


up to date, is the central issue. Nestled inside concerns around Austen as only ever 'Regency' or Austen as relentlessly contemporary is how closely Austen identifies with the groups of people about whom she writes, where and how she directs her affiliations and disaffiliations. Whether she is claimed by and for the dully self-satisfied, whether she is the writer who sides with them or sneers at them, whether her dullness gives comfort in times of strife, including wartime, or whether her irony bites, are also all at issue. Readers of Austen, it turns out, want to move in closely to her to see her, to claim their own version of Austen as the authoritative version. Keymer never indulges in this kind of claustrophobic proximity: like Austen herself he knows when to back away, when to turn away. So, it is fitting that he ends by discussing Cassandra Austen's famous 1804 sketch of Jane seated and with her back to the viewer: '[T]he sketch also catches something important about Austen, her narrative style, and the authorial stance she adopts: poised yet also informal, even intimate to some degree, but with no interest at all in showing her face' (p. 148). 

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Francesca Saggini and Anna Enrichetta Soccio (eds), *Transmedia Creatures: Frankenstein's Afterlives* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2018), 283 pp. ISBN 978-1-68448-060-9; £24.00 (pb).


WRITING ON SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN* (1818) TODAY might seem a superfluous exercise since, as Francesca Saggini highlights in the introduction to this volume, the last two hundred years have seen this novel explored by countless critics through a variety of methods. However, *Transmedia Creatures* offers an opportunity to look at this text anew by focusing on the vast world of its transmedial 'hideous progeny'. What makes this collection thought-provoking is its open understanding of *Frankenstein's* 'afterlives'. For Saggini, a text's 'afterlife does not inevitably entail a critique of the pretext' (p. 3) which the authors of these 'afterings' might not even be familiar with. Destabilising hierarchies imposed by the primacy of the 'original', and deliberately moving away from existing scholarship on the novel, *Transmedia Creatures* suggests that 'the true potential of the source text (or pretext) is most fully revealed by its long-term epistemological elasticity' (p. 1). Studying the 'afterlives' of *Frankenstein* in drama, film, music, poetry, comics and TV series, this volume provides exciting explorations that will interest scholars across disciplines and beyond Romantic studies.

One recurring theme throughout the volume is the focus on non-normative bodies, be they biological or artificial. Eleanor Beal examines Alex Garland's *Ex\_Machina* (2015) as a *Frankenstein* narrative that problematises the link between creator, creation and female-gendered bodies. Highlighting the similarities between Victor Frankenstein and the inventor Nathan Bateman, who builds the robot Ava, Beal argues that *Ex\_Machina* suggests an unresolved tension between personhood and AI designed to conform to 'womanhood'. Analysing *Ex\_Machina* as a hetero-male *Frankenstein* fantasy, Beal builds on Anne K. Mellor's interpretation of Shelley's novel, showing that Garland's film offers glimpses into a male-only society populated by sterile sexually subservient fembots. Issues regarding the relationship between creators and non-normative bodies are also found in Claire Nally's chapter, which analyses steampunk aesthetics in London's National Theatre production of *Frankenstein* (2011) and in Paul McGuigan's film *Victor Frankenstein* (2015). For Nally, the steampunk genre functions as a critique of technology that centres on the living and breathing machine, interested in the 'abnormal' humanoid, which often 'co-opts the damaged or incomplete body' (p. 89). Nally uses disability studies to analyse the 'hunchbacked' assistant Igor, who has been created and thus 'healed' by Victor in McGuigan's film. Nally concludes that this film 'encourages the audience to reflect on disability, but at the same time, it plays upon many of the fears and prejudices associated with the public's reception of disability' (p. 97).

Both Beal and Nally highlight anxieties regarding parenting in *Frankenstein* narratives, a concern shared by Ruth Heholt in her analysis of the TV series *Penny Dreadful* (2014–2016). *Penny Dreadful* presents characters from Shelley's novel and other texts living in a carnivalesque and dark Victorian London. Instead of destroying his domestic relationships as in the novel, in *Penny Dreadful* Victor's revived corpses are his family. As Heholt demonstrates, in the TV series 'the very desire for family leads to corruption' (p. 195), as Victor engages in abusive sexual relations with his creatures. Heholt examines how the series recasts the idealised absent father of the Gothic novel as a criminal, while the main creature becomes good by refusing the domestic, 'allow[ing] the severance of blood-ties and an escape from family that points the way to freedom' (p. 197). Similarly concerned with the family and freedom, Andrew McInnes's essay focuses on Young Adult (YA) *Frankenstein* narratives. For McInnes, Shelley's novel 'voices the profoundly adolescent concerns of personal identity, rebellion, and responsibility' (p. 219). He studies three YA novels that elaborate on gaps left open by Shelley: Kenneth Oppel's *This Dark Endeavour* (2011), Christopher Priestley's *Mister Creecher* (2011) and Kate Horsley's *The Monster's Wife* (2014). His analysis shows how these texts can help readers see elements that Shelley's 'pretext' obscures, such as the 'bratty' adolescent violence of the creature in the face of parental tyranny. McInnes suggests that these novels demonstrate 'that adolescence is founded on violent emotion and can lead to its violent expression without careful checks and balances' (p. 222). For McInnes, studying these 'afterings' at high school and undergraduate level can open the door to new

readings of Shelley focused on young people's concerns. Other chapters also propose concrete ideas as to how to use adaptations and sequels to breathe new life into Shelley's narrative. Daniele Pio Buena's suggestion of using James Searle Dawley's *Frankenstein* (1910) film adaptation to teach about the Lacanian mirror stage is just another example of how this collection can re-vitalise the classroom.

Throughout the volume, the authors grapple with the heavy burden of *Frankenstein*'s bicentennial baggage. This legacy began early, as Diego Saglia's essay reveals by studying *Frankenstein*-themed melodramas staged in Paris and London in 1826. Saglia shows these pieces originated some of the most long-lasting tropes in *Frankenstein* narratives, including the green or blueish skin tone to signify Otherness. He highlights the transcultural value of this Anglo-French theatrical conversation, suggesting it was essential for 'the mutation of *Frankenstein* into a cultural product aimed at transnational audiences' (p. 165). Characteristics inherited from the melodramas that Saglia mentions persist in 'afterings' studied in other chapters, such as the *Frankenstein* comics analysed by Federico Meschini. This preoccupation with the text's immense cultural baggage is also present in the final chapter by Anna Enrichetta Soccio on Stuart Land's *Back from the Dead: The True Sequel to Frankenstein* (2011). Soccio suggests that Land's text portrays a 'trans-textual return' effect that moves from the novel to the cinema and from the cinema back to the novel' (p. 240) with a creature that carries aspects accumulated throughout the long tradition of its transmedia versions. For Soccio, 'Land's creature is a fictional character who embodies the burden of a bicentennial tradition and reflects upon it' (p. 243). The pressure caused by these burdensome 'afterlives' is also suggested by Meschini when analysing comics in which accumulating constraints have made new narrative lines progressively more difficult to write.

While this collection is divided in four sections focusing on science and technology, the trans/post-human, sensorial experiences, and sequels or serialisations in poetry and prose, all essays are interconnected. *Transmedia Creatures* is a quick read, moving swiftly through disciplines and ideas in highly readable short chapters. Its thought-provoking analyses of an eclectic set of 'afterings' has the potential to direct the reader's attention to fascinating art with which they may not yet be familiar. 

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**Michael Bradshaw** has published extensively on late Romantic writing, including Beddoes, Darley, Hood and the Shelleys. He is the co-editor, with Ute Berns, of *The Ashgate Research Companion to Thomas Lovell Beddoes* (2007), editor of *Disabling Romanticism: Body, Mind, and Text* (2016), and co-editor, with Gioia Angeletti of "Travel, Migration, Exile, a special issue of the journal *La questione Romantica* (2024). His research interests include literatures of the body, critical disability studies, textual fragmentation and modern allusion to Romantic poetry. Michael is Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Winchester.

**Anjeli Chapman Wolf** studied *Punch Magazine* around the *fin de siècle* through a postcolonial lens at Lucy Cavendish College, University of Cambridge. Her undergraduate degree is from Vanderbilt University, where she completed an Honours Dissertation on postpartum depression in women of colour. Her invited talks include Cambridge's History of Memory & Emotion and Modern British History workshops as well as the 2023 Winter School in Saas-Fee, jointly run by Cambridge and the Adolphe Merkle Institute. Her postcolonial play *Siege*, which illustrates the horror of British imperial rule in twentieth-century India, was chosen to be workshopped with the Royal Court. Her anthology of short fiction, *Spite*, was published in 2024 by Wrong Publishing.

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