Victor’s Body:  
Male Hysteria and Homoeroticism in  
Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein and  
Kenneth Branagh’s Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein
Abstract

This thesis investigates the male body in Mary Shelley’s novel *Frankenstein*, first published in 1818, and Kenneth Branagh’s film *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein*, released in 1994. So doing, the thesis focuses on the analysis of hysteria and homoeroticism in three male-male relationships: Victor and the monster, Victor and Walton, and Victor and Clerval. The main argument claims that, in the novel, Victor Frankenstein displays symptoms of male hysteria, which result from his repressing homoerotic desire and give evidence of male embodiment. It is not possible for Victor to repress bodily needs in the long run, and he experiences and reacts to the world with his body *and* mind. In the film, on the other hand, Victor’s heterosexuality is emphasised and he is depicted as a strong, powerful man rather than a nervous member of the upper class. The divergences between the representations of the male body in the primary texts, the thesis argues, reflect different ideas about the male body in the 1810s and 1990s. Although the image of the muscular and masculine, heterosexual man that was prevalent in the 1990s was already in the making in the 1810s, it was not as consolidated.

The discussion of masculinity from a historical perspective makes use of Michel Foucault’s outline of the history of sexuality, Mark S. Micale’s account of hysteria and George L. Mosse’s ideas about masculinity. For a differentiated analysis of male-male relationships, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s continuum of male homosocial desire is drawn on.
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1 Introduction

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*\(^1\) was first published in 1818 and is probably one of the most read and researched novels in literary history. The immense interest in the novel has also resulted in a myriad of film adaptations. According to Cecil Helman, only between 1910 and 1976 were 32 Frankenstein films produced (21). One of the most recent film adaptations, and the adaptation this thesis analyses together with the novel, is Kenneth Branagh’s *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein*. There have been more famous Frankenstein films, above all James Whale’s version from 1931, which, according to Bouriana Zakharieva, “remains the most influential of the film adaptations and has accounted for the clichéd popular perception of the Monster” (416). The reason why I investigate *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein* instead of any of the other films is that I am interested in more recent developments of the discussion of the male body and its representation in literature and film.\(^2\) Released in 1994, the film was made at a time that witnessed increasing interest in the topics “male body” and “masculinity” (Goldstein vii-viii; Bordo, “Reading” 266, 281). Furthermore, in the 1990s, the academic interest in the novel reached a new peak. According to Johanna Smith, more than half of the entries under “Mary Shelley Frankenstein” that are listed in the on-line *MLA Bibliography* were written after 1990 (237). It seems, therefore, a fertile approach to choose Branagh’s film version for my investigation of the male body in *Frankenstein*.

The Body in *Frankenstein*

Of course, one might ask why another investigation in *Frankenstein* should be worthwhile at all, as so much has been written about the novel. First of all, earlier studies on the body in

\(^{1}\) In the following, the novel is referred to as *Frankenstein*.

\(^{2}\) There are more Frankenstein films that were released towards the end of the 1900s, one example being Franc Roddam’s *The Bride* from 1985 with Sting as Victor Frankenstein. For my purposes, one of the advantages Branagh’s film has is its high fidelity to the novel, as I will shortly explain.
Frankenstein have concentrated very much on the body of the monster and on feminist readings of the novel, leaving aside the representation of the male body in the novel “as such”. This is surprising, considering the fact that Frankenstein has rightfully been called “a novel about men”, for example by Frann Michel (350). Besides, the novel is designed to provoke bodily reactions: Mary Shelley famously explains in her preface to the 1831 edition of Frankenstein that she wanted to write a novel “which would speak to the mysterious fears of our nature, and awaken thrilling horror – one to make the reader dread to look around, to curdle the blood, and quicken the beatings of the heart” (“Introduction” 171). This, obviously, describes a reaction that might be intended by all kinds of Gothic texts. As Fred Botting and Dale Townshend put it, “the effects of Gothic romance are terrible, corporeal, stimulating: hairs stand on end, the flesh crawls, readers are shocked and excited in equal measure by supernatural events and base desires” (4).

In Frankenstein, however, as Bette London points out, “the story’s horror is dramatized in the experiences of men, in the exchange of sensations between male bodies” (263). Hence, the novel not only aims at provoking bodily reactions, in both men and women, but it also is a novel about bodies, male bodies. This essay follows London in that it makes explicit the maleness of the bodies in Frankenstein; something that other critics have only implied. For Judith Halberstam, “Frankenstein’s monster makes flesh itself Gothic and Shelley, therefore, maps out a new geography of terror and finds fear to be a by-product of embodiment rather than a trick played upon the body by the mind” (28; my emphasis). For Jerrold E. Hogle too, the embodiment of the monster is what makes Frankenstein different

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3 For discussions of the monster’s body, see for example Bouriana Zakharieva’s “Frankenstein of the Nineties: The Composite Body”, Susan Stryker’s “My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix – Performing Transgender Rage” and James Heffernan’s “Looking at the Monster: Frankenstein and Film”. For feminist readings of the body in Frankenstein, see for example the works by Bette London and Colleen Hobbs; these are presented in chapter three of this thesis, as the analysis makes use of them.

4 In “Lesbian Panic and Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein”, Michel argues that the novel carries a lesbian subtext and that “Frankenstein’s creature can also be read as the embodiment of . . . lesbian panic” (351). Her reading provides an interesting complement to studies that analyse the male homosexual subtext of the novel. Those will be presented throughout the thesis, as I too focus on male homoeroticism in novel and film.
from other Gothic texts, “[t]he body seems to be restored to the Gothic in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* . . . when the alchemist/scientist of the title produces a physical creature from pieces of the dead drawn from sepulchres” (156). Yet, while Halberstam and Hogle refer to the body of the monster, this thesis concentrates on the body of the creator, of Victor Frankenstein.

**General Aims of and Theories Used in This Investigation**

It is Victor who is in focus rather than the monster, as the general aim of the thesis is to investigate how normative ideas on masculinity and the male body are reflected in the novel and the film. Therefore, I want to discuss a “more normal” man in the novel, at least when it comes to his bodily stature and possibilities. Analysing Victor Frankenstein, the thesis investigates male embodiment, male hysteria and homoeroticism. The comparison of the novel and the film illustrates, the thesis claims, that the norms of modern masculinity, which were in the making when *Frankenstein* was first published, had “hardened” until *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein* was released.

Discussing the development of modern masculinity, the thesis draws most of all on George L. Mosse. In *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity*, Mosse dates the beginnings of modern manliness to the second half of the eighteenth century and discusses its development until the 1990s. As this time span corresponds approximately to the time span embraced by Shelley’s novel and Branagh’s film, the thesis limits the discussion of masculinity to these years. Furthermore, Mosse sees the ideal of the strong-minded, courageous man at the heart of the modern image of masculinity (4), and it is this ideal the thesis refers to as normative masculinity.

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5 This is not so say that the components of the manly ideal were all new in the 1750s. “The building blocks of modern masculinity existed”, according to Mosse, “but they were systematized . . . only at the start of the modern age” (5). I also want to point out that alternative masculinities have existed throughout history, and that the development of the manly ideal has not come to an end in the 1990s.
The discussion of embodiment, understood as the phenomenon that body and mind form a unity, is embedded in the investigation of homoeroticism and male hysteria. In *Hysterical Men: The Hidden History of Male Nervous Illness*, Mark S. Micale presents a thorough account of the history of male hysteria, and his work is used for the analysis of male hysteria in the primary texts. The investigation of homoeroticism makes use of Michel Foucault’s and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s ideas. Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality* includes the history of homosexuality, which makes it helpful for the historical contextualisation of my findings. Another reason to use Foucault’s work is that it explains how binaries like man/woman and heterosexuality/homosexuality are constructed within discourse. The human body is not independent of discourse either but, according to Foucault, is a product of history as well as biology. That is, body and sexuality are sites of discursive power. Sedgwick’s ideas in *Between Men*, on the other hand, are useful for this thesis because they allow to describe the relationship between hetero- and homosexuality in non-binary terms. Furthermore, homosexuality is more a subtext than a prominent theme in *Frankenstein*, and Sedgwick’s concept of a continuum of male homosocial desire makes it possible to investigate male-male relationships in the novel and the film with more differentiation.

**The Traditional Dualism of Male Reason and Female Body**

The Frankenstein story’s focus on the male body is noteworthy, not least because, traditionally, men have been associated with reason and women with the body (Bordo, *Weight* 11-15; Micale 102; London 256). This tradition has been reflected in literary criticism, which until recent years has neglected the male body and, by focusing on the female body only, supported the binaries male/female and reason/body and their linking. This thesis wants to contribute to the discussion of the male body that has been going on since the 1990s,

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6 Throughout the thesis, I use the term Frankenstein story to refer to the core that all Frankenstein incarnations have in common, that is to any one of the versions and all of them.
questioning not only the gendered dualism of male reason versus female body but – by
emphasising the unity of body and mind – also the very binary reason, or mind, versus body.

In this context, it is crucial to mention that, although associations of men with “active
spirit” and women with “passive body” (Bordo, *Weight* 11) go back to ancient philosophers
like Aristotle, the gendering of the mind/body dualism became more distinct in the nineteenth
century, that is at Mary Shelley’s times. The gendering of reason as male and the body as
female was embedded in the general developments of the time: The nineteenth century
witnessed a “masculinization of knowledge” (101), as Micale calls it, which was induced by
the separation of science and art with ever more narrow specialisations within the field of
science. As a consequence, professions became more defined and academia developed
accordingly. It is in this climate that Victor Frankenstein goes to Ingolstadt to study the
sciences. Furthermore, Micale describes the emergence of science in the nineteenth century
“as both an intellectual system and a professional activity . . . as a strictly masculine domain”
(101; my emphasis). When the sciences became more specialised, “[r]eason itself came to be
gendered as masculine, whereas emotion was evermore associated with the feminine” (102).

Scientific discourse itself contributed to this form of gendering. In 1823, Julien Joseph
Virey, professor of natural history and “expert on gender issues” – it was him who defined
*man* and *woman* for the *Dictionnaire des sciences médicales* – summarised the differences
between male and female physiology: “[M]ales live by the head, the heart, the extremities,
and the upper portions of the body; women live by the uterus, abdomen, and tissue of their
breasts, as well as by their lower, internal organs” (qtd. in Micale 70). That is, scientific
literature supported the association of men with reason and activity and women with body and
passivity, as the head is associated with reason and the extremities with action, whereas the
female womb is associated with reproduction, bodily materiality and, paradoxically, passivity.

In the Frankenstein story, of course, it is a man, Victor, who engages in reproduction.
Nevertheless, as “up” is culturally coded as superior to “down”, there is a hierarchy involved in Virey’s differentiation that connects men to the upper and women to the lower part of the body. This form of gendered dualism has an impact on the gender roles of men and women. Both men and women encounter a plethora of common ideas about gender that influence their reception by others, their lives and bodies. Therefore, both the female and the male body are interesting. Both women and men live with, in and through their bodies. As mentioned, Foucault argues that bodies, like gender, are culturally constructed. The study of gender in different media, then, allows us to investigate different ways of how gender and bodies are created.

**Why an Adaptation Study?**

One reason to read *Frankenstein* with *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein* is the novel’s focus on visuality and the gaze. Traditionally, novels are associated with the verbal and films with the visual. In *Frankenstein*, however, specularity and the gaze are themes of the novel. In Branagh’s words, “Mary Shelley’s story is . . . a supremely cinematic experience” (qtd. in Branagh, *Frankenstein* 177). James Heffernan agrees only partly. Heffernan investigates how the visuality of Frankenstein films, the fact that the viewer sees the monster, affects the story; he states that “Mary Shelley’s novel is by turns supremely cinematic and stubbornly un-cinematic” (“Monster” 141). Still, according to Heffernan, the novel is visual in that it invites the reader to see what the monster sees in a number of instances. For example, the monster tells Victor how he gazed at the De Laceys. London’s argument that *Frankenstein*’s key scenes are “represented in the narrative as a kind of framed frieze” also highlights the novel’s visuality (255).

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7 This distinction goes back to the eighteenth century and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s work on the difference between painting and poetry. Lessing postulated that painting has primarily spatial character, whereas poetry has primarily temporal character (Elliott 9-10; Heffernan, “Literacy” 38-39). See for example Kamilla Elliott’s *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate* for a discussion of this categorisation, its influence on adaptation studies and more recent theoretical positions.

8 Quoting Branagh, I have in mind that he as the film’s director might not be fully objective but that he must always have the film’s promotion in mind.
Secondly, reading the novel and the film together makes sense simply because of the subject of my analysis, Victor’s body. As the essay attempts a reading of men as embodied beings, I expect advantages from making use of dynamic means such as film. Note that we, that is both women and men, move with help of our bodies and that our bodies respond when we are moved. The film makes visible movements that the novel can “only” explain in words.

Branagh’s film, then, is especially interesting for my project because it attempts to be faithful to the novel, as its title *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein* indicates. In fact, Branagh explains in “Frankenstein Reimagined”, “we wanted to follow the events of the novel as closely as practicable, to include as much of the story as possible, while tying everything to an overriding response to the material – that is, our interpretation of it” (17). If fidelity to the adapted novel was a goal of the filmmakers, then differences in the representation of the male body between the primary texts can be traced back to different internalised concepts about the male body in the early nineteenth and late twentieth centuries. It may be stressed at this point that I do not consider one work, film or novel, better or worse than the other, nor do I consider differences between the film and the novel mistakes. I relate here to the discussion of fidelity that has been going on in adaptation studies during the last decade. One of the first to spark this discussion was Thomas Leitch, who criticises that “[f]idelity to its source text – whether it is conceived as success in re-creating specific textual details or the effect of the whole – is a hopelessly fallacious measure of a given adaptation’s value because it is unattainable, undesirable, and theoretically possible only in a trivial sense” (“Fallacies” 161). Furthermore, using fidelity for evaluation automatically favours the source text over the adaptation and thus establishes a hierarchy in which the text is seen as superior to the adaptation.

I do not treat fidelity as an evaluative criterion, however, but I am convinced that a simultaneous and comparative reading of the primary texts, which identifies similarities and differences between the two sources, enhances our understanding of the male body in the
Frankenstein story, both in the novel and in the film. Furthermore, differences between the representation of the male body in the novel and the film can teach us something about differences in the conception of the male body and masculinity in the 1810s and 1990s. As Linda Hutcheon points out, “[a]n adaptation, like the work it adapts, is always framed in a context – a time and a place, a society and a culture; it does not exist in a vacuum” (142).

**Relations Between the Body, Hysteria and Homoeroticism**

Discussing the male body in *Frankenstein* and *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein*, the thesis focuses, as mentioned, on male embodiment, hysteria and homoeroticism. At first glance, these issues seem rather unrelated. Still, they are not. Hysterical symptoms include physical symptoms, and, over many centuries, they were mainly explained by bodily reasons (Micale 1-48; 244). Furthermore, like the body, hysteria has traditionally been gendered female. From the ancient times until the seventeenth century, hysteria was considered an exclusively female illness. Up until the fifth century, hysteria was described as a disease of the uterus, which explains why it was “reserved” for women. The ailment was even named after the female regenerative organs, *hystera* being the Greek word for *uterus* or *womb* (“uterus”; Micale 5). It is also noteworthy that, according to Micale, “[t]he medical history of female hysteria is an account of how men in power have seen women – the story of a controlling, panoptic gaze of one sex onto the other” (281). Micale’s account of hysteria suggests that as long as man is the spectator, hysteria is reserved for women.

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9 That is to say, it is not my aim to prioritise either of the two media. Still, as Linda Hutcheon points out, “the case study model . . . in practice . . . has tended to privilege or at least give priority (and therefore, implicitly, value) to what is always called the . . . ‘original’” (XV). Indeed, writing this thesis I have found it difficult to avoid the appearance of a hierarchy between the novel and the film. However, the way I treat the novel and the film has nothing to do with theoretical priorities. Mostly in the analysis, I start a new section with a discussion of the novel, to then continue to the film and differences between the novel and the film. As the novel was written before the film was made, and the ideas the novel reflects are more than 150 years older than the rather contemporary ideas the film conveys, this seems the logical order. If the analysis of the novel takes more space than the analysis of the film at times, the reason for this is that the film has proved more straightforward when it comes to sexuality and male-male relationships. That is to say, I need more space to develop my arguments around the novel in a convincing way. Another, quite obvious reason is that more has been written about the novel than the film, and therefore the discussion of secondary sources that deal with the novel is more expansive than of the ones that treat the film.
Still, there have been men who have shown signs of hysteria as well. As hysteria has been associated with women, men with hysterical symptoms have been considered effeminate. The same is true for homosexual men; they too have been seen as effeminate. It is essential to note here that, according to Mosse, “[t]he contrast between manly and effeminate men was present throughout the construction of modern manliness” (45). That is, effeminate men, and therefore men showing signs of hysteria and homosexual men, constituted a countertype against which normative masculinity was established. Hence, the male gaze has not only controlled women but also men who have not lived up to the norms.

In this context, it is important to point out the difficulty of speaking of homosexuality at Mary Shelley’s times. According to Foucault, it is not possible to speak of homosexuality as a concept before the 1870s (43). The phenomenon existed of course, but it was not discussed as a specific kind of sexuality nor was it perceived as a character trait. Yet, male-male sexual relationships were punishable by law then. The fact that homosexuality as a concept emerged only during the second half of the nineteenth century makes it interesting to read a text from the 1810s together with a film from the 1990s, when gay rights were established and homosexuality was considered a character trait.

**The Specific Claims of This Thesis as a Reaction to Previous Research**

But why should this text be *Frankenstein*? This question will be answered throughout the thesis, as I argue that important male-male relationships in the novel carry a subtext of sexual attraction. Anne Mellor, one of the most influential feminist critics of *Frankenstein*, observes that “Victor Frankenstein’s most passionate relationships are with men rather than with women” (121), referring to the relationships between Victor and Clerval, Victor and Walton, and Victor and the monster. Mellor does not, however, investigate the homoerotic dimensions of these relationships in more detail. This essay engages in such an analysis, not only in the novel but also in the film *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein*. 
Doing so, the analysis makes use of previous feminist and gender criticism on both the novel and the film. London’s paper on the male body as a spectacle in *Frankenstein* is one source the thesis heavily draws on; Colleen Hobbs’ analysis of Victor’s hysteria in the novel is another. Also homoeroticism in the novel has been analysed, for example by Eric Daffron. Taking their articles as a point of departure, this thesis establishes a connection between male embodiment, hysteria and homoeroticism.

To be more specific, the analysis argues that Victor, in the novel, develops hysterical symptoms as a result of his repressing homoerotic desire, which is considered evidence of male embodiment.\(^\text{10}\) As Victor shows erotic desire only for men, so the argument, he can be read as a homosexual character.\(^\text{11}\) In the film, the thesis claims, Victor’s homoerotic desire is much less prominent. He is depicted as a heterosexual character and does not show hysterical symptoms as in the novel. This explains why male hysteria in the film has not got any noteworthy attention by literary critics. Homoeroticism in the film, in contrast, has been discussed for example by Michael Laplace-Sinatra.

**Organisation of the Thesis**

I will now turn to the theory chapter and introduce the ideas and concepts that will be used for the investigation of the male body in the primary texts. Then, the analysis section will follow, which investigates the male body in *Frankenstein* and *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein* by analysing three male-male relationships: Victor and the monster, Victor and Walton, Victor and Clerval. For each of the three relationships, it is discussed how they reflect male hysteria and homoeroticism in both the novel and the film. The discussion of male embodiment, as mentioned, is integrated into the investigations of hysteria and homoeroticism.

\(^{10}\) I do not speak of hysteria and repression in strictly Freudian terms, although my ideas are certainly influenced by Freud’s work, in as much as it has influenced European thinking in general during the twentieth century.\(^{11}\) Although I argue that Victor can be read as a homosexual character, I speak of his homoerotic desire most of the time, as opposed to homosexual desire. The reason for this is that I do not argue that he engages in an actual sexual relationship with one of the other male characters. As I treat his homoerotic desire in the novel – and only in the novel – as a sign of his homosexuality, however, the theory part explains the concept of homosexuality and not homoeroticism.
2 Analytical Framework

To argue for a simultaneous reading of novel and film, this chapter first presents Jørgen Bruhn’s ideas on adaptation as a dialogic process. The main part of the chapter starts with George L. Mosse’s ideas about the establishment of modern masculinity. Then, Michel Foucault’s work on sexuality is sketched, as well as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s continuum of male homosocial desire. Finally, Mark S. Micale’s account of hysteria and its history is outlined.

2.1 Adaptation Theory

In the introduction, I have touched upon the issue of fidelity. One of the most recent anthologies on adaptation is Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions, edited by Jørgen Bruhn, Anne Gjelsvik and Eirik Frisvold Hanssen. In their introductory chapter, the editors address “[t]he unavoidable question of fidelity” (5), pointing out that “most current research considers fidelity discourse as no longer viable” (5). Still, the authors consider the comparative element obligatory in case studies of adaptations; it lies in the nature of things, so to speak. One solution to this theoretical dilemma – the dilemma that comparison is unavoidable but easily leads to hierarchisation – has been “to ‘translate’ fidelity into the more neutral, and thus useful, measure of similarity and difference on various levels of the compared texts” (5). This is what this thesis does. As mentioned in the introduction, similarities and differences of the novel and the film will be analysed; but the similarities and differences will then be discussed as opposed to evaluated. My interest lies in the question what the differences I find may tell us about early nineteenth and late twentieth century ideas about the male body.
Comparing the novel and the film, I will have in mind the arguments that Bruhn makes in “Dialogizing Adaptation Studies: From One-way Transport to a Dialogic Two-way Process”. Bruhn argues that “[a]ny rewriting or adaptation of a text is always influencing the original work and even the most ‘loyal’ or repetitive adaptation imaginable is bound to be unsuccessful in terms of copying the original” (70). The idea that an adaptation affects and even changes the adapted text casts a different light on adaptation studies and the hierarchisation that might or might not be involved in comparative analyses. If adaptation is understood as a “two-way process” (Bruhn 69), the hierarchic relationship that has traditionally been assumed between a source and its adaptation becomes a reciprocal and therefore (at least more) equal one.

How, then, can the film, which comes second, influence the novel, which came first? And what should an investigation of an adaptation look like, assuming that the adaptation affects the adapted novel? According to Bruhn, the changes adaptations provoke in a novel are rather complex and cannot be easily explained. Still, two forms of changes that are commonly accepted are “[e]ditorial/authorial changes in the paratext” and “[c]hanges in readers’ reception” (73; emphases removed). The former can involve new book covers or other marketing strategies; an example for the latter is a reader who sees a novel in a new light, when he/she has seen a director’s interpretation of it. Studying an adaptation, Bruhn argues, “we should study both the source and result of the adaptation as two texts, infinitely changing positions, taking turns being sources for each other in the ongoing work of the reception in the adaptational process” (73; Bruhn’s emphasis).

This thesis, as mentioned, starts a new section always by discussing the novel. Still, at parts the discussion treats the novel and the film at once, that is, the discussions of the novel and the film are not always clearly separated. This is not a flaw in the structure of this essay,

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12 Or, as Leitch puts it, “the book will always be . . . better at being itself” (Discontents 16; Leitch’s emphasis).
but I am convinced that the close and dialogic relationship between a source and its adaptation that Bruhn suggests makes it necessary to look at the novel and the film together. This thesis reads the novel and the film together and in comparison, because that way I expect to learn more about the male body in Frankenstein and in Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein than the investigation of only one of the media would allow. Furthermore, I use comparative and contextual analyses out of curiosity and interest in the question how far today’s ideas about the male body have distanced themselves from or perhaps returned to nineteenth century ideas.

2.2 The Male Body

Masculinity and Homosexuality

As mentioned, Mosse outlines the emergence of the manly ideal from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards. According to Mosse, the masculine ideal, which involves courage, will power and honour, has been quite stable since then (4). Other components of the masculine stereotype in the eighteenth century were moderation and self-control (8). In this context, it is necessary to point out that Mosse refers to the manly ideal of the middle classes, which gained more and more importance at the time. The manly ideal of the upper classes could differentiate significantly from those of the middle classes, as the next section on hysteria will show.

It is crucial to mention that, in terms of hierarchies and binaries, two groups have been important for the creation of the masculine ideal: women and effeminate men have served as a contrast against which “man” has defined himself. For this thesis, it is essential to remember that “effeminate men” includes both homosexual and hysterical men. The ideal of masculinity has been established against women and effeminate men, then. According to Mosse, “the word effeminate came into general usage during the eighteenth century indicating an unmanly
softness and delicacy” (9; Mosse’s emphasis). Put differently, hardness has been crucial to the masculine stereotype from the beginning. Effeminate men, in contrast, have been “deprive[d] of their manhood” (Mosse 53).

Furthermore, the body has played an important role for the manly ideal. For Mosse, “[t]he stereotype of masculinity was conceived as a totality based upon the nature of man’s body” in the late eighteenth century (5). Mosse’s observation does not stand in contrast to the associations of masculinity with reason and femininity with a “passive, ‘natural’, bodily state” I have mentioned earlier in this essay (Bordo, “Reading” 288). While woman is governed by her monstrous body, man forms his body according to his will. Put differently, the male body is a signifier of manly virtues; it “took on symbolic meaning” in the late eighteenth century (Mosse 5). According to Mosse, “[m]asculinity was regarded as of one piece from its very beginning: body and soul, outward appearance and inward virtue were supposed to form one harmonious whole, a perfect construct where every part was in its place” (5).

Here, Mosse considers Johann Kaspar Lavater’s idea that a virtuous mind is accompanied by a beautiful body (25). This idea, together with the conviction that it is muscles that make a masculine and beautiful body – as prevalent both in the eighteenth century and in the late twentieth century (Mosse 29; Bordo, “Reading” 290) – potentially leads to a subordination of the body to the mind. This stands in contrast to what I refer to when I think of body and mind as a “harmonious whole” (Mosse 5), namely embodiment: the idea that human beings always react to and experience the world with their bodies and minds and that it is not possible to “turn off” either the one or the other.

It is also worth mentioning that the idea of the beautiful male body is not without homoerotic connotations. Mosse outlines the significance of Johann Joachim Winckelmann’s

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13 In this context, Patrick McGann’s “Eating Muscle: Material-Semiotics and a Manly Appetite” is interesting. Questioning the masculine ideal of the 1980s and 1990s in the US, McGann outlines the importance of “male-identified food signifiers” for the construction of masculinity (88). “Consuming [steak]”, McGann states, “represents no less than the equation of meat with power: men eating muscle to become muscular” (90).
work on the Greek sculpture for the development of the masculine ideal (29-39). As an art historian in the eighteenth century, Winckelmann praised the beauty of ancient Greek sculpture, most of all of young athletes, whose bodies connoted power and virility as well as proportion and self-control, strength and restraint. According to Mosse, “[t]his love for the body beautiful would . . . characterize the masculine stereotype” (32). As Winckelmann is known to have been homosexual, Mosse states that “a homoerotic sensibility stood at the start of an image that was to inform the ideal of normative masculinity” (32). Also Graham Robb points out that “Winckelmann’s sexuality was seen to be central to his influence on European culture” (93), but Robb does not refer to the manly ideal. Rather, Robb considers Winckelmann responsible for having shown that “Greek love” was not an intellectual enterprise only.

This is not to say that Winckelmann openly practised homosexuality.14 This would not have been possible at the time. It may be pointed out here that the words homosexual or homosexuality did not exist then. The Oxford English Dictionary dates the coinage of the term homosexuality back to 1892 (“homosexuality”).15 Neither had sexuality such a central role for the establishment of identity as it has today. Therefore, according to Max Fincher, “[d]iscussing sexuality along the lines of a modern idea of sexuality as a category of identity that we and others define us by is not so easily transferable to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries” (7). And yet, arguing that Frankenstein has a homosexual subtext, I speak of the sexuality and homosexuality of characters created in the early nineteenth century as well as men who lived at the time or earlier. Doing so, I keep in mind that I use modern

14 Robb speaks of Winckelmann’s “outing” (91), but “outing” (91) in this sense rather means giving nourishment to other people’s doubts about the own sexuality.
15 According to Foucault, as mentioned, homosexuality as it is understood today has existed since the 1870s: “We must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized – Westphal’s famous article of 1870 on ‘contrary sexual sensations’ can stand as its date of birth . . . ” (43).
terms to describe ancient phenomena, but phenomena that have changed their connotations probably several times in history.

Foucault famously outlines the development of the modern concept of sexuality in *The History of Sexuality*. Foucault argues that sex has not – as widely believed – been repressed since the classical age, but that, by contrast, sex has become an omnipresent topic. Foucault speaks of “the great process of transforming sex into discourse” (22) that began with confession in the Catholic Church and has infiltrated all spaces of human life. Before the nineteenth century, canonical and civil law together with the Christian pastoral established the heterosexual marriage as the space for sexual activity. “The ‘rest’”, Foucault writes about those whose sexuality did not correspond to the norms, “remained a good deal more confused” (37). In other words, same-sex sex was not distinguished from other sexual practices that did not conform to the norms or the law, as for example adultery; nor did the term exist, as I have already explained.

Yet, as Sedgwick points out, something like a male homosexual culture did exist already among the aristocrats of seventeenth century Britain, and “[t]he cluster of associations about this role . . . include effeminacy, connoisseurship, high religion, and an interest in Catholic Europe” (93). Still, Sedgwick admits that these are associations that have been made with aristocrats rather generally, independently of their assumed sexual preferences.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, then, saw a “discursive explosion” (38) regarding sex and sexuality, Foucault argues. This explosion resulted, amongst other things, in the classifications of pathological sexuality that medical doctors and psychoanalysts established in the nineteenth century. Paradoxically, these categorisations have led to a “multiplication of disparate sexualities” (49): sexual practices and desires that before had been subsumed under the term sodomy were now differentiated, labelled and analysed. Alternative sexualities “became things that were essentially different” (39). As Mosse
observes, drawing on Paul Derks, “in the eighteenth century there was a certain tolerance of homosexuality that would be unthinkable in the next century. Tolerance then did not mean acceptance of homosexuality but an ability to ignore it” (67), as in cases like Winckelmann’s, whose homosexuality was tacitly accepted.

In the nineteenth century, this was not possible any longer. The homosexual became a distinct category; in Foucault’s words, “[t]he sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species” (43). Moreover, sexuality became essential for the definition of people’s identity: “The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology . . . Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality” (43). For this thesis, as mentioned, the difference in the conceptualisation of homosexuality before and after the 1870s is interesting, as it deals with a novel that was written before and a film that was made after this “turn”. As I have pointed out, the thesis will argue that Victor can be read as homosexual in the novel but not in the film. In other words, there is a far greater homoerotic dimension to the novel than to the film.

Foucault shows further that a “normalizing society” (144) developed in the nineteenth century, in which sex was omnipresent and became an important political instrument. Sex gave rise “to an entire micro-power concerned with the body” (145-46) and sexuality “became the stamp of individuality – at the same time what enabled one to analyze the latter and what made it possible to master it” (146). It is interesting to consider Mosse in this context, according to whom homosexual men served as a foil for normative masculinity and thus masculine identity in the nineteenth century (83). Homosexual men were seen as outsiders, people who “could have no honor” (63) and therefore were unmanly – as honour

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16 Robb questions Foucault and criticises that Foucault’s position has been taken too far by scholars who posit that homosexuality had not existed before the term was coined (11, 43). Robb points out that “there always were people who were primarily or exclusively attracted to people of their own sex. . . . and were perceived to be different” (12).
was essential for the manly ideal. All middle class men, however, who did not correspond to the masculine stereotype, were seen as a threat for masculinity (83). This applied to sick men as well. In other words, both homosexual and sick men, especially when their sickness was associated with weak nerves, that is hysteria, provided countertypes of normative masculinity. Both groups were considered effeminate and both lacked self-control, one of the integral components of the manly ideal.

Returning to Foucault, he speaks of sexuality and sex in rather abstract terms, as he points out himself. Thus, he asks himself whether “the analysis of sexuality necessarily impl[ies] the elision of the body, anatomy, the biological, the functional” (151). His answer is no. The body does not have to be effaced, but it is necessary to understand that the body is not there a priori. For Foucault, the body is formed as a social construct within discourse, or in his words, “the biological and the historical are not consecutive to one another . . . but are bound together in an increasingly complex fashion in accordance with the development of the modern technologies of power that take life as their objective” (152).

While Foucault explains how the heterosexual/homosexual binary has come about, Sedgwick’s ideas make it possible to formulate a relationship of hetero- and homosexuality that does without dichotomies. Yet, in the focus of her work stands the relationship between male homosociality and male homosexuality. Sedgwick describes a continuum that she names “male homosocial desire” (1), with social bonding at the one end and homosexuality at the other end of the continuum. Hence, Sedgwick makes explicit the “potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual” (1). The term desire, in Sedgwick, is not reserved for genital desire, then, but stands for “the affective or social force, the glue, even when its manifestation is hostility . . . that shapes an important relationship” (2). It is further interesting that bonding activities, that is activities that enhance links between men but are not
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sexually motivated, “may, as in our society, be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality” (1).

Sedgwick’s and Foucault’s ideas are applicable today. But what about the manly ideal in the 1990s and the implications of homosexuality then? According to Mosse, “a general change in the accepted morals and manners, basic to any change in the [masculine] stereotype was as yet – by the 1990s – very much in doubt” (191). Of course there had been developments – the woman’s rights movement and the gay and lesbian movement are two important examples – that had challenged the established ideal, and new alternative images of masculinity had emerged. Yet, the image of masculinity that had been established in the nineteenth century had survived and been consolidated.

Gays and lesbians had definitely gained more rights by the end of the twentieth century, but many gay men, too, embraced the traditional idea of masculinity and emphasised their masculine attributes (Mosse 190). Also, even if gay men did not serve as a countertype anymore the way they had done in previous centuries, they still were experienced as an Other. Bordo follows the discussion about homosexuals in the military, and finds that “the arguments against ‘integrated’ locker rooms and showers are not about regulating gay behaviour but about protecting heterosexual men from certain unacceptable thoughts and feelings of their own” (“Reading” 283; Bordo’s emphasis). When heterosexual men know that there are gay men among them in the shower room, they feel the power of the male gaze on themselves, that is they feel objectified and denigrated. For Bordo, this is paradoxical: “For although it is the imagined effeminacy of homosexual men that makes them objects of heterosexual derision, here it is their imagined masculinity (that is, the consciousness of them as active, evaluating sexual subjects, with a defining and ‘penetrating’ sexual gaze) that makes them the objects of heterosexual fear” (“Reading” 287; Bordo’s emphasis). Worse than the fear of being looked at, however, is the idea of being penetrated. Gendered dualism ascribes activity
to men and passivity to women. In other words, men want to be in control. The idea of being the passive part is, therefore, threatening and associated with femininity and effeminacy.

Bordo also comments the ideal of the masculine body, that, in my opinion, has been surprisingly stable since Winckelmann. She explains, somewhat provocatively, “[g]ay and straight, male and female, blue-collar and white collar, everyone in our culture today (who can afford to) is getting hard and ripped” (“Reading” 290). The analysis will show that Victor corresponds to this ideal in the film; the novel does not give any details about his looks, but he is displayed as nervous and sick, and therefore as weak rather than strong. However, considering Bordo’s statement, one may ask how far the gay and lesbian as well as the women’s movement have challenged the masculine ideal or contributed to its maintenance by striving for the same ideals. I conclude that while, officially, the gap between heterosexual men and women as well as gay men had become smaller, the image of the masculine and muscular man from the 1800s was still prevalent in the 1990s. For this image, hardness, will power, and self-restraint (body forming requires much self-restraint) were the important features. When it comes to Victor Frankenstein, he shows will power when he creates the monster, but self-restraint is not a trait he possesses.

**Male Hysteria in History**

As mentioned, women and gay men were not the only groups that served as countertypes for the creation and maintenance of the modern ideal of masculinity. Another group were sick men, especially those whose illness was associated with bad nerves. Put differently, both homosexual and hysterical men were seen as effeminate and functioned as foils for normative masculinity. Furthermore, hysterical men were regularly considered homosexual, for example in nineteenth century France (Micale 200).

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17 There were other male main characters who were presented that way at the time, for example Goethe’s Werther. Victor is no exception, then, which is crucial when it comes to the historicisation of my findings.
According to Micale, “[h]ysteria is among the oldest described disorders . . . and among the most gendered” (5). From ancient times until the fifth century, hysteria was explained by gynaecological theories and thus considered an exclusively female illness (Micale 8-10; Mullan 207). This did not change during the fifth to thirteenth centuries, although Christianity found new, demonological explanations for the disease. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries then, hysteria was demystified and “became a medical malady” (Micale 11). In the seventeenth century, hysteria came to be explained by neurological factors and the gender-specificity of the illness was first questioned during the 1670s to the 1690s. Great Britain produced many publications on the matter and two important names in this context are Thomas Willis and Thomas Sydenham. In the late 1600s, they introduced a new diagnosis, hypochondriasis, which was the male form of hysteria. Willis’ and Sydenham’s terms and categories of male and female forms of hysteria were “common currency by the middle of the eighteenth century” (204), as John Mullan puts it in Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century.

Although Willis’ and Sydenham’s neurological explanations of hysteria were not as gendering as previous theories – Sydenham described hysteria and hypochondriasis as “for all intents and purposes the identical disorder” (Micale 19) – the two physicians still considered the prevalence of the nervous illness significantly higher in women than in men. Moreover, nervous men were not considered “real men”, as Mosse points out, “[s]ick and diseased men had ruined their nerves, which not only threatened to make them effeminate . . . but, through the state of their bodies and mind, documented their lack of manliness” (60).

Nonetheless, among the British upper class, the attitude towards nervousness in men was different in the eighteenth century. Britain, then, witnessed what Micale calls in a heading “The Nervous Culture of Georgian Britain” (22). Micale outlines “a number of overlapping cults of sensibility” (24) that were prevalent from the 1730s to the 1790s in
medicine, philosophy, theology and literary writing. In literary writing, emotional and sentimental characters dominated throughout this “age of sensibility” (Micale 24), and both male and female characters shed tears without it being perceived inappropriate. However, the English malady, as the physician George Cheyne named nervous illness, was associated with the upper classes (Micale 40; Mullan 203). As Micale puts it, “[g]ood blood and bad nerves went hand in hand” (26). Still, Mullan stresses the ambivalence of nervous illness: “For the physicians, a susceptibility to the powers of feeling may be a token of refinement, but it is also the cause of disturbance” (207).

Nevertheless, neither the literary nor the medical discourse stigmatised the nervous individual during the 1730s to 1790s (Micale 36). Hysterical women and men could well be caricatured but nothing more. In other words, nervous men were not considered effeminate or homosexual in eighteenth century medical or literary writings in Britain. Yet, the broad public did consider the man of sensibility effeminate, as Tim Fulford points out in Romanticism and Masculinity (7). They worshiped Lord Nelson, not least because he embodied the opposite of the aristocratic men, who had disappointed the public with their nervous preciousness: “The effeminate man of sensibility, the ineffective Dukes and Princes, were compensated for by a hero who redefined chivalry in terms of resolution, self-command and paternalism” (Fulford 7). Thus, Lord Nelson represented the manly ideal of the middle classes that has been outlined in the previous part of this essay.

From the 1790s onwards, the discussion of hysteria in literary and medical writing changed. This is noteworthy because Frankenstein was written in the 1810s and one might expect that Mary Shelley was influenced both by the take on male hysteria prevalent during the cult of sensibility and the discourse on male hysteria that dominated the 1800s. Yet, there was not one discourse on male hysteria in the nineteenth century. For Micale, there were two cultures of hysteria that dominated the decades from the 1790s to the 1870s (99). Romantic
writers showed great interest in psychological aspects of men and considered imagination a source for artistic creativity. For the Romantic poets, feeling and sympathy were female qualities, which they tried to include into the arts in order to create “a poetry of feeling” (Micale 104). The poets’ exploration of male psychology involved new ideals of the feminine or androgynous man. Still, their attitudes towards the English malady had changed, as well as to “the sensibility of the Georgian gentleman, who was now deemed silly and effete” (Micale 103). Of course, Mary Shelley’s husband Percy Shelley was one of the most famous Romantic poets and it is known that the couple had a common circle of writing friends. This is to say that Mary Shelley was very well acquainted with the ideas of the Romantic poets.

In contrast to the literary discourse, medical writings did not discuss male psychology between the 1790s and the 1870s. If male emotionality was hinted at in medical texts, then it was characterised “as a sign of personal weakness and national decline” (Micale 105). Male hysteria was stigmatised as a sign of femininity or effeminacy, and hysterical men were even said to have a feminine appearance. In 1807, the Scottish physician Thomas Trotter argued that “these persons are commonly pale and sallow, soft-fibred, and of a slender make. Not a few of them behind the counter approach in external form toward the female constitution; and they seem to borrow from their fair customers an effeminacy of manners . . . that sometimes make[s] their sex doubtful” (qtd. in Micale 83).

In this context it is worth remembering that the nineteenth century witnessed an increasing specialisation of and within the sciences, which came along with an increased gender divide. While medical and literary writing had worked together and established the English malady in the eighteenth century, the sciences and the arts became two different realms during the nineteenth century; one result of this being that reason now was considered masculine and emotions feminine. In this new climate, scientists, who all were men, did not want to discuss psychological aspects of masculinity openly (Micale 103). Once more
hysteria became an exclusively female illness, and from now on its causes were discussed in the context of sexuality. Thus,

to explore the possibility that hysteria was not a woman-only disorder risked uncovering the elements of mental and emotional “femininity” in the “male” psyche itself. In a related threat, just as the male medical gaze on female hysteria repeatedly produced a sexualized discourse, so the specter of male physicians gazing with passionate intensity on other adult men in intimate emotional distress suggested an unacceptable homoerotic intimacy. (Micale 281)

The general public adopted the view of the scientific discourse rather than the poets’ attitude to emotions and masculinity. One reason for that was the changing society: now the growing Protestant middle class set the trends rather than aristocracy. The ideal Protestant man was a good husband and father and belonged to the “upholders of the social order” (Micale 54); he was industrious, tough and sober. Emotional self-expression, sensual pleasures and idleness were disdained. Another reason was impending war. In a climate of constant war threat, scientific values like control and rationality must have seemed more desirable than the emotionality of the poets. According to Mosse, the “stereotype of the clean-cut young Englishman” (50) who displayed power and courage and who was ready to die for his country in war had become widely accepted by the 1850s.

To conclude the theory section, it only remains to say that hysteria was not a topic anymore at the end of the twentieth century (Micale 283). The diagnosis hysteria was replaced by other diagnoses, which do not have a gendered or sexist history, and which can be summarised as psychosomatic disorders.

This chapter has presented Bruhn’s ideas on adaptation as a theoretical background for reading novel and film together. Then, the historical concepts masculinity, homosexuality and
male hysteria have been outlined. Whereas Mosse argues that the modern idea of masculinity has its origin in the second half of the eighteenth century, Foucault dates the “creation” of homosexuality to the 1870s. This is not to say that same-sex desire and love did not exist before, but the concept homosexuality as a distinct form of sexuality and identity forming characteristic came to existence only then. Sedgwick makes it possible to consider male-male friendship and male homosexuality not as opposites but as located on a continuum of male homosocial desire. Hysteria, according to Micale, has been discussed constantly since the ancient times, but only in relation to women. Male hysteria was not believed possible until the seventeenth century. Middle class men in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries considered both hysterical and homosexual men effeminate. In the twentieth century, then, hysteria as a concept was dismissed, and gay rights were established.
3 Hysteria and Homoeroticism – The Body of Victor Frankenstein

As mentioned in the introduction, I am not the first one who is interested in the male body in *Frankenstein*. The first part of the following analysis is particularly indebted to London’s “Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, and the Spectacle of Masculinity”, which argues that the male body in *Frankenstein* can be read as a spectacle.

This thesis wants to continue what London begins, namely a “reconsideration” of the “common understanding of masculinity” that does not deny the male body (261). Taking her article as a point of departure, I claim that *Frankenstein* conveys more about the male body than that it is a spectacle: the novel illustrates male embodiment. One instance of embodiment is the hysterical symptoms Victor shows in the novel and which, I argue, result from the way he handles his homoerotic desires. The depiction of male embodiment, hysteria and homoeroticism in the novel is then compared to the film *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein*; this is done separately for the three relationships Victor and monster, Victor and Walton, and Victor and Clerval.

London reads *Frankenstein* through three pieces of art, among them Henry Weekes’ sculpture *Monument to Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, which displays Mary Shelley mourning over the dead Percy Shelley.18 London’s paper establishes parallels between the novel *Frankenstein* and the pieces of art, arguing that these “memorials reactivate *Frankenstein*’s own iconography, opening the novel to new interpretive possibilities” (255). This thesis will return to the discussion of Weekes’ sculpture, which I find interesting not only because it shows Mary and Percy Shelley but because it constitutes an example of 1800s masculinity; although not of normative 1800s masculinity, as I will argue in the section “Monstrous Homoeroticism in (Mary Shelley’s) *Frankenstein*”.

18 The other two pieces of art London discusses are Edward Onslow Ford’s sculpture *Shelley Memorial* and Louis-Édouard Fournier’s painting *The Funeral of Shelley*. For images of the sculptures and the painting, see [http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/london.html](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/london.html).
London’s text is important as it suggests “read[ing] Frankenstein’s self-display in and as the writing of his body” (261). Since such an approach has generally been reserved for the reading of female characters, London increases the possibilities of reading male characters and bodies in general. In my view, a concentration on the similarities between the genders, starting from the fact that both men and women have bodies or, what is more, are embodied beings, questions both the hierarchy mind/body and the binary man/woman. To overcome the gendering of the body as female is a step towards thwarting the mind/body hierarchy. If there is evidence that the body is as important for men as for women, the concept body “crosses a line” from inferior to superior concepts, as male still is coded superior to female. At the same time, such a “crossing of frontiers” would weaken the binary male/female, as it becomes clear that man and woman have something in common.

This thesis, then, continues London’s questioning of the man/woman binary, but it extends the discussion London has started in that it investigates male embodiment – in addition to the body as a passive spectacle – and in that it includes a historical perspective; it compares a novel from the 1810s with a film from the 1990s.

3.1 Victor and the Monster

Male Hysteria in *Frankenstein*

During the creation scene, Victor’s body is very prominent. Speaking of the time when he was working on the monster, Victor remembers how his “cheek had grown pale” and his “eyeballs were starting from their sockets” (32). For London, Victor reveals male specularity by referring to his body “as an object made up of component parts” this way (261). In my opinion, the scene conveys embodiment and, therefore, says more about the male body than that it is there and can be looked at and thus is a spectacle. Also Mary A. Favret comments the close relation between body and mind in *Frankenstein*. In “A Woman Writes the Fiction of
Science: The Body in *Frankenstein*, Favret argues that *Frankenstein* counters early nineteenth century scientists’ and poets’ takes on the body, “whereas scientist and poet disengage ‘mind’ or ‘genius’ from matter in order to elevate a new, disembodied conception of human nature, the novelist insists upon binding those artificial conceptions to the flesh. Animation will have bodily form and bodily consequences” (55). I want to point out, however, that male embodiment is not only bound to the animation of the monster but is omnipresent in the novel, although it may become most obvious in connection with the creation of the monster. I argue in this section that Victor’s ideals reflect an early nineteenth century take on masculinity: he tries to be a man of reason. He does not reach this ideal, however, partly because he engages in un-reasonable theories that have already been laid aside at his time, partly because he cannot free himself from his body; he is an embodied person, which involves more than merely having a body. In Victor’s case, one way in which his embodiment is expressed is the development of hysterical symptoms.

Victor explicitly defines his ideal: “A human being in perfection ought always to preserve a calm and peaceful mind, and never to allow passion or transitory desire to disturb his tranquillity” (33). It is striking that the body is not mentioned at all in this ideal. One could say that Victor’s ideal expresses the absence of a monstrous body, as passion and desire are associated with the body. However, Victor’s ideal reflects the English middle class ideal of the nineteenth century, as self-control is a crucial factor of this ideal (Mosse 49).

Victor also comments implicitly on the ideals of the time. I have earlier named Virey, who in 1823 wrote that “males live by the head, the heart, the extremities, and the upper portions of the body” (qtd. in Micale 70). Women, in contrast, “live by the uterus, abdomen, and tissue of their breasts, as well as by their lower, internal organs” (qtd. in Micale 70). This theoretical position is reflected in the creation scene, as Victor only mentions those parts of his body that Virey ascribes to men: his “heart”, “cheek”, “head”, “eyeballs” and his “limbs”
Describing himself in terms of the upper parts of the body and extremities, then, Victor stresses his masculine features. However, the gender binary is not the only hierarchic dualism the scene addresses. In terms of the mind/body dualism, Victor ignores his bodily needs and continues with his studies – which obviously are associated with reason, however unreasonable they are – no matter how he feels: Although he is “emaciated with confinement” (32), he stays “engaged, heart and soul, in one pursuit” (32).  

Even though Victor strives after being a man of reason, to concentrate on his studies and not to be affected by his body, he cannot repress his body and postpone the satisfaction of bodily needs in the long run; Victor begins to display symptoms of hysteria:

> Every night I was oppressed by a slow fever, and I became nervous to a most painful degree; a disease that I regretted the more because I had hitherto enjoyed most excellent health, and had always boasted of the firmness of my nerves. But I believed that exercise and amusement would soon drive away such symptoms; and I promised myself both of these, when my creation should be complete. (33-34)

As the quote illustrates, Victor knows instinctively that what he does is wrong. His body reacts with nervous symptoms to the scientific and therefore seemingly “reason-able” work Victor engages in. On this point I agree with Hobbs, who in “Reading the Symptoms: An Exploration of Repression and Hysteria in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*” states, Victor’s “body [signals] that the project conflicts with his internal moral code” (161). Similarly, Favret argues that “Victor’s exhausted body, like that of a hysteric, must represent the secret exchange [he has with the monster] that he cannot articulate” (52). In other words, Victor’s body displays more reason than his mind, as his body warns Victor that what he does is

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19 Favret argues that both Victor and Mary Shelley prioritise their projects – which both involve the creation of the monster’s body – over their own bodies, stating that “[i]n their disregard for personal health, the creators’ own bodies ironically become instruments sacrificed to the demands of production” (52).
wrong. The hierarchy of the Cartesian mind/body dualism is turned around here. This is the case not only when Victor works on the male monster, but it repeats itself when he works on the female monster.\(^\text{20}\) Victor remembers: “I looked towards its completion with a tremulous and eager hope, which I dared not trust myself to question, but which was intermixed with obscure forebodings of evil, that made my heart sicken in my bosom” (114).

The relationship of body and mind is also addressed later in the story. When Victor reports his experiences to Walton, his “limbs . . . tremble, and [his] eyes swim with the remembrance” (32). The fact that the memory alone goes along with such bodily effects illustrates a union of body and mind in the sense that body and mind always react together. Victor remembers the creation of the monster not only with his brains but also with his body, that is, as an embodied person. As Favret puts it, “it is Victor’s body that, having already exhibited an emaciated frame, a pale cheek, chattering teeth, and convulsed limbs, registers a ‘violent antipathy even to the name of natural philosophy’” (57; my emphasis). After the monster has disappeared from Ingolstadt, Victor does not want to be reminded of him, as he feels physically ill when he thinks of anything that has to do with his creation.

However, I agree with Hobbs that Victor shows symptoms of hysteria and that he does so for the first time when he works on the monster. In the quote above Victor admits that he “became nervous” (33), after always having “enjoyed most excellent health” (33) and “boasted of the firmness of [his] nerves” (34). That is, Victor juxtaposes the healthy condition he enjoyed before he started his work on the monster with his seemingly weak condition shortly before the monster’s animation. As he used to “boast” of his firm nerves, mental strength is presented as desirable, perhaps manly. A nervous condition would therefore be

\(^{20}\) There have been discussions whether the monster is male or female. In “Horror’s Twin: Mary Shelley’s Monstrous Eve”, Sandra M. Gilbert suggests that “Victor Frankenstein’s male monster may really be a female in disguise” (63), and she concludes that Victor and the monster “were Eve and Eve all along” (71). I consider the monster a male monster, not least because Victor uses male pronouns speaking of him. Furthermore, the monster demands “a creature of another sex” (99), which Victor defines as female when he is asking himself, “the creature who already lived loathed his own deformity, and might he not conceive a greater abhorrence for it when it came before his eyes in the female form?” (114).
something undesirable and negative, perhaps feminine. In this context, it is interesting to remember that hysteria was considered a female illness over many centuries. Hobbs, then, reads Victor’s hysteria as a sign of femininity. Furthermore, Hobbs sees his hysteria not only as an expression or result of the violation of his internalised moral concepts, but “Victor’s [hysterical] body becomes”, for Hobbs, “the text of the feminine characteristics he has denied himself”, that is of repressed fear and emotions (161). As I have mentioned in the introduction to this essay, I read Victor’s hysterical symptoms as the result of his repressing homoerotic desire. Although Hobbs does not speak of homosexuality or homoeroticism, in a specific sense her argument can be seen to include my position; if one defines erotic desire for men as a feminine characteristic. In the public opinion, male homosexuality and femininity or effeminacy were closely associated during the nineteenth century.

London, too, describes Victor as a hysterical character, referring to the scene of Clerval’s arrival in Ingolstadt after the animation of the monster: “Possessed by an ‘excess of sensitiveness’ and activated by Clerval’s gaze, Frankenstein’s body becomes a notable site of hysterical self-display” (262). Nevertheless, London points out that male hysteria had been treated “as a sign of privilege and superiority” (262) the decades before Frankenstein was written. Therefore, London does not interpret Victor’s hysteria as a sign of femininity like Hobbs. London calls Victor’s body “a grotesque male body” (262) and argues that Frankenstein “participates in a culturally specific reconfiguration of the problems of masculine idealization” (262).

In my opinion, Victor’s hysterical symptoms cannot simply be considered a sign of femininity or a sign of superiority, as both positions are too simplifying. As I have outlined in the theory part, there were various contradicting discourses on male hysteria prevalent at the time. Male hysteria was – in upper class circles – associated with superiority during the cult
of sensibility in eighteenth century Britain but scorned or hushed up during the nineteenth century.

Hobbs builds her argument that Victor displays a female form of hysteria on the physician John Ferriar, a Scotsman who worked in a Manchester asylum around 1800. According to Ferriar, hysteria in men results from hard drinking or feelings like pride, disappointment, anxiety over business and terror, whereas in women it results from repressed or misdirected passions (Hobbs 153-54). I agree with Hobbs that, in terms of this classification, Victor’s symptoms can be assigned to the second category, female hysteria. Mullan, however, who studies quite a few medical sources from the time, notes regarding the risk of becoming hypochondriac that men who were diagnosed as hypochondriac were “typically described as those who study, who write, who remove themselves from a world of trade, ambition, and ‘business’” (208). According to such a diagnostic manual, Victor would be prone to hypochondriasis, that is, the male form of hysteria. He stays on his own to pursue his studies and withdraws from the world. One cannot say that he has no ambitions, of course, but his ambitions have nothing to do with trade or business. Before and during the creation of the monster, Victor resembles the image of the mad scientist rather than the ambitious businessman. He is not so much interested in wealth as in knowledge and, for that matter, glory: “[W]ealth was an inferior object; but what glory would attend the discovery, if I could banish disease from the human frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!” (22). As Mullan has studied considerably more sources than Hobbs, who only refers to Ferriar, I lean my interpretation of Victor on Mullan’s findings and read Victor’s nervousness as the male form of hysteria.

This part of the analysis has shown that Victor displays embodiment; he cannot repress his body but develops hysterical, that is bodily, symptoms during the time he works on the creation of the monster. I have described his symptoms as a male form of hysteria,
according to Mullan’s findings on the diagnosis of hypochondriasis in the eighteenth and
nineteenth centuries. As there were contradicting discourses on male hysteria in the
eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it is too early to say something about the associations
Victor’s hysterical symptoms may have evoked at the time. Before I go on to analyse male
hysteria in the film Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, I want to discuss male homoerotic desire
and the role it plays in the creation scene in both the novel and the film.

**Monstrous Homoeroticism in (Mary Shelley’s) Frankenstein**

There are two reasons why I interrupt the discussion of hysteria at this stage of the essay:
Firstly, because I argue that Victor’s hysterical symptoms not only arise from repressing
fatigue or, as Hobbs argues, from the conflict between his actions and his ethical values, but
from repressing homoerotic desire. Secondly, in my opinion, the sculptures London draws on
in her reading of Frankenstein reveal more than only the specularity of the male body. I argue
that Weekes’ Monument to Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Shelley conveys male
homoeroticism, which can also be found in the novel.21

Therefore, I return to Weekes’ sculpture now; the scope of this thesis does not allow
an interpretation of both sculptures London discusses. A closer look at the sculpture reveals
that Percy Shelley’s male body is modelled with both masculine and feminine features. In this
context, it is important to name two things: Firstly, there have been rumours that Percy
Shelley had love affairs with men and with women. John Lauritsen argues in “Hellenism and
Homoeroticism in Shelley and His Circle” that Percy Shelley was gay and not attracted to

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21 As mentioned, the sculpture is interesting because it provides an example of nineteenth century masculinity. Furthermore, the sculpture shows Percy Shelley, and thus I relate the discussion of Victor’s homoeroticism not only to the investigation of masculinity and male hysteria but also to biographical circumstances in Mary Shelley’s life. Both Mellor and William Veeder use biographical material in their analyses of Frankenstein. Relating Victor to Percy Shelley, Veeder states in Mary Shelley & Frankenstein: The Fate of Androgyny, “[h]omosexuality is also a component of Victor’s pursuit of the monster and of [Percy] Shelley’s intense relationships with various men” (88). Veeder, however, goes on to read the relationship between Victor and the monster in terms of hermaphroditism, considering the two together as one hermaphrodite (98). This essay, in contrast, wants to focus on the component of homosexuality or homoeroticism in both the novel and the film.
women. According to Lauritsen, Percy Shelley made editorial changes in his love poems, for example changed originally male into female names, in order to cover his homoerotic desires. Moreover, Percy Shelley wrote the essay “Discourse on the Manners of the Ancient Greeks Relative to the Subject of Love”, in which he campaigns for tolerance for same-sex sex. This essay was, however, not published in full length until in 1931 (Robb 177). Nevertheless, it is only possible to draw conclusions on Percy Shelley’s homo- or bisexuality; there is no “real” evidence. As Fincher notes in another context, “we cannot speak of ‘being in the closet’ in the Romantic period because being out is not an option, being doubted is” (22).

Secondly, as mentioned in the theory part, both hysterical and homosexual men were said to have a “feminine appearance” at the time. Percy Shelley himself writes in a letter about Lord Byron’s homosexual friends that they are “wretches who seem almost to have lost the gait and physiognomy of man, and who do not scruple to avow practices which are not only not named but I believe seldom even conceived in England” (qtd. in Robb 177). Whether this was his real opinion or meant to conceal his own homosexuality is not an issue of this essay. What is important here is the prevalence of the idea that homosexual men look feminine in the nineteenth century.

The idea that effeminate men – which includes hysterical and homosexual men – have what is traditionally considered female forms is reflected in Weekes’ sculpture, alongside Percy Shelley’s virility. His virility is expressed, according to London, by “the veiled phallus that centers the scene” (255). London states further that the sculpture makes “self-conscious borrowings from Christian iconography, [and] calls attention . . . to the display of

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22 Lauritsen also accuses Mary Shelley of having launched a “campaign of disinformation” (359) after Percy Shelley’s death, in order to cover the tracks of his homosexuality.
masculinity” (254-55). I agree with London that the sculpture recalls Michelangelo’s *Pietà*. Yet, in my opinion, the resemblance of Percy Shelley in Weekes’ sculpture to sculptures of Jesus does not only accentuate masculinity. The *Pietà* displays Virgin Mary as she holds Jesus’ dead body in her lap. Jesus Christ, as the Son of God made man, combines images of power and feebleness in one person. As I see it, it is the same with Percy in the sculpture; it is his male, virile body that takes centre stage, but he is dead, his head falls back, the mouth is open and the chest lies bare. The posture expresses vulnerability. Furthermore, Michelangelo is known for his homoerotic themes (Lauritsen 358). Therefore, Weekes’ *Monument*, because of its similarity to Michelangelo’s work but also because of the rumours of Percy Shelley’s homo- or bisexuality, carries hidden connotations to homoeroticism. What is more, I also see resemblances to Titian’s *Venus and the Lute Player*. Percy Shelley’s body is in a position similar to the *Venus*’ (erotic) body; there are many paintings with women in such a pose, hence the sculpture’s feminine and erotic touch. It follows that the sculpture not only reveals the specularity of the male body London refers to, but it also alludes to homoeroticism.

Is this homoeroticism reflected in *Frankenstein* and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*? Laplace-Sinatra asks the same question in “Science, Gender and Otherness in Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Kenneth Branagh’s Film Adaptation”, focusing mainly on the relationship between Victor and the monster. He argues that “the film re-inscribes Victor’s homosexuality by over-emphasising his heterosexuality” (258). For Laplace-Sinatra, Victor shows homoerotic desire for his creation in the novel, which is reflected in the film’s creation scene in the struggle between Victor and the creature, when Victor tries to help the monster stand up (263). Heidi Kaye, in “Feminist Sympathies Versus Masculine Backlash: Kenneth Branagh’s *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein***”, comments on homoeroticism in the film’s creation scene too.

23 For an image of Weekes’ sculpture, see http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/london.html . An image of the *Pietà* can be found here: http://www.italianrenaissance.org/michelangelos-pieta/ .
24 For an image of the painting, see http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/36.29 .
Kaye argues that “Branagh’s semi-nakedness is not represented as heterosexual. He is showing off for the boys, not the girls” (68). I agree that the creation scene in the film carries homoerotic connotations, but I am reluctant to describe them as the failure of Branagh’s attempts “to prevent any potential misreading of the story which would imply homosexuality”, as Laplace-Sinatra does (263). Rather, I want to draw on Sedgwick’s continuum of male homosocial desire here.

As I see it, the struggle between Victor and the monster potentially undermines Victor’s masculinity, or at least his heterosexual masculinity. Like Laplace-Sinatra, I see the wrestling, (half-)naked bodies as a suggestion of a sex act (263). Does this mean that Victor is gay? For me, the answer is no; mainly because of the important role Elizabeth plays in the film. It is here where Sedgwick comes in, as her ideas help us to explain the assumed contradiction between Victor’s heterosexuality and the homoeroticism he expresses. Sedgwick’s continuum makes it possible to think of men as having homoerotic desires while still being heterosexual. If homosocial bonding and homosexuality are the opposite poles of a continuum of homosocial desire, it is not clear where on this continuum (or whether at all) homoerotic desires involve not being heterosexual. In fact, Sedgwick’s Between Men aims “to question . . . the presumptively symmetrical opposition between homo- and heterosexuality” (219). The fact that Victor shows homoerotic desire in the creation scene is, therefore, not enough evidence to speak of him as homosexual (in the sense of having sexual desire for men and for men only). More evidence would be necessary for that, which, in my opinion, the film does not give. In contrast, as I have pointed out, I will argue that Victor can be read as a homosexual character in the novel. In the novel, he shows desire for the monster and for Clerval but not for Elizabeth, and also the relationship between Victor and Walton differentiates considerably in terms of homoeroticism between novel and film.
Nonetheless, Victor abandons the monster right after his creation, which has been much commented by literary critics. According to Laplace-Sinatra, the abandonment “illustrates the masculine inability to deal with the trauma of after-birth” (264), but can also be explained as Victor’s reaction “to his own sexuality when he is confronting the naked body of his Creature” (265). The idea to read Frankenstein as “the trauma of afterbirth” (264) goes back to Ellen Moers, who was the first to read the novel as a “birth myth” (216), in her seminal essay “Female Gothic: The Monster’s Mother”. For Moers, the novel reflects a woman’s postnatal depression as well as her fear to lose her child. Other feminist critics, for example Mellor, focus on procreation in Frankenstein and point out that the idea of men making men renders women superfluous (115). I suggest another possibility to read Frankenstein’s artificial procreation: if procreation were possible without heterosexual sex, this would thwart the difference between heterosexual and homosexual sex, or at least the most important difference. Jeremy Bentham, according to Robb the “real silent star of early gay rights” around 1800 (177), called homosexuality “the improlific appetite” (qtd. in Robb 177), stressing the fact that homosexual sex cannot be fertile. Victor’s endeavour to create human life can therefore be read as an attempt to equate homosexuality with heterosexuality.

Eric Daffron, too, investigates homoerotic desire in Frankenstein. In “Male Bonding: Sympathy and Shelley’s Frankenstein”, Daffron argues that the novel describes male-male relationships in terms of a continuum, “one that moves . . . from non-sexual to sexual male relations” (424). Daffron does not explicitly relate his findings to the continuum Sedgwick proposes, but makes visible a continuum reaching from same-sex friendship to heterosexual and male-male love that underlies Percy Shelley’s texts. It is this continuum that, according to Daffron, shows in Frankenstein.

Daffron, then, situates the relationship between Victor and Clerval at the non-sexual end of the continuum, considering it “a perfect example of close friendship” (424). The
relationship between the monster and Victor is, for Daffron, at the other end of the continuum. I agree with Daffron that “Victor manifests a certain desire for men” (425) in the novel that becomes visible not least in his physical excitement when he creates the monster, a male monster. Already Mellor has noted that “Frankenstein dedicates himself to his scientific experiment with a passion that can be described only as sexual” (121), and Halberstam, too, argues that Victor shows homoerotic desire during the creation of the monster. For Halberstam, Victor’s homoeroticism becomes evident through his “voluntary exclusion from friends and family in pursuit of the secret of creating life” (42). For Daffron, however, Victor’s desire becomes hatred when the monster realises Victor’s homosexuality and starts his campaign of revenge on Victor. Drawing on Sedgwick, according to whom homosexuality was the biggest secret one could have in the nineteenth century, Daffron reads Victor’s secret as “a feared desire for men” (425). That is, Victor’s homosexual desires turn into homophobia.

As I see it, the monster, whose creation Victor “had desired . . . with an ardour that far exceeded moderation” during the creation process (34), embodies Victor’s homoerotic desire in the novel; because of the passion the monster arouses in Victor and because Victor keeps him so secret. Furthermore, Foucault argues that the eighteenth and nineteenth century “persecution of the peripheral sexualities entailed an incorporation of perversions” (42; Foucault’s emphasis). The monster is such an incorporation; Victor’s homoerotic desire manifests itself not only in his own body but also in the body of the monster. However, only the monster in the novel can embody Victor’s peripheral sexuality – the sections “Victor and Walton” and “Victor and Clerval” will bring more evidence for Victor’s homosexuality; in the film, Victor’s sexuality corresponds to the heterosexual norm. There are also other reasons why I do not want to speak of the monster as an embodiment of Victor’s homoeroticism in the film: Firstly, Victor’s expectations when he creates the monster are directed to the outside
world, the cure of diseases, not to his inner world, his sexuality; the following part on male hysteria in the film will discuss this in more detail. Secondly, Victor talks to Clerval about his plans, that is the monster is not as secret. Thirdly, although he decides to create a male monster first in the film, too, he creates a female monster as well, which shows that he is not as concentrated on male life in the film as in the novel. Last but not least, he uses Waldman’s brain for the monster, a man he admires intellectually rather than he “desires” him sexually.

Note that neither Laplace-Sinatra nor Daffron speaks of the monster embodying Victor’s homoerotic desire in the novel. Instead, Laplace-Sinatra uses the term when it comes to Elizabeth in the film; for him, “Elizabeth comes to embody Victor’s heterosexuality in the film” (265). Nevertheless, if the monster embodies Victor’s homoerotic desire as well as the fears such a forbidden desire provokes at the same time – remember that Daffron reads “Frankenstein’s secret . . . as a feared desire for men” (425) – then Victor must be ambivalent towards the monster, wanting to abandon and to stay with him at the same time.

To draw on Sedgwick’s continuum of male homosocial desire, in the very moment Victor animates the monster, he leaves the “safe” end of the homosocial bonding side of the continuum and starts a journey towards the homosexual end of the continuum. Yet, his ambivalence towards or fear of his own emotions and desires makes him abandon the monster. This conforms to Laplace-Sinatra’s argument I have mentioned, that Victor leaves the monster because the creation confronts him with his homosexuality (265). Sedgwick herself argues that the “sense of persecution [prevalent in Frankenstein] represents the fearful, phantasmic rejection by recasting of an original homosexual (or even merely homosocial) desire” as described by Freud (91-92), which allows us to see Frankenstein as a novel

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25 Speaking of Victor’s desire for the monster or of the monster embodying Victor’s desire can make an important difference. In Bearing the Word, Margaret Homans argues that “Frankenstein’s desire for his creation lasts only so long as that creation remains uncreated” (107), that is without a living body. Therefore, Homans reads the novel as “the story of what it feels like to be the undesired embodiment of romantic imaginative desire” (108).
“embodying strongly homophobic mechanisms” (92). No matter what one thinks dominates in the end, Victor’s homoerotic desire or the homophobic reactions they provoke within him, it becomes clear that he is split by his ambivalent feelings for the monster. In the novel, the monster embodies his homoerotic desire and is therefore, following Sedgwick, the origin of homophobia at the same time. Taking this idea one step further, if the monster embodies Victor’s homoerotic desire, then it is his homoerotic desire that ruins him.

Against this background, the hysterical symptoms Victor shows in the novel can be read as resulting from an attempted repression of his homoerotic desires. Victor himself relates the beginning of the symptoms to the creation of the monster: “I feel pleasure in dwelling on the recollections of childhood, before misfortune had tainted my mind, and changed its bright visions of extensive usefulness into gloomy and narrow reflections upon self” (21). In my view, “misfortune” (21) refers to the creation of the monster and therefore his homosexuality. I have earlier outlined Hobbs’ argument that Victor becomes hysterical because the creation of the monster stands in contrast to “his internal moral code” and because he represses his “feminine characteristics”, that is his emotions (Hobbs 161). Assuming that hysteria can result from the repression of personal traits and the experience of internal conflicts, then Victor’s hysterical symptoms reflect his ambivalence towards his own homoerotic desires. During the creation of the monster, Victor remembers, “my enthusiasm was checked by my anxiety” (33). That is, his internalised moral codes say that being

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26 A more elaborate Girardian feminist reading is done by Mary Jacobus in “Is There a Woman in this Text?”. Jacobus reads the relationship between Victor and the monster as an oedipal rivalry that necessarily leads to the destruction of the woman involved.

27 As mentioned, I do not draw explicitly on Freud when I use the terms hysteria and repression. Still, the idea that repression leads to neurosis – and hysteria has been considered a form of neurosis – goes back to psychoanalysis and has been famously described by Freud. An interesting text in this context is Freud’s “Analysis Terminable and Interminable”; the more so as it also comments on homosexuality and feminine characteristics in men. Freud explains that everybody’s “libido is distributed between objects of both sexes, either in manifest or latent form” (397), and thus he does not describe homosexuality and heterosexuality as a binary here. Later, he points out that many men who come into therapy struggle “against their passive or feminine attitude towards other men” (403). Yet, Freud does not relate these two statements to each other, i.e. one may not conclude that latent homosexuality and feminine characteristics are one and the same psychological phenomenon.
homosexual is no alternative. The nervousness he shows during the creation of the monster comes from the very mixture of anticipated pleasure and fear of what he is going to do or the possible consequences of his deeds, homosexuality being a violation of the law.

To conclude this section, Victor’s homoerotic desire shows in the creation scenes of both novel and film, but only in the novel do I want to call the monster an embodiment of Victor’s homoerotic desire. Having seen that homoeroticism can explain the hysterical symptoms Victor displays in the novel, the discussion now turns to male hysteria in the film’s creation scene. Is Victor’s body as prominent in the creation scene of the film as it is in the novel? Does he display the same symptoms of hysteria?

**Male Hysteria in Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein**

As Laplace-Sinatra points out, “the spectator is able to see . . . Branagh’s character . . . topless, sweating and visibly very excited” in the creation scene (263). Kaye calls the creation scene in the film “Branagh’s muscle bound scene” (68), which illustrates that Victor’s body is emphasised and he is presented as a spectacle, just as London suggests in her reading of the novel. Still, the specularity is achieved not by Victor’s decomposition, as in the novel, but by showing him half-naked. In the film, decomposition does not take place within Victor’s body but around him, when he creates the monster. Elizabeth leaves him, and the town is devastated by the cholera. It is in this moment, when everything around him falls apart, that he decides to finally animate the monster in a kind of hysterical reaction.

Yet, this is the only time Victor shows signs of hysteria during the creation process in the film. Laplace-Sinatra argues that “Branagh rightly interprets the creation scene from the novel as a crucial part of the story” (262), and I agree with him that “Branagh does more than just re-inscribe science as the major element of Frankenstein: he makes it the major part of this scene, and the climax of his film” (262). As I see it, the film’s stronger emphasis on the sciences involves that Victor is depicted with the characteristics of a “typical scientist” rather
than a “typical hysterical”. This is also intended by Branagh, who wanted “to render the character of Victor Frankenstein less of an hysterical – we believe Victor Frankenstein is not a mad scientist but a dangerously sane one” (“Reimagined” 17).²⁸

Victor’s aim is not, as in the novel, to create a “new species [that] would bless [him] as its creator and source” (32) or to gain the “glory [that] would attend the discovery, if [he] could banish disease from the human frame” (22), the selfish aims of a madman. In the film, he wants to make things better and to “defeat death and disease, to let people on this earth have the chance of life, healthy sustained life for everyone, to allow people who love each other to be together forever” (SP 69)²⁹, the aim of a young and idealist doctor who wants to improve the world. According to Branagh, Victor “is a sane, cultured, civilized man, one whose ambition, as he sees it, is to be a benefactor of mankind” (“Reimagined” 19). In my opinion, Victor’s idealist aims make him appear somehow insane, too: at a time when epidemics like the cholera regularly cost thousands of lives, before the discovery of Penicillin or the development of a working vaccination system, his aims sound insane; hence there still is the connotation of the mad scientist. On the other hand, the viewer knows that Victor’s wish was going to become true in the twentieth century: in Europe, women do not die giving birth, the average life span has increased significantly and many more diseases can be cured. In Branagh’s words, “[i]ts now an imaginable step, to prevent people from dying” (“Reimagined” 17). For me, this is why the modern viewer sees Victor also as a kind of pioneer, someone who was ahead of the times and had to convince his ignorant contemporaries. One might argue that this is true for the novel, too. Yet, Victor’s “adventurous” side is less evident in the novel. Lawrence Lipking states that even literary

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²⁸ I stated in the introduction to this essay that Branagh’s aim to make the film faithful to the novel allows us to explain differences in the representation of masculinity in novel and film by different internalised concepts of masculinity in the 1810s and 1990s. The fact that Branagh actively decides to show a different, less hysterical Victor seems to thwart my argumentation at first sight. Yet, it does not. The fact that Branagh does not want Victor to be a hysterical character can also be related to the cultural context.

²⁹ I use the abbreviation SP for Steph Lady and Frank Darabont’s screenplay throughout the essay.
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critics do not see “Victor Frankenstein’s genius” (317). This is where Bruhn’s ideas about adaptation as a two-way process come in. As I see it, the film highlights Victor’s scientific success and, so doing, “changes” the source text. Watching the film helps to perceive Victor’s strong sides also in the novel, as an analysis of the film’s impact on the novel shows.

The film informs the novel as it provides an explanation of the early nineteenth century that the novel does not give – it does not have to as it was written for people living at the time. Without having watched the film, the modern reader, or at least most modern readers, would not be aware of the role of the sciences in the early nineteenth century. The sciences developed significantly during this century, and “[i]n medicine, the age-old practices of self-medication, household doctoring, and neighbor consultations declined as ever larger numbers of people sought treatment by trained and certified caretakers” (Micale 100). Academically trained doctors had high social status. The film’s images explain these circumstances as well as the fact that Victor lived at a time when epidemics occurred regularly and medical possibilities were limited. Victor represents the progressive scientist in the film, whereas Clerval stands for ethics and morals.

Viewers have this knowledge in mind then when they (re-)read the novel, and thus the film helps to see the successful scientist in Victor. Reading only the novel, Victor’s hysterical symptoms, his nervousness and fears, dominate his characterisation. In contrast to the film, he does not even try to convince his contemporaries of his project. Furthermore, in the novel, it is clear from the beginning that Victor has engaged in the “wrong” fields of sciences. Victor explains early in the novel that he wished he had never engaged in Agrippa, because then, possibly, “the train of [his] ideas would never have received the fatal impulse that led to [his] ruin” (21). Hence, he presents himself as a “loser”.

The film, however, emphasises Victor’s strong sides, how he ventures to go new ways, which then of course lead to a catastrophe in any case. So even if Victor’s aims are obviously
too high, he represents a type of man who is admired in the 1990: he is best in class, knows what he wants and is not afraid of taking risks. He shows muscles, not only literally but also figuratively speaking.

There is one scene in the film that makes obvious the ignorance of the people I have mentioned: when Waldman wants to vaccinate the masses against the pox, he is stabbed by a one-legged man who refuses to take an injection. The scene does not only illustrate the state of the art in medicine in the early nineteenth century, it also shows how gender issues affect people’s attitudes and actions in all kinds of contexts. It does so in that it demonstrates the ordinary man’s fear of and aversion against being penetrated. It is not an option for a man to be entered by another man. According to Bordo, “the association of masculinity with the ‘doer’ not the ‘done to,’ the penetrator not the penetrated, the desiring sexual subject rather than the ‘receiver’ of the desires of another – runs extraordinarily deep in our culture” (“Reading” 288). In the vaccination scene, this association is reflected by the patient who fights against the injection and stabs the doctor instead. What is at stake is his masculinity. He, who has already lost a leg, does not bear further assaults on his masculinity. Twice, he calls out, “you’re not stickin that in me!” (SP 66). Stabbing Waldman, he demonstrates that he is still a “doer” not a “done to” (Bordo, “Reading” 288). In other words, the scene conveys homophobia, understood as the heterosexual man’s fear of being desired by a homosexual man, as well as the close association between masculinity and activity. Furthermore, the scene illustrates male embodiment. The man defends his body boundaries as they signify (masculine) integrity. This signifying relationship itself is an instance of embodiment; man is psychologically dependent on his body.

To return to the creation scene, Victor does show a similar “unrelaxed and breathless eagerness” (32) during the creation of the monster in the film as in the novel, but the eagerness he displays in the film is not related to hysteria. The nervous attacks Victor suffers
from in the novel are absent from the film. He is not weak, “emaciated with confinement” (32) – whether “confinement” (32) refers to spatial, mental, or sexual confinement is another question that shall not be discussed now –, but he is a tough maker, which is conveyed not least by the phallic symbols his apparatuses constitute, for example the container that functions as a “womb” as well as the grate on which the body is dunked into this container. Victor handles these apparatuses with “masculine” authority: he has constructed mechanical installations that allow him to push the apparatuses into the right places with the help of chains. As Kaye states, “[t]he sexual imagery is . . . explicitly male: the sperm-like eels are ejaculated down the glass tube from the bollock-shaped container into the waiting sarcophagus to bring to life the Creature” (65). It is important to note that the sexual imagery occurs in the context of the “birth” of a grown man. Hence, the installations underline Victor’s masculinity and add to the homoeroticism I have commented on when I discussed the struggle of Victor and the monster that follows after the monster’s “birth”.

In this context, a look at the relation between homoeroticism and hysteria becomes interesting. I have been arguing that Victor is not the hysterical character in the film he is in the novel. As I consider his hysterical symptoms in the novel a result from his repressing homoerotic desire, their absence from the film suggests that Victor does not have to fight against homoerotic desire. The latter can mean several things: either he accepts his homoerotic desire or he does not have it in the first place. Another possibility is opened up by Sedgwick’s continuum. I have explained earlier that the male homosocial continuum makes it possible to think of a man as showing homoerotic desire and being heterosexual. If we do not consider homosexuality/heterosexuality a binary but accept the idea that homosexuality develops and only gradually differs from homosociality, it seems very well possible that a heterosexual man shows homoerotic desire – with or without being aware of it. In Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, Victor shows homoerotic desire but homoeroticism is outplayed by
the heterosexual desire he shows for Elizabeth, which is why homoeroticism does not lead to internal conflicts.

In other words, Victor’s sexual desires do not stand in conflict with the moral norms, which can be seen as one reason why he does not suffer from hysteria during the creation of the monster. Another reason for the absence of hysterical symptoms is that he talks to Clerval about his plans to create a human being. Drawing on Hobbs, I have argued that Victor’s body works as a warning system at the time of the monster’s creation in the novel. The body warns Victor not to continue his unethical project. In the film, this is not necessary. Victor discusses his plans with Clerval, who warns him: “Even if it were possible, and even if you had the right, which you don’t, to make this decision for us – can you imagine for one second that there wouldn’t be a terrible price to pay?” (SP 69). Put differently, Clerval replaces Victor’s body as the reasonable voice in the film. Hence, Victor does not show any weakness during his work with the construction of the monster. He does so only when he falls asleep in the laboratory the night before Elizabeth arrives in Ingolstadt. Confronted with her, Victor has an emotional breakdown.

I agree with Laplace-Sinatra that Elizabeth is a far more active character in the film than in the novel. According to Laplace-Sinatra, “[t]o turn Elizabeth into such an active character implicitly assigns some stereotypical feminine attributes to Victor” (255). In my opinion, this is true for the scene after Elizabeth’s arrival. In his first surprise, Victor cannot look at her and does not want to be looked at by her. Put differently, the scene does not show the traditional male gaze; for a moment, traditional power relations are turned around, and Victor writhes under Elizabeth’s gaze. He is afraid of the encounter with her and tries to hide, passively letting her go when she leaves. Hence, the film takes up the idea that Victor shows

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30 Elizabeth’s passive character in the novel has been analysed by feminist criticism of the novel. Mellor outlines that *Frankenstein* reflects and criticises patriarchal structures of society at the time, which compelled women to passivity in the private realm while men ruled in the public sphere (115-17). According to Ashley Cross, however, the novel “appears to reinforce the division of society into two gendered spheres: the scientific, active, masculine sphere . . . and the domestic, passive, feminine sphere” (551).
stereotypically female characteristics, but whereas he displays signs of hysteria in the novel, he is emotionally dependent on his lover in the film. This dependency does not lead to hysteria, as, again, there is nothing he must fight back: heterosexual desire corresponds to the norms of the 1990s (and the 1810s). It becomes evident that two functions Victor’s body has in the novel are transferred to other characters in the film: the inner voice of his body is outsourced to Clerval, and his “feminine” features are activated by Elizabeth and do not result from an ambivalence towards the monster (like the hysterical symptoms he shows in the novel). After the creation of the monster, of course, he suffers a breakdown, exactly as in the novel. Still, also this breakdown can partly be explained by Elizabeth. When Victor realises what he has done, he realises the costs at which he has animated the monster, too: he has driven away both Elizabeth and Clerval.

Hence in both film and novel, psychosomatic disorders stand in connection with the person whom Victor desires: in the film, his breakdowns – even if much less prominent than in the novel – are triggered by Elizabeth, and in the novel, his nervous illness is caused by the monster. This connection gives evidence of male embodiment: Firstly, Victor’s breakdowns have a psychological as well as bodily component. Secondly, and more importantly, sexual desire is a bodily sensation. In the end, it is not the person he desires who has so much power over both his body and mind (to make him break down), but the body itself, as it is the desire of the body that finally stands behind the power of Elizabeth or the monster.

At this point, I want to turn to the question how more general issues of the body and gender are hinted at in the film. In this context, it is interesting to note that Branagh, despite his concentration on the sciences, also pays tribute to the arts. The creation scene refers to one of the most famous Renaissance artists, Leonardo da Vinci. Victor, like Waldman before him,
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uses da Vinci’s Vitruvian Man as a construction manual for the monster.\textsuperscript{31} The drawing can be seen in Waldman’s study, and Victor uses it when he is working on the monster’s body. Furthermore, Victor himself embodies the Vitruvian Man when he stands on the vessel, under the ceiling, his hands reaching for the chains and his feet apart. By referencing da Vinci’s Vitruvian Man, I claim, the film highlights the human body positively and points to the discursivity of gender.

I start my argumentation with the second point, the discursivity of gender. At da Vinci’s time, the arts and the sciences were not as separate as they became during the nineteenth century, which, as I have explained, witnessed professionalisation and the separation of the arts and the sciences with ever more specialised fields within the sciences. Hence, da Vinci studied both the arts and the sciences (Kemp, Leonardo 82). What is more, he used his scientific knowledge for making art. In his paintings, for example, “every painted effect was, in theory, based on a natural law” (Kemp, Visualizations 12). Hence, the image of the Vitruvian Man conveys that the arts and the sciences are socially constructed areas, as their relationship has changed over the centuries. Also, their divergence in the nineteenth century resulted in the gendering of reason as masculine and emotion as feminine: The introduction to this essay has shown that the sciences were a masculine domain in the nineteenth century, and that their increasing significance and specialisation involved the gendering of reason as masculine. The arts, however, are associated with emotions, and although most famous artists of the time were men, they were considered effeminate by the middle classes, which had started to play a more and more important role in society. It is, therefore, possible to say that the sciences connote masculinity whereas the arts connote femininity. Thus, as an allusion to the constructedness of the arts and the sciences, the

\textsuperscript{31} For an image of the Vitruvian Man, see http://leonardodavinci.stanford.edu/submissions/clabaugh/welcome.html .
Vitruvian Man alludes to the constructedness of established gender dichotomies and therefore of masculinity as well.

Nonetheless, what is more important is that the Vitruvian Man illustrates the ideal proportions of the human body (Kemp, Leonardo 96), and that da Vinci saw the “body of the human being as a microcosm or ‘lesser world’”, that is an analogy to the cosmos (Kemp, Visualizations 13). This underscores that bodily ideals are no new phenomenon, and it gives great significance to the body, which has been neglected or even denied at other times, for example by Christianity. The fact that Victor himself features the Vitruvian Man, then, illustrates that he has perfect proportions and thus highlights his bodily materiality in a positive way, at the same time as it alludes to both the arts and the sciences. Victor’s plans, of course, reflect a synthesis of the arts and the sciences, as he is going to create beautiful life. It is not his intention to create an ugly monster, but he “selected his features as beautiful” (34), as it is said in the novel. The perfect proportions of the Vitruvian Man in the film and the selection of beautiful body parts in the novel recall Winckelmann and his ideal of the Greek sculpture, which in turn evokes Mosse’s explanation that the masculine stereotype originates from Winckelmann’s “love for the body beautiful” and therefore from homoerotic sensibility (32). I have earlier discussed the homoerotic subtext in the film’s the creation scene. In the film then, as in the establishment of the masculine ideal, homoerotic desire stands at the beginning of what turns out to be heterosexual masculinity: the monster and Victor are going to fight for Elizabeth. Yet, Victor does not speak about beauty in the film, but he wants to use the best of all raw materials for the body of the monster. The fact that he uses Waldman’s brain, then, connects “the best” with the most intelligent rather than the most beautiful.

Hence, the monster is made of the best materials. It is not the material Victor’s creation is made from, then, that makes him a monster but social norms. This statement needs clarification. At first sight, the existence of the monster and its consequences for the
Frankenstein family seem to convey the idea that one should live according to the social norms. Victor, who does not do so but makes his dream of creating life reality, pays a high price for having animated the monster. So does his family. However, the monster turns evil only through his bad experiences with humans, and it is only possible to speculate what would have happened, had Victor not abandoned the monster. Writing on the novel *Frankenstein*, Hobbs argues that Victor denies the monster because he cannot talk about him to his father, who represents a culture of male reason and self-control (160). Furthermore, “[t]he tension between [Victor’s] need to deny his creature’s existence and his wish to ‘bring home’ the monster is resolved by a series of hysterical symptoms” (160). Accepting Hobbs’ argument and assuming that Alphonse represents social norms – as he corresponds to the masculine ideal at the time – one may conclude that Victor abandons the monster (and develops hysterical symptoms) because he does not find the strength or courage to openly counter the social norms. It is mere speculation of course to say that the creation might not have turned evil had Victor not abandoned him; but the novel and the film’s emphasis on social factors in the

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32 Again, an influential contribution in this context comes from Mellor, who states, “[w]hat the creature does know is that a child deprived of a loving family becomes a monster. Again and again he insists that he was born good but compelled by others into evil” (45).

Lipking argues against Mellor, criticising that literary researchers in the late twentieth century have too lopsidedly taken a stand for the creature and against Victor. For Lipking, questions like “is the Creature a natural man or an unnatural monster” lie at “the heart of the novel” (320). The novel, thus, engages in contradictions. In Lipking’s words, “Mary Shelley’s novel teaches . . . that love of the Other and fear of the Other, however logically incompatible, can be equally well motivated” (320).

However, interesting papers that stress the role of the society in the monster’s becoming evil are Stryker’s “My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix – Performing Transgender Rage”, which I have already named, and Margo V. Perkins’ “The Nature of Otherness: Class and Difference in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*”. Stryker, a transsexual woman, compares her own experiences with her “unnatural body” (84) to those of the monster. For Stryker, the monster’s rage is a product of the negative experiences he makes because of his body – a body that does not conform to the social norms.

Perkins points out that the novel criticises “the culpability of an entire society not only in the creation, abuse, and eventual destruction of the monster-as-Other, but equally in the devastation, terror, and misery the latter inflicts because of his detested status” (27).

Zakharieva investigates Branagh’s film and finds that the novel and the film differ in their explanations of the monster’s evilness. Zakharieva sees the monster’s evilness as a result from his experiences of being rejected in the novel. The film, for Zakharieva, “is laconic and ambivalent in this respect. The character’s cruelty is defined by a corporeal immediacy, it is unmediated” (424). I do not fully agree with her when it comes to the film. Even if the film does not provide a psychological explanation for every cruel action of the monster, it does explain why the creature turns to evil in the first place.
creation’s becoming a monster, that is evil, make it probable. Therefore, I come to the conclusion that the evil or monstrous lies in the blind acceptance of social norms.

One might even go so far as to speculate that Victor would have presented his creation to his family had the creature not been so ugly. When Victor has finished the creation, his attitudes towards him change because of the creature’s appearance. What has been planned as a beautiful man turns out to be an ugly monster: “Beautiful! – Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; . . . now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart” (34). In that case, it is the norms of beauty that he cannot overcome. Also Favret comes to the conclusion that “[t]he creature’s violent rage emerges not from the scientific difference between natural and unnatural production but rather the aesthetic difference between ‘beautiful’ and ‘monstrous’ creatures” (60).

The previous section of this essay on homoeroticism in context of the relationship Victor and the monster, however, allows yet another interpretation. Reading the monster as the embodiment of Victor’s homoerotic desire, I stated that his sexuality can be considered the source of his ruin. Yet, if it is not the monster as such that ruins Victor, but his abandoning the monster – as the creature turns evil because he was left alone – then not Victor’s homosexuality as such but the repression of his homosexuality is the reason for his demise. The idea that Victor’s calamity originates from the repression of homoerotic desire relates to Sedgwick’s argument that Frankenstein embodies male homophobia, as Victor’s paranoia results from rejected homosexuality or homosociality (92). If the creature is Victor’s dream that has become real, as he has created a man for himself who is flesh and blood, then the lines “now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart” (34) appear in a different light. The monster Victor fears is his own homoerotic desire and the possibility to live this desire, against internalised societal norms.
Again, I arrive at Laplace-Sinatra’s argument that the abandonment of the monster can be seen as Victor’s reaction to his own sexuality (265).

To summarise this part of the essay, it has been argued that Victor is presented as an embodied being in the novel’s creation scene and that his embodiment results in his displaying hysterical symptoms, as his body demonstrates more reason than his mind. Another reason for Victor showing signs of hysteria is that he represses his homoerotic desires. In the film, the struggle between Victor and the monster in the creation scene has a homoerotic dimension, but the monster cannot be called an embodiment of Victor’s homoerotic desire nor does Victor display hysterical symptoms as in the novel. The film lays more emphasis on Victor’s scientific efforts, showing him as a strong man who becomes weak only in the presence of his fiancée. This specific weakness has also been described as an instance of embodiment.

3.2 Victor and Walton

Returning to male embodiment and hysteria in the novel, I want to analyse how the different takes on hysteria discussed earlier in this essay relate to Victor Frankenstein. The novel was first published in 1818 and thus written at a time during which the public view on nervous illness especially in men changed. Victor can therefore be described as a character whose masculinity is still in the making, not really defined. From an eighteenth century point of view, I have been arguing, Victor displays hypochondriasis, an illness that attacks upper class men with fine nerves who are devoted to their studies. The ill really suffer emotionally. The novel supports such a take on Victor in several instances. One of them is Walton’s description of Victor in the fourth letter to his sister: Victor “faint[s]” (14) when the sailors carry him on board and into the cabin, which is a symptom of hysteria. Also Victor’s changes in mood,
between being “overcome by gloom” (16) and letting words “flow with rapidity and unparalleled eloquence” (16), connote hysteria.

Moreover, Walton writes to his sister that he “never saw a more interesting creature: his eyes have generally an expression of wildness, and even madness; but there a moments when . . . his whole countenance is lighted up, as it were, with a beam of benevolence and sweetness that I never saw equalled” (14). In an eighteenth century context, madness would be a more severe form of nervous disorder than hysteria (Micale 24); nevertheless, it is a form of nervous disorder, and Walton, who does not belong to the bohemian or aristocratic circles, might not be able to tell the difference. Of course, the description of Victor as potentially mad paves the way for a story of a mad scientist. It is also noteworthy that the madness is in “his eyes” (14), that is it is seated in the body, if he is mad. Still, benevolence was a positive characteristic of the eighteenth century gentleman. Walton, hence, describes Victor as a member of the upper class, a gentleman, who displays signs of nervous illness. Walton admires Victor who “must have been a noble creature in his better days, being even now in wreck so attractive and amiable” (15), that is Walton does not condemn Victor for his nervous condition but it rather awakens his sympathy. In other words, Walton’s attitude towards Victor reflects the discourse on hysteria as it was dominant among the upper class during the cult of sensibility in the eighteenth century.

Walton’s positive reaction to Victor is striking, considering that Walton himself does not come from an aristocratic family. As a member of the emerging middle class, he can be 33 The fact that Walton is “self-educated” (16) but has the money to undertake his journey indicates that he belongs to a wealthy but non-aristocratic family. Victor’s family, in contrast, “is one of the most distinguished” of Geneva, and his “ancestors had been for many years counsellors and syndics” (17-18).

34 The description of Victor as “attractive and amiable” (15) is an expression of the eighteenth century association of the morally good and physically attractive. Lavater’s ideas about physiognomy had strong influence at the time, and according to him there was a direct connection between attractiveness and virtue: “[T]he more virtuous, the greater the beauty of any human being; the less virtuous, the uglier his appearance” (qtd. in Mosse 25). This idea is reflected not only in Victor but also in the monster. Mellor remarks about Frankenstein’s characters’ attitude towards the monster, “[t]hey read his features or interpret his appearance as having a determinate meaning. In effect, they endorse the contemporary theories of Johan Caspar Lavater and Franz Gall” (128).
expected to laugh at or scorn Victor’s nervous condition; the theory part has shown that middle class men considered hysterical upper class men effeminate. However, Walton’s admiration for Victor could reflect class ambitions, which would explain why he singles out those characteristics in his report of Victor that are associated with the upper class. Another possibility is to read Walton’s admiration for Victor as an expression of homoerotic desire. For Mellor, “Walton responds to Frankenstein with an ardor that seems homoerotic” (121). In fact, class ambition and homoeroticism do not exclude one another. Drawing on Alan Bray, Sedgwick links an early “male homosexual subculture” (92) in the Renaissance to the aristocratic class. According to Sedgwick, aristocrats had the possibility to hide homosexuality under “the close protective coloration given by the aristocratic milieu” (93). At the same time, the aristocracy was stereotyped as effeminate, a characteristic that was also assigned to homosexual men. Rumours about the upper class and their sexuality may, thus, add to the mystery Victor is for Walton, making him even more interesting and “desirable”.

Daffron argues persuasively that Walton not only admires Victor as a benevolent gentleman but that he also shows erotic desire for him. Walton has waited for someone to love and his praises of Victor express a desire that exceeds friendship. Victor, however, fears his own homoerotic desires too much to engage in an erotic relationship with Walton. Daffron argues further that Victor does not tell Walton about his secret and hence prevents too close intimacy between them. Therefore, Walton writes down Victor’s tale, deriving sexual pleasures from writing about Victor (Daffron 428-29). I agree with Daffron regarding Walton’s homoerotic desire for Victor, but in contrast to Daffron I argue that Victor overcomes homophobia on board Walton’s vessel.

Walton is from the beginning more than delighted that Victor comes on board and praises him enthusiastically. He calls him a “divine wanderer” (16) who is like a “celestial spirit, that has a halo around him” (16), epithets one would reserve for a lover rather than a
friend. Walton knows himself that his praises are the ones of someone newly fallen in love, as he writes in a letter to his sister, “if you will, smile at the warmth of my expressions, while I find every day new causes for repeating them” (17). Furthermore, Walton speaks of his feelings to Victor, “[o]ne day I mentioned to him the desire I had always felt of finding a friend who might sympathize with me, and direct me by his counsel” (16).Addressing his sister, he adds, “I have longed for a friend; I have sought one who would sympathize with me and love me” (147). In other words, Walton is looking for a partner who wants to share his life, and he even talks about it to Victor.35

In my opinion, Victor is not repelled by Walton’s sympathy, but here on the vessel, where he is closely watched by Walton – and thus a spectacle, the passive object of Walton’s gaze – and societal norms are put on ice, he tells Walton about his secret, the monster. Hence, I contradict Daffron, who argues that Walton tries to discover Victor’s secret but does not find out about it. Daffron claims that Walton does not get to know about Victor’s homosexuality, because Victor does not explain to him the exact process of the monster’s creation: “Walton reveals a desire to know Frankenstein’s secret of creation. . . . Yet . . . Frankenstein limits their sympathy by withholding his secret” (428-29). As I see it, Walton does discover Victor’s secret. I have been arguing that the monster embodies Victor’s homoerotic desire, and, hence, the fact that Victor reveals his story – the story of how he created the monster and what followed – to Walton means he reveals his sexuality. This places Victor in an active role again, as he has created the monster himself and decides to speak of him. What is more, Victor tells Walton the whole story of his life, revealing all his fears for the other, including his fears of the monster, that is of his homoerotic desire. This is something he has not done before. In this context it is important to

35 For Veeder, who is interested in feminine and masculine traits of the characters in Frankenstein, “Robert sounds decidedly ‘feminine’” (88), and he “desires from a man . . . what the weaker vessel traditionally receives from her husband” (88).
remember that, although the novel starts with the encounter between Walton and Victor, it stands last in the story as it “happened”. In the novel, Victor does not tell anybody about his secret before he talks about it to Walton, with the exception of the magistrate at Geneva. Still, there he does not become explicit; nothing of the conversation is repeated in the novel. He is not believed either, as the magistrate waves the conversation aside.

That is, the first time Victor talks about his secret and encounters understanding and acceptance, even the experience of being desired, is on board Walton’s vessel. Before he arrives there, he has spent “many months” (141) hunting the monster, concentrating solely on his dangerous secret. When he then goes on board, he displays the nervous symptoms described above, his status being worse than ever before. Talking about his secret and being accepted, however, helps him to recover at least partly. His hysterical fits and feverish illness are interrupted by moments of clarity. When he has told his story to Walton, he even finds the energy to help him. Victor manages to prevent Walton’s men from mutiny. He does so “with a voice so modulated to the different feelings expressed in his speech, with an eye so full of lofty design and heroism, that can you wonder that these men were moved” (150; sic). In other words, Victor stops keeping his desire secret; in a very intimate situation he tells Walton about his desires, and the talking lessens the hysterical symptoms. On the one hand, the reduction of the symptoms through talking provides a link to Freud’s psychoanalysis. On the other hand, Victor hides the secret of the monster, that is his homoerotic desire, quite consciously – he hides the monster from his family and Clerval. Therefore, talking to Walton does not involve an investigation of his unconscious. Rather, it allows Victor to finally express his erotic desires, if only in words. Walton and Victor share the same plight, then, they share a secret, which for Victor takes the form of a monster and for Walton the North Pole.
Nevertheless, Victor’s thoughts and his desire centre on the monster, not Walton, as his language suggests: “Even now I cannot recollect, without passion, my reveries while the work was incomplete. I trod heaven in my thoughts, now exulting in my powers, now burning with the idea of their effects” (147; my emphases). Thus he dies, enfeebled by the hunt for the monster, perfectly aware of what is happening, “Alas! The strength I relied on is gone; I feel that I shall soon die, and he, my enemy and persecutor, may still be in being” (151). He cannot think of anything else than the monster, then, up until his death. There are different possibilities to read Victor’s hunt for the monster. Firstly, the hunt might be a manifestation of Victor’s uncontrollable desire. Assuming that Victor follows his desire when he hunts the monster, it is his sexuality that weakens and finally kills him. Considering Victor’s intention to kill the monster, on the other hand, the hunt can be read as an attempt to fight against his own sexuality. Then it is not his sexuality as such but the attempt to change (kill) his sexuality that kills him. These contradicting ideas reflect Victor’s ambivalence towards the monster I have discussed previously. It is because Victor desires and fears the monster at the same time that it is possible to understand the hunt as surrender to his desire or the fight against it, or both at the same time.

Mellor makes another interesting observation. For Mellor, “[h]unter and hunted blur into one consciousness. . . . By the end of the novel, we cannot separate the wretched, solitary Frankenstein from the wretched, solitary monster” (135). Reading the monster as the embodiment of Victor’s homoerotic desire as I do, the quote implies that desire is not separable from the man. In other words, Victor does not have desire but he is desire. The blurring that Mellor describes is an expression of embodiment then, or of the unity of body and mind, as body (the hunted desire) and mind (the hunting man who is associated with reason) become one. Furthermore, Margaret Homans points out that the story is framed by two situations in which Victor’s passions direct his actions. Like in the creation scene, during
the hunt “[o]nce again, the demon is the object of Frankenstein’s quest, pursued now in hate rather than in love” (110). Whether the passions that drive Victor come from hate or love, he is guided by his emotions rather than reason, and the emotions find reflection in Victor’s body. Hence, it becomes clear once more that *Frankenstein* can be read as a novel about the body.

Summarising the analysis of the relationship between Victor and Walton in the novel, it strengthens the argument that Victor’s illness is related to his homosexuality. Walton and Victor both show homoerotic desire, but Victor’s thoughts are focused on the monster. Furthermore, in Walton’s description, Victor’s form of hysteria is associated with the cult of sensibility. Victor is described as an upper class gentleman, then, who bears hysteria as a sign of privilege – but also a source of suffering. These findings stand in contrast to the film, as the following paragraphs will show.

While the novel introduces Victor through Walton’s letters to his sister, the film does not give any insights into Walton’s thoughts. In the film, it is not Walton who discovers madness in Victor’s eyes, but the other way around. Victor looks at Walton and understands right away that Walton shares his madness. Thus, while Victor is in a hysterical delirium and therefore dependent on Walton’s goodwill at the beginning of the novel, he is quite clear at the beginning of the film; he is “exhausted” but “fiercely determined”, according to the screenplay (SP35). Victor does not show any weaknesses when he meets Walton; he is not feverish and manages to keep his grief in check. Moreover, he is superior to Walton, as he is depicted as someone who has made the same experiences (and mistakes) but who has overcome “the mad phase” of his life. Hence, as in the novel where Victor is introduced as “attractive and amiable” (15) and therefore as a good person, Victor is presented as a good person in the film: as the one who wants to stop Walton from sacrificing his men for the sake of his personal ambitions. In order to do so, Victor asks Walton, “[h]ear my story, Captain
Walton, and be warned” (SP 39). As in the novel, then, Victor tells Walton the story of his life, including the story of the monster. Yet, speaking of his secrets does not involve homoerotic desires, as in the novel. First of all, the monster does not embody erotic desire, which means that the subject is less “delicate” in the film than in the novel. The monster is not as secret either, as I have mentioned before; Victor has discussed the creation of the monster with Clerval.

Furthermore, emotions demonstrating sympathy for and genuine interest in each other are absent from the opening scene of the film. As Laplace-Sinatra points out, Branagh “depicts a Walton who is no longer very friendly towards, and in admiration of, Frankenstein” (256). What is more, in my view, Victor and Walton engage in a kind of power struggle. When Victor asks Walton, “[b]ring your men and your weapons, and follow me!” (SP36), Walton responds with an “I give the orders here” (SP 36). Both men want to be in control, engaging in a fight for authority and power. In other words, sympathetic emotions between men are replaced by power struggles. Struggles in the plural, as Walton is challenged by his men, too. Figuratively speaking, the men show muscles. They want to rule and they engage in competitions and power struggles Bordo describes as typical for the 1990s (“Reading” 295).

Hence, the analysis of the relationship between Victor and Walton reveals considerable differences between novel and film. Victor, who is hysterical and shows homoerotic desire in the novel when he meets Walton – but not explicitly for Walton – is a determined man who knows how to assert himself in the film.

3.3 Victor and Clerval

Hysterical Scientist Versus Man of Emotion

To return to the novel and Victor’s hysterical condition, his nervous state becomes obvious also through his juxtaposition to Henry Clerval. Many critics have noted that Clerval and
Victor are biographical figures. William Veeder states that “Henry Clerval, as well as Victor Frankenstein, ‘is’ Percy Shelley” (7). According to Mellor, “Henry Clerval is both an alter-ego of Victor Frankenstein and the embodiment of all the qualities of Percy Shelley that Mary most loved” (74). Victor, on the other hand, “embodies certain elements of Percy Shelley’s temperament and character that had begun to trouble Mary Shelley” (Mellor 73). Whether the characters are modelled on Percy Shelley or not, I argue that Clerval and Victor are juxtaposed in that Clerval represents the emotional man idealised by the Romantic poet, whereas Victor represents the nervous gentleman who was considered superior during the 1730s to the 1780s but later was scorned as effete.

As mentioned, eighteenth century physicians argued that “those who study, who write, who remove themselves from a world of trade, ambition, and ‘business’” (Mullan 208) had a higher risk for hypochondriasis. Victor dedicates himself to studies and the sciences; his aim is knowledge not money and hence he falls into this definition. Clerval, on the other hand, is the son of a businessman who only reluctantly allows him a few years of studies, “great was the difficulty to persuade my [Clerval’s] father that it was not absolutely necessary for a merchant not to understand any thing except book-keeping” (36). Even if Clerval becomes a university student too, he is a merchant’s son and he is going to be a merchant, and as such he features pragmatism rather than fine nerves. During Victor’s long illness after the creation of the monster, Clerval is his “only nurse” (37); he does what has to be done and tends Victor, “concealing the extent of [his] disorder” (37) from Alphonse Frankenstein and Elizabeth in order not to worry them too much.

However, the fact that Clerval nurses Victor potentially moves their relationship from the homosocial towards the homosexual end of Sedgwick’s continuum. In the theory part, I explained that male hysteria was not discussed in medical literature between the 1790s and 1870s. Micale sees one reason for the absence of male hysteria from the medical discourse in
the “unacceptable homoerotic intimacy” (281) that is associated with one man, a doctor, gazing at another who is in emotional distress. Victor's breakdown brings him and Clerval into such an intimate situation. Yet, the homoerotic dimension of their relationship will be discussed in the next section.

Now, it is important to note that Clerval combines pragmatism with empathy – not least illustrated in his nursing Victor – and imagination. According to Victor, Clerval’s “imagination was too vivid for the minutiae of science. Languages were his principal study” (43). The quote recalls the Romantic poets who see imagination as a creative source; is not language the tool of the poet? Mellor goes so far as to state, “[h]e is a poet” (74). Clerval’s imagination stands in contrast to Victor’s nervous susceptibility, which becomes most evident when they travel to England. Victor is “depressed in mind” (107), then, and full with “debasing and miserable fears” (111). Clerval, on the other hand, indulges in nature and “was alive to every new scene; joyful when he saw the beauties of the setting sun, and more happy when he beheld it rise, and recommence a new day” (106). In other words, Clerval’s imagination is associated with creation and new beginning. Clerval’s imagination is creative, while Victor’s “dreary imaginations” (106) and the sorrow he is overwhelmed with are destructive, “a blight had come over [his] existence” (109). Clerval, although a merchant, shows traces of the Romantic poet’s ideal of the emotional man. Admittedly, Victor’s imagination has also been creative, as it has led to the creation of the monster. Yet, although this creation is much more sensational than Clerval’s or any poet’s creations could be, it ultimately leads to destruction.

Closely considered, the fact that Victor’s imagination is destructive while Clerval’s imagination is creative enhances the dichotomy intellectual man versus bodily woman. Victor’s attempts to create human life fail in the end, which makes clear that only women can give birth to children. Men can only be intellectually prolific then, like Clerval; giving birth is
a privilege reserved for women. Thus, the contrast between sterility and fertility becomes evident in two ways here: man’s sterility as opposed to woman’s fertility and Victor’s sterility as opposed to Clerval’s intellectual fertility. While Victor’s destructive imagination produces the one outcome that stands in the centre of the story, that is the monster, Clerval’s creative imagination is reflected in many small instances throughout the novel. As children, for example, Victor and Clerval “used to act plays composed by [Clerval] out of [his] favourite books” (20). As a youth, “Henry had a refined mind . . . he believed that a man might be a very good trader, and yet possess a cultivated understanding” (25). Hence, he imagines himself as a learned merchant and even manages to persuade his father to allow him a few years of university studies, as I have explained.

Clerval, with his empathy and imagination, has a stabilising effect on Victor that shows throughout the novel. Already in Ingolstadt, Clerval’s social intelligence comes to the fore: When Waldman praises Victor for the progress he has made in his studies and Victor “writhed under his words” (42), “Clerval, whose eyes and feelings were always quick in discerning the sensations of others, declined the subject . . . and the conversation took a more general turn” (42). On the trip to England, Victor remembers, Clerval’s presence made him feel better, “when alone, I could fill my mind with the sights of heaven and earth; the voice of Henry soothed me, and I could thus cheat myself into a transitory peace” (109). After Clerval’s death then, Victor falls seriously ill.

London argues that Clerval’s death and Victor’s subsequent illness are evidence that “the novel turns on male mirrors, and the male body remains the privileged site of inscription” (262). I agree with London that both Clerval’s dead body and Victor’s convulsing body convey male specularity, but for my own argument Hobbs’ argumentation is still more relevant: Hobbs reads Victor’s illness as an escape from feelings of guilt, stating that “his sickness bears out his inner feelings: his ailment is a fever, a symptom that indicates a burning
admission of culpability” (162). In other words, his illness is an example of male embodiment, as again grief and guilt manifest themselves in Victor’s body. It may be stressed here that Hobbs refers to the guilt of having created Clerval’s murderer. Yet, as I see it, one must include Victor’s sexuality in the analysis. If Victor’s homoerotic desire has made him create the monster, and if he desires the monster, then Victor may feel guilty of his erotic desires; a desire that was forbidden at the time.

To anticipate the next section, it will argue that Victor shows homoerotic desire for Clerval. Considering the possibility that the monster knows about Victor’s homoerotic desire for Clerval – the monster reads about Victor’s secrets in the journal Victor has written – it becomes clear why Clerval is the first one who must die after Victor has destructed the female monster that he was going to create as a bride for the creature: Victor destroys the monster’s object of desire and the monster Victor’s. In other words, Victor feels guilty because his desire for Clerval is the reason why Clerval must die.

Returning to hysteria, it becomes evident that the juxtaposition of Clerval and Victor involves the juxtaposition of emotion and sensation, as Clerval represents emotions and Victor (nervous) sensations. Hence, the characters convey a division of psychological aspects, emotions, and bodily aspects, sensations, in men. As I have outlined, men experiencing nervous sensations evoked different associations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Both types of associations can be found in Frankenstein. The previous section on Victor and Walton has shown that Victor corresponds to the description of men prone to become hysterical used in the eighteenth century when male hysteria was not associated with effeminacy or homosexuality – at least not in medical or literary writing. Clerval serves as a counterpart, so to speak; he is a merchant and he is not as immersed in his studies as Victor. On the other hand, the novel deploys the vocabulary of the Romantic poet – which might also but not only be due to Percy Shelley’s editorial revisions discussed by Mellor (52-69) – in the
description of Clerval. And the Romantic poets praised imagination’s creative force and emotions in connection with nature, but disdained the sensibility of the Georgian gentleman (Micale 103). From their point of view, Victor’s display of hysterical symptoms can be described as effeminate.

Nevertheless, one should not forget that Clerval is described in Victor’s words, although these are written down by Walton: “I [Walton] have resolved every night, when I am not engaged, to record, as nearly as possible in his own words, what he [Victor] has related during the day” (17). That is, Victor, who represents sensations, is capable of seeing Clerval’s emotional character and putting it into words. It is thus Victor who employs the language of the Romantic poet, which in turn renders the distinction between sensation and emotion or between psychology and body if not obsolete in any case less sharp. Also the sculptures London discusses in her analysis of *Frankenstein* reveal the poet’s, in this case Percy Shelley’s, body; which of course is the reason why London applies them to her reading. That is, sensations and emotions, body and psychology are not strictly separate spheres in the end.

The film refrains from using Clerval as a counterpart to Victor in the way the novel does. To begin with, Clerval is not a merchant but studies medicine like Victor. That is, they are not juxtaposed in terms of Mullan’s definition of the hypochondriac man, as in the novel. Further, the men are close friends and Clerval has a supporting function in the film too, but very different from the novel: the discussion of the creation scene in the film has already demonstrated that Clerval, in the film, takes over functions Victor’s body has in the novel; Clerval is Victor’s reasonable voice and warning system. Thus, the film draws away attention from the body in at least two ways: Firstly, it is not his body that tries to stop Victor but Clerval. Secondly, as Clerval does not die in the film, the specularity of Clerval’s and Victor’s bodies is less stressed: there is no “shattered corpse of Clerval” (London 262), whose sight makes Victor suffer another breakdown, as in the novel. It sounds paradoxical that a novel,
which consists of words, conveys more specularity than a film, which consists of images, and of course I only refer to this one scene of Clerval’s death, or rather the absence of this scene.

Nonetheless, Clerval has another “supporting” function in the film, if one wants to call it that: the fact that both Victor and Clerval are students of medicine invites to make direct comparisons between the two men. This way, Clerval “supports” Victor, because in direct comparison Victor is the more successful of the two. Like the relationship between Victor and Walton, Victor and Clerval’s relationship that is dictated if not by power struggles then still by a distinct hierarchy. Victor is best in class, whereas Clerval has troubles passing the anatomy course, even faints in class, which of course makes him look “a softy”. Victor also has more money. He is going to take over his father’s surgery and can afford to ask Clerval to become his partner. That is, Victor is going to be Clerval’s boss, as it is him who brings all the seed capital. Last but not least, Victor has a fiancée who as adores him and Clerval does not.

The men do not illustrate the contrast between the nervous gentleman and the Romantic poet in the film, then. Clerval does not represent the man of emotions in the film as he does in the novel, and Victor is not as nervous. Still, Clerval nurses Victor when he falls ill after the creation of the monster, but, as he is a student of medicine, his nursing Victor has less to do with sympathy or empathy but the more with professionalism. The men, therefore, experience the same intimate situation in the film as in the novel, with Clerval gazing at Victor, who is in emotional distress. However, if there are any reasons that this situation could be associated with homoerotic desire in the film, this is prevented by the presence of Elizabeth. Clerval helps Elizabeth to nurse Victor.

**Homoerotic Bonds**

I have earlier cited Daffron who analyses the novel *Frankenstein* and argues that, on a continuum of male-male relationships, the relationship between Victor and the monster can be
seen at the homosexual end and the relationship between Victor and Clerval at the homosocial end of the continuum. I do not agree with Daffron when it comes to the relationship between Clerval and Victor in the novel, but question the clearly platonic relationship Daffron describes. As Mellor states, “[Victor’s] description of Clerval’s haunting eyes . . . verges on the erotic” (121). In my view, Victor’s homoerotic desire becomes especially clear when it is compared to his absent desire for Elizabeth. Victor shows more excitement talking about Clerval than speaking of Elizabeth. It is rather a commonplace that Victor does not really get excited about Elizabeth, but I still want to use Victor’s comments on her in direct comparison to his comments on Clerval to highlight the difference in the language he uses.36

When Victor introduces Elizabeth and Clerval in the account of his childhood, he says of Elizabeth, “I loved to tend on her, as I should on a favourite animal” (20). In contrast, Clerval is presented more enthusiastically as “a boy of singular talent and fancy” (20). When Clerval arrives in Ingolstadt, “[n]othing could equal [Victor’s] delight on seeing Clerval; . . . [he] felt suddenly, and for the first time during many months calm and serene joy” (36). What is more, Victor speaks of an excitement that conveys sexual arousal, “[i]t was not joy only that possessed me; I felt my flesh tingle with excess of sensitiveness, and my pulse beat rapidly” (37). As he has discovered the monster’s absence by then, what should make his heart beat if not Clerval? In contrast, when he meets Elizabeth for the first time after six years, he is neither physically aroused nor delighted to see her, but states rather dryly that “[t]ime had made great alterations in her form since I had last beheld her. . . . She was now a woman in stature and expression of countenance, which was uncommonly lovely” (51).

36 Mellor, for example, says about Victor’s relationship with Elizabeth, “instead of developing his heterosexual relationship with Elizabeth, he has engaged in a homoerotic fantasy of omnipotence, devoting all his attention to a male object in a parody of God’s creation of his only begotten Son through the agency of the Holy Spirit, resulting in what Mary Daly has called the masturbatory Trinity” (63). In addition, Mellor states, “Victor Frankenstein’s strongest erotic desires are not so much for his putative lover as for his lost mother” (74). Hobbs argues, “Shelley has Victor’s quasi-incestuous relationship with Elizabeth emphasize compatibility, not the sexual chemistry” (158). Hobbs claims further that Victor’s “passion is directed toward his work” (158).
Clerval does not only make him more excited, he can also appease Victor when he is in fears, something that Elizabeth cannot. When the Frankenstein family and Elizabeth have returned from Chamounix, Elizabeth’s presence cannot soothe Victor, who remembers, “the gentle affection of my beloved Elizabeth was inadequate to draw me from the depth of my despair” (101). In Clerval’s presence, however, Victor calms down. Talking about their trip to England, Victor says himself, “even I was pleased. I lay at the bottom of the boat, and, as I gazed on the cloudless blue sky, I seemed to drink in a tranquillity to which I had long been a stranger” (107).

Reading, as I have suggested, the monster as the embodiment of Victor’s homoerotic desire, the trip to England gets a special significance. Before he decides for the trip, Victor talks to his father about his marriage with Elizabeth, explaining that his “future hopes and prospects are entirely bound up in the expectation of [their] union. . . . an union from which [he] expected peace” (104). Assuming that Victor is homosexual, “expected peace” (104) can be read in two ways: Firstly, he might expect, consciously or unconsciously, his homoerotic desire to diminish once he is married. Secondly, he might see marriage as a refuge from society, from being doubted.

However, “the idea of an immediate union with [his] cousin [is] one of horror and dismay” for him (104), and he decides to travel to England first, in order to be able to satisfy the monster (by giving him a bride), and in the hope of being safe afterwards. Thus, he leaves for Strasbourg, “where Clerval would join [him]” (105). Victor decides to do the journey to England with Clerval, then, and not with Elizabeth. At that stage, the monster has not threatened with revenge on the wedding night, so marrying Elizabeth and taking her would have been an alternative. Metaphorically speaking, Victor wants to make his life’s journey with a man, Clerval. The aim of the England journey is to be together with Clerval, for about two years, to then return home without the monster, that is without homoerotic desires. I do
not, however, argue that Clerval displays sexual desire for Victor or that they engage in a sexual relationship. Victor watches Clerval carefully throughout their trip – Clerval becoming the spectacle – and absorbs every word Clerval says, remembering them much later when he records them to Walton, “Clerval! beloved friend! even now it delights me to record your words, and to dwell on the praise of which you are so eminently deserving” (107). Yet, Victor does not tell Clerval about the monster, keeping his desires secret.

The trip ends, as I have pointed out, with Clerval’s death. What happens in Ireland is an exchange of objects of desires: Victor destroys the monster’s bride and the monster murders Clerval. London compares Victor’s reactions to Clerval’s and Elizabeth’s deaths, coming to the conclusion that “[w]hereas the murder of Elizabeth prompts Frankenstein to purposeful, if frenzied, action, the sight of the prostrate man . . . stops Frankenstein completely” (262). That is, Clerval’s death affects him more deeply than Elizabeth’s. Nevertheless, the fact that Victor destroys the monster’s bride and therefore decides not to satisfy his opponent can be read as the insight that he cannot change his homoerotic desire: he cannot give the monster a female to make him go away. However, it becomes evident that Victor desires only men, or male beings, the monster and Clerval. He does not show desire for women, and when he speaks of his secret, the monster, he does so to Walton, a man who in turn is attracted by Victor. This, finally, is why I speak of Victor as a homosexual character in the novel.

In the film, the relationship between Victor and Clerval is not as close as in the novel. Clerval is not a childhood friend of Victor who nearly counts as a family member, but they meet in Ingolstadt where they both have come to study. Thus, Elizabeth, who has grown up like a sister to Victor, has a privileged status compared to Clerval that she does not have in the novel. Furthermore, the journey to England never takes place and Clerval does not die. When Victor returns to the estate with the dead body of Elizabeth in his arms to awaken her to life,
he encounters Clerval at the beginning of the stairs, who tells him that his father is dead. “Then, there is nothing left to lose”, Victor reacts (SP 127). Leaving Clerval standing at the stairs, Victor walks past him and carries Elizabeth’s dead body up to the attic. The scene illustrates two things: Firstly, Victor posits himself above Clerval, leaving him at the foot of the stairs, and secondly, Victor does not desire Clerval, as Clerval is nothing to lose. In the novel, the death of Clerval is the biggest loss for Victor, making him totally hamstrung. In the film, however, Clerval does not belong to the family and when all family members are dead, Victor cannot imagine that Clerval could be a point of attack for the monster. Whereas the conflict between the monster and Victor results in the destruction of each other’s object of desire in the novel (Clerval for the bride), in the film they fight against each other and for Elizabeth. Victor’s object of desire dies in the film, too, but here it is Elizabeth, and she finally kills herself. The analysis shows, then, that all three male-male relationships discussed in this thesis are rival relationships in the film. Victor and the monster both fight for Elizabeth, Victor and Walton both want to take command, and Victor and Clerval are defined in terms of a hierarchical relationship that makes Victor appear the more successful of the two men.

A rivalry between Victor and Walton or Victor and Clerval is not perceptible in the novel, however. This is where I want to return to Bruhn’s idea of the dialogic process between film adaptation and source novel. Reading the novel without having seen the film, the homoerotic dimension of the novel remains less obvious. After having seen the film with its clearly heterosexual characterisation of Victor – with the exception of the struggle in the creation scene – his homoerotic desires suddenly stand in contrast to what one has seen in the film and, hence, become more visible. The same applies to the relationships between Victor and Walton and Victor and Clerval, which are coloured by Victor’s (and Walton’s) homoerotic desires in the novel but not in the film. Today’s viewers are used to the kind of
competing relationships shown in the film, as they still dominate our times. In the novel, however, the relationships Victor-Clerval and Victor-Walton are different from typical descriptions of friendship between heterosexual men in the 1990s. Of course one sees the caring components that these relationships involve also without having seen the film, but having in mind the film when reading the novel, the reader is more likely to perceive the homoerotic subtext of *Frankenstein*.

Independently of their relationships, the fact that the characters are displayed so differently in the novel and the film points to the constructedness of the concept masculinity and therefore to the constructedness of gender and the gender dichotomy in general. As I have explained, Foucault points out that the idea of the homosexual man as an identity dates back to the 1870s, that is after *Frankenstein* was written. This suggests that, although forbidden, homosexuality did not have to affect all areas of life in the 1810s, and therefore might not have been as stigmatised as it became later. In this context, it is interesting to remember Mosse, who points out that homosexuality could well be tolerated in the sense of ignored in the eighteenth century, but not in the nineteenth century, when “clear lines had been drawn that must not be crossed” (67). *Frankenstein* was written early in the 1800s, when crossing the line might still have been possible. In the 1990s on the other hand, being gay was not a stigma anymore. Still, among heterosexual men, certain reservations against homosexual men remained, as Bordo’s analysis of the attitude of heterosexual men towards homosexual men in the military has shown. It is not impossible that heterosexual men in the 1990s felt more compelled to stress their heterosexuality for not being “mistaken” for gay. Although, according to Mosse, “homosexuals seemed to move from the margins of society to challenge the normative stereotype in a much more effective manner than ever before” after the Second World War (188), Bordo’s description of the “doer” against the “done to” (“Reading” 288), the impenetrable men against the penetrable woman, suggests that heterosexuality (being a
doer and not a done to) is still inscribed in the manly ideal. Victor’s emphasised heterosexuality in the film can, therefore, be understood as an expression of a culture in which men have to demonstrate their being a doer. This might not have been necessary in the early nineteenth century in the same way, when sexuality was less identity forming.

To conclude the discussion of the dialogic adaptation process at this point, I must admit that only the film made me aware of the sexual dimension the novel undoubtedly has. Considering what has been discussed before, however, this might not be surprising. In the 1990s, sexuality had long been a defining identity trait, as opposed to the 1810s.
4 Conclusion

This thesis has analysed the male body by investigating the character Victor Frankenstein in both the novel *Frankenstein* and the film *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein*, focusing on hysteria and homoeroticism as well as questions of male embodiment as conveyed by the three relationships Victor-monster, Victor-Walton and Victor-Clerval.

The discussion of the relationship between Victor and the monster has illustrated that Victor is displayed as an embodied man in both the novel and the film. In the novel, he develops hysterical symptoms, which I have identified as the male form of hysteria as it was diagnosed in the eighteenth century, often called hypochondriasis. These symptoms result not least from the conflict he experiences between his actions, the creation of a man, and the moral codes at the time, as also Hobbs has pointed out. Therefore, Victor's hysteria gives evidence of male embodiment: internal conflicts manifest themselves in the body. In contrast to Hobbs, I have argued that the conflict Victor experiences includes his homosexuality. The monster embodies Victor's homoerotic desire, which is why Victor is ambivalent towards him: he desires him, but internalised moral codes tell him that he cannot love a man, which is why he also fears him. In other words, Victor fears his own homoerotic desire, as Daffron has stated, too.

In the film, there is a moment of homoerotic tension when Victor struggles with the monster right after he has come to life, as Laplace-Sinatra has shown. Yet, Victor is described as a clearly heterosexual man, and as an ambitious scientist rather than a hysterical. Instead of a nervous man who awaits the birth of the monster in agitation and in an ever worse state of health as in the novel, the viewer sees a man whose potency is emphasised for example by the way he handles his technical equipment, which consists of a collection of phallic symbols.

What the film has in common with the novel is that it conveys male embodiment. Although Victor is not the hysterical character he is in the novel, he breaks down twice in Elizabeth’s
presence. Emotional breakdowns are both in the novel and in the film triggered by the object of desire. In the novel, Victor shows nerves because of the monster; in the film because of Elizabeth. As desire is ascribed to the body, it is Victor’s body that stands behind his collapses, which again proves his embodiment. Yet, paradoxically, male embodiment has become more obvious in the novel than in the film. The novel emphasises that Victor reacts to and experiences the world both with his body and his mind. In the film, the unity of body and mind comes less to the fore but is still there. Hence, the analysis has confirmed that men are embodied beings. That is, the body is not reserved for women, but also men have a body and a mind, and these are not independent of each other.

The relationship between Victor and Walton has diverging connotations in the novel and in the film. The film shows two men who try to be in power, rivals fighting for authority. In the novel, on the other hand, Victor is highly admired by Walton, even desired. Victor himself tells Walton about his secret, thus making himself vulnerable, giving Walton power over him, instead of trying to gain dominance over the other. He does tell Walton about the monster in the film too, of course, but in the film the monster does not embody forbidden, homoerotic desire and is not as secret as in the novel: Victor has talked about his plans to Waldman and Clerval. Furthermore, in the novel, Walton’s descriptions of Victor in his letters to his sister describe Victor as a nervous but benevolent gentleman, which is why Victor’s male hysteria is associated with the cult of sensibility that, in the eighteenth century, saw hysteria in upper class men as a sign of privilege.

While Victor embodies the nervous gentleman in the novel, Clerval represents the man of emotion, an ideal of the Romantic poets. Victor, I have argued, desires Clerval, whom he has known since childhood and always preferred to Elizabeth. Yet, he does not tell Clerval about the monster and therefore keeps his desire secret. It is enough for Victor to be with Clerval and to be able to watch him on their trip to England, but the monster, who knows
about Victor’s homosexuality, kills Clerval after Victor has destroyed the monster’s bride. Hence, killing Clerval is about a direct revenge on Victor. Victor killed the monster’s bride and now the monster kills Victor’s object of desire. In the film, Victor desires Elizabeth, who has a prior position in comparison with Clerval. Clerval and Victor have a close but hierarchic friendship: as Clerval is a student of medicine like Victor in the film, they stand in direct comparison, which makes Victor look better. Victor passes his courses more easily, he does not faint when he should cut a dead body, and he can offer Clerval a position as his partner in his practice when they have finished their studies.

What conclusions can be drawn from these findings? Firstly, I want to discuss the aims that I have had with the comparison of the novel and the film. I have expected that the case study of an adaptation would lead to increased insights into the character of Victor in both the novel and the film, and I have wanted to investigate in what way the novel and the film reflect ideas on masculinity prevalent in the 1810s and 1990s respectively. The discussion of the dialogic process of adaptation that Bruhn suggests has stayed at a rather superficial level, but still the analysis has shown that the film adaptation influences the novel as well as the novel the film adaptation. When it comes to Victor, the novel and the film both complement one another in the depiction of the character as well as contradict each other. They complement one another as they stress different character traits of Victor. Victor has both strong and weak sides both in the film and in the novel. Yet, whereas the novel emphasises his hysterical side, the film stresses his strong sides, him being a pioneer in the sciences. Knowing one text while reading the other helps readers see the whole character of Victor rather than only the traits that are stressed by the respective text that they are engaging in. Nevertheless, novel and film contradict each other, as Victor can be interpreted as homosexual in the novel but is clearly heterosexual in the film. Still, Victor’s homoerotic desire does not become evident right away, when reading the novel. The film’s stress on
sexuality as a theme, then, can make readers aware of the fact that the novel depicts Victor differently from the film and open their eyes to Victor’s homosexuality.

Taking the historicity of masculinity into account, it is possible to explain the divergent depiction of Victor and the relationships Victor-monster, Victor-Walton and Victor-Clerval in the novel and the film at least partly by the dates of their creation. In the film, the 1990s culture of rivalry between men who want to be rulers and therefore show their muscles is reflected in the rival relationship between Victor and Walton. The relationship between Victor and Clerval, on the other hand, is not described as a rival friendship, but still in hierarchical terms: the two are compared throughout the film. Last but not least, Victor is depicted as a “masculine”, heterosexual man, as a “winner”. In the novel, however, Victor is weak and hysterical. Still, the latter can be read as the characterisation of an upper class gentleman, as during the cult of sensibility in eighteenth century Britain, nervous susceptibility was seen as a privilege of upper class men (and women). Whereas both homosexual and hysterical men were considered effeminate by the middle class, artists and aristocracy could tolerate homosexuality and “afford” hysteria. Hence, the depictions of Victor and his relationships with other men as well as the monster in novel and film reproduce discourses that went on when the novel and the film were created. Considering Mosse’s account of the history of masculinity, the novel was written at the very beginning of modern masculinity, whereas the normative manly ideal had been rather unchanged for 200 or 250 years when the film was released. Put differently, by the 1990s, further alternative masculinities had joined the modern ideal of masculinity that was in the making in the 1810s, but the latter still existed and had even been strengthened. Virtues like will power and courage were still dominant, and the 1990s experienced a new hype of body building. Men wanted to demonstrate masculine virtues with their bodies. This applies not only to heterosexual men, however, but also many homosexual men had come to incorporate the masculine ideal of the
strong and muscular men during the 1900s. Still, the general masculine stereotype had “hardened” in comparison to the 1810s, perhaps as a reaction to emerging alternatives. This development is reflected in the divergent depiction of Victor in novel and film. The mere fact that there are ideals, however, which are dependent on time and also on different social strata, illustrates that ideas about masculinity and femininity or heterosexuality and homosexuality are not more than exactly that: ideas, created within discourse.

Speaking of the binary heterosexuality/homosexuality, the simultaneous reading of novel and film has a very interesting, perhaps somewhat surprising effect: we think of Victor as homosexual and heterosexual at the same time. The fact that this is possible indicates that there is no binary heterosexuality/homosexuality. Hetero- and homosexuality can rather be described as products of discourse, as Foucault has done. Or, it is possible to describe homosocial desire in terms of a continuum with two poles, as Sedgwick suggests, with homosocial bonding at the one end and homosexual desire at the other end of the continuum.

Summarising, this thesis has questioned two binaries – male reason/female body and heterosexuality/homosexuality – in the analysis of three relationships – Victor-monster, Victor-Walton and Victor-Clerval. Evidence has been brought that the binaries are not “natural” hierarchies but created and established within discourse. The functions of male embodiment, however, could only be touched upon in a few, specific examples. As mentioned, the study of the male body is a comparatively new field in literary criticism. There is, therefore, much to explore and it is exciting to imagine what future research on male embodiment will bring.
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Kerren


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