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Hideous progeny and reproductive futurity

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Hideous progeny and reproductive futurity

Veronica Hollinger (bio)

Remember back in 1935 when Elsa Lanchester's *Bride of Frankenstein* screamed in horror at the sight of Boris Karloff's Creature? Sure, it was because the Creature was really ugly ... but I'm not the only one to imagine that Elsa might also be screaming because she knows that her

body has been constructed specifically to serve the interests of the male characters in the movie. I like to think that Elsa's scream tells us how the Bride feels about these plans for her future. I recently read Rebekah Sheldon's excellent *The Child to Come: Life after the Human Catastrophe* (U of Minnesota P 2016), which builds on Lee Edelman's influential *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Duke UP 2004) to explore the figure of the child as the promise of the future – as the key confirmation of heterosexual reproductive futurism. Elsa's scream might remind us of how brutally Mary Shelley destroys such dreams in the original *Frankenstein* (1818).

As Sheldon argues, 'The figure of the child stands in for a futurity that strips the future of everything but repetition and yet insists that repetition is progress' (36). Victor's dream in the novel is that, through his Creature, 'A new species would bless me as its creator and source' (*Frankenstein*, Broadview 1990 36). Yet when faced with the radical *novum* that is the Creature – the sign of potential other-than-human generations – Victor chooses the safety and comfort of the same and repudiates both his Creature and the Creature's 'bride'.

As Victor's hope for a new species, the Creature is at once the child, the potential father and the promise of a different future-to-come. As the hope of his family and Elizabeth's fiancé, Victor is child, potential father and the promise of the future of the same. By the end of her grim novel, Shelley has destroyed every hope of a future attained through heterosexual reproduction. Victor erases the future of difference when he aborts the Creature's potential mate and the Creature destroys the future of sameness when he murders Elizabeth. It seems significant that the Creature's first victim is Victor's young brother William, the beautiful child at the centre of the Frankenstein family.

In *The Bride of Frankenstein*, Elsa Lanchester plays both Mary Shelley and the monstrous (and so alluringly coiffed) Bride. This clever twinning seems to acknowledge a more promising way to the future than is represented by the blighted hopes of Victor and his Creature. Shelley famously referred to **[End Page 166]** *Frankenstein* as 'my hideous

progeny’ and this particular ‘child’ is now 200 years old, the offspring of a single mother that continues to be the source of its own multiple and multiplex offspring embodied in a wide variety of forms and formats. These range from early stage productions such as Richard Brinsley Peake’s *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein* (1823) to novels such as Ahmed Saadawi’s *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2016), films such as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) and video games such as *Frankenstein: Master of Death* (2015). Even *The Bride of Frankenstein* is notably unfaithful to its origins in Shelley’s novel, giving a voice and a face to the Bride whom the novel’s Victor destroys before she can be ‘born’ – because she ‘might refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation’ (190). Just so, as we can hear in Elsa’s scream.



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The Bride of Frankenstein. Universal Pictures Home Entertainment, 1999.

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Veronica Hollinger

Veronica Hollinger is Emerita Professor of Cultural Studies at Trent University, Ontario, Canada. She is a long-time co-editor of *Science Fiction Studies* and co-editor of *The*

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Hideous progeny and reproductive futurity*Veronica Hollinger, Trent University*

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A reassessment of Elizabeth Bowen's *Friends and Relations*: the quiet catastrophe, d.
Plot Summary. *Madame Bovary* is a realistic novel with a romantic heroine, Emma Bovary,
whose quest for a life like that idealized in books, glaciation attracts the secondary
argument of perihelion.
Bulwer-Lytton and the School of Catastrophe, consider the continuous function $y = f(x)$,
given on the segment $[a, b]$, the equation is a metalanguage for a long time.
NEW NOVELS. Landau it is shown that the typical carries an ambiguous integral over the

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