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‘In Just Seven Days, I Can Make You a Man’: Queerness and Masculinity in *Frankenstein* (1818) and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975)

Katie MacLean 

University of Stirling

ABSTRACT

This article examines the intersections of queerness, masculinity and heteronormativity in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) and its queer adaptation, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975). While *Rocky Horror* is celebrated as a cult classic, its role as an adaptation of *Frankenstein* has received little attention within Romantic studies. I argue that attention to *Rocky Horror* as a Shelley adaptation illuminates the author’s concern with compulsory heterosexuality and the family, transsexuality, sexual violence against women, and the construction of nineteenth-century masculinities. The depiction of *Rocky Horror*’s Frank-N-Furter, whose creation of Rocky queers Frankenstein’s creation of The Monster, critiques and parodies contemporary American gender roles and patriarchal family structures. Ultimately, the article argues that recognizing *Rocky Horror* as a queer adaptation of *Frankenstein* not only uncovers queer subtexts within Shelley’s novel but also expands our understanding of adaptation studies.

KEYWORDS

Frankenstein; adaptation; queer studies; Romanticism; trans studies

Pop-star Sabrina Carpenter’s latest music video, ‘Tears’, parodies the queer legacy of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818). Carpenter, dressed as a conservative Southern Belle, breaks down outside a haunted house and is taken on a journey of sexual discovery by a drag queen, as she sings a song pleading her boyfriend to do basic domestic tasks, like wash the dishes or assemble an IKEA chair. Carpenter’s persona is clearly inspired by Janet Weiss of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), who is similarly taken on a journey of sexual discovery by drag queen/alien transexual Dr Frank-N-Furter, *i.e.* Dr Frankenstein. This queer cult film that has been neglected in Romantic scholarship as an adaptation of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), but Carpenter’s music video demonstrates the continued relevance of both Shelley’s novel and its adaptative works. Originally a musical on London’s West End, the film has subsequently become known for both Tim Curry’s iconic performance and fan-led audience participation at local screenings. As an adaptation, it most obviously echoes Shelley’s *Frankenstein* in the character Frank-N-Furter, as the plot hinges on his

CONTACT Katie MacLean  katie.maclean@stir.ac.uk

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creation of Rocky, the film's Monster, intended to serve as both a son, lover, and lab experiment that showcases Frank-N-Furter's scientific ingenuity. As an adaptation of *Frankenstein*, it is not unique in this sense; themes from the original novel, such as science-fiction, medical innovation, the Gothic genre, and biblical allusions, have found recurring contemporary uses and interpretations amongst modern directors and writers. However, *Rocky Horror* is worth closer analysis in its use of Shelley's thematic concerns to explore – and reimagine – queerness. This article will argue that, although the film is in many ways a camp parody which revels in its own ridiculousness, it adapts and expands concerns with gender and sexuality that are genuinely present in the original nineteenth-century text. Olivia Moskot has argued that the film, rather than taking vague inspiration from *Frankenstein* and the creator-monster motif, is a direct adaptation of Shelley's novel that is deserving of 'serious' academic attention.¹ This article will put Moskot's assertion into practice through analysis of three sex/gender categories in both *Frankenstein* and *Rocky Horror*: transsexuality, masculinity, and heterosexuality. It will argue that attention to *Rocky Horror* as a Shelley adaptation illuminates Mary Shelley's concern with compulsory heterosexuality and the family, Victor Frankenstein's aspirational transsexuality, male violence against women, and the construction of nineteenth-century masculinities. In *Rocky Horror*, these concerns from Shelley's text have trickled down into the popular imagination, highlighting both audiences' and adapters' continued fascination with the queer dimensions of *Frankenstein*.

Queerness in *Frankenstein* has commonly been analyzed through homoeroticism between Frankenstein and his Monster, or in the concept of monstrosity, constructed bodies, and transsexuality/transgender bodies. Susan Stryker's landmark essay/performance piece, 'My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage', articulates trans identification with Shelley's monster:

The transsexual body is an unnatural body. It is the product of medical science. It is a technological construction. It is flesh torn apart and sewn together again in a shape other than that in which it was born. In these circumstances, I find a deep affinity between myself as a transsexual woman and the monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Like the monster, I am too often perceived as less than fully human due to the means of my embodiment; like the monster's as well, my exclusion from human community fuels a deep and abiding rage in me that I, like the monster, direct against the conditions in which I must struggle to exist.²

The Monster, an outsider to heteronormative society, has therefore been widely established in queer readings of the text, however concerns of gender can also be analyzed in Victor Frankenstein. The transsexuality of Frankenstein is figured most obviously through his quest to create The Monster asexually, with parenthood as a central theme of the novel. In her 1831 preface, Shelley writes, 'I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper. I have an affection for it, for it was the offspring of happy days, when death and grief were but words, which found no

¹Olivia Moskot, 'Vulnerable Monsters: A Comparison of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Richard O'Brien's *Rocky Horror*', *Criterion: A Journal of Literary Criticism* 12, no. 2 (2019): 12.

²Susan Stryker, 'My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage,' *GLQ* 1 (1994): 238.

true echo in my heart.³ Shelley considers the text as a child of her own, of which she is both mother and father. Of course, Shelley's life was marred by unfortunate circumstances surrounding births. On 6 March 1815, she writes in a letter to her close friend, Thomas Jefferson Hogg: 'My dearest Hogg my baby is dead [...] from its appearance it evidently died of convulsions [...] I am no longer a mother now.'⁴ A diary entry from the same year reads:

Dream that my little baby came to life again; that it had only been cold, and that we rubbed it before the fire, and it lived. Awake and find no baby. I think about the little thing all day. Not in good spirits.⁵

Shelley's dream of bringing her child back to life by rubbing it by the fire mirrors in some ways the birth of Frankenstein's Monster, constructed from corpses and brought to life by electricity. Further stillbirths and deaths in her family and close circle complicated Shelley's feelings towards motherhood, birth, and children. Her 1818 novel is full of language around pregnancy, and whilst scholars have traditionally associated trans studies with the Creature, Victor Frankenstein's quest to create life also places him as mother/father to his creation. Shelley's language utilizes the discourse of pregnancy: Victor describes himself as having spent so much time in 'painful labour', in which his 'cheek had grown pale with study, and [his] person had become emaciated with confinement'.⁶ Mirroring the gestational period in female pregnancy, Victor's narrative highlights the passage of months and season as he creates his 'son': 'The summer months passed while I was thus engaged, heart and soul, in one pursuit [...] Winter, spring, and summer passed away during my labours.'⁷ Shelley's language highlights the connection between his scientific project and female pregnancy, and the physical toll the labour takes on his body. However, Victor latterly regards his creation with amazement and disgust – he asks, 'How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pain and care I had endeavoured to form?'⁸ As suggested by Barbara Johnson, Victor's regret can be viewed as a study of 'postpartum depression [...] and maternal rejection of a newborn infant [...] relating] the entire novel to Mary Shelley's mixed feelings about motherhood'.⁹ Ellen Moers similarly argues that *Frankenstein* is 'distinctly a woman's mythmaking on the subject of birth' as reveals 'the trauma of the afterbirth'.¹⁰ The Monster agrees, with his own description of himself as 'an abortion, to be spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on'.¹¹ *Frankenstein* can therefore be viewed as Shelley's investigation into the psychological impact of birth and the complex relationship between mother and newborn.

³Mary Shelley, 'Author's Introduction', in *Frankenstein*, ed. Maurice Hindle (London: Penguin, 2003), 10.

⁴Mary Shelley, *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. Betty T. Bennett (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 10.

⁵Mary Shelley, *Mary Shelley's Journal*, ed. Frederick L. Jones (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1947), 41.

⁶Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 53, 55.

⁷*Ibid.*, 56–7.

⁸*Ibid.*, 58.

⁹Barbara Johnson, 'Review of My Monster/My Self', *Diacritics* 12, no. 2 (1982): 6.

¹⁰Ellen Moers, 'Female Gothic', in *Eighteenth-Century Gothic: Radcliffe, Reader, Writer, Romancer*, ed. Fred Botting and Dale Townshend (Oxford: Taylor and Francis, 2004), 124.

¹¹Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 224.

Victor Frankenstein is therefore a queer figure whose quest to create life blurs the distinctions, not just between human/monster, but male/female and mother/father. The first shot of the adaptation *Rocky Horror* is a disembodied female mouth wearing red lipstick, which lip-syncs the song 'Science Fiction/Double Feature' to a male voice, sung by screenwriter and actor Richard O'Brien. The film's opening immediately blurs sex/gender boundaries, as in the novel, and foregrounds the theme of androgyny that will be explored in Victor Frankenstein's adaptative counterpart – the transsexual alien scientist Doctor Frank-N-Furter. Frank's transsexuality adapts the concern with pregnancy and the 'natural' distinction between male and female or mother and father from Shelley's novel. Negative associations between monstrosity and transgender experience are reversed; rather than the themes of shame, secrecy, and anxiety that plague Victor Frankenstein throughout Shelley's original text, his adaptative counterpart has become a symbol of unapologetic queerness in the LGBTQ+ community. Frank-N-Furter's iconic costume highlights the film's concern with gender transgression and blurs the lines between the male and female body; hairy legs and a crotch bulge contrast with fishnets, glitter, makeup, and high heels. Transvestitism and gender queerness is further celebrated through Curry's performance of the song 'Sweet Transvestite'. *Rocky Horror* also portrays the creator/monster relationship in similar terms of parent/child dynamics. 'Tonight is the night that my beautiful creature is to be born!' declares Frank-N-Furter to the Transylvanian convention that has gathered in his lab to witness the birth.¹² The costume choice in this scene highlights his maternal role, as Shaun Shoman notes that Frank wears a green apron, 'tied like a dress around his waist, which gives the dual impression of both a doctor prepared to deliver a child and a mother about to give birth'.¹³ He also dons pink latex rubber gloves and a thick string of white pearls, reminding audiences of a 1950s housewife. Imagery tied to pregnancy and labour is also used in the scene, for example, Frank's Creature is birthed from a tank of liquid, emulating a womb like space. Alyssa Pete suggests that Rocky's solo song 'The Sword of Damocles' and the line 'I've got the feeling someone's going to be cutting the thread', 'evokes the image of cutting the umbilical cord after birth'.¹⁴ Rocky's costume is reminiscent of childhood, as he has a bleached blonde bowl cut and skimpy golden shorts which Moskot suggests 'are fashioned in such a way that viewers cannot help but connect their form to that of a diaper'.¹⁵ The film therefore portrays Frank as both mother and father to his child, the Creature Rocky, through cinematic techniques such as costume and lyricism. At the end of the film, in a replication of *King Kong* (1933), Rocky scales the stage set with Frank-N-Furter on his back, before plunging to death back into the womblike space of the pool. The pool's floor tiles depict Michelangelo's 'The Creation of Adam', utilizing biblical imagery in the same way that Shelley does in the original text to visualize the main thematic concern of genesis. This echoes Shelley's frequent biblical allusions and intertextual play with Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which the Monster reads in Volume II. The Monster himself says to Frankenstein, 'Remember that I am thy creature;

¹²*The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, directed by Jim Sharman (20th Century Fox, 1975), 33:14–33:23.

¹³Shaun Shoman, 'Frank-N-Furter or the Modern Gothic: Adapted Subversion in The Rocky Horror Picture Show', *Film Matters* 7, no. 2 (2016): 23.

¹⁴*The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, 36:43–36:47; Alyssa Pete, "'Swim the Warm Waters of Sins of the Flesh": Gender and Sexuality in Frankenstein and The Rocky Horror Picture Show', *Undergraduate Research Symposium*, University of Oregon (2019), 6.

¹⁵Moskot, 'Vulnerable Monsters', 93.

I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. Everywhere I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded.¹⁶ *Rocky Horror* queers Shelley's biblical imagery – moments before Frank's death the characters dive into the pool dressed as burlesque dancers to partake in a bisexual orgy, and audience members commonly shout, 'Last one in the pool is a heterosexual!' at the screen.¹⁷ The pool, like the laboratory tank, is a womblike and religious space that becomes queered, transforming into a site of subversive sexuality and gender transgression. *Rocky Horror* therefore adapts Victor Frankenstein's maternal desire to give birth and transgress gender boundaries through queering the character in the transexual character of Doctor Frank-N-Furter, expanding on themes of motherhood, pregnancy, and nature found in Shelley's original text.

In Shelley's 1831 introduction to the novel, she answers the question of: 'How [she], then a young girl, came to think of and to dilate upon so very hideous an idea?'¹⁸ Until 1831 it was often believed that her husband, Percy Shelley, was the author of *Frankenstein*. The gender of the author was therefore central – both in its creation and reception in the nineteenth century. Gender is also a main thematic concern of the novel: analysis of masculinity in the text reveals *Frankenstein* as a critique of nineteenth-century patriarchal attitudes, and imperialist expansionist desires are tied to gendered language in the text. Male hubris is embedded into the structure of the text through Walton's imperialistic expedition across the Arctic, with the desire to 'tame' nature and conquest landscapes emblematic of nineteenth-century British masculinity. Frankenstein also conveys his scientific endeavours in gendered terms: Monsieur Waldman teaches him that ancient philosophers, 'penetrate into the recesses of nature, and show how she works in her hiding-places'.¹⁹ In *Frankenstein*, nature is female, and Shelley explores how masculinist attitudes towards expansionism and science result in the destruction of the female. When the Monster demands that Frankenstein create a female partner for him, Frankenstein imagines a female monster 'ten thousand times more malignant than her mate'.²⁰ Victor fears the idea of the female creature's uncontrolled sexual urges, believing that 'one of the first results of those sympathies for which the daemon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth'.²¹ Male anxiety around female sexuality results in Frankenstein's destruction of the female creature:

I thought with a sensation of madness on my promise of creating another like to him, and trembling with passion, tore to pieces the thing on which I was engaged.²²

The remains of the half-finished creature, whom I had destroyed, lay scattered on the floor, and I almost felt as if I had mangled the living flesh of a human being.²³

One of the most gruesome and gory events in the novel, Victor's mutilation of the female creature has been described by Anne K. Mellor as imagery suggesting

¹⁶Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 103.

¹⁷Cosmo McKinley, 'The Rocky Horror Picture Show New York City Script', Cosmo's Factory Presents The Rocky Horror Picture Show, https://cosmosfactory.org/script_nyc.shtml (accessed October 9, 2025).

¹⁸Shelley, 'Author's Introduction', 5 [emphasis added].

¹⁹Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 49.

²⁰Ibid., 170.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., 171.

²³Ibid., 175.

a violent rape.²⁴ The word choice of ‘trembling’ connotes sex whilst ‘tore’ can be seen as a penetrative action, similar to the tearing of a hymen. Jonathan Padley argues that the female creature would be a ‘man-woman’ ‘whose very existence would emasculate, effeminise, and beautify men [...] and for this reason – to protect the potency of egotistical sublime masculinity – Frankenstein savagely recommit[s] the female’s body to the grave’.²⁵ Fear of female sexuality and anxiety surrounding the gender of the creature therefore leads to Victor ‘protecting’ his masculinity through violence. This scene is mirrored by the Monster’s retributory murder of Victor’s fiancée Elizabeth a few chapters later:

She was there, lifeless and inanimate, thrown across the bed, her head hanging down, and her pale and distorted features half covered by her hair. Every where I turn I see the same figure – her bloodless arms and relaxed form flung by the murderer on its bridal brier.²⁶

The scene of the crime conjures similar imagery of rape and sexual violence to Victor’s destruction of the female creature. Victor’s masculinist pursuit of nature has resulted in the brutal murder of his fiancée, as his ‘child’ has replicated the sexual aggression and male violence that characterized Victor’s assault against the female creature.

In *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, various forms of masculinity are parodied through the male characters. As mentioned, audience participation has become a huge dimension of *Rocky Horror*’s cult following, at both theatre goers and audiences at film showings follow scripts that poke fun at the characters, including swearing, sexual language, and pop culture references depending on the time/location of the screening. Audiences’ mainly target and make fun of Brad and Janet for their conservative attitudes to sex, being referred to simply as ‘asshole’ and ‘slut’ in the fandom. An online fan script featuring audience lines from a New York City screening showcases how gender informs audiences’ perceptions of the characters, particularly the ‘weak’ masculinity of Brad (audience lines in square brackets):

[‘Get tough, Brad!’]

Brad: Hospitality!?! All we asked was to use your telephone, goddammit, a reasonable request which you’ve chosen to ignore.

Janet: Brad, don’t be ungrateful.

Brad: Ungrateful! [when Brad removes his glasses, ‘It’s Superman!’ or, ‘Super Brad!’]²⁷

The audience satirizes Brad’s attempts to appear masculine against Frank-N-Furter, who also frequently refers to Brad’s gender – for example, in one scene he says ironically, ‘How forceful you are, Brad. Such a perfect specimen of manhood. So [...] dominant.’²⁸ Brad’s failed masculinity and sexual inferiority highlights the fluid gender expressions and transgressive sexualities that occur inside the castle, as foreshadowed by the audience interjections just before the couple meet Frank:

²⁴Anne K. Mellor, ‘Possessing Nature: The Female in *Frankenstein*’, in *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. Anne K. Mellor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 224.

²⁵Jonathan Padley, ‘Frankenstein and (Sublime) Creation’, *Romanticism* 9, no. 2 (2003): n.p.

²⁶Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 199.

²⁷The Rocky Horror Picture Show New York City Script’.

²⁸*The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, 31:01–31:08.

Janet: I'm coming with you! ['That'll be a first!'] Besides darling, the owner of that phone might be a beautiful woman, ['He is!'] and you might never come back again. ['You should be so lucky.']²⁹

Brad is shown to be sexually inferior to the 'beautiful woman' Frank, as Janet's sexual interest in the doctor is made clear early in the film – at various points he reduces her to giggles or she stares at him with her mouth agape:

Frank: You must be awfully proud of him, Janet.

Janet: ['Hey, Janet, are you a slut?'] Well, yes I am. (giggles)³⁰

Brad is later cuckolded by Frank when he seduces Janet, and is then seduced by Frank himself, demonstrating that although he is a transexual alien, he is more of a dominant 'man' than Brad. As Linda Hutcheon argues, 'Stage audiences [...] are an active dimension of the meaning-making of any play, not only in their interpretive work but also in their physical and emotional responses at the time of viewing.'³¹ Analysis of audience participation in *Rocky Horror* demonstrates how the adaptation parodies masculinity as socially constructed and reliant on sexual hierarchies, mirroring Shelley's own fascination with sex/gender roles from the original novel.

Frank-N-Furter is one of the most 'masculine' characters in *Rocky Horror*, despite being a transexual. Considering the etymology of 'Frank-N-Furter', the German frankfurter sausage, phallic imagery is present not only through Tim Curry's skimpy costuming but through the name of the character – his penis, sexual power, and domination, are constantly foregrounded in the script. Furthermore, the 'marriage' between Rocky and Frank-N-Furter highlights his queer masculinity, as Frank-N-Furter plays the role of both bride and groom at various points. However, Rocky is later shown to be chained to the marital bed, marking him as feminine and submissive. As Steven Beverburg Reale notes:

It is Frank, regardless of which gender signal he adopts at any given moment, who is invariably the dominant party, as it is Frank who determines at which moments he and Rocky will be charged as masculine or feminine. Thus, like glam rockers, Frank appropriates femininity as a transvestite (not as a transsexual) because his masculinity offers the freedom to make such an appropriation. Ultimately, Frank 'wears' femininity, but is not construed as feminine.³²

This is demonstrated through the scenes in which Frank-N-Furter seduces both Brad and Janet by masquerading as their preferred sex. Frank-N-Furter displays his own perfect image of masculinity in his song 'I Can Make You a Man'. The lyrics to the song parody the Charles Atlas 'Dynamic Tension' exercise method that was popularized in the 1920s, and foregrounds physical strength as the marker of the ideal man:

And soon in the gym/
With a determined chin/
The sweat from his pores/
As he works for his cause/

²⁹See note 17 above.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London: Routledge, 2013), 155.

³²Steven Beverburg Reale, 'A Sheep in Wolf's Corset: Timbral and Vocal Signifiers of Masculinity in The Rocky Horror Picture/Glee Show', *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* 6, no. 2 (2012): 146.

[...] He'll be a strong man.³³

As Frank-N-Furter's creation, Rocky is essentially a sex toy for the doctor, and the campy, over the top exploration of heightened masculinity in this performance is associated with the interest in the male body and the musculature in gay subcultures.³⁴ Therefore, the characterization of both Rocky and Frank-N-Furter explores contemporary queer masculinities, expanding upon Shelley's interrogation of nineteenth-century modes of masculinity from the original novel.

The 1818 preface to *Frankenstein* was written for Shelley by her husband, who declares that '[her] chief concern [...] has been limited to avoiding the enervating effects of the novels of the present day, and to the exhibition of the amiableness of domestic affection, and the excellence of universal virtue'.³⁵ Whilst contemporary understandings of *Frankenstein* may not directly link the Gothic novel with themes of domesticity, Percy Shelley correctly identifies his wife's interest in the dynamics of familial relationships and domestic occurrences. The text revolves around family structures – the Frankensteins, the DeLaceys, the Waltons, and the Monster's own search for his 'father' and creator. Viewing Shelley's concern with family from a queer perspective illuminates several moments in the plot of *Frankenstein* in which these family dynamics reveal deeper insights into the formation of gender and sexuality under emerging Capitalist concepts of the family in nineteenth-century England. In Volume Two of the novel, the Monster stalks the impoverished DeLacey family, and in doing so learns how a nineteenth-century family operates. The son is 'constantly employed out of doors' and the daughter 'in various laborious occupations within', under the patriarchal figure of their father.³⁶ The Monster's obsession with the DeLaceys showcases how notions of gender and sexuality are learned through the spectacle of family life, in which children learn from their parents how to replicate normative behaviours:

Other lessons were impressed upon me even more deeply. I heard of the difference of sexes; and the birth and growth of children; how the father doated on the smiles on the infant, and the lively sallies of the older child; how all the life and cares of the mother were wrapped up in the precious charge [...]. But where were my friends and relations? No father had watched my infant days, no mother had blessed me with smiles and caresses.³⁷

The Monster learns the roles that each gender should undertake in a domestic setting. However, when he finally interacts with the DeLaceys, the son frantically beats him and the traumatized family leave the cottage. The Monster's rejection from normal society in the microcosm of the family highlights his position as a queer outsider – he does not have a family and cannot participate in their culture. Mair Rigby argues:

[The Monster] gives strongest expression to what we might call the 'queer voice': the excluded voice on the margins, the voice that causes us to question the representation of normality. He offers not so much a new conception of family as a different perspective on the grid of cultural intelligibility through which the meaning of the signifier 'family' is constructed. From a queer perspective, one of the most intriguing aspects of the Monster's

³³*The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, 40:09–40:52.

³⁴See Murray Drummond, 'Men's Bodies: Listening to the Voices of Young Gay Men', *Men and Masculinities* 7, no. 3 (2005): 270–90.

³⁵Percy Bysshe Shelley, '1818 Preface', in *Frankenstein*, ed. Maurice Hindle (London: Penguin, 2003), 12.

³⁶Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 113.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 123–4 [emphasis added].

narrative is the way it demonstrates the reiterative power of family discourse to produce the very phenomena it claims to exclude.³⁸

Shelley's depiction of domesticity and family relationships in *Frankenstein* therefore highlights a deep concern with the limiting structure of nineteenth-century family unit as a means of replicating heterosexuality and gender norms, and instead producing queer outsiders to heteronormative society.

Furthermore, throughout *Frankenstein*, marriage is shown to be a ritual to produce economic and social gains rather than being born out of genuine heterosexual desire and love. Elizabeth writes to Victor, 'You well know [...] that our union had been the favourite plan of your parents ever since our infancy. We were told this when young, and taught to look forward to it as an event that would certainly take place.'³⁹ It is economic gain that motivates Victor's father to marry the two cousins – 'Through my father's exertions a part of the inheritance of Elizabeth had been restored to her by the Austrian government. A small possession on the shores of Como belonged to her.'⁴⁰ All other marriages in the text are motivated by practical reasons rather than genuine desire – for example, for the Arabian Safie, 'The prospect of marrying a Christian and remaining in a country where women were allowed to take a rank in society was enchanting to her.'⁴¹ And so she marries Felix DeLacey. Victor's anxiety surrounding his impending marriage to his cousin is manifested through the presence of the Monster, who vows – 'I will be with you on your wedding-night!'⁴² The phrase haunts Victor and Shelley uses homoerotic language to convey the Monster's queer presence on the wedding night, as 'he had determined to consummate his crimes by [Victor's] death'.⁴³ Shelley highlights how Victor puts on a performance that he is looking forward to the wedding:

I concealed my feelings by an appearance of hilarity that brought smiles and joy to the countenance of my father. Preparations were made for the event, congratulatory visits were received, and all wore a smiling appearance. I shut up, as well as I could, in my own heart the anxiety that preyed there and entered with seeming earnestness into the plans of my father, although they might only serve as the decorations of my tragedy.⁴⁴

Shelley's concern with marriage as a social and economic tool, and the anxiety Victor feels due to the presence of the queer figure of the monster on his wedding night, with marriage as 'the seal to his fate', showcases a complex understanding of compulsory heterosexuality even 200 years before Adrienne Rich coined the term.⁴⁵ Those who engage in feminist readings of the text suggest that the Monster's murder of Elizabeth is the killing of the ideal, submissive wife. Jaqueline M. Labbe argues that the murder 'makes real what the story and the law have all along subtly acknowledged as the figurative result of wedlock – the death of the woman'.⁴⁶ Furthermore, Katherine Ellis explains:

In *Frankenstein*, the function of the family is one of splitting and restricting. By outlawing all behaviour not conducive to harmony, the bourgeois family perpetuates itself by producing

³⁸Mair Rigby, 'Monstrous Desire: Frankenstein and the Queer Gothic' (PhD diss., Cardiff University, 2006), 38.

³⁹Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 191.

⁴⁰Ibid., 195–6.

⁴¹Ibid., 127.

⁴²Ibid., 192.

⁴³Ibid., 192–3.

⁴⁴Ibid., 195.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Jaqueline M. Labbe, 'A Monstrous Fiction: Frankenstein and the Wifely Ideal', *Women's Writing* 6, no. 3 (1999): 353.

divided selves, each half desperately searching for a magic someone with whom a union can take place that will end the split.⁴⁷

By acknowledging the overlapping interests between feminist and queer readings of *Frankenstein*, then, a fully rounded view of heterosexual marriage and the domestic family structure in the text showcases Shelley's concern with the formation of queer outsiders to society, and the ultimate failure and destruction of heteronormative society.

By queering the story of *Frankenstein*, *Rocky Horror* similarly critiques heterosexual marriage and the sexual norms of contemporary culture. The respective hero and heroine Brad and Janet are presented as a strait-laced, 'square' couple who are queered through their experience in Frank-N-Furter's castle and the sexual debauchery that occurs there. In the opening scene of the film, in which Brad and Janet attend their friends' wedding, the filmmakers parody the church rituals: the guests throw rice at the bride and groom, Janet catches the bride's bouquet and screams hysterically, and the honeymoon car reads 'WAIT TILL TONITE SHE GOT HERS NOW HE'LL GET HIS.'⁴⁸ The scene sets up the expected roles of each gender in marriage, for example, Brad labels the marriage a success because, '[e]veryone knows that Betty's a wonderful little cook. Why, Ralph himself he'll be in line for a promotion in a year or two.'⁴⁹ The following musical number 'Damn it Janet', in which Brad proposes, parodies heterosexuality most obviously in its setting – the graveyard of the church. As the performance moves inside, a coffin is brought out to prepare for a funeral. This symbolism parodies conventional treatment of heterosexual love in Hollywood culture as eternal, instead showcasing anxieties around the confining nature of marriage. Vera Dika argues:

Seen from the perspective of the 1970s, this highly coded sequence takes us back to the style of the 1950s in mildly parodistic form [...] We are meant to think of that past and its clearly well defined gender roles [...] as well as its uncomplicated acceptance of monogamous heterosexuality, as conventions of a bygone era.⁵⁰

Whilst the film pokes fun at how 'straight' Brad and Janet are, the presentation of heterosexual marriage, with its threat of sexual violence ('HE'LL GET HIS'), is a strong critique of gendernormativity, religion, and marriage in American society. Furthermore, the events of the film 'queer' Brad and Janet by the end of the film. As suggested by the narrator, the Criminologist, the couple taste 'forbidden fruit' when they have sex with Frank-N-Furter – for Brad, because he is engaging in homosexuality, and for Janet, because she is engaging in pre-marital sex.⁵¹ Near the end of the film, the song 'Rose Tint My World' is performed as a burlesque which leads to a bisexual orgy in the pool, and the lyrics showcase how their heteronormative view of life and sexuality has been queered by the events at the castle. Brad and Janet are no longer sexually repressed and seeking heterosexual union, and instead the queering of the couple not only celebrates fluidity and sensuality but invokes a successful critique of the nature of compulsory heterosexuality in 1970s America. *Rocky Horror* mirrors Shelley's interest in heterosexual marriage, domesticity, and familial relationships by using

⁴⁷Katherine Ellis, 'Paradise Lost: The Limits of Domesticity in the Nineteenth Century Novel', *Feminist Studies* 2, no. 2 (1975): 60.

⁴⁸*The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, 06:37.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 07:16–07:29.

⁵⁰Vera Dika, *Recycled Culture in Contemporary Art and Film: The Uses of Nostalgia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 110–1.

⁵¹*The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, 1:15:44.

satire and parody to critique the heteronormative standards of 1970s America. By making queerness explicit in this adaptation, writers Jim Sharman and Richard O'Brien have utilized *Frankenstein* as a tool with which to interrogate sexual repression and queer subcultures in the context of contemporary American society. This overtly parodic presentation of heterosexuality allows viewers and scholars to reflect more deeply on Shelley's own treatment of compulsory heterosexuality and cultural anxieties around marriage.

The Rocky Horror Picture Show is a cult classic because it adapts a classic text to show it in a new, queer light, by using Shelley's *Frankenstein* to comment on contemporary issues surrounding gender and sexuality in 1970s American society. Through use of pastiche, camp, parody, and musicality, the film visualizes and exaggerates queerness in the original text to craft a comedic adaptation that also makes interesting critiques surrounding heterosexuality and masculinity in modern America. Just like Shelley's novel and its interest in marriage, domesticity, family relationships and heterosexuality, the film explores 'straight' America through the couple Brad and Janet. By queering the character Victor Frankenstein through his transexual counterpart Frank-N-Furter, the film plays with Frankenstein's desire to give birth to his creation by employing cross dressing and gender bending – ultimately celebrating queer masculinities via Frankenstein and the Monster's adaptative counterparts. The film ultimately allows for reflection on queer subtexts in Shelley's novel, and the adaptation's more obvious interrogations of contemporary cultural norms can prompt a reinvestigation of Shelley's implicit critiques or explorations of nineteenth-century British masculinity, heterosexual marriage, and gender. If, as Pamela Demory suggests, '[b]oth adaptation and queerness suffer from the stereotype of being secondary, somehow less authentic', then this article has shown that affording serious attention to queer adaptations of canonical texts can illuminate areas of study in Romantic scholarship in new ways.⁵²

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Notes on Contributor

Katie MacLean is a Carnegie Trust-funded PhD researcher at the University of Stirling. Her project investigates Jane Austen and the theatre from the eighteenth century to present day, focusing on queer dimensions of adaptation and performance. She was the 2024 Jane Austen Scholar-in-Residence at Goucher College, Maryland, and a 2024 Visiting Fellow at Chawton House, contributing to the exhibition 'Sisters of the Pen: Jane Austen, Influence, Legacy'. She is the incoming Editor-in-Chief of *Romance, Revolution and Reform* Journal and her first article, 'Becoming Jane on Stage: Queerness in Early Twentieth-Century Austen Bioplays', was recently published by *Adaptation Journal*.

ORCID

Katie MacLean  <http://orcid.org/0009-0008-6048-7961>

⁵²Pamela Demory, 'Queer/Adaptation: An Introduction', in *Queer/Adaptation: An Introduction*, ed. Pamela Demory (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 1.