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INTRALINGUAL TRANSLATION AND FRANKENSTEIN IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH PRESS

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After the publication of Mary Shelley's novel Frankenstein in 1818, the story took on a life of its own. People started comparing every-day occurrences in their lives to the fictional character. Initially it was about monsters and creators of monsters, and then other interpretations crept in: artistry, creativity, and scientific progress among others. This paper provides an overview of the development of the Frankenstein simile and metaphor in post-Romantic nineteenth-century Britain and treats the range of meanings as intralingual translations of the original story.

Key words: Frankenstein, Mary Shelley, simile, metaphor, translation

After the publication of Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* in 1818, the story took on a life of its own. Its popularity can be related to the subsequent stage adaptations that made Frankenstein a household name. As a result, people started comparing every-day occurrences in their lives to the fictional character and the parallels went hand in hand with new interpretations of him. This paper provides an overview of the development of the Frankenstein simile and the Frankenstein metaphor in post-Romantic nineteenth-century Britain. The examples come from usage in the newspapers, and the database I have drawn upon is *The British Newspaper Archive*. The first allusion to Frankenstein dates back to 1822 and is in the form of a simile, which sets the tone for the subsequent metaphorical transfer. Therefore, it seems pertinent for the purposes of this research to adopt the classical approach that considers a metaphor an elliptical simile. Here is a highlight of how the ancients saw the interdependence between the two categories:

> A simile is also a metaphor; for there is little difference: when the poet says, "He rushed as a lion," it is a simile, but "The lion rushed" [with lion referring to a man] would be metaphor; since both are brave, he used a

> metaphor [i.e., a simile] and spoke of Achilles as a lion. . . . [Similes] should be brought in like metaphors; for they are metaphors, differing in the form of expression.
>
> (Aristotle 2007: 205)

> On the whole *metaphor* is a shorter form of *simile*, while there is this further difference, that in the latter we compare some object to the thing which we wish to describe, whereas in the former this object is actually substituted for the thing.
>
> (Quintilian 1922)

Both Aristotle and Quintilian point to the similarities between the two tropes but I hasten to add that the former considers metaphors the larger category wherein similes are a subspecies, while the latter follows Cicero in seeing the simile as the general term (Addison 1993: 402). To what an extent the Frankenstein examples studied here may have theoretical implications for that centuries-old debate remains to be seen; however, they do confirm a chronological progression of Frankenstein similes into Frankenstein metaphors. The definition of a simile is less straight-forward than it may at first appear but I rely on Catherine Addison's, who "to a large extent agree[s] with McCall and define[s] the figure in terms of its form, as a stated comparison usually signalled by the tags 'like', 'as', or 'just as … so' but sometimes only implying them or using variations, such as 'so have I seen' or 'if … so'" (Addison 1993: 404). Such a definition accommodates ordinary comparisons and similes alike, so it may be helpful to take into account the following distinction:

> The difference between a simile and an ordinary comparison, however, is that similes are predicative comparisons (in which the predicate describes the subject), and ordinary comparisons are symmetrical comparisons (in which the subject and the predicate are referentially independent). In the latter, but not in the former, the subject and the predicate can be intersubstituted without any consequential change of meaning.
>
> (Bredin 1998: 67)

When it comes to metaphor, contemporary definitions vary widely depending on the school of thought. *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* renders it in a compact fashion along these lines: "**metaphor,** the transfer of a name or descriptive term to an object different from, but analogous to, that to which it is properly applicable" (Drabble, ed. 2000: 665). M.H. Abrams, on the other hand, explores the theories of metaphor at some length and explains that they evoke "an implicit comparison between two disparate things", according to the similarity view; that "a metaphor

works by bringing together the disparate 'thoughts' of the vehicle and tenor so as to effect a meaning that 'is a resultant of their interaction' and that cannot be duplicated by literal assertions of a similarity between the two elements", according to the interaction view; that proponents of the pragmatic view would assert provocatively, "Metaphors … mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation, mean, and nothing more"; or indeed "that the ordinary use of language is pervasively and indispensably metaphorical, and that metaphor persistently and profoundly structures the ways human beings perceive, what they know, and how they think" according to cognitivists (Abrams 1999: 155-157). Regardless of the modes of theorising, however, readers can recognise and understand metaphors perfectly well.

Given the range of examples covered, I would like to suggest that the evolution of the Frankenstein metaphor (including the transition from simile to metaphor) represents a series of intralingual translations over time. Intralingual translation is one of three types of translation recognised by Roman Jakobson, in this case, translation within the same language (Jakobson 1959: 233). Jakobson is not the first to identify the phenomenon: Schleiermacher precedes him in pointing out that we often translate for ourselves from our own language when the speaker "possesses a different frame of mind or feeling" (Lefevere, ed. 1992: 142). This interpretation of metaphor as translation is partly indebted to etymology. If we consider the entry for "metaphor" in the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, we come to the meaning of the original Greek word: "to carry over or across" (Harper 2001-2021), which is identical to the original meaning of "translate" in Latin, "to bear across, to carry over" (Harper 2001-2021). Still, the other part of it is the contemporary dictionary codification of "Frankenstein" that signifies a transposition has taken place: "used to talk about something that somebody creates or invents that goes out of control and becomes dangerous, often destroying the person who created it" (OALD 2022). Such a definition overturns the original dynamics of the story, in which Frankenstein is the Creator rather than the Creation. The meaning highlighted by the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* is one of a broader range of meanings as fixed in the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*:

> ***Frankenstein***
> **1a:** the title character in Mary W. Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* who creates a monster that ruins his life;
> **1b:** a monster in the shape of a man especially in popularized versions of the Frankenstein story;

> **2:** a monstrous creation, *especially*: a work or agency that ruins its originator.
>
> (Merriam-Webster 2022)

Reinforced by dictionary definitions, monstrosity lives in the popular imagination as a Frankenstein equivalent, even though literary criticism has moved on with its interpretations of Mary Shelley's tale.

Newspaper publications are pertinent illustrations of widespread imagery and Frankenstein crossed from the fictional into the mundane back in 1822 when a Paris reporter made a political commentary on Russia:

> …it is believed here, that Russia has submitted to an understanding with England, Austria, and France, that in the event of a war with the Porte, those three Powers should be the arbiters of the conduct of Russia – specifying the lengths to which she ought to go, and marking the bounds of her southern advances. This all sounds well; but if that Northern Colossus, like Frankenstein's monster, once begins its strides, will the man that sets it in motion be able to direct its steps?
>
> (*Morning Chronicle* 1822: 3)

The most important characteristic of Frankenstein's Creature here is the horror it evokes. By 1823 Mary Shelley's publications are advertised in the papers as "by the author of *Frankenstein*" and, after the initial anonymity, her name is firmly associated with her novel. The success of the three-act stage play *Presumption; or, the Fate of Frankenstein* by Richard Brinsley Peake had everything to do with the ensuing popularity of Shelley's story, planting as it did the Creator and his Creation in people's imagination. Two major types of usage would dominate the nineteenth-century simile and metaphor and they are both related to monstrosity. On the one hand, there is Frankenstein as the Creator of monsters that turn against him. Here is an example from 1830. In the rubric "State of the Ministry and House of Commons" that discusses the politics of the day and draws upon various papers for its info, a commentary on petitions is made, wherein this parallel with Shelley's central characters comes up:

> The national privilege – the right of petition, which in John Bull's vernacular means the right of complaint – is thus likely to be superseded by the very necessity it was intended to create: Frankenstein made a monster that threatened to devour him – so may this right of petition, insisted upon so pertinaciously by the people, at last overwhelm them.
>
> (*Westmorland Gazette* 1830: 6)

On the other hand, there is the Creature Frankenstein, the popular reference of choice for the nameless "monster". The practice was already well established in 1830 and here is an example from an overview of court cases, where the reporter narrates the story of a robber who cannot be convicted for lack of evidence and is advised to leave town as "no stone will be left unturned" to prove him guilty. The following sentence wraps up the report, "Whether or not this advice will have the effect of ridding his guilty parents of his odious presence we know not; at present they seem to be in a similar predicament to the manufacturer of Frankenstein – they have made the man but what the deuce are they to do with him" (*Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* 1830: 3). Leaving aside the striking assumption that the defendant is guilty even though there is no evidence, the reference picks up on interpreting the relationship between Creator and Creature as identical with that between parent and child. Certainly, this is directly related to responsibility – hence, the parents are deemed "guilty" in this publication: guilty of, presumably, their son's transgressions. Before too long, literary discussions of the Frankenstein plot are going to turn to Victor's responsibility for the crimes committed by his Creation.

Up to 1830 or thereabouts usage is still holding onto parallels and comparisons and we can locate similes rather than metaphors. In the 1830s the political parallels dominate the scene, even if there are other examples of usage in the criminal reports and in the outlines of an economy threatened by corporations. Another recurrent interpretation has to do with the fury of the monster, taking revenge on its Creator. Amongst those it comes as a surprise to see Frankenstein as the name of a ship: "The first Lieutenant Quin was for a long period employed in surveys with Captain Beaufort, the present hydrographer to the Admiralty, in the Frankenstein and other ships" (*English Chronicle and Whitehall Evening Post* 1830: 4). In the latter example, Frankenstein's reputation is more likely aligned with scientific research and discoveries than with monstrosity. The same spirit of progress has informed the following report about "the Frankenstein school of anatomy", even if the reporter's attitude has taken a rather cynical turn,

> We expect before they cease reforming mankind to see some extraordinary advances made in the Frankenstein school of anatomy. When our sons' sons walk about the *Palais-Royal* they will doubtless behold an interesting assortment of artificial features displayed in the *Gallerie d' Orleans* – growing specimens of thy virtues "Incomparable Oil Macassar!" on the heads of the marble statues, will solicit their

> selection – and, for what we know, entire suits of intestines may be made to order at the shortest possible notice for cholera customers
>
> (*Morning Post* 1837: 3).

In his sarcasm about the benefits of medical science, the journalist reproduces Swift's Juvenalian satire on scientific experiments in Part 3 of *Gulliver's Travels*. This example demonstrates leaving similes behind for the sake of the metaphor.

By 1849 the metaphor is in full swing. Here are a couple of examples to illustrate its multifaceted use. *The Sun* talks about a "female Frankenstein" that is "a real existent beautiful thing" – the note is dedicated to the supposed marriage of a contemporary celebrity, the opera singer Jenny Lind known as "the Swedish Nightingale". The reference is reminiscent of Keats's "A thing of beauty is a joy forever" (*Endymion*, Book I) and seems at odds with the more familiar connotations of Frankenstein. Here Frankenstein is the creation "that our dearly beloved and much libelled Mrs. Gamp created for her own future torment" (*Sun* 1849: 5). This usage is new because of the feminine associations (both Creator and Creature are female), it brings up mystery and beauty rather than monstrosity, and it implies the Creator is to blame for punishing herself; last but not least, there is an anticipation of the postmodern mix of layers: the Creator is a fictional character (from Dickens's *Martin Chuzzlewit*) whereas the creation is a real-life artist, but reality itself is likened to fiction because Ms Jenny Lind is expected to become Mrs Harris, and fictional Mrs Harris is fictional Mrs Gamp's *alter ego*, as it were, "a phantom of Mrs Gamp's brain … created for the express purpose of holding visionary dialogues with her on all manner of subjects, and invariably winding up with a compliment to the excellence of her nature", says Dickens (1997: 393, Chapter 25). At the political end of the spectrum, the use of a "Frankenstein-democracy" in the *Morning Post* is loaded with attitudes towards the United States of America (Morning Post 1849: 2) that find their way across a number of publications and are still echoed a couple of months after this publication by the *Morning Herald*, discussing the "huge Frankenstein of the American republic" that "England by the conquest of Canada breathed the breath of life into" (*Morning Herald* 1849: 6). For the first time, it seems, Frankenstein is about component parts. The phrasing comes from George Warburton's *Conquest of Canada* (1849) reviewed in the *Morning Herald*. The diversification of meanings seems to support Lionel Wee's point that "the behaviour of metaphorically used proper names accords more with the class-inclusion model of

metaphor … than with the correspondence model" (Wee 2006: 356). His distinction between the two models relies on whether the different strands of meaning are separable and independent of one another or whether they belong together in a package (Wee 2006: 362).

It is popular culture rather than the reading of books that establishes contemporary myths so I'll briefly mention another stage adaptation here. The 1849 Christmas burlesque *Frankenstein; or, The Model Man* adds new meanings to the familiar concept. In it ideas about educating the monster come up and they echo Mary Wollstonecraft's proposition that equality comes through education. The audience can hear that Frankenstein is responsible for the actions of his Creature. The comedy re-translates the metaphor – it humanises and domesticates the monster, "making him acceptable to the rest of the humans in the play", according to a commentator (Sandner, ed. 2018). Arguably influenced by the interpretation on stage, in a speech addressed to some 800 people present, a John Pitcairn Trotter discussed the education programme of the Mechanics' Institutes in such terms: "mere intellectual superiority was a sort of Frankenstein, with strong thews and sinews, but wanting benevolence to guide their exercise"; the speaker urged everyone to promote "a sound moral and intellectual education" rather than academic snobbery (*Dumfries and Galloway Standard* 1850: 1). While the strength of muscle brings to mind the monster, the intellectual superiority remains ambivalent: is it Victor's or does it refer to the educated Creature in the burlesque?

Size matters with Frankenstein – Victor built his Creature out of bigger body parts to save time and effort. With the construction of the Great Western (in 1838), the size of railways turned into an engineering bone of contention – there was the rivalry between what was then called the narrow gauge (now standard at 4 feet 8 ½ inches) and Isambard Kingdom Brunel's broad gauge (7 feet ¼ inches). In this context Brunel was called "a creator of railway Frankensteins" (*Morning Advertiser* 1850: 3). The locomotives were seen as monstrous with one of them at 60 tons with its tender (and others approximating 40) – the alarm was caused by the destruction of rails and the realisation that heavier rails were needed for the heavier engines. This, however, according to an 1850 reporter, did not stop the competition (Robert Stephenson and "all the engineers of his school") from doing "their best to excel Mr. Brunel" (*Morning Advertiser* 1850: 3). Stability was at stake and it took a while to find out that the length of the engine was more important than its weight.

Every so often the monstrosity of capitalism is labelled Frankensteinian – here are a couple of examples that demonstrate the tendency: first comes an honorary mention of the "Frankenstein of Free-trade" in the context of export and the price of cotton wool (*Royal Cornwall Gazette* 1850: 5); then, editor George Reynolds presses for social reform, arguing in his newly founded weekly that "Competition is a monster which these Frankensteins of shopkeepers have themselves created and inspired with all its terrible vitality: and now it is pursuing them to devour them wholesale" (*Reynolds's Newspaper* 1850: 1). A closely related usage has to do with Ireland – in 1843 the *Punch* printed Kenny Meadows's cartoon "The Irish Frankenstein", which vilified the peasantry and featured the growing importance of the repeal movement. The Irish famine was to follow in 1844-1845; the Corn Laws were repealed in 1846. But if these are examples of intersemiotic translation, an analyst discussed the Irish famine in 1850 calling "a starving, evicted, dying population, […] the Frankenstein from which the landlords shrank with affright" (*Standard of Freedom* 1850: 9).

A radically different type of usage is the nickname "Frankenstein" associated with a composer of promenade waltzes (*Edinburgh Evening Courant* 1858: 2). In his case the name has become synonymous with imagination and creativity. Similarly positive is another reference that has to do with the reconstruction of the sewage system "after the manner of an inventive Frankenstein" (*Morning Advertiser* 1858: 4). Whether we are talking art or civil engineering, Frankenstein has become an emblem of resourcefulness and originality. Such translations of the metaphor are not dominant but they persist and are carried over, across borders and languages, into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (cf. Kostadinova 2019).

All in all, the decades after the publication of *Frankenstein* provide a test case for how the everyday use of language is affected by the world of fiction and popular culture, how a proper name is reassigned for common usage, and how the original weight it carries is gradually shifted. Initially Frankenstein is used in the press to denote the creators of monsters and the monsters themselves, first by way of similes and then resorting to metaphors. Thus, monstrosity is the earliest intralingual translation of the fictional character into the language of English-speaking newspaper readers. Bit by bit new meanings were attached to Frankenstein and in the 1850s it acquired such translations as imagination and creativity. Despite the kaleidoscope of meanings, however, dictionary definitions remain restrictive and still recycle Frankensteinian monstrosity.

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