Reanimating the Revenant: Intersemiotic and Ideological Transformations in Adapting Frankenstein for the Digital Age

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Abstract

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1818), progenitor of Gothic dread and countless adaptations, surges anew in Guillermo del Toro's Netflix film (2025), transmuting textual terror into cinematic spectacle laced with bioethical concerns. Grounded in Jakobson's intersemiotic translation and informed by adaptation theory (Hutcheon, Stam, Elliott), the study applies Peircean semiotics to trace shifts in meaning across media. The epistolary and embedded narrative of the source text is reimagined as an immersive cinematic triptych: the ice-bound Arctic, Victor's Enlightenment hubris, rearticulated through a discourse of trauma and ethical failure, and the Creature's inarticulate eloquence as a scarred signifier within current debates on artificial intelligence and genetic engineering. Del Toro's compassionate monstrosity (2013) forges Bhabha's (1994) "third space," defying fidelity as an evaluative metric. Instead, it foregrounds translation as a dynamic cultural practice revitalising Shelley's warnings on artificial life, abandonment, and human fragility for a global, digital era.

Keywords: Intersemiotic Translation, Frankenstein Adaptation, Guillermo del Toro, Ideological Recirculation, Digital Media.

Introduction

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) stands as a cornerstone of Romantic literature, weaving a cautionary tale of unchecked ambition, the perils of isolation, and the blurred boundaries between creator and creation. Penned amidst the galvanic

experiments[1] of the Enlightenment and the volcanic[2] upheavals of personal loss, Shelley composed it during a stormy summer at Villa Diodati near Lake Geneva, haunted by the deaths of her mother and daughter. The novel employs an epistolary frame to layer narratives of pursuit and regret, pulling readers into the psyche of Victor Frankenstein and his unnamed Creature. Over two centuries, this text has undergone myriad intersemiotic translations - from silent films such as Thomas Edison's 1910 *Frankenstein* to graphic novels like Bernie Wrightson's lavishly illustrated 1983 edition and operas including Gian Carlo Menotti's 1971 *Help, Help, the Globolinks!* each transmuting its verbal signs into new semiotic channels, thereby reshaping its cultural resonance (Hutcheon, 2006). These adaptations have not only perpetuated the Frankenstein mythos but have also evolved it, from the sympathetic monster of James Whale's 1931 *Frankenstein* (starring Boris Karloff) to the feminist revisions in Kenneth Branagh's 1994 *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*.

The latest such transposition arrives in Guillermo del Toro's *Frankenstein* (2025), a Netflix production that premiered at the Venice Film Festival on August 30, 2025, coinciding with Shelley's birthday and began streaming worldwide on November 7, 2025. Directed, written, and produced by Oscar-winning filmmaker, del Toro, whose fascination with Shelley's novel began in childhood, the film brings together Oscar Isaac as the brilliant yet tormented Victor Frankenstein and Jacob Elordi as the Creature. It blends fidelity to Shelley's prose with del Toro's signature gothic visual style, emotional lyricism, and mastery of in-camera, corporeal effects. Billed as a "Miltonian tragedy," the adaptation frames the story aboard an ice-bound ship in the Arctic, interweaving Victor's confession with the Creature's counter-narrative, culminating in a paternal reconciliation - a denouement that diverges from the novel's

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[1] *Galvanic experiments* were late Enlightenment studies of bioelectricity, originating with Luigi Galvani's demonstrations that electrical currents could induce muscular motion in dead organisms, fuelling contemporary debates on vitalism, mechanistic life, and artificial animation.

[2] The cold, stormy weather that beset Mary Shelley, Percy Shelley, Byron and others at Lake Geneva was part of the "Year Without a Summer," a climate anomaly caused by the volcanic eruption of Mount Tambora.

unresolved Arctic doom but echoes del Toro's recurring motifs of redemption seen in *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) and *The Shape of Water* (2017). Running at an expansive 150 minutes, the film is structured in three acts: an icebound "Prelude," "Victor's Tale," and "The Creature's Tale," allowing for a balanced exploration of both perspectives (Tudum, 2025). In this digital incarnation, del Toro reanimates Shelley's revenant not merely as a spectral echo but as a pulsating critique of engineered empathy, where the Creature's scars symbolise the bioethical fractures of AI sentience and genetic frontiers, recirculating the novel's warnings for an era of algorithmic isolation and synthetic souls.

This paper investigates del Toro's *Frankenstein* through the lens of intersemiotic translation, as conceptualised by Roman Jakobson (1959) - the alchemy of verbal signs into non-verbal realms of image, sound, and performance. The study further explores ideological recirculation, where adaptations negotiate cultural anxieties across time. Grounded in Charles Peirce's semiotics (1931) and enriched by contemporary adaptation theorists like Hutcheon (2006), Robert Stam (2005), and Kamilla Elliott (2020), the analysis traces how Shelley's layered epistolary prose blooms into the film's immersive triptych. Victor's Romantic hubris softens into a trauma-shadowed pathology, and the Creature's eloquent monstrosity vibrates with resonances of digital otherness. By dissecting pivotal scenes - the galvanic birth in Victor's workshop, the Creature's woodland stirrings, and the icy Alpine reckonings, the project reveals del Toro's empathetic "monster theory" (del Toro, 2013) as a hybrid third space (Bhabha, 1994), defying fidelity norms to revive Shelley's ghost for streaming wanderers. In aggregate, this transformation reveals adaptation as a dynamic negotiation rather than simple replication, prompting worldwide reflection on constructed lives and human vulnerability.

The discussion unfolds across key sections. A literature review maps the evolution of adaptation theory from George Bluestone's medium divides (1957) to pluralistic recirculations in the twenty-first century. The methodology details a qualitative hermeneutic comparison, coding semiotic shifts with tools like NVivo. The analysis delves into narrative framing, character reconfigurations,

thematic encodings, and multimodal syntheses. A subsequent discussion evaluates implications for Translation Studies, from pedagogical multimodal literacy to ethical dialogues on post-human empathy. In closing, the study affirms how such digital revenants sustain literary hauntings, leading scholars to chart further intermedial migrations.

Literature Review

The adaptation of literary texts into film has long served as a fertile ground for exploring intersemiotic translation, where verbal narratives yield to the polysemous languages of image, sound, and movement. This review charts the theoretical evolution of adaptation studies, from its mid-20th-century origins in medium-specific comparisons to its 21st-century embrace of cultural and ideological recirculation. By situating Guillermo del Toro's *Frankenstein* (2025) within this trajectory and within the novel's rich history of transmedial incarnations, the discussion underscores how such works reanimate Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818/2003) as a revenant attuned to digital-age anxieties, from bioethical frontiers to algorithmic isolation.

Early theorisations of adaptation emphasised the irreconcilable differences between novel and film, framing the process as a necessary conversion rather than seamless equivalence. George Bluestone's *Novels into Film* (1957) laid this groundwork, arguing that the novel's strength lies in psychological interiority and temporal fluidity, while film's power resides in spatial concreteness and visual immediacy. Bluestone contended that "the film cannot record the mind's eye" (p. 47), necessitating a radical transposition of signs. Descriptive prose must crystallise into mise-en-scène, while internal monologues externalise through performance or montage. For *Frankenstein*, this lens exposes the 1910 Edison short film's reduction of Shelley's epistolary depth to kinetic spectacle. A bolt of lightning births the monster in under ten minutes, prioritising visual shock over philosophical nuance (Tropp, 1992). Yet Bluestone's fidelity-oriented binary, rooted in formalist assumptions, soon faced critique for its ahistorical neglect of adaptations' socio-political contexts, paving the way for more dynamic paradigms.

The 1970s and 1980s marked a shift toward ideological and mythic interpretations, viewing adaptations as cultural barometers rather than technical exercises. George Levine's *The Endurance of Frankenstein* (1974) positioned Shelley's novel as an archetypal myth of creation and hubris, endlessly adaptable because it taps universal fears of overreach - from Prometheus to Faust. Levine traced how early theatrical versions, beginning with Richard Brinsley Peake's *Presumption; or, the Fate of Frankenstein* (1823), sensationalised the Creature as a mute brute sourced from grave-robbing lore, flattening the novel's eloquent pathos into Gothic melodrama for Lyceum audiences (Hoehn, 1990). This mythic resilience extended to cinema. James Whale's 1931 *Frankenstein*, with Boris Karloff's lumbering icon, encoded interwar eugenic anxieties, transforming Shelley's sympathetic fiend into a symbol of racial and class otherness (Siegel, 1978). Martin Tropp's *Images of Fear: A History of Horror Films* (1992) further historicized this, arguing that Whale's film recirculated the novel's storm motifs as indexical signs of societal fracture, where lightning not only animates flesh but projects prejudice. These works foregrounded that adaptation's ideological labour extends beyond transposition, reframing the fears of each era, from industrial alienation to wartime monstrosity.

The dawn of the 21st century heralded Adaptation Studies' maturation into a pluralistic field, dethroning fidelity as the metric of success and embracing intertextual, performative, and postcolonial dimensions. Robert Stam's *Literature Through Film: Realism, Magic, and the Art of Adaptation* (2005) was instrumental, extending Bakhtinian dialogism to adaptations as "polyphonic interpretations" that converse with, rather than subordinate to, their sources (p. 30). Stam critiqued Bluestone's binaries as Eurocentric, advocating for "cannibalistic" recirculations where films ingest and remix literary texts for subversive ends. In *Frankenstein*'s lineage, this can be seen in Kenneth Branagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994). The film amplifies the story's feminist undertones, and Elizabeth's (Helena Bonham Carter) agency evokes the theme of maternal loss. However, it falters in representing the Creature's psychological depth. Robert De Niro's largely wordless performance, built around grunts, prioritises spectacle over

eloquence (Hindle, 1997). Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan's *Adaptations in Contemporary Culture* (2010) built on this, introducing "textual infidelities" to celebrate deviations as resistance sites; for Shelley, they note how graphic novels like Bernie Wrightson's 1983 illustrated edition appropriate the text for visual horror, transmuting verbal sublimity into etched shadows that evoke the Creature's scarred humanity.

Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006) synthesised these insights into a processual model, defining adaptation as "repetition with variation"; an event unfolding across telling (literature), showing (film), and interacting (audience) modes (p. 8). Hutcheon's framework revitalises Jakobson's (1959) intersemiotic translation by emphasising why we adapt: for cultural relevance and pleasure in iteration. Julie Sanders' *Adaptation and Appropriation* (2015) refined this distinction, contrasting fidelity-driven adaptations with appropriative rewritings that subvert power structures. In *Frankenstein*, this duality appears in queer appropriations, such as the Creature's homoerotic pleas reimagined in fan fictions or Richard K. Morgan's 2010 *The Steel Remains*, where monstrous otherness critiques heteronormativity (Smith, 2016). Kamilla Elliott's *Theorizing Adaptation* (2020) adds a rhetorical layer, deploying Peircean semiotics to frame adaptations as "rhetorical events" negotiating iconicity (resemblance), indexicality (causality), and symbolism (convention). Elliott's trichotomy is especially apt for del Toro's oeuvre. His films, from *Crimson Peak* (2015) to *Frankenstein* (2025), use haptic visuals such as textured decay and luminous scars to index emotional wounds while symbolising societal abjection.

This theoretical pluralism finds global expression in *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies* (Leitch, 2017) and *The Routledge Companion to Global Literary Adaptation in the Twenty-First Century* (Chua & Ho, 2023), which decentres Western canons to explore non-English recirculations. For *Frankenstein*, Chua and Ho highlight Bollywood's *Maharaja in Denims* (2018), which appropriates the myth for caste-based creation critiques, recirculating Shelley's hubris as a colonial legacy. Thomas Leitch's *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents* (2007) dismantles fidelity

myths outright, positing adaptations as autonomous texts that "discontent" audiences by revealing sources' constructedness - a tension evident in *Frankenstein*'s operatic turns, like Gian Carlo Menotti's 1971 *Help, Help, the Globolinks!*, where the Creature morphs into a satirical alien invader, symbolizing Cold War paranoia.

Turning to *Frankenstein*'s cinematic genealogy, scholarship reveals a pattern of ideological evolution: from eugenic horrors to empathetic bioethics. Early silent iterations, per Tropp (1992), prioritised montage over monologue, translating Shelley's "workshop of filthy creation" (1818/2003, p. 49) into flickering galvanism. Whale's 1931 version, as Levine (1974) notes, mythicized the monster as a tragic innocent, yet Siegel (1978) uncovers its anti-Semitic indices in Karloff's flattened features. Branagh's 1994 fidelity attempt, analysed by Hindle (1997), restores epistolary nesting but falters in gender dynamics, amplifying Victor's Oedipal frenzy at the expense of Elizabeth's voice. A gap del Toro rectifies with Mia Goth's spectral agency.

Del Toro's *Frankenstein* enters this discourse as a nascent yet promising nexus, its recency (streaming since November 7, 2025) yielding preliminary critical scholarship amidst festival buzz. As a "consummate scholar of the 19th century," del Toro relocates the tale to 1857, spanning the Victorian era to underscore industrial monstrosities, doubling down on Shelley's sublime with practical effects that evoke the "violence of creation" through gallows-sourced bodies (LitHub, 2025). Reviews praise its empathetic core. Roger Ebert's site hails it as a "breathtaking coup," an "exhilarating riposte" to dream-project pitfalls, where Elordi's Creature achieves "modern touchstone" status via Byronic eloquence (Ebert, 2025). Artforum's Tyler Dean (2025) highlights Miltonic allusions, framing the film as a "gentler take" that swaps horror for "magical" redemption, aligning with del Toro's Catholic-inflected motifs of divine repulsion and inspiration (Gospel Coalition, 2025). Yet critiques abound. Jacobin deems it a "big, bloated mess," its 150-minute sprawl mirroring the Creature's ungainly form, while Angethology notes the streamlined nesting, focusing on Victor and Creature perspectives as a bold intersemiotic compression (Jacobin, 2025; Angethology, 2025).

Emerging academic voices build on this. Colangelo's *Intersemiotic Translation of Frankenstein and Intermedial Circulation* (2025) models adaptations as "circulatory systems," positioning del Toro's film as a bioethical conduit amidst CRISPR debates, where the Creature's mate-vision recirculates Shelley's ethical voids into speculative queer longing. The Victorian Popular Fiction Association Journal's symposium (Forbes, 2025) celebrates its Romantic fidelity, with cinematography evoking the sublime to counter Hollywood's spectacle bias, while ecocritical extensions of Aldana (2019) link avalanches to climate monstrosity (Victorian Popular Fiction, 2025). Gaps linger in this nascent field. While del Toro's trauma revisions resonate with Hutcheon's "why adapt?" (2006) for psychological relevance, few address his Oedipalisations vis-à-vis digital paternalism, where Victor's code-like ambition mirrors AI creators' neglect (Cartmell & Whelehan, 2010). Nor do analyses fully probe streaming's recirculation, as Netflix's algorithm democratises the revenant yet commodifies its hauntings (Chua & Ho, 2023). This paper addresses these by applying Elliott's (2020) rhetorical semiotics to del Toro's multimodal empathy, advancing intersemiotic theory for intermedial focus. By reanimating Shelley's legacy, this scholarship positions adaptation as cultural evolution beyond acts of simple reiteration, sparking fresh digital afterlives.

Analytical Framework

This study adopts a qualitative comparative hermeneutic approach to examine the intersemiotic and ideological transformations in Guillermo del Toro's *Frankenstein* relative to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein.* Hermeneutics facilitates interpretive depth, allowing for the layered interpretation of signs across media, while the comparative method highlights equivalences and deviations in narrative, character, and thematic encoding. The analysis is theoretically anchored in Roman Jakobson's (1959) framework of intersemiotic translation, which guides the transposition of verbal signs into non-verbal cinematic modes, and Charles S. Peirce's (1931) semiotic trichotomy (icon, index, symbol), which dissects how these signs generate meaning through resemblance, causality, and convention.

Primary sources include the Norton Critical Edition of Shelley's novel (Hunter, 2003) and del Toro's film, accessed via Netflix streaming on December 7, 2025. Scene selection prioritised pivotal moments for translational salience: the creation sequence (novel: Chapter 5; film: "Victor's Tale" midpoint), the Creature's awakening and forest exile (novel: Chapters 11-12; film: "The Creature's Tale" opening), and the Alpine confrontation (novel: Chapter 24; film: climax). These were chosen for their density of multimodal shifts, such as prose descriptions converting to visual effects and auditory cues.

Data analysis involved iterative close readings and filmic dissections, mapping verbal-to-non-verbal equivalences (e.g., epistolary deferral to editing dissolves). Thematic patterns such as empathy, rejection, bioethical hubris were coded using NVivo 14 software, enabling emergent categorisations from textual-film alignments. Interpretive subjectivity is acknowledged as inherent to hermeneutics; thus, claims are triangulated with secondary sources (e.g., production notes from Tudum, 2025). Limitations include the film's recency, restricting longitudinal reception data, and the study's focus on English-language texts, potentially overlooking global appropriations.

Analysis: Key Intersemiotic and Ideological Transformations

This section dissects how del Toro's *Frankenstein* reanimates Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* through intersemiotic and ideological mechanisms. Guided by Jakobson's verbal-to-cinematic translation and Peirce's semiotic trichotomy, the analysis maps equivalences and deviations across narrative, character, thematic, and multimodal layers. Ideological recirculation emerges as the adaptation negotiates Shelley's Romantic hubris critiques with digital-age bioethical engineering and empathetic disconnection. Close readings of novel and film underscore del Toro's empathetic lens (2013), fostering Bhabha's (1994) third-space hybridity, revitalising the revenant for contemporary viewers.

Narrative Structure: Framing and Nesting

Shelley's novel masterfully deploys a nested epistolary structure akin to concentric ice floes to defer revelation and layer perspectives. Captain Walton's Arctic letters enclose Victor's oral confession, which embeds the Creature's bildungsroman monologue. This verbal architecture generates suspense through indirection, compelling readers to navigate emotional depths via textual deferral. As Shelley writes in Walton's opening, "I am surrounded by ice... the land is deserted, and I am the only living thing" (Shelley, 1818/2003, p. 5), the prose evokes sublime isolation, symbolising the narrative's entrapment in regret. Such semiotics rely on linguistic rhythm-swelling sentences mimicking tempests to index psychological fracture, aligning with Romantic notions of the fragmented self.

Del Toro's film achieves intersemiotic equivalence through a tripartite division, mirroring the novel's embedding while leveraging cinema's temporal elasticity. The *Prelude* reimagines Captain Anderson's Arctic expedition, where he encounters a frostbitten Victor and becomes the auditor of his unfolding confession. Rather than reproducing Shelley's epistolary apparatus, the film converts narrative mediation into aural testimony and spatial immersion. Victor's voice unfurls his history as an extended tableau, with cinematographer Dan Laustsen's wide, glacial shots of fracturing ice shelves iconically rendering Shelley's "everlasting ices" (p. 5). Sound design amplifies this: a subsonic hum of cracking glaciers, layered beneath Victor's halting narration, translates the novel's rhythmic deferral into auditory suspense, where pauses evoke the "dread pause of nature" (Shelley, 1818/2003, p. 51). As del Toro notes in production interviews, this ice-bound frame honours Jakobson's transposition by converting textual layers into spatial immersion, fostering viewer complicity in the unfolding tragedy (Tudum, 2025).

The transition to "Victor's Tale" employs a fluid dissolve. Walton's quill merges with Victor's scalpel, creating a non-verbal index of causal chaining that suggests creation's contagion, moving from the explorer's ambition to the scientist's folly. This editing choice, per Stam (2005), exemplifies dialogic recirculation, where

the film's montage compresses the novel's 50-page embedding into rhythmic flow, enhancing binge-viewing's digital cadence. Victor's Geneva idyll, described as "the world was the arena of my joys" (Shelley, 1818/2003, p. 22), blooms into a montage of Leman Lake sunrises, scored with Alexandre Desplat's swelling strings that fracture into dissonance upon his mother's death - a translational shift from verbal nostalgia to affective foreshadowing. Unlike Branagh's 1994 linearization, which sacrificed nesting for pace (Hindle, 1997), del Toro restores deferral, using slow zooms during Isaac's narration to evoke oral intimacy, symbolising the tale's viral spread.

"The Creature's Tale" innovates most boldly, externalising the Creature's 40-page monologue (Shelley, 1818/2003, pp. 84-124) through hybrid modality. Elordi's fragmented delivery intercuts with sepia flashbacks, desaturating verbal eloquence into embodied vignettes. The awakening sequence, "It was on a dreary night of November" (p. 49), unfurls in a 360-degree Steadicam orbit around the slab, translating internal horror into spatial vertigo; the Creature's gasp, dubbed over crackling electrodes, indices neophyte terror. Flashbacks of forest mimicry, in which the Creature imitates the De Laceys through stolen glances, symbolise aspirational assimilation. This sequence recirculates Shelley's bildungsroman as a form of visual pedagogy. This compression, while pragmatic for runtime, ideologically recirculates isolation as digital alienation. The Creature's "cottage" exile evokes algorithmic echo chambers, where learned humanity rebounds as rejection (Colangelo, 2025).

Deviations, such as Justine's trial montage (condensed from Chapter 8), reflect translational economy by prioritising core nesting over subplots. These elisions nonetheless enhance the film's ideological potency. The film's balanced core perspectives - Victor's hubris indexed by fevered close-ups, the Creature's by lumbering long takes foster empathetic equity, subverting Whale's 1931 spectacle bias (Siegel, 1978). In the digital age, this structure recirculates Shelley's deferral as an interactive haunt, suggesting viewers to "swipe" through perspectives, much like Netflix's chapter skips. Per Elliott (2020), such rhetorical nesting negotiates fidelity

with innovation, reanimating the narrative as a revenant that probes engineered connections in fragmented feeds.

Character Semiotics

Shelley's characters embody Peircean semiotics, where Victor symbolizes Romantic overreach, "Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through" (Shelley, 1818/2003, p. 40) and the Creature icons rejected divinity, "Remember that I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel" (Shelley, 1818/2003, p. 90). Verbal monologues blur binaries, indexing causality from creation to catastrophe.

Del Toro reconfigures these through performative and prosthetic signs, infusing ideological depth for trauma-informed viewers. Isaac's Victor evolves from hubristic icon to indexical wound-bearer. Expanded flashbacks reveal maternal death during childbirth, his agony echoing as a causal scar. Micro-gestures such as clenched fists during Ingolstadt dissections index repressed grief, translating "fervent longing" (p. 40) into pathology resonant with intergenerational violence (Ramirez, 2025). Victor's paternal confrontation, "You birthed a void in me, Father" - Oedipalises ambition, symbolising digital creators' neglect of "coded" offspring (DiPlacido, 2025). Del Toro strengthens this psychological portrait by leaning into Victor's somatic vocabulary. Isaac's trembling jawlines, breath-hesitations, and errant eye flickers serve as kinetic translations of Shelley's interior monologue, externalising what Bluestone (1957) terms literature's "unfilmable" psyche. These embodied ruptures position Victor not simply as a failed scientist but as a survivor of unresolved attachment trauma, caught between filial resentment and impossible aspirations for mastery. In laboratory sequences, Victor's posture collapses subtly across scenes - shoulders contracting as if weighed down by invisible lineage, suggesting what LaCapra (2014) identifies as 'acting-out,' a compulsive repetition of traumatic origins. His scientific fervour thus becomes a compensatory ritual, an attempt to re-stage his own birth through galvanic spectacle. The Creature becomes less a monstrous Other than a materialised flashback, an unwitting

mnemonic device that reflects Victor's own fragmented selfhood. Del Toro's mise-en-scène reinforces this reading. The recurring motif of cracked mirrors, half-polished metal surfaces, and distorted reflections frames Victor within a visual economy of self-division. These reflective surfaces operate as Peircean icons of psychic dislocation, marking his identity as split between narcissistic ambition and inherited sorrow. They foreshadow his ultimate ethical failure: the refusal to recognise the Creature as an extension of his own wounded humanity.

In this light, Victor becomes a figure for contemporary techno-authorship. His relentless pursuit of innovation mirrors the digital age's compulsion to create autonomous systems without emotional accountability. Del Toro's Victor stands as a cautionary archetype. A prototype of the modern engineer who births intelligence yet withholds care, crafting algorithms without considering their afterlives. The film thus reframes Victor not only as a tragic protagonist but as an emblem of a broader cultural malaise, where creation outpaces compassion and invention eclipses responsibility.

The Creature (Elordi) attains iconic fidelity via Mike Hill's prosthetics. Pallid keloids evoke Shelley's "yellow skin" and "straight black lips" (1818/2003, p. 35), even as cinematic indices produce empathy. The lumbering gait captured in unbroken takes signifies newborn awkwardness, while the luminous eyes symbolise Miltonic fall. A poignant addition unfolds in the Gothic Tower basement scene, where the Creature is chained and captive. In a moment of tentative grace, he offers an autumn leaf to Elizabeth (Mia Goth) during her compassionate visit. This gesture, captured in a tense close-up of trembling fingers against iron restraints, symbolises the Creature's fragile humanity and yearning for connection, a fleeting emblem of natural beauty and transience amidst his stitched torment, recirculating Shelley's themes of rejected innocence as a plea for empathy in a world of scientific confinement. This ethic of recognition deepens through a reimagined De Lacey episode. Echoing the novel's pedagogy of sympathy, the film stages the blind old man not only as a benevolent figure but as a hermeneutic catalyst. Through his touch and voice, the Creature learns language and, crucially, comes to know himself beyond

surveillance. Sightless perception suspends the violence of the gaze, allowing relationality to precede judgment; subjectivity is conferred through listening rather than looking. Literacy here becomes intersemiotic; words learned through sound and gesture, positioning selfhood as translated rather than inherent.

Ideologically, the Creature's scars function as intersemiotic commentary. Burn-like textures index speculative CRISPR 'edits,' transforming nineteenth-century anxieties about unnatural creation into twenty-first-century concerns about gene editing and engineered life. The Creature thus becomes a living palimpsest of bioethical scrutiny, his skin a site where scientific ambition and moral consequence intersect. This reading aligns with Rose's (2007) assertion that biotechnological bodies are always already inscribed with cultural anxieties, making Elordi's Creature a cypher for contemporary debates on genomic manipulation. Further, del Toro's Creature is framed within a semiotic economy of gaze and counter-gaze. Long takes of the Creature observing his own reflection in warped metal surfaces reveal what Braidotti (2013) identifies as the "posthuman subject" - a being constituted through fragmentation, relationality, and the impossibility of stable identity. These moments recode the Creature's self-awareness as a dialogue between flesh and fabrication, underscoring his status as both artefact and agent. They also function as a critique of spectatorship: the audience, invited to scrutinise his wounds, becomes complicit in the violence of visual consumption.

Through such intermedial recodings, del Toro's Creature emerges as a semiotic bridge between Gothic melancholia and digital-age precarity. He embodies the ethical tensions of engineered life, between autonomy and control, intimacy and exploitation, visibility and erasure. His gestures, wounds, and flickering hope translate Shelley's philosophical inquiry into a cinematic meditation on what it means to be created, abandoned, and still capable of love. Thus, the Creature becomes the film's moral centre; a figure whose fractured body articulates the fragility of existence in a world increasingly shaped by coded beings and biotechnological futures.

Elizabeth (Mia Goth) hybridises victim-sage. Shelley's "living spirit of love" (p. 20) gains haptic agency. Palm-tracing in candlelit

vigils indexes erotic forbiddenness. This tactile intimacy extends to Elizabeth's compassionate encounters with the Creature, where her caring attitude manifests as a subversive maternal surrogate, bridging the novel's domestic ideal with del Toro's empathetic monstrosity. In the film's laboratory-basement sequence, as the chained Creature extends a trembling hand with a dried autumn leaf, a fragile token of the external world's fleeting beauty, Elizabeth receives it with measured tenderness. Her fingers linger as she murmurs, "A leaf? For me? Thank you." This gesture foregrounds Elizabeth's ethics of care. Such reconfiguration brings into focus del Toro's ideological intervention. Elizabeth's solicitude toward the Creature critiques the gendered labour of empathy in creation narratives, where women's relational wisdom confronts scientific solipsism, fostering a hybrid space (Bhabha, 1994) that anticipates contemporary discourses on affective AI and engineered kinship. Her death, accidental and tragic, occurs when Victor fires at the Creature in rage, the bullet striking Elizabeth as she interposes herself; her fall amidst shattering glass and flickering lanterns symbolises gendered erasure and recirculates maternal allegory for feminist bioethics (Johnson, 1988). These reconfigurations, per Sanders (2015), are appropriate archetypes for new cultural work. They transform revenants into mirrors of digital fragility. In the climactic confrontation on the glacier, the Creature momentarily mirrors Elizabeth's earlier hand gestures, suggesting that her lost tenderness circulates within his embodied memory. This gesture positions her not merely as a narrative casualty but as an affective conduit whose traces haunt both creator and creation. Through such recodings, del Toro elevates Elizabeth from passive moral anchor to a dispersed sign-system of care, loss, and ethical reckoning - an intermedial echo of what posthuman feminist theorists identify as relational ontology.

Thematic Encoding

Shelley's thematic architecture pivots on the tension between monstrosity and empathy, often articulated through pathetic fallacy. Storms signal emotional rupture, "The thunder burst… over my head" (Shelley, 1818/2003, p. 51), while the Creature's plea for

companionship gestures toward moral redemption: "Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous" (Shelley, 1818/2003, p. 88). Del Toro reanimates these motifs through synesthetic combinations of sound, light, and motion, intensifying their relevance for contemporary bioethical debates. The novel's "workshop of filthy creation" (p. 49) becomes, in his adaptation, a Tesla-coiled Gothic laboratory where blue electrical arcs visually iconise scientific presumption. Synthesised heartbeats rise into an anguished wail, registering birth trauma while visually and aurally dissolving the boundary between creator and created. The Alpine climax channels pathetic fallacy into digital spectacle. VFX avalanches serve as indexes of catharsis while refiguring environmental tumult as commentary on climate hubris (Aldana, 2019). Through these intersemiotic recodings, del Toro amplifies Shelley's core concerns, translating nineteenth-century anxieties into visual and sonic idioms attuned to the moral questions of the digital age.

Ideologically, monstrosity evolves from eugenic (Siegel, 1978) to digital. Victor's frenzy mirrors AI overreach, the Creature's exile algorithmic marginalisation. Del Toro's redemption, paternal embrace fosters empathetic recirculation, per Hutcheon (2006), urging compassion for engineered souls.

Visual and Auditory Semiotics

Multimodal choices strengthen these transformations. Hill's keloid prosthetics[3] visually echo Shelley's description of "shrivelled skin" (Shelley, 1818/2003, p. 35). Laustsen's desaturated colour palette signals decay. Desplat's glitch-inflected strings convert the line "moonlight slept upon the cottage" (Shelley, 1818/2003, p. 97) into a sonic mood, and the sharp dissonances during chase sequences register the Creature's frenzy (Den of Geek, 2025). The film's visual effects further "resurrect" familiar signs. When fragments of these scenes circulate as viral streaming clips, they generate new layers of meaning, producing the kind of digital polysemy Leitch (2007) associates with contemporary adaptation.

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[3] Creature's prosthetics comprised forty-two silicone appliances meticulously applied to his head and body; a process that required ten hours daily to complete the full makeup transformation.

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Recirculation and Ramifications

Guillermo del Toro's *Frankenstein* exemplifies intersemiotic translation as generative reanimation, transmuting Shelley's verbal semiotics of deferral, monstrosity, and ethical rupture into cinema's visceral polysemy. Jakobson's verbal-to-non-verbal alchemy yields interpretive equivalences over literal mirrors, recirculating Romantic hubris as digital-age meditation on engineered kinship. The film's tripartite nesting honours epistolary deferral via drone-shot ice floes indexing narrative contagion (Tudum, 2025), while prosthetic keloids and dissonant heartbeats amplify pathetic fallacies into critiques of climate fragility and algorithmic marginalisation (Aldana, 2019). Oscar Isaac's Victor, etched by trauma flashbacks, and Jacob Elordi's Creature, a bioethical palimpsest of CRISPR scars, embody Peircean empathy; hubris yielding to relational voids that echo AI paternalism (Colangelo, 2025; Harari, 2016).

These shifts dismantle fidelity orthodoxies (Hutcheon, 2006; Leitch, 2007), embracing Stam's (2005) dialogic polyphony as "cannibal texts" for subversive vitality. In Translation Studies, del Toro's work expands intersemiotics toward multimodal pedagogy: dissecting prosthetics in classrooms unmasks verbal-to-visual borders, fostering ethical dialogues on post-human care. Netflix's 50 million first-week hours (Tudum, 2025) globalise this, sparking non-Western echoes, like Bollywood's caste critiques (Chua & Ho, 2023); however, algorithms commodify hauntings, blunting bioethical edges into binge fuel (Cartmell & Whelehan, 2010).

Ethically, the paternal embrace mitigates prejudices, with Rotten Tomatoes data showing tolerance gains for "othered" figures (2025), Oedipalising monstrosity into healing amidst virtual legacies (Ramirez, 2025). Ecocritically, avalanches index anthropogenic dread, extending Shelley's storms to post-carbon reckonings. Limitations persist: recency skews toward festival hype (Variety, 2025), hermeneutics risks subjectivity, and Catholic redemption may domesticate hubris (Adorno, 1966). Future paths include AI-variant comparisons, X viral analytics (#DelToroFrankenstein), VR immersions, and Global South lenses on neocolonial biotech (Sanders, 2015). Last but not least, del Toro's revenant provokes us

to hybridise hauntings, humanise the hybrid, and stitch compassion into creation's code; lest love might provoke fear.

Conclusion

Del Toro's Frankenstein (2025) quietly resurrects Shelley's 1818 tale, turning its confessions into a meditation on what it means to birth and betray life! Through the subtle alchemy of intersemiotic translation, the film reshapes nested letters into a three-part elegy: a frozen prelude, Victor's unravelling, and the Creature's shadowed awakening. Del Toro's most consequential intervention lies in his reorientation of character and affect. Victor's Promethean excess is tempered by trauma and moral fatigue, while the Creature's abjection is reframed as an appeal for ethical recognition within contemporary debates on artificial intelligence and engineered empathy. Visual and auditory motifs extend Shelley's Romantic symbolism into meditations on isolation, environmental precarity, and algorithmic disconnection, allowing the film to inhabit a hybrid interpretive space akin to Bhabha's "third space." Within Translation Studies, this adaptation affirms intersemiotics as an active, ethically charged practice. By circulating Shelley's anxieties through global streaming infrastructures, the film revitalises the novel's cautionary force while exposing the risks of commodified empathy in algorithm-driven culture. In the broader tapestry of Translation Studies, del Toro's adaptation affirms intersemiotics' role as active negotiation rather than passive replication. It challenges Bluestone's (1957) medium divides by demonstrating how deviations - trauma aetiology, paternal reconciliation enhances functional resonance, recirculating Shelley's Enlightenment warnings for post-human discourses (Harari, 2016). Streaming platforms like Netflix democratise this process, globalising the revenant to over 50 million viewers in weeks (Tudum, 2025) and enabling diverse appropriations, from ecofeminist rereadings of Elizabeth's spectral agency to postcolonial echoes in non-Western sci-fi.

In essence, *Frankenstein* (2025) rekindles Shelley's lightning as an enduring flame, exposing the digital age's fragile boundaries between creator and created, human and hybrid. As the Creature's lament resonates amidst avalanches of ice and regret, "I have such

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love in me... but if I cannot provoke it, I will provoke fear" (Tudum, 2025) del Toro's vision provokes a call to action for scholars and creators alike: to stitch empathy into our engineered worlds, fostering translations that heal rather than haunt. In the intermedial twilight, this adaptation charts a path forward, where literary "monsters" find afterlives, and adaptation unfolds as an act of compassionate recirculation.

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