rest. (118)

Overtly repetitive/repeated fictional characters such as Batman or Frankenstein's creature or Dorian Gray make the workings of singularity particularly obvious; in a Deleuzian sense, they “do not have identity, because they are caught up in continual metamorphoses. But they can be described, nevertheless, as *singularities*, because—even as they pass through all possible predicates—they do not have these predicates *all at once*. Batman has no fixed identity, but each iteration of Batman is a singular one” (Shaviro 121). It is only fitting, in this regard, that the creatures in *Penny Dreadful* – Caliban/Clare, Lily-Brona, Proteus – are all named after myths, literary or cultural icons, in other words, chimeras: in a sense they have too many names and thus, like Shelley's monster, no proper name at all. Appearances can indeed be deceiving – to the eye that looks to essence exclusively.

But even disregarding these particular creatures' (Frankensteinian creatures, that is) extensive adaptation history, there is something of the power of the simulacrum inherent in creatures of narrative fiction, in general – in the creatures that stories bring forth in their capacity to express singularity, differential repetition, processes of becoming. *Penny*

Dreadful, in what is an almost directly metafictional comment, makes this explicit. In the first season, Caliban is taken in as a stagehand by the benevolent director of a boulevard theatre. He watches from behind the scenes as characters are shot on stage and actors rise, seconds later, to receive their applause. “Could there have been a more appropriate place for me?” he reflects. “Night after night, the players died gruesomely and then came back to life again for the next show. They were undying, like me – creatures of perpetual resurrection” (1.3, 00:21:35-52). Linking Caliban/Clare, in particular, to institutions of popular fiction – the Grand Guignol theatre in Season One, a wax works in Season Two – seems to suggest that he becomes a paradigm case of fictional creatures in general *because* he is a Frankenstein creature, that is, because of his explicit negotiability in terms of resurrection.

Caliban's (self-)assessment is both glaringly obvious and infinitely obscure – as is the simulacrum. “[F]olded within” fictional creatures there is, just as Deleuze claims for the simulacra under attack by Plato, “a process of limitlessness” – the potential of unlimited return, always the same but not the same as before (“Plato” 49). In Deleuze's review of Plato, the simulacrum – the “mirage,” the “counterfeit” (“Plato” 47), “dreams, shadows, reflections, paintings” (*Difference and Repetition* 85) – appears as something like the ‘evil twin’ to the copy and is explained in opposition to it: while copies resemble ‘inwardly,’ in their “essence” (“Plato” 49) rather than, or before, resembling externally, simulacra resemble only externally. “The copy is an image endowed with resemblance, the simulacrum is an image without resemblance,” Deleuze explains, like “man” who has, according to the catechism, “through sin [...] lost the resemblance while retaining the image” of God (“Plato” 48). Simulacra thus have “externalised resemblance and live on difference instead” (*Difference and Repetition* 162). Liberated from the demand of essential correspondence, the simulacrum “implies great dimensions, depths, and distances which the observer cannot dominate” (“Plato” 49).¹³ While in *Penny Dreadful*, such limitless existence is, more often

13 Simulacra “embody the evil power of the false claimant [in Plato]” (Deleuze, “Plato” 47). See Daniel Smith for how the whole problem of simulacra, of

than not, denied in the single instance (Jack needs to be buried, Victor's workshop of creation is abandoned, Dorian's existence will petrify in beauty, Ethan has to shoot his lover, and all stories must end), it lives on in principle – in the differential repeatability of (narrative) fiction. It is in this quality of differential repetition and repeatability that, according to Deleuze, 'real life' and the order of simulacra correspond: "This, then, is the way the conditions of real experience and the structure of the work of art reunite: [...] the internal reverberation and amplified movement, the aggressiveness of the simulacra" ("Plato" 52).

Beyond Sovereign Imitation

Going back to the question of difference and representation, then: *are* simulacra or are they *about*? If anything, they are one because they are the other, in a paradoxical revolution of surfaces. Stories as simulacra are indeed an "operation in two directions" – and rarely is this more obvious than in serial stories – because they need not look forward in order to be productive. They are very well able to be productive through and precisely *in* the moment in which they are being retrospective. Of course, not

essences vs. existences, arises from the desire to separate true claimants (for, say, a political office) from false ones. He sums up the point of Deleuze's concept of simulacra as follows: "The essential Platonic distinction, Deleuze argues, is more profound than the speculative distinction between model and copy, original and image. The deeper, practical distinction moves between two kinds of images or *eidolon*, for which the Platonic Idea is meant to provide a concrete criterion of selection. 'Copies' or icons (*eikones*) are well-grounded claimants to the transcendent Idea, authenticated by their internal resemblance to the Idea, whereas 'simulacra' (*phantasmata*) are like false claimants, built on a dissimilarity and implying an essential perversion or deviation from the Idea. If the goal of Platonism is the triumph of icons over simulacra, the inversion of Platonism would entail an *affirmation* of the simulacrum as such, which must thus be given its own concept. Deleuze consequently defines the simulacrum in terms of an internal dissimilitude or 'disparateness,' which in turn implies a new conception of Ideas, no longer as self-identical qualities [...], but rather as constituting a *pure concept of difference*" (89).

every story begins by saying ‘once upon a time.’ And yet, stories are able to begin by saying ‘once upon a time’, and in this sense have a tendency to free themselves from the hierarchy of ‘what came first,’ the original or the copy. (And in fact, maybe those which we least expect to do so – the supposedly most conventional of their species, the ‘once upon a time’ forms of story – do so most thoroughly.)

In Deleuzian terms, this makes perfect sense: as simulacra, stories imitate the future. This, arguably, allows singularity as properly ontological – ontogenetical – factor to come to the fore more clearly than it does through Derridean notions of tracing alone, though those follow a similar temporal ‘illogicality.’ Ultimately, however, whether we frame difference as productive singularity or as creative scission – or even, in Latour’s terminology, as “being-as-other” (*Inquiry* 162) – in either case the kind of difference that is implied is non-oppositional and non-categorical. Deleuze talks about “difference without a concept” as the basis for individuation; Derrida’s logic of the trace and its belatedness, or its *différance*, requires all production (of meaning and of existence) to be a continuous process (an “always already”) which might imply a cascade of thresholds but is without sharp edges towards its ‘outsides.’¹⁴ In much the same way, I would like to suggest, does narrative fiction work by virtue of the production of non-oppositional difference. Stories are not sharply, categorically delineated from their ‘outside,’ towards reality; rather, they have thresholds of difference which can be crossed by certain practices, from drawing up a curtain to setting the camera at an angle to quite simply imagining myself to be somebody else.

Crucially, this emancipates imitation from its dependence on a ‘master imitator,’ that is, a consciousness which would *recognise*, in its supposed particular astuteness, the correspondences between life and story, or one story and another, and then manage to find adequate means for translating them. The adaptive industriousness (or even, the adaptation industry) that builds and re-builds the *Frankenstein* complex involves us,

14 On the latter issue, see also Andrade on “Derrida’s Writing: Notes on the Freudian Model of Language.”

but it isn't, in any narrower or exclusive sense, 'ours.' The cohesion between stories and life, and between one story and another, is warranted by more than that – beyond similarity, it is enabled by singularity, which presides over both fictional beings and the stories which express them. It might be a necessary ingredient in the process that somebody capable of writing (or painting, or ...) picks up their pen – but the compulsion to insist that this is the only *real* requirement for a story to come into existence, and also the first, speaks maybe to no more than the persistent seductiveness of a conventional representational paradigm.