Between

Brides and Automata in *The Frankenstein Chronicles*

Federica Perazzini

Abstract

This article offers an analysis of the television series *The Frankenstein Chronicles* (*TFC*), positioning it as a significant contribution to the neo-Victorian revival of the *Frankenstein* narrative within contemporary televisual seriality. By integrating historical and contemporary anxieties surrounding identity and mortality, *TFC* underscores the relationship between biotechnological advancements and shifting societal perceptions of life and death. Central to this exploration is the character of Esther Rose, a working-class Jewish seamstress who embodies the monstrous feminine archetype of the Bride of Frankenstein, reinterpreted through a postfeminist lens that highlights her intersectional trauma as a mourning mother. Esther's narrative serves as a critique of the Victorian patriarchal association of femininity with artificiality, thus emphasizing the ethical dilemmas surrounding scientific progress within the context of capitalist extractivism and the mechanization of marginalized groups.

Keywords

Adaptation, Frankenstein, Transmedia, Gender, Intersectionality.

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1. Introduction

The field of adaptation studies is deeply indebted to Linda Hutcheon's concept of "traveling stories" which delineates how certain texts evolve and «get retold in different ways in new material and cultural environments» (2006: 177). Hutcheon argues that, just like genes, these stories replicate and proliferate into «new environments by virtue of mutation» (*ibidem*) according to what she describes as a Darwinian process of cultural selection of significant narrative patterns. This concept arguably finds its most concrete realization in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* along with its extensive history of transmedia iterations and appropriations. As a matter of fact, since its first publication in 1818, *Frankenstein*'s «irrational excess of signification» (Brantlinger 1998: 59) has haunted our cultural consciousness for over two centuries, evolving into one of the biggest palimpsests of Western literary canon. Most recently, Shelley's «monstrous progeny» (Friedman 2016) of audiovisual adaptations has spawned a series of neo-Victorian productions which reinterpret late-twentieth and early-twenty-first-century anxieties about post-human biotechnological developments.

Within the contemporary landscape of televisual seriality, for example, Benjamin Langford and Barry Ross's *The Frankenstein Chronicles* (ITV Encore, 2015-2017) functions as a timely re-signification of the «Frankenstein meme»[1] drawing inspiration from a variety of literary hypotexts beyond Shelley's novel, such as Percy Bysshe Shelley's *The Necessity of Atheism* (1811) and *Queen Mab* (1813), as well as William Blake's *London* (1794) and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790). In its intricate blending of crime mystery and biofiction, *TFC* merges real historical figures – such as Robert Peel (1788-1850), Charles Dickens writing under his early pseudonym 'Boz' (1812-1870), and Augusta Ada Byron – with the fictional detective John Marlott (played by Sean Bean) and his villainous antagonist,

Dr Daniel Hervey (played by Ed Stoppard). Throughout the first season, Marlott investigates on a series of gruesome murders that mimic the surgical abominations of Shelley's *Modern Prometheus*, where slum children are kidnapped and dismembered to create a grotesque assemblage of body parts. In the second season, instead, the series broadens its focus to depict the exploitation of the working-class residents of Devil's Acre, who fall victim to a serial killer masking a larger gentrification scheme. Dr Hervey is revealed as the mastermind behind all these atrocities, driven by his imperative to procure "raw material" for his resurrectional experiments[2].

More relevant to the scope of this article, alongside and interwoven with these major investigative plotlines, *TFC* also provides an effective postmodern instance of the Bride subplot, that is to say Mary Shelley's prematurely aborted storyline revolving on Frankenstein's reanimation of a female corpse. Originally assembled to fulfill the creature's blackmailing request for a «friend […] of another sex» (Shelley 2006: 175), in the novel, Frankenstein's "monstrous Eve"[3] is never actually brought to life because of her maker's concerns regarding her potential exercise of agency. In fact, Frankenstein is aware of the risks related to the fact that she «was to become a thinking and reasoning animal, [and] might refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation» (*ibid.*: 202). For this reason, Frankenstein ultimately withholds from making a female companion for his ghastly creature, risking his own life to protect the world from a potential "race of devils" that could result from their union (*ibid.*: 203). Although this supposed-to-be-bride never materializes in Shelley's source-text, she is repeatedly reanimated by the cinematic tradition. Beginning with James Whale's inceptive film *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), most filmic adaptations have either portrayed the Bride as a victimized subaltern, eventually destroyed by her maker, intended mate, or even committing suicide. Alter-

[2] In the series' junction of intertextual resonances, Hervey's revolutionary technology does not revolve on barbaric procedures carried out through electricity or stitched limbs, but on a revolutionary technology similar to a stem cell potion made of gestational yolk sac tissues and human endocardium. The motif of harvesting raw material thus echoes Shelley's novel: «I now also began to collect the materials necessary for my new creation, and this was to me like the torture of single drops of water continually falling on the head» (Shelley 2006: 175) as well as Kenneth Branagh's film adaptation *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994), in which Frankenstein detaches himself from his abominations by repeating to himself «raw materials, nothing more».

[3] Cf. Gilbert - Gubar 2020.

natively, she is also depicted as a fiercely independent woman who comes to represent a feminist threat to an unsuspecting world (Hawley 2015).

Building on these premises, in its second season, *TFC* adapts the cinematic archetype of the Bride to fit the rhythms and conventions of TV serial storytelling by creating the character of Esther Rose (played by Maeve Dermody): a working-class seamstress who loses her husband and child due to their precarious living conditions. As such, in confronting the universal question of how to cope with the loss of loved ones, Esther embodies the complex interplay between agency, motherhood, and grief in light of a postfeminist horizon of intersectional trauma[4].

Once again, it is Dr Hervey who is tasked with "transforming" Esther into the Bride at the behest of a sinister aristocrat, Frederick Dippel, the son of his alchemist mentor Johann Konrad Dippel (1673-1734). Kept alive by his father's *elixir* of eternal life – a formula only Hervey can reproduce – Frederick Dippel's desire for a female companion to share his supernatural, undying condition parallels the creature's demand in Shelley's original text. Notably, this narrative expands on this theme by drawing a parallel between Esther's gradual transformation into the Bride, as suggested in the series finale, "The Bride of Frankenstein" (S2:E6), and the construction of a mechanical automaton by Ada Byron, a clear allusion to the visionary pioneer of computer science, Augusta Ada, Countess of Lovelace (1815-1852)[5]. Similarly to Hervey's resurrected creations, Ada's clockwork doll reformulates the problems of Shelley's *Frankenstein* and its Bride subplot by equating the systemic oppression of women, either as wives or androids, to their societal position as mere properties designed to serve and obey. Furthermore, the deliberate choice of inserting the authoress of the famous Note G as the creator of human-like automata is strategically designed to converge the age-old specter of sentient machines with a presentist reflection on the power of Artificial Intelligence so as to alter our perception of human finitude. This transition from the Gothic motif of biotechnological simulacra to a reflection of the emergence of the so-called "postmortal society" suggests that digital resurrections might increasingly blur the boundary between

[4] Cf. Gill 2007, Hawley 2015.

[5] Augusta Ada Byron, Countess of Lovelace (1815–1852), was the child poet Lord Byron. While translating Luigi Federico Menabrea's "Notions sur la machine analytique de M. Charles Babbage" (1842), Lovelace famously supplemented the paper with her own ideas through a series of notes, labelled from A to G, which have become foundational to the history of computer programming.

life and death, much like Frankenstein's reanimation experiments did.

2. Creatures or creators? Esther Rose and Ada Byron

In *TFC*, the typical geometry of desire subtending the Bride subplot – the triangulation between the creator (Hervey) and his male and female creations (Dippel and Esther) – is further complicated by the introduction of John Marlott as Hervey's first actual resurrected creature in the series. In fact, at the end of season one, Marlott is wrongfully executed for a crime orchestrated by Hervey to conceal his own activities, only to be secretly resurrected against his will. Horrified by his new, abominable state, Marlott escapes Hervey's control and embarks on an undercover mission to prevent his maker from creating further monsters like himself.

Season two thus begins in Esther Rose's secondhand clothing shop in Devil's Acre[6], where Marlott is sent to acquire «a more suitable set of clothing» (S2:E1). While measuring Marlott, Esther is neither fearful nor repulsed by the surgical scars on his chest, the physical marks of his monstrous transformation. Instead, she responds with empathy and discretion, assuming his scars to be the result of wartime service.

> Esther: A military bearing.
> Marlott: I need the collar to be high, if you can, please?
> Esther: I know what will do. I'll give you some privacy.
> Marlott: Thank you. Is that enough? [*Esther gives Marlott his coins back*]
> Esther: That's right for a man who served his country. (S2:E1)

By gifting Marlott with new, respectable garments, Esther's seamstress skills play a pivotal role in Marlott's "vestimentary resurrection", symbolically granting him a new identity and the chance for another life.

Katherine Hayles (2000) has demonstrated how the combined creative processes involving both the making of human life and artistic expression have historically been expressed through gendered metaphors: women's creative acts are often represented by the silent feminine crafts of

[6] MOSES ROSE USED & LAUNDERED CLOTHING is the name of Esther's shop which alludes to the legendary figure of Louis Moses Rose (1785-1851?), a French Jew who left the besieged Alamo in 1836 and is believed to have wandered the earth ever since. Thus, Esther's shop encapsulates her fate as a perpetual survivor.

sewing, embroidery, and quilting, whereas men's are depicted through the more masculine occupation of surgery, severing, and suturing. In this perspective, Marlott's self-discovery journey at the heart of the second season underscores the dichotomy of the creative discursive construction, hinting to Esther's accomplished art of sewing as a poietic tool of expression and identity reformation. More crucially, Esther's creativity is also what triggers her role in the Bride subplot when a mysterious upper-class lady enters her shop and commissions a dress.

> Esther: Can I help you?
> Lady: The embroidery, is this your work?
> Esther: It is.
> Lady: It is most intricate. I may require your services for a dress.
> Esther: For yourself, Miss?
> Lady: It is for my friend, Mr Dipple. It would sound far less strange if you'd just come with me to Saint James'. It's a lot more fun to see than to explain. But you must come at once. (S2:E2)

To gain a clearer understanding of this extravagant request, Esther follows the lady – soon introduced as Ada Byron – to Mr Dipple's mansion. There, she discovers that her expertise is called upon creating a ball gown for «one of [Dipple's] many toys», specifically, a life-sized, life-like automaton. As Esther advances in her work, she grows closer to Dipple, united by their shared grief over personal losses. In S2:E4, for example, Esther confides Dipple the deaths of her husband and son, to which the man responds with his profound familiarity with death («I understand. All my life... I have been surrounded by death. I have seen more than any person alive» S2:E4). While developing genuine affection for Dipple, Esther also gains a deeper appreciation for Ada's brilliance, recognizing her as the true creator behind Dipple's automata collection:

> Ada: I'm configuring a clockwork figure, just as life-sized and life-like as you or I.
> Esther: An automaton, wearing that gown.
> Ada: We will be unveiling her at Mr. Dipple's party.
> Esther: You mean... the gown is for a doll? Why would a grown man be so enamored of a contraption?
> Dipple: Knowing the gown is to be worn by a mere contraption will not diminish your attention to detail.
> Esther: Of course not. (S2:E3)

As the season unfolds, it becomes evident that Dipple's fascination with robotic technologies is intertwined to his longing for absolute power and self-serving transcendence over God. Conversely, Ada's forward-thinking and inclusive vision of the age of machines stands in sharp opposition to Dipple's perspective as she passionately advocates for a future when machines will empower women over men:

> Dipple: If man can create machines and make them do as we command, then man will have more power than God.
> Ada: I've no desire for man to have power over God. For women to have power over men, however…
> Esther: Why shouldn't men have power over God?
> Ada: Because power, like a desolating pestilence, pollutes whatever it touches. And obedience, bane of all genius, virtue, freedom, truth, makes slaves of men, and of the human frame. A mechanized automaton.
> Dipple: Did I say that to your father?
> Ada: It was Mr Shelley. (S2:E3)

In this dialogue, Ada's reference to P.B. Shelley's *Queen Mab* (1813) highlights the series' socio-political message concerning the dehumanizing effects of power, especially in the context of the objectification and mechanization of women. The quoted passage can thus be interpreted through a gender lens, suggesting that relegating women to submissive roles stifles their potential for creativity, autonomy, and authenticity. At the same time, it also discloses the shared fate of Esther and Ada, whose creative talents – Esther's in embroidery and dressmaking; Ada's in crafting clockwork automata – are overshadowed, if not directly suppressed, by the man of privilege. It is no coincidence that Dipple's frequent pastime of observing a dancing ballerina in a music box metaphorically represents the projection of his male gaze onto Esther, who he intends to possess and manipulate as his own figurative doll. While it could be argued that Dipple's entitlement and domineering attitude toward Esther stems from their class difference, his behavior is not limited to her alone. In S2:E3, he threatens his peer, Ada Byron, with the misogynistic threat that: «[…] if she doesn't finish her work on time, I shall paint her gold and pass her off as an automaton myself». This confirms that, despite their brilliance and creativity, Dipple's male gaze uniformly reduces Esther and Ada to mere mechanical figures of oppressed otherness devoid of agency and freedom.

3. Brides and automata

The scholarly analysis of the history of automata development is closely linked to the advent of industrial capitalism, which is seen as the enabling condition for the rise of the geopolitical and financial assets of the Victorian imperial economy[7]. While eighteenth-century automata drew on mechanical models to explain and simulate the body's internal and external physiological functions (i.e., Vaucanson's Canard Digérateur ostensibly imitating the process of digestion), the nineteenth century saw a shift in focus. Instead of replicating physiology, automata were increasingly associated with their potential for profit as precursors of factory machineries. In fact, as David Brewster (1781–1868) asserts in his *Letters on Natural Magic* (1832), the wonder-inspiring automata of the eighteenth century:

> those mechanical wonders, which in one century enriched only the conjuror who used them, contributed in another to augment the wealth of the nation; and those automatic toys, which once amused the vulgar, are now employed in extending the power and promoting the civilization of our species. (Brewster 2011: 286)

Despite the scientific and economic implications of automata development for industrial progress, during the *fin de siècle* – often referred to by Christian Bailly (1987) as the golden age of automata – these devices were primarily celebrated for their entertainment value within the luxury collectible commodities market. As Kara Reilly (2011) has shown, luxury automata were initially intended as "living" replica of celebrity stage performers such as dancers, musicians, conjurers, acrobats, but also monkeys dressed in human attire, doing human activities. These new collectible commodities not only allowed the public to own their private simulacra of their favorite celebrities, but also raised significant questions about the boundaries between humans and machines, and even between life and death.

From this perspective, *TFC* integrates the rich cultural history of Victorian automata with a postmodern ideological framework, presenting Dipple's collection of machine-dolls as a coping strategy for enduring the curse of his own immortality[8]. This is ambiguously alluded in S2:E6, when

[7] Cf. Riskin 2003.

[8] Dipple constantly defines himself as a collector («I am a collector. I am interested in all things» S2:E5) and, as such, is obsessively dedicated to his contraptions, having their parts replaced, clothes mended, or even asking Ada to

Dipple reveals himself to be, in a sense, a fellow creature to Marlott («Now, do you understand? You are not the only one. You and I are like brothers» S2:E6) as he, too, was used as a guinea pig for his father's experiments on the *elixir*. Such a disclosure is previously sustained in S2:E5, when Dipple is shown to read an old letter from his father which stresses his sacrifice to grant him the gift of eternal life: «My beloved son, I have sacrificed everything I have so that I may hear your precious heart beat for all eternity. Keep this formula close to your heart. It holds the secret to everlasting life. Farewell, sweet boy» (S2:E5). Although it remains unclear what kind of sacrifice Dipple's father means, it can be inferred that it implies his son's death and reanimation[9]. On a less speculative level, though, it could also be that the term sacrifice simply refers to the burden of immortal creatures bound to witness their friends, lovers, and children to age and perish before their eyes («I have lived longer than any man. I have watched the best of people I love decayed and died» S2:E6).

For this reason, Dipple's automata collection is re-signified in the series as a *memento vivere* (remember that you must live) demonstrating humanity's obsessive endeavor to assert control and continuity over their finitude. Only through the immutable cogs and gears of his automata can Dipple replicate – and bring back to an artificial life – the movements of those he has lost over his unnaturally long existence.

However, this new "piece" that Dipple commissioned to Ada for his collection, i.e., the automaton bride, seems more likely to reflect a future fantasy of romantic partnership rather than a nostalgic replica of a lost one. This is most fully unfolded in S2:E4 when Dipple hosts an opulent party to unveil his robotic marvel to the public. Dressed in the resplendent white gown and veil crafted by Esther, the clockwork doll begins to perform a series of intricate movements that blur the lines between the artificial and the organic, invoking the uncanny valley effect[10]. This moment of life-like illusion embodies a distinctly Baudrillardian tone of simulation within a simulation, further emphasized by the fact that the automaton is portrayed by a real actress (Victoria Emslie). Most interestingly, while Ada plays the

«not hurt their feelings» (S2:E2).

[9] In his capacity of seeing the dead, Dipple is indeed assimilated to Hervey's other resurrected creatures, such as Marlott and, later on, Esther.

[10] The uncanny valley can be described as the hypothesized relationship between the extent to which a humanoid resembles an actual human being and the discomfort it evokes which disrupts the normal boundaries between human and non-human, life and machine. (MacDorman - Ishiguro 2006).

music that accompanies the doll's mechanical pantomime, Dipple directs significant glances at Esther, foreshadowing his desire to transform her into a submissive, ornamental doll-bride.

For contemporary viewers, Dipple's sentimental conflation between Esther and the automaton bride echoes one of the most popular tropes of the science fiction genre, namely the building of servile, highly sexualized female androids carving up their way to enfranchisement and self-determination. However, the complex relationship between women and automata, along with their ideological representation within the different fields of cultural production, extends far beyond and before the postmodern paradigm of post-humanism, rooted in the broader context of Victorian gender construction[11]. Notoriously, the Victorian era magnified its entire patriarchal ontology on the «negative suggestion that woman is an inherently unnatural form» (Coleman - Fraser 2011: 15) by increasingly associating machines with action – and thus with masculinity – while linking automata with mere repetition and femininity[12]. This conventional relationship between femininity and artificiality became exemplary in the context of mesmerism, one of the most sensational practices of nineteenth-century scientific culture. In Victorian Britain, demonstrations of mesmerism experiments, including hypnotic trances and altered states of consciousness, became popular spectacles. These events often reflected gender-related anxieties, as mesmerists were predominantly men, typically working with female subjects, thus reinforcing stereotypes of feminine vulnerability by portraying hypnotized women as passive and inert[13]. Then, by the end of the century, decadent fantasies about intelligent machines, far more advanced than what was technologically possible at the time, became a staple of short fiction. Stories such as George Augustus Sala's *Patent Woman* (1875) and Villiers de L'Isle-Adam's *L'Ève future* (1886), often depict female automata created by male inventors on the verge of marrying humans (Anger - Vranker 2024). These and many other robotic re-tellings of the Pygmalion myth converge in *TFC* as the series suggests that marriage is the ultimate goal of Dipple's courtship of Esther.

[11] Cf. Wood 2002, Wosk 2015.

[12] Cf.: Minsoo Kang 2011, for further reading on the conceptual boundaries between the ideas of automata and puppets and their convergences into Victorian culture.

[13] Roger Luckhurst observes that from the «first accounts of Mesmer's treatments it was the risk to women at the hands of male charlatans that was the key anxiety» (Luckhurst 2000: 148).

Dipple: Come with me.
Esther: As what? Your seamstress or your mistress?
Dipple: As my wife.
Esther: Why do the rich feel they can meddle with our emotions, sir? I am not for collection. (S2:E5)

In fact, despite Esther's initial rejection, when Dipple reveals his ability to see the ghost of her deceased son Sam, Esther's grief and desire for reunion with her child overcome her moral, social, and religious reservations about the dangers of her union with Dipple. She eventually consents to "transform" (as Hervey describes the entire process of resurrection) because both Dipple and Hervey claim that she will see her son again. Dipple asserts that: «There are more things possible on this earth than you could ever dream of. There is no death. There's only life. I can show you. You will see him. I promise you» (E2:E5). Later in the same episode, Hervey corroborates this assumption:

Hervey: I will not force you. This is your choice to make. It is too precious a gift not to be
Esther: What choice? To die?
Hervey: To transform. To be reunited with your child. Not in heaven, but here. On earth. (S2:E5).

4. Resurrected bride, everlasting mother

Esther's transformation into Dipple's immortal bride closely mirrors the creation sequence depicted in Whale's *The Bride of Frankenstein*. As Esther lies peacefully on Hervey's surgical table under Dipple's close supervision, the scene evokes the collaborative efforts of Whale's two male creators, Dr Pretorius and Dr Henry Frankenstein, in reanimating their female corpse. However, unlike in Whale's film, the series does not incorporate "cosmic diffusers", electrodes, or the clichéd use of lightning during a storm, but a subtler injection of Hervey's resurrecting serum through what appears to be a precursor to an IV drip inserted into a choker-collar. The seemingly insignificant detail of the choker actually serves as a specific reference to the iconography of the Bride as derived from Paul Morrissey's camp masterpiece *Flesh for Frankenstein* (1973). In this film, the hyper-sexualization of the she-creature (played by Dalila Di Lazzaro) is symbolized by her choker, which not only conceals the horizontal scar encircling her neck, but also

serves as a symbol of submissiveness associated with the BDSM subculture[14]. In this context, a choker signifies that the wearer is the property of their dominant partner, mirroring how Dipple regards Esther as he impatiently hovers over her unconscious body, taking deep sniffs of her scent before her resurrection. While the choker certainly constitutes a vestimentary reminder of their power dynamic, another detail further enhances Esther's bridal iconography: the dress she sewed for Dipple's female automaton, which is placed beside her, likely intended as a gift to be worn upon her rebirth. Only she will never wear it, nor will she ever submit to anyone.

In a daring season finale, with the metropolitan police closing in on both Dipple and Hervey as the primary suspects in the Devil's Acre slayings, Esther rejects her subordinate destiny as Dipple's female companion and frees herself from his control with the self-assertive statement «I am no one's»:

> Dipple: Esther, it is time we left. Esther!!!
> Marlott: It's not your decision.
> Dipple: That is exactly what it is. She's my bride, my property. [*Esther hits Dipple*]
> Esther: I am no one's. (S2:E6)

In accordance with the cinematic tradition of *The Bride of Frankenstein*, Esther's inherent monstrosity is ultimately revealed not through her supernatural status as an undead creature, but through her rejection of Dipple's male authority as both husband and creator. By fully exercising her agency, Esther embraces a more egalitarian partnership founded on purely platonic, brotherly love with Marlott who, although previously failed to save her from Hervey's procedure, will now ensure her safe escape from London. As Marlott and Esther reach her shop to gather a few items for their journey, she urgently asks him about her son's presence: «Is he here? Is Sam here? Can you look, please?». Unfortunately, Marlott's negative response leads to a crucial revelation in the series, as he reluctantly explains that the ability to see and communicate with the dead cruelly excludes one's own dead.

[14] During the second half of the nineteenth century, chokers garnered a divisive reputation because they were commonly worn by ballerinas, but were also heavily associated with prostitutes – as depicted in Manet's famous painting, *Olympia* (1863).

Marlott: No, I don't see him.
Esther: You're lying.
Marlott: No, today, now, I don't see him.
Esther: But you see the dead, don't you?
Marlott: Yeah, I see them. But not my family. Not my wife and my daughter. I'm sorry, Esther. But we don't see our own dead. (S2:E6)

At this point, Esther's recognition of the impossibility of being reunited with her son on earth is accompanied by an ultimate, most profound epiphany about herself.

Esther: But I see death everywhere. Here I am. A dead woman buried under her work. And there, here, a dead mother just shrouded in her grief. I am the ghost that has haunted this place. I have lived inside my grief so long. In... in this shop, just… consumed by it. If Sam is here, it is because I have clung to him too long. I could never accept his death. (S2:E6)

Even before Dipple's twisted plan to resurrect Esther as his subservient bride, the unending pain of bereavement had forced her into a mechanical, instrumental existence; one that excruciatingly mimicked an automaton's lack of feelings. Her narrative arc thus closes with an inebriating acceptance of her new beginning as a Nietzschean heroine of active nihilism.

Marlott: He has robbed you of God. Hervey!
Esther: Then may God forgive me, but I do not need Him. Not anymore. I will not have it, these… These dictates of gods and men. I… I must learn to live by my own sensibility now. Just… Guilt be gone. Grief be gone. I am alive. Today is the beginning. (S2:S6)

In the wake of Christianity's self-dissolution, Esther embodies Nietzsche's concept of the free spirit, or the Übermensch as outlined in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-1885) and *The Antichrist* (1895). This figure challenges conventional notions of human existence by presenting an ideal individual who transcends societal constraints imposed by traditional morality and religious beliefs, creating new values based on personal will to

power and self-expression. Esther's declaration, «I must learn to live by my own sensibility now […] Today is the beginning», signals her readiness to embrace her new power of self-creation and determination, living authentically and free from the limitations of her intersectional submission.

In the end, the series' creature-characters will find a way to journey onward. Esther emerges as an unprecedented type of female gothic wanderer, comforted by the invisible yet perceptible presence of her son by her side. Similarly, Marlott comes to accept his role as a bringer of justice in the world without God of secular modernity. As for Dipple, his hybrid status as both creature and commissioner-creator leaves his fate uncertain. Surely, his narrative arc concludes with an eerie circularity as he returns to his mansion where all his furniture and automata are covered in white sheets, resembling a haunted gallery of ghosts. He gazes one last time at Ada's female automaton, which starts moving her robotic hand and slowly flutter her eyelashes beneath the white veil. Finally, he sits alone in his customary armchair, contemplating his impending demise, with no vials of Hervey's elixir left, no bride to share eternity with (except his clockwork-doll) on the afterlife's desolate seashore[15]. He seems to realize that, throughout all his years on earth, he has not been much different from an automaton himself.

5. Conclusions

This article has analyzed how *TFC* successfully bridges historical and contemporary anxieties about the limits of what it means to be human, offering a layered narrative that honors the legacy of Mary Shelley's work while pushing the boundaries of the Gothic genre to explore the monstrous intersections of gender, class, and technological advancement. Notably, the article has examined the series' most significant interpolations between the monstrous feminine and the Bride subplot through the character of Esther Rose, comparing her story arc to the issue of artificial life through a

[15] The series' interpenetration of the worlds of the living and the dead and the consequent portrayal of the afterlife is undoubtedly one of the most intriguing aspects of *TFC*. At the moment of their passing or unconsciousness all creature-characters – Marlott, Esther Rose, and apparently also Dipple – catch a glimpse of the other side, awakening in a cold seashore with endless, crushing waves, symbolizing the perpetual state of unrest and isolation experienced by lost souls.

parallel with Ada Byron's female automaton. As the pinnacle of technological advancements during the age of machines, automata thus reinterpret Shelley's parable of scientific hubris, embodying humanity's attempt to transcend the limits of human finitude by using technology to engender subjection over all beings, particularly women. In this context, the character of Esther Rose can be considered as a milestone in the transmedia evolution of the Bride subplot, emphasizing how she both confirms and subverts traditional narratives associated with Whale's foundational representation of the female creature. On one hand, Esther adheres to the stereotype of the volitive *femme fatale* who dares to reject her intended partner. On the other hand, she inherently subverts the Bride's original emphasis on agency and consent, as she is the only creature who willingly chooses to die and embrace resurrection in order to become the eternal mother of her lost child. Although Esther undoubtedly embodies a progressive vision of female empowerment and resilience, she also constitutes a complex figure of the monstrous feminine, whose motherhood legitimizes her survival and archetypal transformation into an immortal wanderer. From this perspective, her vehement rejection of the Bride's role in the series' finale («I'm no one's») appears to nullify the possibility of escaping gender performance, as she is always and already bound to her role as a mother. However, if this performance is indeed inescapable, it is also one Esther fervently reclaims.

In the best neoliberal rhetoric of post-feminist sensibility, motherhood thus emerges as women's actual superpower and identitarian prerogative. This is expressed not only in their capacity to biologically generate life, but also in their ability to feel and identify with a maternal bond, independent of male involvement, surpassing the power structures of the nuclear family, and, most importantly, beyond the common boundaries of life and death[16].

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