

# Pet Sematary, or Stephen King Re-Appropriating the Frankenstein Myth

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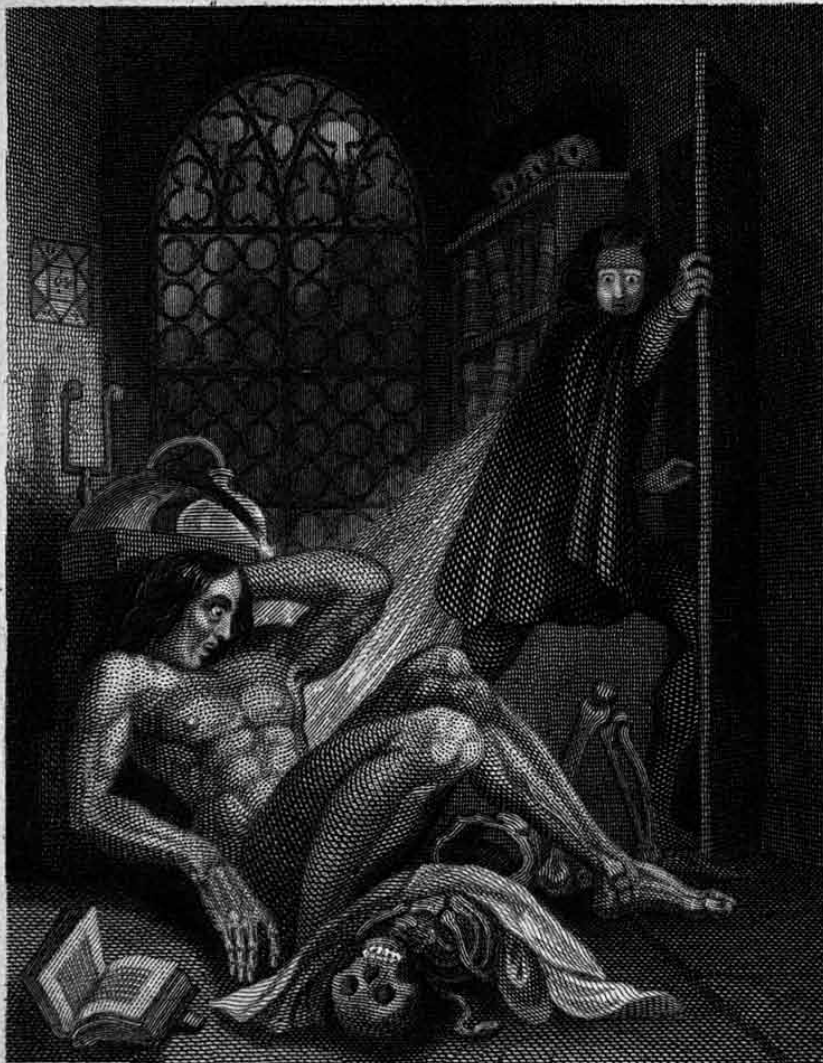
## Summary

The horror bestseller writer Stephen King has been acknowledged for updating the fundamental motifs of the horror story to suit the taste of contemporary audiences. In his seminal work *Danse Macabre* (1981), devoted to discussing the intricacies of horror fiction, King pays homage to great classics of the genre, ultimately confessing his admiration for the nineteenth-century novel *Frankenstein* (1818), which presents many intertextual links with his own novel *Pet Sematary* (1983). The plot in King's novel runs parallel to that of Mary Shelley, as it also depicts the life of a doctor, Louis Creed, who decides to trespass forbidden limits in order to bring his beloved departed back to life. In both cases, these two scientists dare defy the powers of the unknown, playing God in an increasingly atheist and too scientifically based society. However, if Victor Frankenstein achieves his purpose as a result of his scientific obsession, Louis Creed's sin is precisely rooted in his scepticism with regard to faith and religion. This paper aims at analysing both works from a comparative perspective in order to underline how the gothic and the sinister is treated and is transformed from Shelley's classic to King's contemporary novel.

## I. Stephen King's poetics and tribute to the classics

If there is an author that has remained a brand name for the last decades in contemporary popular horror fiction, that author must definitely be Stephen King. Having achieved such extraordinary status since the publication of his first novel *Carrie* (1974), some detractors, sceptical about popular fiction, have often accused him of producing thick volumes with great speed and resorting to any means to achieve

◀ Frontispicio de la edición de *Frankenstein* o el moderno Prometeo de 1831



T. Holst, del.

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## FRANKENSTEIN.

*"By the glimmer of the half-extinguished  
light, I saw the dull, yellow eye of the  
creature open; it breathed hard, and a  
convulsive motion agitated its limbs.  
\*\*\* I rushed out of the room."*

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the intended effect of horrifying the reader. However, literary critics, such as Samuel Schuman, have also tried to identify the outstanding elements that have turned Stephen King into a best-selling contemporary author. A great capacity to imagine effective plots, an ability to create unique characters, as well as a powerfully ethical attitude matching his New England origins<sup>1</sup>, have often been highlighted as remarkable strengths of his prose. Nonetheless, through time, King has mainly become a cult author for his utmost understanding of his readership as well as his extensive knowledge about the great classics of the genre.

Stephen King has excelled in reaching his audience through his belief in the need to cause a particular effect on the reader. Knowing well about the emotional needs of his audience, he chooses an effect and constructs an imaginary universe making use of any means to achieve that intended effect. Likewise, King has also shown his conscientious ways as a writer, reflecting upon horror as a genre in his nonfiction volume *Danse Macabre* (1981), and even about his own creative technique in his poetics *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* (2000). His passionate care about "the art and craft of telling stories"<sup>2</sup>, as he defines it in his volume *On Writing*, as well as his concern about producing an effect on the reader, have often led critics such as Burton R. Pollin to compare him with Edgar Allan Poe<sup>3</sup>, especially as Stephen King has acknowledged his debt to the nineteenth-century short-story writer and master of the genre on many occasions.

In this respect, even if King is well aware of being considered a popular writer, he has often made use of his knowledge about classic works of the genre to adapt them and update them in his works, reworking classic tales to make them popular and suitable for contemporary audiences. Hence, *Salem's Lot* (1975) has been considered King's homage to Bram Stoker's seminal vampire novel, and likewise, *The Shining* (1977) has often been interpreted as King's own account of the classical haunted-house story in gothic fiction<sup>4</sup>. In this sense, in his nonfiction account about the evolution of contemporary horror fiction, *Danse Ma-*

1. Samuel Schuman, "Taking Stephen King Seriously: Reflections on a Decade of Best-Sellers", *The Gothic World of Stephen King: Landscape of Nightmares*, eds. Gary Hoppenstand and Ray B. Browne (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Press, 1987) p.109.

2. Stephen King, *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2001) p. xi.

3. Burton R. Pollin, "Stephen King's Fiction and the Heritage of Poe", *Poe's Seductive Influence on Great Writers* (New York: iUniverse, 2004) pp. 230-243.

4. Gary Hoppenstand and Ray B. Browne, "The Horror of It All: Stephen King and the Landscape of the American Nightmare" *The Gothic World of Stephen King: Landscape of Nightmares*, eds. Gary Hoppenstand and Ray B. Browne (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Press, 1987) p.2.

*cabre*, King pays homage to great classics of the genre, confessing his admiration for *Frankenstein* (1818). With regard to Mary Shelley's novel, Stephen King sarcastically wonders:

How did it happen that this modest gothic tale, which was only about a hundred pages long in its first draft (Ms Shelley's husband, Percy encouraged her to flesh it out), became caught in a kind of cultural echo chamber, amplifying through the years until, a hundred and sixty-four years later, we have a cereal called Frankenberry [...] an old TV series called The Munsters [...] Aurora Frankenstein model kits [...] and a saying such as 'He looked like Frankenstein' as a kind of apotheosis of ugly?<sup>5</sup>

Apart from showing the enormous popularity Mary Shelley's novel still retains nowadays even in popular culture through films and TV series, Stephen King's hilarious comments in the decade of the 1980s incidentally display a pervasive inaccuracy on behalf of the author almost certainly due to the popularity of the Frankenstein myth. Even if unconsciously, in the last sentence of his remark shown above, Stephen King refers to the monster naming it Frankenstein, when in Mary Shelley's original novel, the creature remains unnamed all throughout, as the appellative Frankenstein only responds to the family name of the monster's creator, Victor. Nonetheless, the fact of mistaking the name of the creator for that of the creature has been the result of the popularisation of the story in subsequent adaptations, especially in films, which have greatly contributed to making this inaccuracy highly persistent.

Stephen King's comments on the popularity of Mary Shelley's novel also echo the more recent words of Paul O'Flinn, arguing that "there is no such thing as *Frankenstein*, there are only *Frankensteins*, as the text is ceaselessly rewritten, reproduced, refilmed and redesigned"<sup>6</sup>. Likewise, O'Flinn also claims *Frankenstein* arises as a good example of the three major ways in which alteration and rearrangement of a text take place, that is, through a corpus of literary criticism, through adaptation in films, and through the passage of time itself which necessarily refocuses a text and reorders its elements. In this sense, a literary critical apparatus such as feminism interpreted Mary Shelley's first novel as a woman's experience of patriarchy and domesticity. Classic film versions of *Frankenstein* from Universal Pictures or Hammer Films aimed at attracting the audience by means of dehumanising the monster, as in many of the film versions the creature becomes inarticulate and evil, as totally opposed to its characterisation in the original novel. Likewise, through time, the same text has acquired different meanings regardless of the author's primary intention.

5. Stephen King, *Danse Macabre* (London: Warner, 2000) pp.71-2.

6. Paul O'Flinn, "Production and Reproduction: The Case of *Frankenstein*", *Horror, The Film Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005) p.105.

Hence, Stephen King makes use of this third way of altering and rearranging a text, taking the basic elements and discourses of Mary Shelley's eponymous novel, and transforming them to suit the demands of contemporary audiences. The main discourse underlining Mary Shelley's novel warns about the frightening dangers of stretching the limits of science too far, as Victor Frankenstein crosses the boundaries of life and death so as to attain the gift of immortality by scientific means. The plot of Stephen King's novel *Pet Sematary* (1983) runs parallel to that of Mary Shelley, as it also depicts the life of a doctor, Louis Creed, who decides to trespass forbidden limits in order to bring his beloved departed back to life. In both cases, these two scientists dare defy the powers of the unknown, playing God in an increasingly atheist and too scientifically based society, even if both novels place a different emphasis on either the scientific or religious discourse.

## II. The biographical origins of the myth

In terms of the personal experiences that gave rise to their novels, both Mary Shelley and Stephen King seemed particularly concerned to give account of them in the preface of their respective works. Mary Shelley's narrative of the origins of *Frankenstein* in her introduction of the 1831 edition of the novel has acquired great popularity through time<sup>7</sup>. The summer Percy and Mary Shelley spent in Switzerland in 1816 as neighbours of Lord Byron proved uncongenial and particularly rainy, and thus, following the request of the author of *Childe Harold*, they all decided to write a ghost story. At first, Mary Shelley felt unable to think of a story until the genesis of her *Frankenstein* began to take shape in a dream. Lord Byron and Percy Shelley had lately been discussing the principles of existence due to Erasmus Darwin's discoveries and Luigi Galvani's experiments, and whether there was any possibility of reanimating a body deprived of life. Mary had remained a silent but devout listener to all their conversations. Arguably, arising from these scientific debates, she dreamt of an ambitious student, who eager to play the role of the Creator, had endowed dead matter with the spark of life, and while he lied sleeping, his creation stood by his side staring at its own maker. This vision began to haunt Mary, and thus, she decided to use it in her story, believing that what had terrified her would also terrify others.

Similarly, in the introduction to his novel, Stephen King also comments on the way he came up with the central idea in *Pet Sematary*<sup>8</sup>. In the 1970s, King was invited to spend a year at the University of Maine as a writer in residence and also as a lecturer in the literature of the fan-

7. Mary Shelley, "Author's Introduction to the Standard Novels Edition (1831)", *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus* (London: Penguin, 2003) pp. 5-10.

8. Stephen King, "Introduction", *Pet Sematary* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989) pp. xi-xiv.

tastic. To that end, King's family rented a house near the campus in a rural town. Even though it was a quiet environment, a neighbour warned them about the dangers of the road nearby, busy with tanker trucks going to the chemical plant down the way. King began to gain insight into that surrounding menace when he discovered a path that led to a little pet cemetery in the woods, where the children from the neighbourhood used to bury their pets; most of them having been run over on the road.

At the time, Stephen King and his wife, Tabitha, had an eight-year-old daughter and a son that was less than two years of age. Hence, they became particularly concerned about the threat that busy road by their house might pose. Nonetheless, those fears became reified when their daughter's pet, a cat named Smucky, was run over and correspondingly buried in the pet cemetery of the area. As King admits, that was the first event that made his daughter wonder about death. Likewise, King was soon to undergo one of the scariest experiences of his life when he went to fly a kite with his son, and even if he was merely a toddler, he began to run towards the road while a big truck was approaching fast. King reacted quickly, thus preventing any kind of tragedy, but from then onwards, he could not help but think what might have happened if, on that occasion, he had not been cautious enough.

In King's opinion, his novel *Pet Sematary* arose from the distress experienced at that time, admitting that, once he had finished writing the book, he felt reluctant to publish it and thus left the manuscript untouched for years, precisely due to the anguishing and startling effect the events described in the novel still exerted on him. In this sense, King himself has admitted that his readers generally regard *The Shining* (1977) as the novel that scares them most, although he has always considered *Pet Sematary* the most frightening book he has ever written, mainly for the personal and fearsome experiences that gave rise to the novel.

In both cases, the primary ideas underlying *Frankenstein* and *Pet Sematary* came up to their respective authors from the personal incidents that befell them at the time. Nevertheless, at a more unconscious level, it seems necessary to gain insight into the reasons why these personal experiences proved particularly frightening for the authors. Mary Shelley's nightmare about the scientist staring at the abominable creature he had endowed with life may have arisen from the conversations about the principle of life that Byron and Percy Shelley held, but arguably, it was also related to Mary Shelley's own personal fears of motherhood and giving birth. Her mother, the early feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, died of puerperal fever only ten days after Mary's birth. Having been raised only by her father, Mary tried to hold on to family life through her union with the poet Percy B. Shelley. Nevertheless, she had a series of premature babies that died soon after their birth, and likewise, her first son, William, also tragically passed away at the

age of three. Giving birth to death instead of life, Mary Shelley created *Frankenstein* as a reflection of her motherhood gone wrong, also conceiving it as a novel of initiation into the crudities of existence through the need to accept decease and not to tamper with the natural order of life and death. In this respect, feminist readings of Mary Shelley's novel have reflected upon a male appropriation of motherhood which ends in blatant catastrophe, as both Victor Frankenstein, and by extension, doctor Louis Creed in Stephen King's novel, being males, dare to give birth to life. As a case in point, Nora Crook has drawn attention to reading *Frankenstein* as a birth myth as the span of Captain Walton's narrative extends to nine months and a day<sup>9</sup>.

Similarly, Stephen King's novel *Pet Sematary* seems to owe much to his own experience of fatherhood and family life. Raised only by his mother, as his father abandoned the family when Stephen was only two years of age, King, like Mary Shelley, also praised the ethics of family life precisely because of having endured the absence of a parent when he was a child. Hence, the tragedy that might have unfolded had he not been attentive enough to watch over his two-year-old son playing by the road, appeared to conceal even more intricate fears such as whether he could consider himself a good and devoted parent in comparison to his own father.

### III. *Literary formula and development: plot and characterisation*

In terms of characterisation, plot and even underlying discourses, saving the necessary temporal distance, Stephen King's novel *Pet Sematary* presents important intertextual links with Mary Shelley's classic novel *Frankenstein*. As a romantic hero and devoted scientist surmounting the limitations that characterise human beings, Victor Frankenstein finds his counterpart in Louis Creed in Stephen King's novel. Louis Creed is a medical doctor and a family man, rational and agnostic, who views death as the end of all things. Conversely, in King's novel, it is Louis' wife, Rachel, counterpart to Elizabeth Lavenza in Mary Shelley's novel, who presents a trauma with death as a result of witnessing the painful demise of her disabled sister when Rachel was merely eight years of age.

As Victor Frankenstein leaves home to study at Ingolstadt University, Louis Creed and his family, that is, his wife Rachel, and his two children Eileen and Gage, move from Chicago to Maine once Louis is informed he has been accepted for a position at university. Even if both Victor and Louis are significantly dutiful to their respective families,

9. Nora Crook, "Mary Shelley, Author of *Frankenstein*", *A Companion to the Gothic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) p. 59.

Victor gradually grows estranged from them due to his absorbing devotion to science, and likewise, Louis cannot help but wish he was sometimes on his own, free from any duties and responsibilities. In Mary Shelley's novel, Victor thus states:

"I pursued my undertaking with unremitting ardour. My cheek had grown pale with study, and my person had become emaciated with confinement. Sometimes, on the very brink of certainty, I failed; yet still I clung to the hope which the next day or the next hour might realise. One secret which I alone possessed was the hope to which I had dedicated myself"<sup>10</sup>.

Victor Frankenstein's willing isolation to pursue his scientific studies, far away from home, is echoed by Louis Creed's secret dream that he was sometimes alone, away from his family, and thus, able to do his wish. In Stephen King's novel, Louis indulges in day-dreaming about escaping his responsibilities as a family man in this way:

"A wild but not unattractive idea suddenly came to him: he would suggest that they go back to Bangor for something to eat while they waited for the moving van, and when his three hostages to fortune got out, he would floor the accelerator and drive away without so much as a look back, foot to the mat, the wagon's huge four-barrel carburetor gobbling expensive gasoline. He would drive south, all the way to Orlando, Florida, where he would get a job at Disney World as a medic, under a new name"<sup>11</sup>.

Victor Frankenstein begins his experiments to bring dead tissue back to life at university, unable to accept the unfair death of his mother at giving birth to his younger brother William. Similarly, in King's novel, Louis Creed begins to gain insight into the nature of death, as one of his patients, Victor Pascow<sup>12</sup>, dies in his surgery, and his daughter, Eileen, has to bear the death of her pet cat, Church, run over by a truck<sup>13</sup>.

While resorting to his vast scientific knowledge so as to find a way to defeat death, Victor Frankenstein meets divergent opinions. Professor Krempe attempts to dissuade Victor from pursuing his experiments and mocks his fondness for medieval alchemists such as Cornelius Agrippa and Paracelsus, stating that "every instant that you have was-

10. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (London: Penguin, 2003) p. 55.

11. Stephen King, *Pet Sematary* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989) p. 4.

12. Victor Pascow's name in Stephen King's book also seems to pay homage to Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's novel.

13. This event necessarily recalls Stephen King's own biographical account about his own daughter having to bear the loss of her cat, Smucky, which, significantly enough, as happens in the novel with Eileen's cat, Church, was also run over by a truck.



ted on those books is utterly and entirely lost"<sup>14</sup>. Conversely, Professor Waldman becomes Victor's mentor, and even if at first he is reluctant to tell him about his own findings, Waldman's ideas inspire Victor to play God and endow the departed with immortality, ultimately confessing to Victor he is happy to have a disciple. In Stephen King's novel, Jud Crandall, a neighbour that lives nearby, is the first to let Louis know about the pet cemetery in the woods, where Eileen's cat is ultimately buried. Like Professor Waldman in Mary Shelley's novel, even if he is at first reluctant to tell Louis the story of that place, Jud finally discloses that the area around is truly known as the Micmac burial ground, and in former times, it was regarded as a sacred place of worship for the Native Americans<sup>15</sup>. However, like Professor Krempe, Jud Crandall also warns Louis about the magic of the burial ground as well as of its resurrecting power, thus ultimately revealing he heard of both pets and neighbours that, even if departed, were buried in the ground and came back alive, but behaving in a different, and at times, even malevolent way. Jud thus ultimately reminds Louis that, in spite of the grief, "sometimes death is better"<sup>16</sup>, concluding that burying the beloved ones in the magic ground to bring them back to life may end in disaster.

If Victor becomes aware of the success of his experiments when he beholds an abominable creature standing by his bedside and staring at him, Louis Creed also gains insight into the magic of the burial ground when, after burying his daughter's pet cat, it comes back alive, even if behaving in a wild way, and Louis, showing his surprise, sarcastically calls it 'Frankencat.' Nonetheless, Louis' nightmare truly begins when his son Gage tragically dies, and Louis has to face the dilemma whether to bury him in the Micmac ground, or simply, accept his death. Like Victor Frankenstein, who out of grief at the death of his mother, decides to explore the limits separating life from death, Louis Creed, desperate to bring his son back to life, buries Gage in the sacred ground, in spite of Jud Crandall's warning. If Victor Frankenstein's creature proves destructive, in King's novel, Gage also comes back to life with murderous tendencies, bringing fatality and destruction to Louis' family<sup>17</sup>. Hence,

14. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (London: Penguin, 2003) p. 47.

15. In some postcolonial readings of Mary Shelley's novel, the creature is interpreted as the colonised subject that arises so as to win his freedom from subjection. In Stephen King's novel, this postcolonial interpretation is given further plausibility as the Micmac burial ground, a former sacred place for Native Americans, is said to have been destroyed and appropriated by colonisers. Its ground still retains some magic power that brings the departed back to life, even if they turn into evil individuals.

16. Stephen King, *Pet Sematary* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989) p. 180.

17. The transformation of the family's cat as well as that of Gage, once they are brought back to life, necessarily brings to mind other classic short-stories within horror fiction such as Edgar Allan Poe's "The Black Cat" (1843), with Pluto as a malevolent cat, and W.W. Jacobs' "The Monkey's Paw" (1902), as the grieved parents wish their beloved son came back to life.

both Victor Frankenstein and Louis Creed are ultimately punished for the sin of daring play God.

#### IV. Instances of intertextuality: similarities and alterations

Both novels present illustrative examples of intertextuality as well as passages that are strongly reminiscent of each other. As a case in point, Louis Creed's vision of his recently departed patient, Victor Pascow, standing by his bedside seems to be a clear homage to Victor Frankenstein's own vision of the creature for the first time, thus echoing Mary Shelley's passage about the scientist's nightmare. In King's novel, the scene is portrayed in the following way:

Something woke him much later, a crash loud enough to cause him to sit up in bed, wondering if Ellie had fallen on the floor or if maybe Gage's crib had collapsed. Then the moon sailed out from behind a cloud, flooding the room with cold white light, and he saw Victor Pascow standing in the doorway. The crash had been Victor Pascow throwing open the door.

He stood there with his head grotesquely bashed in behind the left temple. The blood had dried on his face in maroon stripes like Indian war-paint. His collarbone jutted whitely. He was grinning<sup>18</sup>.

Similarly, in Mary Shelley's novel, Victor Frankenstein's realisation that the creature has been born to a new life is described in the following terms:

I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed: when, by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window shutters, I beheld the wretch — the miserable monster whom I had created. He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me. His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks<sup>19</sup>.

These two passages present remarkable similarities in what arises as a key scene in both novels, when the heroes gain insight into the vision of the creature for the first time and thus realise the forthcoming destruction that is awaiting them.

Despite the blatant intertextual links existing between both novels, Stephen King also re-appropriated Mary Shelley's myth introducing some important changes so as to update the story and adapt it to the field of popular fiction, but also due to the inevitable transformation the myth

18. Stephen King, *Pet Sematary* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989) p. 84.

19. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (London: Penguin, 2003) p. 59.

had already undergone through time and the subsequent adaptations that had been made since the publication of the novel, especially in films. In Mary Shelley's novel, Victor Frankenstein is depicted as ambitious and defiant, totally relying on science as a means to explore limits that are forbidden. Louis Creed is also a scientist, but he is not described as an individual, in the Romantic sense, but as a family man, and his attempts to bring the dead back to life do not respond to ambition or scientific advancement but rather to his inability to cope with the pain and grief at the loss of his son.

Likewise, the creature in Mary Shelley's novel is perceived as inherently good, sensitive and intelligent. Nonetheless, he is corrupted by society as he finds out his abominable appearance only causes fear and hate, thus ultimately turning into an evil creature for his perpetual rejection in society. Conversely, in King's novel, even if aware of the transformation his son will undergo when he returns from the Micmac burial ground, Louis clings to the hope that the creature would still be his son. Hence, the monster in Mary Shelley's novel is perceived as physically revolting, but has a heart of gold, while in King's novel, the creature is the perfect spitting image of the beloved departed but is inherently evil. Both Victor and Louis are deceived by appearances, as Victor is unable to perceive his son behind its abominable physique, while Louis mistakes a creature that merely looks like his Gage for his actual son. Actually, if Victor Frankenstein's creature learns to read on his own and is highly intelligent, the creatures in King's novel are dumb and non-human, unable to speak and think rationally<sup>20</sup>. Victor is also incapable to perceive the goodness and intelligence in the creature, while Louis is unable to perceive its dumbness and wickedness. The method utilised in Mary Shelley's novel to bring the dead back to life is also reversed in King's text, as Victor Frankenstein needs to unearth corpses to bring them back to life, while Louis has to bury them so that they attain immortality, as the Micmac burial ground literally becomes a malevolent earthly womb.

Likewise, Stephen King's novel also introduces an important alteration with regard to Mary Shelley's original novel. In *Frankenstein*, the creature asks Victor to provide it with a female mate, but subsequently, Victor rejects this possibility precisely because of the danger that the dissemination of these creatures could pose to the whole of humankind. Victor's fears are reified in Stephen King's novel when different creatures arise from the Micmac burial ground to cause destruction and desolation. In this sense, the existence of these creatures becomes ende-

20. The portrayal of the creatures in King's novel as flat and dumb characters owes much to the way Frankenstein's monster's creation has been traditionally depicted in classic films, in which the monster is unable to speak and is perceived as simply non-human. This tendency changed with Kenneth Branagh's film entitled *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994), where the creature is given a more humane portrait, and is thus significantly depicted more faithfully to the original novel.

mic, as a legion of evil doubles of the former beings they had recently been. Victor's creature is thus perceived as unique, a social outcast, and is the result of a man's delusions of grandeur, whereas the creatures arising from the Micmac burial ground in King's novel are numerous and threaten to become widespread, thus hinting that Louis' mistake as a result of grief may happen to anyone in the same situation, and thus, it is implied, by the end of the novel, that the spreading of the evil creatures will never be put to an end.

### V. Discourses: the family, the gothic and science

Given the parental and biographical background underlining the origins of both novels, and despite the temporal and geographical differences separating them, both *Frankenstein* and *Pet Semetary* portray the decadence of family life and the loss of innocence, thus reflecting the times when these two works originated. As a New England ethical man, Stephen King's novels have been mostly interpreted within a reactionary discourse that often prevails in popular fiction, and accordingly, some of his most outstanding works often discuss the consequences of neglecting family life. In this sense, King's first heroine, Carrie, was raised as an only child in the sole company of a fervent religious mother. Danny Torrance in King's novel *The Shining* is an apparent victim of abuse due to his father's alcoholic addiction. Likewise, Mary Shelley's novel was engendered having been clearly influenced by Romantic tenets, and thus, in reaction to the oppressive rationalism that had characterised the Enlightenment. The importance given to reason and intellectualism might have also reminded Mary of her own father, William Godwin, with whom she spent a lonely and isolated childhood at home, often listening in silence to the conversations her father held with the intellectuals of the time. Hence, the rationalism that was then exalted left neither space for the display of one's feelings nor for the indulging upbringing of a child in domesticity. In this respect, Madlen Dolar has interpreted the creature in Mary Shelley's novel as "the realisation of the subject of the Enlightenment", since it is created *ex nihilo*, excluded from nature, and his monstrosity simply reflects the monstrosity of culture without nature<sup>21</sup>.

Both novels also present many features characterising the gothic genre. Nonetheless, each respective text contributed greatly to subverting as well as updating the way Gothicism was understood up to then. Not only has *Frankenstein* been traditionally considered the first science fiction novel, but as Fred Botting points out, Mary Shelley's novel de-

21. Madlen Dolar, "I shall be with you on your wedding night': Lacan and the uncanny" *Reading Popular Narrative: A Source Book*, ed. Bob Ashley (London: Leicester University Press, 1997) p. 199.

ployed standard gothic conventions and displayed few of the traditional gothic elements<sup>22</sup>. The story is set in the eighteenth-century rather than in medieval times, there are no ruined castles or abbeys but rather a gloomy laboratory instead, and Victor Frankenstein, even if acknowledged as the hero of the story, also ultimately happens to be its wicked villain. Likewise, Stephen King sets his stories in the contemporary society and often in the daylight, twisting the normal into the abnormal, thus shifting the fundamental motifs of the horror story to adapt them to current times for the sake of verisimilitude. Thus, most of King's stories take place in American middle-class suburbs and depict the everyday life of a family when, quite unexpectedly, all of a sudden, things begin to fall apart.

Hence, rather than resorting to the recurrent display of gothic clichés, the way both authors conceived fear had a profound psychological base. In this sense, Mary Shelley stated she intended her novel "to speak to the mysterious fears of our nature and awaken thrilling horror — one to make the reader dread to look round, to curdle the blood, and quicken the beatings of the heart"<sup>23</sup>. According to Nora Crook, Mary Shelley's conception of fear can be interpreted as lying in the "unconscious and inexplicable sources of psychic disturbance"<sup>24</sup>, and thus addressing our innermost fears.

Likewise, Stephen King's success as a brand name author in popular horror fiction must be partly attributed to his expertise at knowing the emotional needs of his audience, and thus, his will to resort to them so as to produce a particular effect on his readers. King is thus capable of compiling a list of fears, or phobic pressure points, as he calls them, considered to be generally extended among people, and thus, likely to be addressed in his novels. Significantly enough, King seems to be quoting Mary Shelley's words in his nonfiction essay "The Horror Market Writer and the Ten Bears" (1973), when he claims that his ideas to write horror stories come from his nightmares, stating, as Mary Shelley did in the preface to her novel, that "a good assumption to begin with is what scares you will scare someone else"<sup>25</sup>. Hence, once he has selected the particular fear he would like to address, King uses different strategies to produce the intended effect on the reader, resorting to tripartite strategies such as terror, horror, or if necessary, even the gross-out<sup>26</sup>.

22. Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 2004) p. 101.

23. Mary Shelley, "Author's introduction to the standard novels edition (1831)", *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus* (London: Penguin, 2003) pp. 7-8.

24. Nora Crook, "Mary Shelley, Author of *Frankenstein*", *A Companion to the Gothic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) p. 59.

25. Stephen King, "The Horror Market Writer and the Ten Bears", *Popular Fiction: An Anthology*, ed. Gary Hoppenstand (New York: Longman, 1997) p. 93.

26. Stephen King, *Danse Macabre*, (London: Warner, 2000) pp. 36-7.

Mary Shelley's novel has been heralded as the first science fiction narrative. In King's novel, Victor Frankenstein's laboratory turns into the Micmac burial ground; a magic place that can bring the dead back to life. This shift in the setting also underlines the transformation in the main discourses discussed in each novel. Mary Shelley's novel has been interpreted as a cautionary tale depicting the fatality that may result from the scientific replacement of nature and humanity, thus placing an emphasis on the manipulation of science to achieve dissolute ends. Stretching the ethical limits of life for the sake of ambition and vanity as well as defying any pre-established order can only bring about a chaotic and monstrous reality as a result. Stephen King's novel *Pet Sematary* shifts the focus of attention from science to religious beliefs. In an increasingly agnostic society, Doctor Louis Creed believes that death puts all existence to an end. Nonetheless, when Jud Crandall unveils the power attributed to the Micmac burial ground, despite his scientific background and rational nature, Louis begins to believe in the supernatural. Louis' mistake, as well as that of Victor Frankenstein, lies in using this powerful revelation to his own benefit, and thus, playing the role of God in spite of his human limitations.

## Conclusions

Stephen King's novel *Pet Sematary* pays homage to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, incorporating and subverting elements from its characters, its plot, and the discourses addressed in the novel. Both works are also rooted in significant personal events that took place in the course of the authors' lives, which are unveiled in the prologues preceding both novels. In King's novel, most characters are transformed to suit the demands of contemporary audiences, while some discourses such as the decline of traditional family life, and the threat of scientific discoveries without moral precepts still prove relevant nowadays. Likewise, King's novel also transforms the myth incorporating elements from popular culture manifestations such as films, as well as updates traditional tenets of the gothic, thus contributing to advancing the contemporary gothic genre within popular fiction as based on classic works.

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