

# Gender and Technology in Contemporary Frankenstein Film Adaptations

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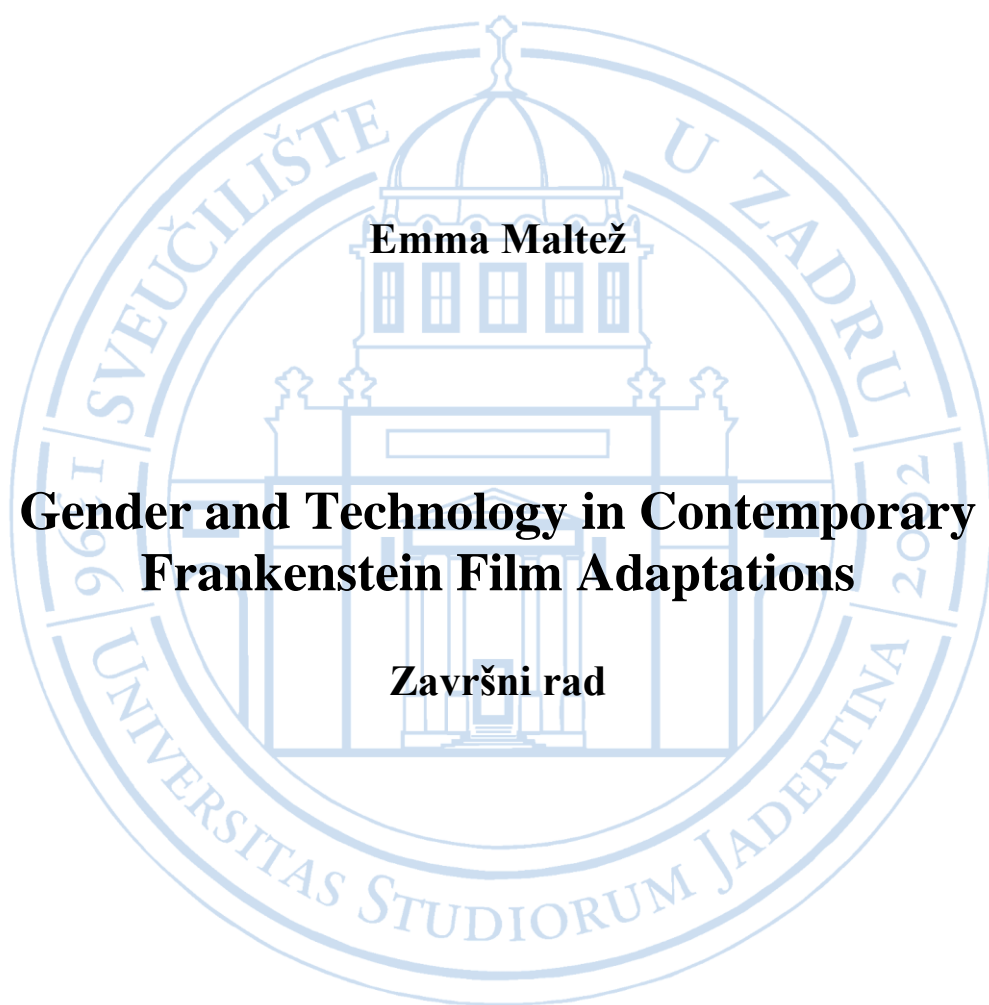


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Sveučilište u Zadru  
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Anglistika



**Emma Maltež**

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Gender and Technology in Contemporary Frankenstein Film Adaptations

Završni rad

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Zadar, 2024.



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Zadar, 9. rujna 2024.

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## 1. Introduction

In this paper, I will write about the themes of gender and technology in two contemporary *Frankenstein* film adaptations, *Frankenstein* by Jed Mercurio from 2007 and *Frankenstein* by Bernard Rose from 2015. The themes of gender and technology are at the focus of this research since these film adaptations put a particular emphasis on the mentioned themes in their reinterpretation of the 1818 novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*. The aim of this research is to investigate how the authors and directors tried to modernize the source text by focusing on the themes of gender and technology. In particular, I will investigate how the authors presented social criticism of contemporary society through the exploration of themes of technology and gender. By relying mainly on Robert Stam's adaptation theory and theoretical concepts of posfeminism and posthumanism, some of the research questions I will try to answer are the following: 1) How do the films represent the time period in which they were written? What are the contextual (social, cultural) clues and how are these reflected in the films? 2) How is the theme of gender explored in the film adaptation *Frankenstein* (2007) by Jed Mercurio? 3) How is the theme of technology explored in the film adaptation *Frankenstein* (2015) by Bernard Rose?

The first film that will be analysed is *Frankenstein*, directed by Jed Mercurio. This adaptation was chosen because there is an array of interesting elements for the study of the theme of gender in relation to the novel: the presence of a woman who is a scientist, terminally ill human child, a woman in an academic space, the monster's behaviour towards her and her colleagues, and the role of a mother. This film came out at a time when public outcry about post-feminism and the MeToo era was present which will be elaborated further in the following chapters.

The second film, *Frankenstein*, was directed by Bernard Rose. In my analysis, I will mostly focus on the role of technology in the film. The elements interesting for the study of technology in relation to the novel in this adaptation are: modern circumstances such as a large industrial city and scientific laboratory, how the machines work and the inside scope into the process of making the creature, the ability to do it again unlike the novel, the corrupted world of modern humans from the monster's point of view, technological aid, presence of: both parents, a best friend, a prostitute and a dog. The circumstances at the time of filming were the growth of technological presence in one's life and the beginnings of artificial intelligence,

which caused a moral panic at the time. More about these circumstances and their relevance will be explained later.

## 1.1 Theoretical Framework

The theory that this work will be based upon is adaptation theory as presented in the work “Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation” by Robert Stam. Robert Stam claims that film adaptations of novels should not be judged according to how accurately they turn the source material into a moving picture but rather that their value lies in the way film authors have rewritten and shaped the story to fit the cultural, temporal and historical context of the time of adaptation (57). In essence, film adaptations are not the exact duplicate of a novel in a different media (Stam 58). It is also argued that ideological reasons can stand behind what the directors wanted to convey with different film elements (Stam 57, 73). If one approaches adaptations in this manner, then looking at the context of the time culture-wise, language-wise and period-wise (Stam 69) is of crucial importance in understanding the directors’ intentions and how and why they added and/or removed something in their rewriting of the source material (Stam 71-3). It is suggested that in one’s criticism of a film adaptation, one should give lesser importance to the fidelity to the source material and instead concern oneself with dialogical responses such as different readings, understandings and rewritings of the source text (Stam 75-6).

First, fidelity to the original source is a difficult thing to achieve according to Robert Stam (56). A novel depends on one person whose writing intentions might not be clear (Stam 57) and because of that, it is hard to be translated to another media, whereas a film depends on a group of people (Stam 56). The directors are given a free choice in bringing their ideas through actors to the big screen (Stam 55, 57) but due to differences in imagination of individuals, people’s ideas of, in this case, Victor and his creature may vary greatly. There is a difference between a character and a performer (Stam 60); character is Elizabeth Frankenstein and the performer is Carrie-Ann Moss. Stam argues that ideas of actor’s past roles can be present in the viewer’s mind (60), so, for instance, while watching *Frankenstein* (Mercurio) one may be reminded of actress Helen McCrory’s previous role of matriarch Polly Gray in the television series *Peaky Blinders* which is a completely different character to the one she played in *Frankenstein* film adaptation.

Robert Stam continues to explain that in the case of film adaptation, every film frame cannot fully replicate the pages of the novel (56). However, what the films can do is take some of the lines from the source text and incorporate them in dialogue or monologue (Stam 65) as is the case in *Frankenstein* (Rose) where the main character, Adam, talks about being a fallen



angel which is a direct quotation from the novel. Cinema allows for and encourages different representation of beliefs and aesthetics (Stam 61), further making fidelity unachievable (Stam 56).

The original story of *Frankenstein* was written more than 200 years ago, and in approaching the contemporary adaptations of the story it is necessary to understand that “[t]he greater the lapse in time, the less reverence toward the source text and the more likely the reinterpretation through the values of the present” (Stam 57). This is what I will be mainly focusing on in the following analysis of *Frankenstein* (Mercurio) and *Frankenstein* (Rose). For example, *Frankenstein* (Mercurio) gives a specific reading of gender, as women were passive and had no voice in the 1818 novel. *Frankenstein* (Rose) gives a specific reading of technology not available in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to Stam, different readings and adaptations of the source text often include critiques which can be submitted to ideologies (Stam 63-4). Following this claim, one can conclude that different ideologies guide the films chosen for this analysis.

Moreover, while transforming the novel into a film, film crew members must choose what will remain in the novel, what parts will be highlighted, which parts and their meanings will be cleared up, how to make it relevant in the contemporary society, and what stands to be criticized and popularized (Stam 68). These changes depend on the genre, relevant ideologies, actor’s reputation, financial situation of the studio, and available technological means. While orchestrating these changes, locations and language used should correspond to the time the adaptation is being filmed in (Stam 69).

To briefly contextualize, *Frankenstein* film adaptation (Mercurio) was filmed and released at the time when the #MeToo movement emerged. Fileborn and Loney-Howes described the movement as the condemnation of sexual violence and giving adequate care to those violated mainly by empowering Hollywood actresses (qtd. in Garrido and Zaptsi, 22). Next contextual clue that is necessary to mention for the purpose of the analysis is that the film was released in the era of the so-called postfeminism. In recent years, postfeminism became a vessel of discussion which deals with changes in feminism and media culture and their correlation (Gill 148). The importance of the women’s issues and the effect of socio-cultural moment can be seen in the change of the gender of the main character in this film adaptation - Victor becomes Victoria.

Secondly, contextual clues about *Frankenstein* (Rose) are the rise of technology, moral panic, and artificial intelligence. Humans have become more dependent on technology in recent years. Among the positive sides, such changes also bring concern. Moral panic is the fear of

something that is happening in society, caused by the structuring of those events. This causes paranoid feelings as well as panic about not being able to do anything (Petric 1). The 2010s were also a decade in which artificial intelligence grew rapidly and shaped the current everyday online encounters (Peskoe-Yang, “The Bot Decade: How AI Took Over Our Lives in the 2010s”). It is clear that it influenced the film and for this reason, it will be further elaborated in the analysis. Now that the contextual clues were briefly identified, the analysis will begin by summarizing key themes of the original text.

## 1.2 The Story of *Frankenstein*

Before we begin our analysis, it is necessary to discuss the original story of *Frankenstein*, its relevance today and why so many adaptations were filmed recently. Girard argued that the themes present in Mary Shelley's novel went against what was the ideal in the Romantic era - worshipping higher beings, the natural world, the emotional world of the main character and a fortunate ending (3). Shelley's themes gave rise to emotions that were not explored before, to those of terror, horror, despair, and to an unfortunate ending (Girard 3). She introduced a scientist instead of a man of church. The castle, monastery and graveyard were removed in favour of a laboratory. The moral greyness was also new, as neither of the main characters are clearly a hero or antihero (Davison and Mulvey-Roberts 2). As such, it was a revolutionary work for the following reasons.

To begin with, Mary dealt with the position of women in society in this novel thanks to her mother's life work (Girard 2). Mary Wollstonecraft was a feminist and anarchist whose literary efforts were largely influential as well as her father William Godwin (Girard 1). Victor's wife Elizabeth is not given a voice. When Victor speaks about her, he is seemingly talking about a doll which stands to illustrate how the societal view of the 19<sup>th</sup> century stripped women away from their rights (Girard 3).

This brings us to the second point which relates to the author's social and moral awareness of the time. She came into contact with various male writers and philosophers during her formative years thanks to her father's connections. This meant she was more educated with more learning opportunities than the average Victorian woman (Girard 2). Shelley also did not know much about technology or medicine in order to write down the scientific process of creating life from mixed anatomical parts (Girard 4). Yet she knew about galvanization and the male scientists behind it. The general public at the time was captivated by it (Patowary "What is Galvanism, And How Did It Inspire Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*?").

At a time when contemporary reanimation was not a branch of science and the field of medicine relied on what we may consider today to be gruesome, a young woman came up with the story that dabbled in the controversies surrounding medical practice. This presented a threat as much as it had piqued the interests of readers (Davison and Mulvey-Roberts 3-4). The critics of the era took her story and turned it back on her (Davison and Mulvey-Roberts 4). However, many adaptations appeared. Not even half a decade had passed since 1818 and the first theatre adaptation was written. Almost a century later, the first cinema adaptation was released. The

film adaptation that opened up a path for numerous film adaptations as we know them today was *Frankenstein* (1931) by James Whale. *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) is one of the many popular film adaptations (Davison and Mulvey-Roberts 5). Any social group that has been marginalized or had their freedom limited can be connected with Frankenstein's creature. When looking at the story in this way, one cannot not notice the ongoing relevance and its further adaptative potential (Davison and Mulvey-Roberts 7).

In spite of *Frankenstein's* continued relevance today, there is a tendency for these adaptations not to receive critical acclaim. Some argue that an adaptation that stays true to the original is not as interesting (Reyes 174). Jancovich claims that keeping the characters from the source text but reinterpreting them in a modern way that the audience can resonate with is better (qtd. in Reyes 174). This can be seen in the *Frankenstein* film adaptation by Bernard Rose. The mythology that Mary Shelley came up with is still present but it has taken on a different shape with zombies (Reyes 177).

## 2. Gender in *Frankenstein* (2007) by Jed Mercurio

This chapter will focus on the theme of gender in the 2007 film adaptation *Frankenstein* by the director Jed Mercurio. To begin with, a short summary of the film will be provided. The differences in representation and treatment of gender issues between the source text and this film will be emphasised. A comparison of Victoria Frankenstein in the film adaptation and Victor Frankenstein's behaviour in the novel as well as a comparison of the plot in the source text and the film adaptation will follow. An explanation of how and why this adaptation serves as a mark of its time will be further provided.

The film shows the present-day where Victoria Frankenstein is hiding from the creature. After that we are shown what happened in the last 9 months that led to this. Victoria is a research scientist, working in an academic division of the university, publicly funded by The National Research Council. Her team has successfully created a human heart that is being tested for transplantation. This is the main motivation behind her work as her 8-year-old son is terminally ill with failing organ systems and suitable organ donors are lacking. She spends time with him showing the audience her caring, motherly side. Her successful project is observed by the Council representative Jane who denies her request for transplanting that heart into her son (00:07:26-00:08:52).

Onwards, Victoria does not listen to her supervisors for her child's sake. She starts a new project called Universal Xenograph. This is the same tank where the heart is. She tried to produce an organ bank. While her helper Ed is distracted, she injects a liquid inside the tank. Later, Ed sees that there is a variety of cells: lung, liver, kidney. Victoria claims this was their ultimate goal (00:12:50-00:13:23). Her child's health is continually worsening, and his blood is taken for additional testing. Out of desperation, Victoria stole the blood vial in order to inject it in the organ bank so all the organs could genetically fit him. After a tooth emerges in the tank, her boss Andrew and Ed question her. On X-rays it is seen that muscle has started to form while Victoria looks inside the tank through the glass window and sees an eye looking back at her. This is the moment in which she claims that whatever is inside the tank is alive (00:19:10-00:19:40). Her child has died and during the funeral, she tells Andrew to terminate the tank as the cells were exposed to chemotherapy and X-rays might have caused it to mutate (00:21:42-00:22:03). However, Jane does not allow this as she wants to see what will happen allowing the monstrous creature to form and escape the tank causing great amounts of liquid and mass to run through the drains.

## 2.1 #MeToo Movement and Postfeminism

The last decade of the 20th century saw an upheaval of postfeminist ethics in the popular culture (McRobbie 256). This was led by the intent to appeal to women in different areas, such as the entertainment industry which proved to follow the current norms (McRobbie 257). There is an unhealthy obsession with the way women look predominantly seen in magazines which condemned women for not looking like the standard which in turn caused the prevalence of sexualization (Gill 149-50). As many statistics show, men abuse women and other men more often than contrarywise (Fleming et al. 251). Following the emergence of the #MeToo movement in 2006 that offered help to victims of sexual abuse which was not available before (Burke "Get to Know Us: History & Inception"), Mercurio chose to spare the women that created the monster; instead creating a monster that killed men. Tarana Burke was the first influential person within this movement at its beginning in 2006. Eleven years later wide attention was given to the crimes of Harvey Weinstein (Hesson 1). He was accused of sexual harassment and abuse. Seeing that Weinstein was a famous film producer, this posed a threat to the Hollywood culture of silence. The sign #MeToo generated a lot of attention after actress Alyssa Milano spoke of her experience online (Garrido and Zapsi 22). The female societal position is reflected in the film industry - influencing what women do and for whom (McRobbie 262). Some postfeminists argue that women's success should exist outside of bounds of feminism (McRobbie 258); had this been the case, women would have continued to stay silent about the experienced abuse.

In Gill's postfeminist sensibility that examines the characteristics of present-day gender media representations (148), it is argued that women being sexually attractive is the core of feminine identity (Gill 149). But the change in post-feminism that Goldman pointed out is that women are now subjects who present themselves as objects as this is what they desire (qtd. in Gill 151). This is a form of corruption and manipulation in which women shape their view of themselves to the view that men have of women (Gill 151-2). On the other hand, women must control their body and mould themselves to this standard no matter how they feel as a pretty body means there is an absence of problems (Gill 150). In examples such as this, it is clear why post-feminist discourse is marked by those who reject feminist identity (McRobbie 257). Furthermore, the notion of women choosing for themselves is exploited in entertainment (McRobbie 262). But it also means that women can have a fulfilling career and find themselves in feminine roles: a wife and a mother (Chandler and Munday "Post-feminism").

In film, Victoria Frankenstein is a scientist and a mother showcasing the individual choice and freedom present in postfeminist discourse (McRobbie 262). She is not shown as sexually attractive to the audience but her feminine identity (Gill 149) is present through these roles. Arguably she achieved this balance by using her career to try to extend her son's life, showcasing extraordinary motherly love and care. After her son's death, she wanted to better her research and limit herself to achievable, smaller scale tasks. Victoria talks to Andrew about destroying the project during her son's funeral. This wish was respected by Andrew but not by Jane, which is an interesting take. A power imbalance is present between two women instead of between men and women. As Gill describes, the differences between women in postfeminist media culture are seen through this polarization of fitting the expectation of being mothers and successful workers (157). Jane is a cold successful business woman which leads the audience to believe she lacks empathy and other 'feminine' traits Victoria exhibits due to her choice. The film also dealt with manipulation (Gill 151-2) through the character of Victoria's ex-husband Henry Clerval. Her choice to engage with him was freely given but Henry hid his true intention.

## 2.2 Gender Differences in the Novel and in the Film Adaptation

I will preface the following part about differences based on gender and presentation of relationships in this film adaptation with Mary Shelley writing the source text as “a cautionary tale for women” (Girard 3). The elements that differ from the novel are the presence of a woman scientist, rekindling of marriage, a real human child, a caring mother and a caring father, their joined efforts to control the creature and the gender differences. Victoria Frankenstein’s late child is the reason behind her creation of a monster. The adaptation offers a view of a female scientist motivated to save a life she created from premature death and creating another life in a laboratory instead of a male scientist that yearns to have a supernatural power of creating life. She is both Victor Frankenstein’s opposite in the sense of trying to save a life naturally created, and identical to him in the sense that she created a life artificially. The gender change from male to female is extremely important as it took the story written in the Victorian era in which it was unimaginable that women were scientists as men and proved it wrong.

The creature that Victoria has created could be read as a replacement for her late child. There is rekindling of her failed marriage, not present in the source text, as well as matrimonial love. There is just the title of marriage in the source text without any actual practice as characters do not see each other for long periods and Elizabeth is killed. Unlike the novel, this film explores the role of a woman in an academic space and the role of a mother. Victoria Frankenstein fails in using science for a greater good bringing chaos instead. Only she has empathy for the creature. She feels responsible in giving the creature a life worth living and not just that of suffering and hate while Victor actively wants to eliminate his creation. All men eventually die at the hands of the creature in this film, not to show women as superior to men but it could be rather read as showing women’s endurance and capability despite society that tries to tear them apart in every area imaginable (Gill 155-6). None of these men are against Victoria and this is not their punishment, rather a testament of the love a mother offers and no need for their further existence in the film. This is the director’s choice to omit or add events (Stam 73). Victor Frankenstein’s creature in the novel has no mother as Victor neglects his wife Elizabeth, who is talked about as a helpless child praised for her beauty, unlike the creature in this film which has a mother. But the creature in the film adaptation cannot talk. Women not dying is not present in the novel as they are not the main characters. There is a shift in this film where women are the main characters that stay alive through the entire film. In the tragedy of losing one’s family, this film shows that even an artificial one could be considered real. Victor Frankenstein did not bother with this as any attempt to familiarize with the creature or have a



family of any kind was a failure. Even though both parents are scientists, the doctor that informs Henry and Victoria about their child's health never faces or talks to Victoria preferring to address her husband. However, in the novel Elizabeth is not equal to Victor. Their relationship is irrelevant to him unlike his studies, the creature and the power that comes with his god-defying task. Victoria in the film adaptation is concerned with her marriage and her child which she desperately tries to save. She was aware of the risk that followed her aims and tried to stop it from happening but was prevented by Jane. This is a crucial point in the film. On the other hand, Victor never stopped pursuing his ambitions. After her son's death, Victoria starts looking at the creature as her son because he has her DNA. Victor's creature has no DNA of his. Regarding their actions, the creature in the film, Victor and his creature in the novel, are all monsters. Victoria is the only one who cannot be classified as a monster as she has not killed anyone and takes full responsibility for her actions. None of the other characters have that redeeming quality that Victoria possesses, and the creature's life was indeed started by her but escaped under her supervisor.

The creature itself was a monstrous humanoid who could not communicate by speech, but it did communicate in screams and groans. The first scene in which we see the creature is it writhing and screaming in pain during a thunderstorm where it can be seen that rain hurts him. He is deformed and does not have the ability to assimilate to humans. As a social outcast he does not observe human behaviour in order to replicate it unlike the novel. Its need for water and food are not shown in the film in the way they are shown in the source text, but its need for a mother's love and warmth are present as well as in the novel. The creature in the film adaptation does feel its mother's love and care, but the creature in the novel never got the chance to feel any kind of love; platonic, parental or romantic. The creature in the film adaptation hid and stayed hidden around the research facility from which it escaped. In the novel the creature escaped from Victor and he did not know of his whereabouts for a longer time than in this film. In the scene where the creature murders a naïve girl who wanted to play is where his height and physical characteristics are clearly seen for the first time. The creature stands at 2 metres tall, has pale skin and severe deformations on his face and limbs. His head is triangle shaped and his limbs are deformed in the sense that he has three fingers on his hands and no toes. His attire is a long coat and a teddy bear. This might symbolize its youth and a basic child's need for parental care. In comparison to the source text, he has no hair, and his skin is not yellow. The veins are not visible on his body and his height and strength are the strongest resemblances to the novel. Murdering the girl is done with no clear motive. I would not read this as some kind

of revenge nor as an attempt to feed as the creature is not a cannibal. It might be read as his evil intent in practice, to kill because it can and show it preying on the weak. This murder gained the attention of only the audience and the police, as the main characters were not made aware of this through the film.

In the novel, the creature killed Victor's younger brother with the motive of trying to get his attention. The director might have wanted to illustrate his vicious nature or keep the event of the creature murdering a child to follow the novel plot. Gender differences from the source text are seen here too as the young girl in the film is there in place of the murdered boy. In this way, the creature gained Victor's attention unlike the creature in the film adaptation. The execution of Justine who did no harm to the creature in the novel is replaced in this adaptation by the murder of a man who stabbed the creature's hand and tried to incinerate him afterwards. The creature further kills all men in Victoria's research team. But Jane, who decided against Victoria's wishes and consequently gave the creature a chance to live, is also not killed. It seems that men were eliminated in the film adaptation to further emphasize the role of women who made the creature come to life.

Perhaps the most important difference from the original source is that the creature in this film adaptation does not kill its respective mother Victoria while Elizabeth, as mother to the creature only by her marriage to Victor, is killed by the creature in the novel. With the high concerns for women's rights at the time of filming, this would go against the cultural wishes and standards only furthering the tragedy. There are also temporal differences in the sense that nine months had to pass in order for the creature to be let loose from its tank. Nine months could be read as a reference to pregnancy even though the creature is made artificially in a tank by a woman. In the source text, Victor takes two years in order to create the creature. This gap of one-year and three months could be read as additional time needed for Victor to prepare for creating life without raising it. Victoria carried her son for 9 months as well as working on the creature for 9 months before it came to life.

Victoria's ex-husband Henry Clerval is an interesting plot addition in this film. He manipulated and seduced her in order to gain intelligence into her scientific work. There is truth to his feelings eventually but he was motivated by selfish gain at first. The creature is, after the death of their son, the closest thing they have to a child. Henry's company helps Victoria put the creature under surveillance. They use Neural Control, a device that implants electrodes in the neck and is able to paralyze the subject at will to gain control over the creature. His employee killed him in the end and was framed for the murder of the girl the creature killed as

her necklace was planted in his hands. But no further actions were taken in that case. His destiny was not fortunate. With his death, Victoria was left with the creature as her only remaining family.

### 3. Technology in *Frankenstein* (2015) by Bernard Rose

This chapter will focus on the theme of technology in the 2015 film adaptation *Frankenstein* directed by Bernard Rose. To begin, the plot of the film will be described. The circumstances in which this film was produced will be further elaborated as well as the posthuman concept. The differences between the original source and this film adaptation in regards to technology and plot choices will follow. A comparison of Victor and Elizabeth Frankenstein in the film adaptation with Victor Frankenstein in the source text will serve to highlight how each used technology. The impact of technology will be described.

First, I will present the plot of the film. Victor and Elizabeth Frankenstein observe their creature Adam who has just come alive. Elizabeth is taking care of him in the same sense a mother would while still doing scientific research. He was later injected with an enhancing liquid. This caused him immense pain, deep burns and wounds. In the next scene, Adam is on an operating table with Elizabeth gently telling him to go to sleep. They tried to kill him. Adam escaped the facility in which he was brought to life avoiding police and hiding away in a forest gradually feeling his basic needs. Desperate, he ate bugs, a rotting deer and leaves kept him warm. A dog came up to him to search for food together. While they were playing in a nearby park overlooking a lake, a little girl came up to Adam and asked him to play. Adam did not know how to talk yet so he tossed her in the lake. She started screaming and Adam saved her. Police officers were called because someone said he tried to drown her. Since he did not understand the policemen telling him to control his dog who kept barking at them, it was killed. This caused Adam to kill one officer and knock out the other (00:32:31-00:36:00).

After fleeing the scene with the dead dog in his arms, he tried to give him a proper burial in the closest field but was interrupted by field owners. Afterwards, Adam woke up in a police station dressed in a madman suit unable to say his name. However, he uttered 'monster'. He stole Elizabeth's identity card causing her to be invited to the station (00:40:37-00:41:20).

One officer put this card in his mouth, shot him and left. Adam was still alive. He came to a neighbourhood full of homeless people. While he was exploring an abandoned tunnel, he met a blind man Eddie, a street guitar player who became his only human friend and protector because of whom he acquired language.

Later Adam met Wanda, Eddie's friend and a prostitute. When they realize Adam has never had sexual experience after he saw it on Wanda's phone, Eddie pays Wanda to provide Adam with a shower and sex. In the hotel room, Adam shows Wanda Elizabeth's identity card. Wanda searched for her picture on the internet. After a shower, his body did not look human.

Upon hearing struggle, Eddie broke into their room and hit Adam with his walking stick after realizing Wanda was dead. Adam fearfully shook and unintentionally killed Eddie, stole Wanda's phone and escaped before the police arrived.

As Wanda's phone was not used after searching for Elizabeth Frankenstein, Adam found a route to the Frankenstein research facility. On his way there, police stopped his walking in the industrial zone. Adam killed both policemen and continued travelling. He broke into the Frankenstein's bedroom and confronted them. In their laboratory he is shown a clone of him being created. He questioned their motives and Victor indirectly threatened him. Adam destroyed the new creature's brain while it was being created by machines, the tank and the furniture. Victor injected a paralyzing liquid in his neck to decapitate him. Elizabeth interrupted this by hitting Victor with a metal platter. Victor hit her back causing her to bleed out. She fell on Adam and Victor withdrew from the room. Adam prepared their funeral pyres. Before he died, he exclaimed that he is Adam as a confirmation of his existence, but only to the surrounding nature (01:23:44-01:24:45).

### 3.1 Technological Rise, Artificial Intelligence and Moral Panic

This film was released at the time when technology and its impact started gaining more importance shaping the world as we know it today. This did not go without panic or catastrophizing the possible outcomes. For this reason, this section will provide contextual clues that were in the background of filming this adaptation such as the rise of technology, artificial intelligence and moral panic that rose up with these happenings.

Online human behaviour is monitored by artificial intelligence whose presence in one's life has become imminent. With it following us, both literally and figuratively, and quickly developing, there is a possibility that it will change the current society into something much more technologically advanced (Peskoe-Yang "The Bot Decade: How AI Took Over Our Lives in the 2010s"). This film takes this concept to practice and sheds a light on the high technological developments that will have to happen in order to be able to produce a man through machines. It fills in the scientific gap that Mary Shelley left behind her (Girard 4): an inner look into what the machines can do and how far the limits of programming can go. On a rather concerning note, state issued regulations of artificial intelligence have been employed only since the 2010s (Peskoe-Yang "The Bot Decade: How AI Took Over Our Lives in the 2010s"). Moral panic depends on those questioned and their political beliefs (Cohen xxxix). It is still present in the modern world, but it mainly happens on social media and other platforms (Walsh 841). Mass communication makes up a great part of any moral panic, as this spreads hysteria among people through a questionable ordering of priorities (Cohen xli-ii). This film provides a good presentation of what happens when technological power corrupts one's mind mainly through the character of Victor Frankenstein and what happens when this is abruptly stopped through the character of Elizabeth Frankenstein.

### 3.2 Differences in the Representation of the Role of Technology in the Novel and the Film Adaptation

I will preface this section with the following description of the *Frankenstein* story as “a cautionary tale against technology” (Latour 19). In this film it is actually shown how the creature came to life unlike the novel where it is not described in detail. The audience might still question intricacies but it is clear that advanced technology programmed by Victor and Elizabeth Frankenstein took over the presence of galvanism and electricity from the novel. What mainly differs from the novel is Victor’s claim about artificially creating life when necessary. Victor abandoned his creature right away in the novel contrasting this film adaptation. In the first few scenes, the audience might reminisce about other films regarding human experiments. One injection destroyed Adam’s ability to regenerate cells causing burns and wounds to emerge all over his body. As a result, he is put into another room on an operating table with pipes containing life-ending poisons. These are injected into his blood.

Victor never found out what caused this failure showing cracks in his genius and his failing to foresee potential scenarios, similarly to the novel Victor who had not thought about the aftermath in the case of success. He had no one to help him in the process of bringing the creature to life differing from this film because a mortician, a fellow doctor, Elizabeth and Victor shared the responsibility. Had the source text Victor Frankenstein even had any helpers, it would not have been Elizabeth or any woman because of their position at the time of writing explained in the first and second chapter. The brain of the creature in the film is that of a one-year-old child created by the machines. It was not extracted from a deceased baby unlike the practices of novel Victor who searched for body parts in graves. Furthermore, Adam’s eyes were made artificially, taking six months to be completed with billions of micro glass fibres. This is why the mortician and the doctor tried to extract them from Adam’s presumed corpse. Before leaving the facility, Adam stole Elizabeth’s name tag which is actually a swipe card. His mother is with him materially and it digitalized her identity showing the power of technology even though Adam does not use it for its intended purposes (Botting 314).

The setting itself mainly shows one busy modern city with a large population density and the industrial zone near it where the creature dwells and the Frankenstein family lives. In the source text, there are cities, villages, wilderness, and the Arctic. There is a pronounced importance of technology and architecture in the adaptation, more so than in the source text. Technological usage is no longer limited to just humans (ab)using it as this adaptation shows that the creature is capable of using modern technology. Admittedly, it is on a much smaller

scale than Victor and Elizabeth Frankenstein but it still shows Adam's resourcefulness and ability to adapt to modern circumstances, similarly to the creature in the source text adapting to Victor's location. This is significant in studying and analysing the theme of technology as relying on it has become the norm, no matter the species, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In this specific scenario, Adam used a mobile phone in order to find the Frankenstein home. Eddie taught him to acquire language and Eddie's friend Wanda introduced him to mobile phones. No one taught Adam how to use phones, but through his past observations, he was able to track the exact location of the Frankenstein family using *GPS tracking*. Wanda did not use her phone after searching for Elizabeth Frankenstein on *Google* which made it easier for Adam to find needed directions. On his way to the Frankenstein family, he took the car route instead of the pedestrian route as this is the default setting on tracking apps. Botting notes how internet has made Adam's experience in the modern world easier (314). When Adam reached the Frankenstein home, he confronted them first in their bedroom and was taken to the research facility afterwards. In the source text, Victor had a shared community space where he created the creature showing the difference between the main characters' social position. In the facility, Adam is faced with the tank that brought him to life where a new creature is being made by machines. His head, face and upper torso are exposed with the rest of his body inside the tank with his brain being prepared at the moment of Adam facing it. He is identical to the first Adam, except that he is their 'perfect product'.

In the source text, there would not have been a new male version of the first creature. Instead, a female creature would have been made in order to ail the creature that was rejected by everyone and desperately hoped for a chance at love. Both new creatures were destroyed before they came alive. The working machines can be heard in the background throughout the facility scene. There are various containers around the tank as well as books, folders and medical tools all neatly organized. It is clear that they are rich and well-funded with the technology at their hands. Victor in the source text works alone without help, relying on electricity and his knowledge. He is successful at his university but nobody knew about his creature. Other differing elements between the novel and the film adaptation will follow in the next section.



### 3.3 Elements That Differ from the Novel

In this film adaptation there are new and additional elements which served to modernize the original plot. What is perhaps the most interesting deviation from the source text is that here the creature has both parents, and is not completely rejected by both of them. Victor and Elizabeth Frankenstein are married and work together which shows a great progression of human and female rights. Another novelty is that it is told entirely from the monster's point of view, allowing the audience to see how he learns to exist in the modern, tainted human world which does not take kindly to him at all. This film adaptation explores the monster's side of the story showcasing his experience differently than the novel does (Stam 55).

There is the addition of a pet dog as Adam's companion for some time which shows how he is more accepted by an animal than by humankind. The dog was by his side and he taught him how to dig and play with him. They searched for food together too. The dog became his best friend. Unfortunately, police killed the dog after an incident in which it looked as if Adam drowned a little girl from an outsider's perspective when he was actually saving her from drowning. He was still nonverbal. For Adam to be able to talk, he had to have someone help him acquire language.

Eddie is the person that taught Adam how to communicate verbally. They found each other in a tunnel while Adam was wandering the industrial zone. A few great differences from the novel, where the creature wandered alone scaring everyone who saw him due to his looks, can be found here: someone who accepted the creature and helped him find his way around society, became his best friend and helped him feel the new kind of platonic warmth aside from Elizabeth which was parental and, in Adam's eyes, romantic warmth. Eddie was a blind black man who recognized the madman suit that Adam was wearing after he left the police station. He saw that Adam needed help and offered it selflessly. He was a homeless street guitar player who taught him how to talk and how to hold the hat for those that would offer him money. His basic needs were satisfied while he was with Eddie since he made sure to feed him and give him clothing. They searched for food together in the nearby restaurants' dumpsters. He also introduced him to his friend Wanda, an Asian prostitute who offered her services to Adam as he has never been with a woman before.

The encounter with Wanda is very important as it leads Adam to finding the Frankenstein family. In the novel, the creature is stripped of any positive interaction with women and his desire for a female partner was never fulfilled. Wanda, Adam and Eddie agreed that they would rent a hotel room where Adam would take a shower and Wanda would take care of him carnally.

Both were financed by money that Eddie earned from guitar playing. Before Adam showers, Wanda asked him about Elizabeth's name tag. In this interaction it is revealed that Adam loves Elizabeth and desires her. Wanda searches for Elizabeth on her phone as she is famous for her research work and shows it to Adam. After this, Adam had showered and Wanda saw his body that no longer looked human. Wanda tried to reject him but Adam, unknowingly, did not let her out of his grasp ending with her death. Eddie saw the aftermath and tried to hit Adam in anger and grief which ended with his unintentional death, too. Adam fled the scene but not without Wanda's phone which led him to the Frankenstein home and Frankenstein research facility. The description of Adam will follow.

Adam does not have a monstrous physique. When watching this adaptation, we are faced with what Jed Mercurio chose for his presentation (Stam 55). He looks like a human man and narrates the adaptation giving it a different dimension from the novel as we see only his point of view (Botting 314). His behaviour is shown as a mere reflection of past experience (Botting 313). Adam's main motivators are his desire to survive, and to confront and question his creators on how and why they made him the way that he is. The creature in the novel is motivated by these same questions and the wish to have someone at his side. In the film, the name Adam is taken from one of the creature's lines in the novel as well as some of his monologue lines. The existence of a name gives him a more stable identity than that of the creature in the source text who lacks a name, a purpose and a love interest. Moreover, he has two names: Monster, the name that he gave to himself following other people's screams upon seeing him, and Adam, the Frankenstein name for him. His first name further segregates him from humanity (Botting 313). His second name is a reference to the Christian myth in the Bible where God created the first man on Earth named Adam. This highlights what the Frankenstein family intends to do: create life as God did with which my analysis of them will begin.

There is wide straying from the source text in the character of Elizabeth in this film as she is equal to Victor Frankenstein as his wife and fellow research scientist. Together they bring their 'son' Adam to life with the help of technology. Their relationship will be provided as well as the posthuman concept (Bostrom 107). Despite Victor and Elizabeth being capable of procreating in the way God cursed humankind with, they chose to find the life essence that God breathed into humans. This is their main scientific motivation as well as their main similarity to Victor in the novel. Furthermore, the way Adam is treated through the film shows the audience that neither of them see him as an equal or as a person (Botting 311) which is also true for the source text Victor. Both film and book characters are chasing godlike powers, but none

of them are capable to deal with the consequences. After Victor realizes the creature is alive, he lets Elizabeth take care of him while he prepares the liquid injection for the creature. After Adam had a negative reaction, he is to be eliminated and is put into another room. Elizabeth leaves first as she cannot watch Adam die and Victor follows her. This is where a parallel can be made with the source text where the creature was abandoned as soon as he came to life while Adam was abandoned when he was to be killed in the film adaptation. Here one can observe a crucial difference from the source text where the creature is rejected by all and has no love interest: the only warmth shown to Adam while inside the research facility is Elizabeth's motherly care for him. Other people in their team: a mortician, a doctor, and Victor are trying to eliminate him. In the source text, Victor is the only character who is trying to eliminate the creature as he is the only one who knows of his existence.

Elizabeth's attitude towards Adam changes based on the setting and keeping her status as a renowned research scientist. When he comes alive, she is very caring and treats him like a mother would care about a new-born baby. At the first try of eliminating him, she cannot handle the sight and leaves the room. When she sees him in the police station, she pretends to have never seen him before even though he was found with her name tag. When Adam comes back to their facility, she is calm and protects him from Victor. Elizabeth saw Adam as her son and Adam saw Elizabeth as both a mother and a love interest. In the film Victor killed Elizabeth because she tried to stop him from killing Adam. Possible readings of this would be Elizabeth caring for Adam and as a desperate attempt to save their creation. This differs greatly from the source text where the creature wants Victor to create a female partner for him. Since Victor refused, the creature killed his wife, Elizabeth.

Victor Frankenstein in the film adaptation is more similar to the main character in the novel. In both, the character of Victor Frankenstein is a failed father who abandoned his creation, showed no sense of responsibility, neglected his wife, and was led by his hunger for power. Novel Victor openly dislikes the creature and negotiates with him only for the chance to be left alone. Film adaptation Victor fakes the warmth towards Adam. His agenda in all of their interactions, after the injection scene, is to eliminate him which simplified his role in comparison to the novel. He does not search for Adam or cares about what happens to him unless he is near unlike the source text where Victor is constantly unsettled by the wandering creature. But unlike the novel, this marriage seems cooperative. The scene where Victor kills Elizabeth can be read as Elizabeth's submissiveness to him. This again pointed to Victor's inability to think ahead of time which led to him losing his wife and his creature.

### 3.4 Posthuman Concept

When watching this film adaptation, it might be hard to know where to classify the creature. The audience might be puzzled on the question of his humanness. Bostrom sees the posthuman as someone who is more proficient than regular humans at minimally one given ability (108). These abilities are “healthspan” which refers to vitality and activity, “cognition” which refers to cognitive abilities, and “emotion” which refers to the ability to appreciate one’s time on Earth as well as not using modern technology (Bostrom 108). There are 2 types of posthumans: new creatures or humans turned posthumans (Bostrom 109). It could be argued that the creature in this film adaptation is a posthuman.

To begin, Adam was made artificially by machines which goes against Bostrom’s condition of not using modern technology (108). The classification of him as a human could be debated. If we take a look into artificial impregnation to compare the two, these children are considered human without exception. In the case of Adam, there is no human contact needed for his coming to life. He is born into an adult male body with the brain of a one-year-old child which were both artificially made. He has no childhood even though his mental capacities remind the audience of children. His eyes are the product of tedious scientific work. He has human needs. There are a lot of factors to be taken into account when looking into what sets him apart from humans and what makes him human. One of these could also be the question of his soul.

This ties into Bostrom’s emotion (108). Adam is very expressive with screams, grunts and wailing. The first word he says is a variation of ‘mom’. Comparing him to a child’s emotional development would be tricky because his brain is developing much faster. Furthermore, he is deeply traumatized. It could be argued that this is why his overreactions at least have a solid foundation. A life where everyone is trying to murder you would be hard to appreciate (Bostrom 110). His emotion then does not set him apart as a posthuman, but his vitality and cognitive abilities according to Bostrom (108) might.

Even without physical training he had the strength of 10 men. This points to his vitality surpassing that of ordinary humans (Bostrom 108). On the other hand, he soon became very sick due to Victor’s injection. Adam was not healthy from this point onwards. From the first day of his life, he has had to defend himself from authority. Despite that, he was active and quickly absorbed information. His cognitive abilities were highlighted: relying on his memory, finding a way to use modern technology, and narrating his life (Bostrom 108). It could be argued then that his cognition sets him apart as posthuman, his vitality only before Victor injected the

mysterious liquid into him and his emotion does not at all set him apart from humans or classifies him among the posthumans according to Bostrom (108). Yet Botting points out that the inability of humans to easily kill him makes him posthuman (311).

## 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper looked into the modern film adaptations of *Frankenstein* while focusing on exploring the themes of gender and technology and how they differ from the source text from 1818 by Mary Shelley. The theory I relied on in order to answer my thesis and research questions was Robert Stam's "Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation". It can be seen that before analysing the film adaptations' plots and the differences, the context and circumstances of production were explained in order to answer the first research question. Classic stories such as *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) reflect the time in which they were written as well as the film adaptations in this analysis which shows how the novel was modernized through directors' choices and plot changes in the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The analysed circumstances for the first film adaptation, *Frankenstein* (Mercurio), were the #MeToo movement and postfeminism. Both influenced the societal view of women which was reflected in the film industry - evident in the female main character Victoria Frankenstein. The importance of this role might have been overlooked without context as well as it answering the second research question. The analysed circumstances for the second film adaptation, *Frankenstein* (Rose), were the rise of technology and artificial intelligence as well as moral panic. Human existence has been changed by technological developments including the film industry and medicinal field. There are different interpretations of what this means for humanity. The film channelled the interpretation of technology being used for selfish gain through the character of Victor Frankenstein. In order to reflect the positive changes in female rights, his wife Elizabeth works with him on using technology to bring a creature in existence. Their creature escapes from them and is exposed to the human world similarly to the Frankenstein's creature in the novel. But modern circumstances in which he has found himself are hard to navigate when one is nonverbal and unfamiliar with the human culture which answered the third research question. In this way, the principles from the afore mentioned theory were followed which made the given analysis more complete. Considering the creativity present in recent years when it comes to film adaptations of classic novels, one can conclude how this tradition of reflecting the period in which they were produced will continue as it has since the novel was first published due to concepts which consistently change.

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## Rod i tehnologija u suvremenim filmskim adaptacijama *Frankenstein*-a

### Sažetak na hrvatskom jeziku

U ovom završnom radu će se opisati način na koji su dvije suvremene filmske adaptacije pokušale osuvremeniti klasično djelo *Frankenstein; ili, Moderni Prometej* iz 1818. autorice Mary Shelley. U tom nastojanju, posebna pažnja će se pridati temama roda i tehnologije. Prva filmska adaptacija koja će se analizirati je *Frankenstein*, film redatelja Jeda Mercurio iz 2007. godine. U analizi ovog filma naglasak će biti na temi roda jer je glavna uloga Victora Frankensteina zamijenjena ženskim likom Victorije Frankenstein. Druga filmska adaptacija koja će se analizirati je *Frankenstein*, film redatelja Bernarda Rose iz 2015 godine. U analizi ovog filma naglasak će biti na prikazu važnosti tehnologije u stvaranju i uništavanju života. Razlike između književnog djela i filmova kao i refleksija vremena u kojima su producirani (kao glavna istraživačka pitanja) će pomoći u razumijevanju važnosti društvenog konteksta za razvoj ove vrste medija. Rad će se osloniti na teoriju adaptacije, odnosno rad autora Roberta Stama kao i teorijske koncepte postfeminizma i posthumanizma.

Ključne riječi: filmska adaptacija, Frankenstein, Mary Shelley, rod, tehnologija, Jed Mercurio, Bernard Rose, teorija adaptacije, postfeminizam, posthumanizam, moderno društvo.

## Gender and Technology in Contemporary *Frankenstein* Film Adaptations

### Abstract

This final work will describe how two contemporary film adaptations tried to modernize the classic Mary Shelley novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* from 1818. In so doing, particular emphasis will be given to the themes of gender and technology. The first film adaptation that will be analysed is *Frankenstein*, Jed Mercurio's 2007 film. In this analysis, the theme of gender will be prevalent as Victor Frankenstein has been replaced by a female main character - Victoria Frankenstein. The second film adaptation that will be analysed is *Frankenstein*, Bernard Rose's 2015 film. In this analysis, the importance of technology in creating and destroying life will be emphasised. The differences between the novel and the film adaptations, and how they reflect the era in which they were produced (as the main research questions) will help in understanding the importance of social context for the development of this form of media. This work will rely on adaptation theory, respectively the work of Robert Stam as well as theoretical concepts of postfeminism and posthumanism.

Key words: film adaptation, Frankenstein, Mary Shelley, gender, technology, Jed Mercurio, Bernard Rose, adaptation theory, postfeminism, posthumanism, contemporary society.