Part Two: Repetition

Intuitively, it doesn't even need a lot of arguments to support the claim that somehow, the *Frankenstein* complex is all about repetition. For one, Victor Frankenstein's creative practice is a practice of re-use, where dead flesh is made to come to life again. For another thing, the *Frankenstein* complex results and keeps growing from all the new old ways of re-telling the story of the creature and his maker. And on top of it all, *Frankenstein* is a narrative, so isn't *Frankenstein* somehow naturally repetitive? Narrative, after all, is a form of recounting events and reporting something that has already happened.

There is more to this than meets the eye, though. On close inspection, repetition is a complicated issue, and so is the repetitive quality of narrative. In the *Frankenstein* complex, repetition reveals itself, first, as a dynamic of sameness and difference, oriented forward as much as backward – somewhat unsurprisingly, one might say, the same river we never step in twice is after all proverbial, not only among philosophers. But further, repetition also reveals itself as not so much a means that narrative avails itself of to devise coherent representations of life, but rather as a general, driving ontological force that stories, as living practice, tap into. This is not to say that repetition doesn't have the effect of creating coherence, but that its status, for narrative fiction, is more than that of an instrument or a technique.

In an admittedly rather categorical statement, Brooks claims that narrative "always makes the implicit claim to be in a state of repetition, as a going over again of a ground already covered […] as the detective retraces the tracks of the criminal. This claim to an act of repetition –

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'I sing of', 'I tell of' – appears to be initiatory of narrative" (*Reading for the Plot* 97). While it might not be as obviously true as Brooks makes it appear that this is "always" the case, it is plausible enough that the indication that one is 'telling *of*' is the prototypical gesture of storytelling. This impression of repetition cannot be accurate in a conventional sense for a number of reasons (and Brooks is indeed careful to only talk about a "claim"): for one, narrative *fiction*, in particular, is certainly not a simple construct in the manner of 'object + representation.' Also, any technique of representation – whatever precise mechanisms we assume for it – will inevitably alter and change what it represents. Repetition is nevertheless the principle of existence stories project for themselves: to be linked to something prior to or beyond themselves which they are able to relate by virtue of this linkage, however much they might make this something up themselves.

This characteristic may be particularly evident for the case of standard written narrative, a story narrated in past tense with a clearly identifiable narrator. More basically, however, it has to do, quite simply, with the fact that something is arranged with regard to something else: the form and order in which events are related is arranged with regard to the form and order of their (supposed) actual occurrence (in narratological vocabulary, the relation between discourse and story). Narrative repetition is thus not in itself bound to a specific medium, though it may be more obvious in some than in others. (This has long been one of the basic tenets of narratology: "[o]nce we define Narrative as the composite of story and discourse (on the basis of its unique double chronology), then *logically*, at least, narratives can be said to be actualizable on the stage or in other iconic media" [Chatman, *Coming to Terms* 114]). It is thus their aboutness that gives stories their repetitive appearance. Then again stories are, as it were, not to be trusted on this account: we can easily argue that this link in the form of 'being about' is illusory as nothing exists prior to the story. It seems, therefore, that stories' indication of repetition in the conventional sense (that is, their indication that they are going over something *again*) is more of a gesture than an actual performance, and that stories are really involved in another kind of repetition – or, to turn this idea around, that the seemingly paradoxical repetitiveness of stories

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is a good indicator that repetition is not quite what we think it is, if we think that repetition defines and exhausts itself in a static reappearance of the exact same.

The recognisability of any item, deconstruction famously claims, be it a written mark or an event or a piece of experience, depends on an inherent break in this item's identity – it can appear as itself because it can re-appear in different forms and contexts and still be identifiable, which in turn implies that it was never completely one with itself, or never limited to itself, in the first place: anything that is identifiable is iterable, and iterability ties repetition to alterity. This is not simply a de-substantialisation, a depletion of identity. Jacques Derrida has captured this, quite accessibly, in the concept of dehiscence, borrowed from botany: "this word marks emphatically that the divided opening, in the growth of a plant, is also what, in a *positive* sense, makes production, reproduction, development possible" (*Limited Inc* 59). Derrida's analysis of iterability thus links identity or individuality, something being recognisable as itself, to repetition and furthermore also emphasises that repetition does more than 'do something again.' Others, in fact, would go as far as claiming that repetition does something else altogether. Gilles Deleuze, for one, discovers repetition as a form assumed by difference, and difference as the movement of being which enables singular beings to emerge. Difference 'hides beneath' apparent re-occurrences of objects or beings; even more to the point, it is *because* difference is able to manifest that objects or beings exist in the first place, and can be identified as repetitions. In a reversal of terms not unsimilar to Derrida's reversal of the relation between iteration and identity (it is because of iteration that there is identity, not the other way round), Deleuze reformulates singularity as the condition of repetition: it is because singularity is something like an ontological capacity – we can distinguish two objects from each other even if they are completely alike – that time and thus life make any sense to us. And how are we to imagine narrative without singularity and without time?

In many ways, stories seem to tap into this 'natural' resource of repetitive productivity; that is, their 'repetition' is really, if anything, a celebration, and thus itself a production, of living singularity – significantly,

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Deleuze speaks of celebrations, of "festivals," right at the outset of *Difference and Repetition*, saying that "this is the apparent paradox of festivals: they repeat an 'unrepeatable.' They do not add a second and third time to the first, but carry the first time to the 'nth' power" (2). Living repetition itself – in other words, singularity – enables this multiplication in Deleuze's account. There might thus be something in the nature of the existent that enables its re-production in narrative rather than the other way around (rather than narrative imposing its repetitive character on reality in recounting it, that is). Whether we want to lay emphasis on the condition of iterability for something being-recognisable-as-itself, or whether we want to lay emphasis on the fundamental factor of non-categorical difference as ontological threshold into singular existence: ultimately, both ideas imply a directionality that essentially accords with the directionality – the progress that is never simply a progress – of stories. Part Two thus aims to investigate the following claim: stories do not so much look back on something they go over again. Rather, stories manifest precisely the paradoxical character of repetition because through revisiting they pro-ject, cast forth or, in other words, create what they tell us about. Their gesture of re-creation is really pro-creative in bringing forth the new and the singular. Existential repetition – whether we want to call it 'iteration' or 'difference' – governs life as much as it governs stories.

The re/pro-creation of life is also what Victor Frankenstein gets himself involved with, of course. His attempts bring up all kinds of questions pertaining to the relation of uniqueness to similarity, novelty to familiarity. In the context at hand, the creatures Victor struggles with are particularly worth looking at as *narrative* creatures, that is, as creatures brought about by virtue of the access narrative has to the dynamics of existential repetition, by narrative's capacity to 'celebrate' them, to react to the invitation to differential repetition that singularity, on the level of personhood as elsewhere, exudes. In the *Frankenstein* complex, this capacity is further enhanced in a particular way: all *Frankenstein* stories in a sense also write the *Frankenstein* story's story and connect, through their own differential repetition, to the differential repetitions of singularity which enabled the story in the first place. Or, to put it in more Derridean

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terms: if *Frankenstein* is iterable – and if its creature is iterable – it must have been 'split' from the start, or something of itself must have always already evaded it and then have become productive (catastrophically productive in the case of the creature) in its further genealogy. For what is *Frankenstein* if not, to borrow a passage from Derrida's "Signature Event Context," a "network of effacement and of difference, of units of iterability, which are separable from their internal and external context and also from themselves, inasmuch as the very iterability which constituted their identity does not permit them ever to be a unity that is identical to itself" (*Limited Inc* 10)?

Ridvan Askin, working towards a narrative theory based on Deleuzian ontology, criticises conventional narratology for its focus on the human and the cognitive, for its "explanatory frameworks, which cast narrative precisely as representational and experiential with no purchase on any mind-independent reality whatsoever" (9). Askin's suggestions towards a differential narratology, in contrast, push "narrative theory to where epistemology capsizes and reverts into ontology, to where narrative ceases merely to be a form of human access to things (while also being that) and becomes expressive of being as such" (5). In some sense, then, Askin uses Deleuze to push precisely towards the vitalism that has been claimed – namely, by Brooks – to be missing from narratology. To a considerable extent, I share Askin's premises. I, too, would like to claim that we need to cast "narrative as expressive rather than representational" (21) and that our guiding questions so far – "What does a text mean? What is its aesthetic value? What are its formal properties?" – need to be supplemented by questions of, "How does [the text] work? What does it do? Which forces does it harbour?" (24). But neither do I take issue with narrative theory's focus on human ethics and understanding in quite as thoroughly a fashion as Askin does nor do I believe that it is only the self-conscious or rather, self-questioning work of postmodernist fiction that involves us in the intricacy

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of its own ontology.[2] In other words, I do believe that something as conventional and widespread as for instance the serial format can and does grant access to the differential repetition – the ontological force – it expresses.

And further, I do believe that there is something to the representational side of things as well that is worth looking at. Askin explains that he does "not deny that narrative always is about something," but that he wishes "to emphasise that before being *about* something it simply *is* something itself and that this *is* determines its aboutness" (5–6). I would like to modify this into the claim that it is not that narrative is something *before* being about something but that it *is* something (with all the ontological weight this implicates) *as* it is about something. For stories, being-about consolidates being, and being consolidates being-about. I feel that Brooks's supplementation of narratology with the vitality of desire borrowed from psychoanalysis can itself usefully be supplemented by a more comprehensive inclusion of materiality such as Deleuze's ontology can provide. But I do not therefore believe that this means we should turn our focus by exactly 180 degrees to approach narrative from the other side entirely – entirely from the non-human, non-representative, affective side of things, that is.

Another opportunity to understand more fully how narrative is, as Askin puts it, "expressive of being as such," is provided by looking more closely at the fact – only seemingly trivial – that narrative is expansive, that it covers more than one state of things. Derrida's description as given above – of a "network of effacement and of difference, of units of iterability" – is originally a description of what Derrida calls the "field of the mark" (*Lim Inc* 10). As Part One has repeatedly insisted, Frankenstein's creature is marked in ways which are crucial for his story. There's no looking at the monster without knowing that 'something has happened here.' In this, there is a curious parallel between the way bodies make meaning and the way fiction makes meaning, and it all

2 For the record, the latter is not something that Askin claims, either; but he voices and practises a strong preference for postmodern fiction when it comes to showing the workings of his differential narratology.

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comes down to figures, to the way in which physical marks can convey meaningfulness both tied to and reaching beyond their own materiality. What happens, then, when this meaningfulness takes narrative form, creates and follows a narrative arc, or what Bruno Latour would maybe call a "trajectory" (if his use of the term in *Inquiry* is any indication)? Does narrative's differential repetition demonstrate the opening of the mark onto existence (physical, energetic, vital) and vice versa? This is conceivable not only through a Deleuzian reinterpretation of what repetition is but also through the – essentially Freudian – notion of delay or deferral, which features in both Derrida's and Brooks's work. Where delay configures the relation between life and death for Freud, it configures the relation between psyche and story for Brooks, and it determines the way that traces make meaning for Derrida. Apparently, vital energies are at work in those moments where figures stretch into narrative arcs. We look at the creature's marked-ness and know that 'something has happened,' that there's a story to tell; and yet, at the same time, it is through this very instance of meaningfulness that the story projects itself in the first place, which suggests, contrary to what Askin implies, a certain simultaneity of representation and being. The story creates its trajectory through following it. Certainly, Deleuze's and Derrida's accounts of how repetition and difference work diverge, and yet they both work towards understanding this very paradox of repetition: its conservative-*and*-creative effect, affirming-*and*-differing, repeating-*and*-renewing – not in the banal sense of variation, but in a more fundamental, idiosyncratic fashion that resonates, also, with the curious temporality that Brooks points out for stories, which live, even as they only begin, off the anticipation of an ending that is at the same time rejected and delayed.

To put it in more figurative terms: where Part One delved into the figural depth of the creature's body as marked, and thus into the bodiliness of life as figured in fiction, the section at hand follows the fate of this mark or marked-ness as it projects and expands in time. To investigate these issues, Part Two is going to look at two versions of *Frankenstein* which make iteration their designated programme through taking the form of sequels and series. Both can be said to frame this iterative

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programme in the terms of actual resurrections: in the frame story to James Whale's film *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), Mary Shelley explicitly resurrects her story, and with it the creature, from the end both have found in the previous film. Where this kind of 'resurrecting return' is more of an introductory device for Whale's film, it becomes a pervading issue in John Logan's television series *Penny Dreadful* (2014–2016). In re-making and re-combining literary classics – most prominently, *Frankenstein*, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* – *Penny Dreadful* relies on the iterability of these texts' protagonists and plot elements and brings up the question of adaptation in a narrower sense. But more than that: being a serial narrative, it doubles the differentially repetitive movement of narrative and confronts us with a diffraction of narrative repetition onto various levels – the level of outward form (serial narration), the level of context (adaptation), and the level of personal uniqueness, which is a pressing concern arising for Victor's creatures (of which there are, quite tellingly, three) in the series.

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