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Mary Shelley's Frankenstein videogame among transmedia franchises: creativity and transcreation merged with interactive non-linear narrative*

Claudio Gnoffo e Marco Pirrone

Introduction

The paper aims to analyze the concept of creativeness through digital media contents. In particular, the study investigates the birth and the development of the disruptive phenomenon of transmedia storytelling, by presenting a specific case study.

In this context, the film adaptation *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* represents one of the most relevant examples of a transmedia franchise: it is responsible for the creation of a narrative universe built around the novel.

As new stories and characters have been created and introduced over time in the Frankenstein narrative universe, the paper then analyzes the case of several versions of a videogame inspired by Mary Shelley's masterpiece.

The videogame, titled *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, like the film, was developed for the SuperNintendo Entertainment system/SuperFamicom, Sega Mega Drive/Genesis and Sega CD, and was released in 1994.

Since the 16-bit graphics and the main hardware features of '90 home consoles were sufficient to create plausible virtual scenarios, both programmers and translators/localizers proposed a peculiar narrative style, based on action-gameplay sequences and in-game texts.

The paper focuses on how the user/player experiences the story of the game, and how the same gameplay experience can provide insight into the original story of the novel, as well as a broader understanding of the Frankenstein narrative universe.

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* The tasks of this work were divided as follows: Claudio Gnoffo was responsible for writing the entire section 1 and sections 2;2.1; 4; 4.1. Marco Pirrone composed sections 2.2;2.3 4.2, and the entire section 3.

In particular, a comparative analysis between the gameplay and the reading experience is conducted, including a consideration of the differences between the versions of the videogame.

Moreover, the study outlines the main issues and challenges about interactive digital storytelling and videogame localization, particularly in relation to creativity and accessibility themes.

Finally, the paper investigates how authorship is managed in the area of transmedia franchises, also describing how fans can creatively contribute to the development and support of a digital product.

The results of this study would be valuable to many researchers and practitioners, in order to investigate possible future perspectives.

1. From Crossmediality to Transmedia Franchise

For several years, we have been witnessing an ongoing process of media convergence, which is intensifying the creation of narrative hybridizations in different media.

In this era of convergence, new emerging audiovisual narratives develop differently in various media, where the narrator becomes a hybrid figure, i.e., a player-user who not only benefits from the narrative but also interacts with it, especially in adaptations of stories such as board games, pinball and, of course, videogames (Montero & Duarte 2011). We refer to them as franchises because these multimedia products primarily respond to economic interests, but are also motivated by the artistic intention of enriching the stories told and the experience of the audience (Belsunces 2011).

When approaching these new audiovisual narratives, involving multiple media, it is necessary to define key concepts.

In the era of convergence, narratives can be of two types: crossmedia and transmedia.

1.1. Crossmedia

The term "crossmedia" refers to content that transitions across different media forms while retaining its core features, albeit with variations, much like a novel made into an audiobook.

Today, with cross-media storytelling we mean an integrated narrative that develops through various media, with various authors and

styles, and in order to experience the complete story audiences should engage with these variations. The narrative remains one, but adapted with tailored variations to the various transpositions.

Understood as such, crossmedia storytelling constitutes a network woven by a series of elements around a definite narrative universe; these elements must coalesce into a coherent canon centered on a single story existing through many manifestations.

Ultimately, crossmedia refers to integrated experiences across multiple media including the internet, video, television, mobile devices, DVD, print and radio. The incorporation of new media into crossmedia experiences implies higher levels of interactivity in the audience. In other words, it is the experience of a story that the user-narrator enjoys while watching a film, reading a novel, playing a game, listening to an audiobook while taking a walk, and so on.

And this experience, so diverse in its potential, is interconnected through various means, unified by narrative continuity and audience interactivity (Davidson *et al.* 2010, 8). This is why creators of cross-media products have two main tasks: enticing audiences to traverse different channels and promoting the idea that each product is a fragment of a larger experience that they must complete in their mind (Apperley 2004). Unlike cross-platform storytelling, which only focuses on adapting the product to various supports, crossmedia storytelling aims to provide additional information for the construction of a unified story.

1.2. Transmedia

According to Jenkins (2008), we can consider transmedia any interconnected story that unfolds on multiple platforms, while maintaining narrative independence. Indeed, in addition to the possibility of experiencing each fragment individually, these versions are all part of a "global story" (Costa Sánchez & Piñeiro Otero 2012, 112).

In fact, we could describe transmedia narration as an expansion of the same story which retains its essence, even when taking into account various non-faithful versions and adaptations.

Beyond telling the story through various media, a transmedia narration can develop through different languages (Scolari 2009) and each version achieves, from time to time, its own autonomy. In a transmedia story, each new text makes a specific and valuable contribution to the

whole (Jenkins 2003). Each medium does what it does best: a story can be introduced through film, expanded through television, novels and comics, and its world can be explored and experienced through a videogame. Each product in the franchise must be autonomous enough to allow for its autonomous consumption.

This clearly aligns with profitability, as evidenced by many successful transmedia projects in the audiovisual sector. Star Wars, Matrix, Marvel and DC superheroes, Super Mario, are just some of these projects which, while not all born as transmedia franchises, over time have evolved as such, since acceptance by the public has proved profitable and led to the story being expanded into different media (Costa Sánchez & Piñeiro Otero 2012, 113).

We will see why these elements will fit perfectly in our case, making *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* an example of a transmedia franchise.

2. An Example of Transmedia Franchise: the Frankenstein Case

Today, very few are unfamiliar with the story of the man who dared to play God by creating another human being like himself, eventually assembling a monster and unleashing a tragedy that is a cautionary tale for readers of all eras. It has been one of the most revived and reworked stories for two centuries now, since, on January 1, 1818, *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* saw the light of day in just five hundred copies at Lackington, a small publishing house. Initially released anonymously, it was only on the following March 11 that the novel began to be known through the very first reviews, which panned the work, but at the same time exalted precisely that aspect that seemed destined to condemn it for reprobation and oblivion: its originality.

Frankenstein is not the typical early 19th century novel, expected to have a moral or in any case an edifying message: its ailed is powerful, but it's far from edifying and, still today, strong and inexhaustible. In 1823, just five years after its publication, the book was transposed into successful theatrical pieces, and, since then , the theatrical, cinematographic, comic and videogame versions are countless, not to mention the merchandising.

In 1994, riding the coattails of the resounding success of the movie *Bram Stoker's Dracula* two years earlier (the movie was the most faith-

ful transposition up to then – and still today – of the famous vampire novel), a similar experiment was attempted with Mary Shelley's masterpiece. While in this *Dracula* version Francis Ford Coppola directed and produced, in *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* he served only as producer, leaving the direction to Kenneth Branagh.

This filmic version failed to replicate the same critical and public success of its vampire predecessor, despite being a good box office success outside the USA; and yet, it remains, to this day, not only the most faithful transposition of the literary text, but also among the more interesting ones.

The videogame examined in this work is based on the film, with a dedicated version for each of the two consoles, Sega Genesis (known as Sega Mega Drive outside the USA) and Super Nintendo, and another one for Sega CD (known as Mega-CD in some countries) according to the custom of the time, consolidated in 1994, of translating films into videogame versions to drive their success. A themed pinball machine was released in early 1995 by Sega Pinball, which later became one of the machines included in the video pinball simulator *The Pinball Arcade* in October 2015, and subsequently in *Stern Pinball Arcade* for free in 2016. *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* stands as a perfect example of a transmedia franchise (Bertetti 2016).

2.1. The Idea Behind the Novel

Mary Shelley, in *Frankenstein*'s conception and drafting, incorporated the prevailing instances of her time, and perfectly reflected the anxieties of that society. In fact, *Frankenstein* saw the light in an era of transition of scientific research. Science, which had once been the domain of passionate and educated individuals exploring various subjects, was evolving into a field dominated by specialists and experts - i.e. scientists. The word "scientist" emerged only years after the publication of the novel: the term is coined by Anglican pastor and philosopher of science, William Whewell, in 1834, in the (anonymous) review of *On the Connexion of the Physical Sciences* by Mary Sommerville.

When the word "scientist" was born, Mary Shelley was 37 years old, and the novel had already reached its third edition. She writed the work inspired by the questions of the time regarding the possibility of giving life back to dead matter, referring to the theories of Erasmus Darwin

(grandfather of the more famous Charles Darwin) and Giovanni Aldini (prosecutor of his uncle Luigi Galvani's studies), as well as the legends surrounding the alchemist Johann Konrad Dippel, who lived in Castle Frankenstein in Germany between the 1600s and 1700s (Camilletti 2018, 88-92). Not to mention the experiments of the time, held in the public square: back then science had no boundaries, and one could witness attempted to electrically reanimate the body of a death row inmate, such as George Foster, as if it were a spectacle (Sampson 2018, 60).

This novel, like all of Mary Shelley's subsequent ones, is a story of ideas. It sprang from a starting idea and explored all its possible consequences, in the most rigorously logical and therefore crude way possible (Sampson 2018, 290). The actions of Mary Shelley's characters can be confused, uncertain, and prone to self-deception, while the characters themselves (and therefore including the homodiegetic narrators of the story, whether they are autodiegetic or allodiegetic) convey their perceptions and narratives assertively and linearly, because they are confident in what they say and in the ideas that move them. All of this may partially explain *Frankenstein*'s success, but it's not enough. In fact, none of her other works have been nearly as successful. In addition to the strength of its ideas, in *Frankenstein* also lies the drama of the characters and their stories, the reader can be passionate about them and what they experience, the narratee would know how their ordeals end up, beyond the ideas they bring, whether they are their own or those of the author. The strength of the novel certainly lied in the truculent idea, gothic as well as sci-fi, of a man of science who manages to revive a corpse with all the possible, unpredictable consequences, but not only that: its power lies in the drama of the characters, between the remorse of Victor Frankenstein who first fantasized about being God and then even regrets being born, and the suffering of his Creature, who angrily begs to be seen and loved.

All of this implies that immediately, despite the severe criticism of the first reviewers, the novel achieved an extraordinary success with the public, which already in 1823 gives way to the first theatrical adaptations and, in 1910, to the first film. This story seems the perfect embodiment of the dilemma of "artificial creation", with all the responsibilities that it entails (Breton 1995, 46). For two centuries, *Frankenstein* has never ceased to intrigue and fascinate, even predictive

of ethical dilemmas that intellectuals, artists and scientists have faced in the contemporary age: an example is the concept of *Frankenstein complex* (Asimov 2005, 24).

However, this becomes bizarre if one considers that *Frankenstein* is probably among the most misunderstood novels ever: few realize that the Creature is not a brute without any self-control. Already from the first theatrical reductions, the profound meaning of the novel is betrayed, namely that the Creature is, in fact, the alter ego of Victor Frankenstein, in a way not too different from the relationship between Jekyll and Hyde. The so-called "monster" is an intelligent and sensitive being as much as its creator, and not simply an abomination assembled like a puzzle of flesh, by whom today we would call a *Mad Scientist* (Ripamonti 2014). This misrepresentation of the "monster" and its relationship with its creator was paradoxical if we consider that, starting from Peggy Webling's theatrical transposition of 1927, the name "Frankenstein" is today attributed as much to the monster as to its creator.

In the novel, Victor refused to take care of his own Creature, abandons it to itself by refusing his own paternity and doesn't gave it any moral or physical support, right from the start. He behaved as the exact opposite of a pedagogist, since he didn't want to have anything to do with his artificial son: he rejected it for no real concrete reason, immediately after giving it life. Therefore, giving the monster the same surname as its father seemed like a sort of posthumous compensation.

The novel is hinged on the centrality of the Victor-Creature dualism, portraying them as two equal and yet antithetical beings, so much so that it recalls, to various critics, Hegel's Servant-Master dialectic, published by the philosopher a few years before the drafting of the novel (Meirieu 2007). The fact is that today this dualism has been lost, and the version of the Creature elaborated in 1931 by the director James Whale, the make-up artist Jack Pierce and the actor Boris Karloff, marked a watershed in this sense: since then, every possible representation of the two Frankensteins, creator and monster, is confronted with that of the Universal film, so each new representation must choose whether to approach that version and therefore to distance itself from the literary protest, or on the contrary to distance itself from that film and re-appropriate the literary source, or again to attempt a synthesis. And it's here that we enter the narratological (and also philological)

aspect of the videogame under examination: it is a reworking (in two distinct forms, as mentioned, one for Genesis/SNES and one for Sega CD) of a film which, in turn, at the time wanted to be, and indeed still is, the most faithful transposition possible of the novel. Indeed, the film wants to recover all the painful complex Victor-Creature dialectic that the novel stages. The same, by extension, happened in the videogame based on the film.

This is not the first videogame inspired by the novel, which happened to be *Frankenstein's Monster* from the Data Age for Atari 2600 in 1983, but it's an extremely interesting case for the experience that the gamer-narratee has, through the gameplay, of a videogame rewriting of the original story, a rewriting which in turn passed through the mediation of a film.

2.2. Frankenstein Novel as Playable Game

Making a videogame based on a literary masterpiece is still today a complex operation. In the early '90, characterized by 16-bit graphics, this process was even more difficult. In the case of the Frankenstein game, the limitations inherent in 2D graphics, including low resolution and poor sound effects, certainly represented an obstacle in the attempt to recreate the same atmosphere of the novel.

Nevertheless, the software house tried to immerse players in some of the main sensations offered by the book, describing the horrors and the consequences of science pushing its limits due to insatiable human curiosity.

Furthermore, the game appeared different from previous incarnations, and tried to put the user more in touch with the (perhaps) inexorable destiny of the horrid Creature generated by the experiments of the audacious Victor Frankenstein. The aim of the game was to guide players through six levels of intense action, all characterized by relatively diversified mechanics and themes, providing the players with the opportunity to discover the deepest and darkest traits of the Creature.

The story followed for the most part the events of the book, and the player's choices will be significant in determining some minor path that the Creature will follow. Thus, the ability of the player is crucial, beyond the mastery of the control system.

As the gameplay assumed a primary role in the player's experience, the story is conveyed for the most part by scenes rather than texts. In fact, also due to on-screen character limitations, the in-game texts were in general short and simple.

In this scenario, the role of translator/localizer involves a peculiar form of creativity, known as *trasncreation* (Vilmantė & Vaida 2011). This technique is used within the localization process to transpose language nuances from one cultural scenario to another. In the videogame field, there are countless examples of this practice.

Transcreation is also used in the marketing field, more specifically within advertising campaigns. In this context, the concept of translation is not enough: the text's impact on the public relies on a very strong emotional component. In fact, rhymes and other linguistic strategies are often used. This approach allows the translator to modify words to align with the target language's linguistic and cultural nuances resonating with the public at that moment.

Eventually, videogame localization requires that translated contents will display properly on the screen. In fact, some languages use more words or longer words for the same concepts, when they are compared to English. Adaptation of internationalization software is necessary to support the right number of characters that have to appear on the screen, also accounting for how the texts can increase or reduce their dimensions when switching from one language to another. This often occurs even with the most common Western languages, so it's important to find a general solution involving under-resourced languages. This would improve the readability of both in-game texts and UI texts.

However, despite some issues and limitations inherent in that period, it was really hard not to be enchanted from the atmosphere and visual style of the game, making possible to enjoy the literary masterpiece in a different way.

2.3. Interactive Nonlinear Storytelling in Frankenstein Narrative Universe

The concept of linear storytelling, with its traditions and applications, is today well established. This structure works particularly well in videogames, as it provides the player with a goal or set of goals to complete in order to solve a problem.

Non-linear narratives extended the advantages of linear ones. The player has now multiple options to choose from. Historically, these options have often been presented as predetermined choices, such as choosing to go one place or another. However, non-linear narrative is about more than just offering choices. It also includes videogames that dynamically generate story elements and alter potential endings, based not only on the choices a player makes, but also on other factors such as performance, timing, or other narrative-related circumstances.

The main aspect of non-linear narrative, therefore, is variability. The player's experience is enriched by variety and a sense of efficacy. What the player does has real consequences on the world in which he or she interacts; in other words, the player is at least given the impression of influencing events.

Non-linear narratives applied to videogames can offer multiple endings or heavily impact the evolution of characters and events. The moment a player is given the ability to influence the narrative, they are automatically given the opportunity to identify with their character, generating more than just emotional investment. Even though the content within non-linear narratives may be pre-defined, the user can impart their own order to the events.

Encouraged by the growing use of technology in the audiovisual sector, interactive digital storytelling has been defined by Miller (2004) as «the use of digital media platforms and interactivity for narrative purposes, whether fictional or non-fiction, which enables the user to influence the flow and sometimes even the content of the story».

Spierling (2005) analyzed the main factors that influenced the birth and subsequent expansion of interactive digital storytelling: the first is linked to an attempt by audiovisual sector professionals to automate the movements of virtual characters by defining their skills based on rules of "intelligent" behavior; the second is related to an attempt by human-computer interaction (HCI) practitioners to use storytelling to make computer applications more understandable and more compelling (Laurel 1993); the third factor stems from the game design sector, which has begun to recognize computer games as interactive artifacts (Crawford 1993). Moreover, the AI industry has taken an interest in automated storytelling in response to user input, building story engines, and planning the actions of autonomous characters on a virtual stage. It is therefore clear that interactive digital storytelling arises

from the combination of various points of view and needs from different disciplines, mainly the audiovisual arts, information technology, human-computer interaction, and communication sciences.

Mary Shelley's novel represents today the fulcrum of the modern transmedia franchises based on the Frankenstein narrative universe. In this context, all the stories associated with each product linked to the original novel, are part of a dense network. Additionally, each media channel contributes to give different ways to experiencing the transmedia franchise. In particular, this happens with the introduction of new characters and events through movies, books, podcast, videogames etc.

This kind of transmedia storytelling is nonlinear (as each different product is linked to specific timelines, events, and characters) and characterized by the necessity to have a coherent organization. Also, the same concept of authorship is complex and varied, as the copyrights are distributed in different companies. However, this can lead to issues with licensing and the involvement in a project.

Narrative universes are also subjected to fan contributions; this phenomenon is known as *fandom* (Lamerichs 2023). In particular, fans can interact with a narrative universe through both official and unofficial means. In the case of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein videogame, fan-made contributions are related to the addition of Spanish language in the game. This practice, known as *romhacking*, was an unofficial common way to edit a game, by adding new features or languages.[1]

3. From Translation to Localization of Digital Products

The work of someone who "translates" computer programs may appear simple and mechanical, but it nevertheless hides many pitfalls.

Compared to traditional translation, the difference does not arise on the level of complexity, but on the ways of interaction between those who produce a program (or related documentation) and those who "translate" it, i.e., adapt the program to their own language and culture.

The globalization of the computer and software industry in the 1980s gave rise to the localization industry, aimed at delivering specific

1. The modified version of the game is available at https://www.romhacking.net/games/2937/

needs to localized software for international markets. Localization goes beyond language transfer, because translation alone was insufficient to bring a software program developed in one country to a form suitable for release in other markets (Esselink 2000).

Since localization addresses the demand of the computer and software industry, it evolves constantly as new electronic contents are created which need to be localized. New dimensions in translation studies are surfacing because of localization practices, requiring further research into this domain.

In *A Practical Guide to Localization*, localization was defined as «taking a product and making it linguistically and culturally appropriate to the target locale (country/region and language) where it will be used and sold» (Esselink 2000). The *Localization Industry Primer*, published by The Localization Industry Standards Association (LISA), defined localization as «the process of adapting and manufacturing a product so that it has the look and feel of a nationally-manufactured piece of goods» (Fry & Lommel 2003) and «the process of modifying products or services to account for differences in distinct markets» (Fry & Lommel 2003). The document has distinguished between localization and translation and it pointed out that localization is not just a linguistic process. Localization must consider not only the linguistic issues, but also the content, the cultural and the technical aspects, to deliver a localized product that is comparable to a local product.

Among the various kinds of software, even videogames undergo localization processes.

In particular, *Game localization* was defined by Chandler (2012) as «the actual process of translating language assets in a game into other languages», adding that the game localization process comprises three main phases, involving translation of language assets and other non-translational activities. O'Hagan (2015) defines game localization as «a set of procedures involved in adjusting games technically, linguistically, and culturally to a given market to distribute them in territories other than their countries of origin». In this complex process, translation only appears in just two steps out of the fourteen steps described.

From the definitions discussed above, it becomes clear that game localization involves more than the lone translation of the language assets.

Game localization can be viewed as a new industry, which came along as a result of the birth of videogames.

Moreover, the internationalization and localization processes often involve a large number of people with different degrees of linguistic competence, necessitating coordination and the maintenance of a coherent style.

Furthermore, those involved in localization must have technical skills that surpass those of traditional translator, since in localization work it is necessary to juggle with portions of code of programming languages, files for defining resources, documents with marked-up text or specially formatted, and so on.

In the case of videogames, localization is a very delicate process that requires considerable creativity and massive intervention in order to recreate, also from a linguistic point of view, the cultural references that can touch the user's emotional chords, making them feel fully involved in the gaming experience. A good linguistic and cultural adaptation makes it possible to realize the player's deep desire to enjoy the playful experience by understanding it perfectly in his or her native language, thus feeling "heard" in their need, being able to immerse completely in the reality of the game, with its images and verbal communication.

3.1. The New Role of the Game Localizer between Creativity and Accessibility

In the field of translation, particularly within multimedia entertainment, the concept of creativity is complex and related to many different aspects. For example, creativity can manifest in the text itself, in the cultural background of a specific market/scenario, or in the authorship of a product.

Also, localizers have to deal with marketing instructions and other possible constraints imposed by software houses or local laws.

Localization - especially in the multimedia entertainment sector – is a challenging phase, often requiring a specific teamwork for every particular *locale* or scenario.

However, although both modern translators and localizers engage in ongoing debates about creativity, they also harbour a certain level of apprehension because excessive creativity can imply illicit liberties with the source text. Furthermore, creativity is deeply linked with both

concepts of authorship and copyright, and this can generate doubts and confusion (Bernal-Merino 2015).

The human experience in project management, linked to advice and knowledge of the newest translation technologies, is necessary for the success of the products.

Indeed, IT tools represented a significant step forward in terms of efficiency and usefulness of machine translation engines. These translation aids, if enriched and tailored for specific sectors, serve as a high-quality resource for translators tasked with checking and correcting translated texts.

It is therefore essential that IT tools are combined with human support and the assistance provided by translation professionals, localization project managers, developers and translators/proofreaders.

Methodologies like post-editing or verified machine translation ensured that translations are now fast, consistent, accurate, less expensive to produce, and adequately adapted to a specific target or sector of expertise.

The new scenarios of modern society presented a series of opportunities and challenges that renewed and redefined the role of the translator, also providing him with numerous aid tools to translation. While on the one hand, information and communication technologies have favored the birth of new professional profiles within the linguistic sphere, particularly in the field of localization of IT products, on the other hand, new transversal skills are always required of these profiles, both in the linguistic-international cultural and IT.

Although IT tools aimed at the field of translation and localization are increasingly and constantly evolving, complete automation remains elusive and human involvement necessary, especially because of the lack of creativity.

Moreover, neural networks and machine learning techniques are today one of the standards on which research and companies are investing, since these tools (with human oversight) made it possible to drastically reduce the time and costs of translation and localization processes.

In this evolving landscape, the skills that the translator-localizer will have to possess will be the main focus about the new role that this professional profile is taking on today.

A role which increasingly identifies him as a supervisor of linguistic-cultural adaptation processes of the products.

4. The Frankenstein Transmedia Franchise through Different View Angles

As we said before, there have been countless transpositions of *Frankenstein* in these two centuries, and each one has tried to highlight one aspect of the work rather than another. After the films by James Whale featuring Boris Karloff's iconic portrayal of the Creature, many movies tried to give us different versions of Victor and of the Creature, but the profound characterizations of both Frankensteins have been lost.

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein was produced in '94, in the wake of the success of *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, but in the early Nineties, we already had two transpositions. *Frankenstein Unbound* (1990) features Mary Shelley herself, played by Bridget Fonda, while the TV film *Frankenstein* (1992) depicted the psychic link between Victor and the Creature as between a man and his own clone, his own alter ego. They are expressions of the need to rewrite Mary Shelley's story so that its deepest aspects are rediscovered, to bring back all of those themes that have been the strength of the novel and the reason for its success, also responding to the contemporary need to show complex and fragile heroes and anti-heroes (Gnoffo 2022, 96-108).

Interest in *Frankenstein* coincided with the rise of what would be now called a "transmedia franchise" (Jenkins 2003). The transmedia franchise, starting from the rewrite made by Branagh's film, added new elements through the derived videogame, adapting the story (however, it should be noted that a videogame in 1994 could not have the same length or complexity as a film).

In a game the user plays one or more characters experiencing their respective points of view. The same happened in the case under examination, where, although the title bore the name of the one who created the monster, like the film and the novel, the player impersonates the Creature. In the videogame, the interactivity of the Creature with the environment and with the other characters is based on two aspects: on the one hand, it depended fundamentally on the player's choices and problem solving skills, on the other hand it's based on the path and on the available options. As in all adventure videogames of that period, it

allowed for an extremely limited freedom of choice, i.e., it reflected the need to eliminate the antagonists (be it the Goombas for Super Mario or, in this case, the angry villagers for the Creature) moving left and right and jumping up and down. For games of this period, these two limited elements, namely the desire to continue the story and the thrill of being eliminated, were enough to create a deep sense of involvement with the experience, if the game had an enough captivating graphics. The gaming experience let users play the experiences reported by the Creature in the novel as homodiegetic and autodiegetic narrator, at the moment of telling its creator about itself.

What Mary Shelley already wanted to achieve, i.e., the reader's identification with the points of view of the characters, in the videogame translated into an immersive impersonation, also through the interactive component, even though it only concerned the Creature, the sole protagonist of the videogame versions, as Victor Frankenstein is reduced to a character in the background, except during the final boss scene. The game, in both versions (Genesis/SNES and Sega CD), had a distinctive style which did not concern itself with recovering or going back to the novel, but rather with coming back to the adaptation that actually inspired it the most, i.e., the film, even if the Sega CD version, as we will see, takes great creative liberties, up to distorting the sense of the original story.

4.1. Gameplay vs Reading. Experiencing the Literary Masterpiece

As mentioned before, the novel is a first-person narrative. To understand the reader's experience of the novel, it is necessary to dwell on this point. We can understand the word "diegesis" as a storyworld (Giovannetti 2021, 45), because everything that the reader learns about the characters, their stories, and the world in which they move depends on the narrator. With *Frankenstein* we have three narrators who alternate in an interlocking mechanism of non-linear narration, all three homodiegetic and autodiegetic.

The first is Captain Walton who recounts his incredible experience in several letters to his sister, first reporting the stories of Victor who, in turn, emerging as the second narrator, not only talks about himself but also reports everything the Creature has told him, and then reporting

his own direct encounter with the Creature. The third and final narrator is the monster itself, both when it recounts its experiences to Victor and when it directly meets Walton, after its creator has died.

Fabula and plot do not coincide, the narration becomes linear only within the long analepsis constituted by the narration of Victor to Walton and, within that, by the narration of the Creature to Victor. This results in an interlocking narrative, similar to a nesting doll or to Chinese boxes, in which the narrators, especially Victor and the Creature, are fundamentally unreliable (Giovannetti 2021, 56). The monster may have tricked its creator into giving him a better version of itself, just as Victor may have tricked Walton into seeking self-absolution, and so both force the Captain, and the reader too, to trust them. In turn, Walton could really be a madman confiding his ravings to his sister, and therefore we should take what he says with a grain of salt. All these first-person narrations, leaving no space for an omniscient extradiegetic narrator, entail that the focus is always internal, centered on what each character feels and experiences, even when reporting the facts of other characters.

4.1.1 The Genesis/SNES Version

The graphics for SNES are undoubtedly superior, with dynamic effects that create the illusion of perspective in movies, while the Genesis version is faster. The player assumes the role of the Creature, who flees from the laboratory as soon as it wakes up, seemingly for no clear reason, while in the novel and in the film the doctor's rejection of the Creature is explicit: Victor is indeed an abandoning father, who denies his own creation (Meirieu 2007, 57). This marks the first sign of the necessary simplification of the plot. The layout of the Creature faithfully follows that of the film, which in turn is very different from that of the novel. In the film, its gait is limp, resembling that of a person who survived a stroke (the idea being to depict the damage of a brain awakened from death), while in the novel the Creature is endowed with extraordinary agility, strength and speed. Therefore the player impersonates a being with a limp who, however, as in all games of this genre, can easily stoop and make great leaps, and furthermore who, in keeping with the spirit of the novel, has to defend itself against all the characters he encounters along the way. In order to

progress from one level to another, the player must solve simple puzzles involving switches and pulleys, which are activated by using the objects encountered when necessary, sometimes even by combining them. The environment is fraught with dangers, but it also holds discoveries, and requires the player to know how to interact. This involves not only jumping from one height to another, avoiding drowning, and moving boulders, but also destroying chests and burning bales of hay to find useful items.

The player's experience is therefore basically one of problem solving, in a plot that focuses mainly on taking action to reach the next stage. However, between one level and another, images accompanied by in-game texts (similar to an illustrated book) reveal that the horrible Creature, whom the player controls, is a kind soul who only wants to have friends. This represents an extreme simplification: by removing any possible ambiguity from the character, the player's goal becomes to Victor so he can create a mate for the Creature. In the novel, the doctor agrees, in exchange for the promise that the monster and its bride will live without any human contact, ultimately chaning his mind and refusing to complete the female version of the monster, who in turn takes revenge by killing Elizabeth. In the film, Victor gives life back to the woman, transforming her into that being that the monster would have desired as its partner. Earlier films have explored what would happen if Victor had completed the creation of a female for the monster, and already in *Frankenstein Unbound* he revived Elizabeth after she was killed by the monster. This step is completely absent in the game: the player impersonates the Creature who returns to Victor to request a mate, only to learn, from another illustrated text, that by pure coincidence Elizabeth has died of unknown causes. Victor gives her life back to get her back with him.

This omission represents a significant plot hole that serves both to simplify the story and to avoid portraying the Creature as a murderer. The revived Elizabeth becomes another enemy from whom the player must defend themselves, until she dies by combustion, as in the film. A caption then explains that the Creature, tired of mankind, heads to the North Pole in search of peace, while Victor hunts it down. This marks a substantial difference: in the novel, it is the Creature, after having exterminated Victor's loved ones, who incites him to be chased by him to the ends of the world. The conclusion holds great psychological

subtlety: just as Victor refused to make the Creature similar to a man by giving it a mate, now it is the Creature that makes Victor similar to itself, that is, to a monster detached from mankind.

In the game, as the player progresses to the last level, the Alexander Nevsky ship, the Creature seeks a dialogue with its creator rather than intending to harm him. The player reaches the last illustrated text, which is decisive: it explains that Walton, after listening to Victor's incredible story, understood, more than Victor himself, that the Creature was a kind being that wished to hurt no one. Thus, when the Creature reaches his cabin, the Captain takes it to the bedside of Frankenstein, who lies there lifeless. In this moment, Walton assumes the same role as a solver/mediator as in the novel, where he is the only one who truly considers the words of the Creature, realizing that Servant-Master dialectic which, with the egoist Victor, had remained unfinished (Meirieu 2007, 51- 53).

This game, like those in its category, is aimed at teenagers, despite being based on a film so crude that its use has been banned for children in various countries, such as in Italy. In 1994 there is still no Pegi standard in Europe, nor is there any content rating in general, there is no recommended age indicated on the game packaging, so the solution is, necessarily, a rewriting of the story that makes it suitable to the target audience for which the videogame is designed, although, paradoxically, the videogame wishes to be driven by the appeal and success of the truculent film.

4.1.2 The Sega CD Version

The version of the game for Sega CD was notably different, which also altered the experience that the player has of it, and, as a consequence, it's crucial to further discuss the console.

Sega CD, released in Japan in '91, uses CD-ROM technology, which at the time was young and, even though its potential was understood, it wasn't possible to take full advantage of it yet. Many of its games are ported from the Sega Genesis, with added CD audio music and full motion video, but the quality wasn't not exceptional and sales are poor. Sega's intuition is right but premature. The release of CD-ROM competitors such as CD-i from Philips and 3DO from Panasonic, although also not very successful, make it a technically outdated console.

Nintendo briefly considered this path by designing the SNES CD, but soon abandoned the enterprise. Between December '94 and November '95, this path will be successfully followed by Sony with the first PlayStation, which will succeed where others have failed (McFerran 2009, 82-87).

During this brief historical phase, the other version of the videogame, like many other Sega CD titles, was a porting of the Genesis version with notable differences. The graphics was undoubtedly of superior quality, the cutscenes between one level and another are remarkable in terms of resolution, perspective and camera movement, since they are intended not so much to explain what happens or to clarify the situation from a narrative point of view, but rather to show the environment where the story was then located and show off graphic quality. This greatly changes the gaming experience.

The Sega CD title was a "Point and Click Adventure" in which the player moved more freely from one environment to another, which he can explore with greater fluidity and realism, his movements were not limited to going left and right and jumping up and down: in their limping (the layout is identical, albeit more defined, to the Genesis/SNES version and the film), the player thoroughly inspected a given environment, until they found something useful or the entrance to the next area. There was no explicit division into levels, but the player smoothly transitions from one environment to another progressing through the story. When the player discovered something of interest or interacts with another character, an in-game text appeared, much like a cartoon speech bubble, to convey the spoken words.

An interesting aspect of this relates to the plot: staying true to the type of game, but deviating from the spirit of both the film and the novel, the player impersonated a Creature that had no difficulty conversing with other human beings and seeking help when needed. This is necessary for the gameplay, since the progress arised from collaborative interaction with the other characters, but it totally betrayed the experience of the monster in the novel and cancels its leitmotiv: if the Creature could interact so easily with other human beings, it would not have harbored such hatred for mankind.

The fights occurred as reserved action-gameplay sequences when the Creature encountered an opponent in its path: the most surreal fight was when, in the Secret Laboratory, the player found Elizabeth.

After Victor broke his promise to create a mate for the Creature, it wished to depart, but Elizabeth blocked its way. The Creature, who, unlike the novel and the film, was reluctant to harm her, begged her to let it go, but she insisted, resulting in a fight where her fighting style is reminiscent of Chun Li from *Street Fighter*. The player must reluctantly defeat her, after which a heartbroken Victor took her body bringing her back to life, mirroring the film. Here the plot took an unexpected turn: instead of dying, the Revived Elizabeth follows the Creature and they go away together in front of a morally destroyed Victor. The two go to the North Pole embarking as clandestines on the Alexander Nevsky, but Victor joined them. The player must defeat Dr. Frankenstein as the final boss, after which the monster, for no reason, set fire to the ship leaving with its mate: this was a very peculiar rewrite of the story, where the Creature was not only the hero but even managed to have a companion and a happy ending. There was no Walton nor any logic in this ending. This game's version was essentially based on remarkable graphics for those times and an interesting gameplay, but totally detached from the themes of both the film and the novel.

Here, we encounter a striking example of transmedia storytelling, where we access a pre-existing narrative universe but with alternative story elements and substantial variations. If the Genesis/SNES version followed the book but provided an action-based narration and few illustrated texts, this Sega CD version was more narrative and wanted to offer a new plot.

4.2. Videogames Adaptions of Literary Works. Some Issues and Challenges

One of the main challenges related to videogame localization is to define the appropriate skills for translators, adapting their curriculum by incorporating additional competencies that bridge the gap between the classroom and emerging industry practices. Software houses need to find a way to create the best possible cooperation between the translator/localizer and the programmer (Ressin & Nocera *et al.* 2011). In order to do this, the first step would be to directly involve the translator in the internationalization process (Estrella *et al.* 2019). In the area of videogame adaptions of literary works, it is important to keep the translator informed about the proper context of the game,

providing all the information about the story, the main characters, and the environment in which the game will be developed.

In this case, creativity is strictly linked to the concept of transcreation, in order to better adapt textual and audio contents to a specific cultural scenario. Moreover, crossmediality and transmedia storytelling represent two further aspects to consider in software and videogame localization, as they are often linked to other medial forms and channels.

Also, localization efforts, especially in the case of narrative games, must be framed in linguistic and cultural contexts: in particular, the translator will have to maintain, as far as possible, a certain stylistic and lexical coherence (Pirrone & D'Ulizia 2023), both for the single application and overall user interface that end users will have to interact with. For this particular reason, localization projects usually start with the definition of glossaries and style guides. In in the realm of videogames, translators have to deal with the programming source code, and with the costs of production, development, and location.

Then, videogame localization requires that translated contents display properly on the screen. In fact, some languages use more words or longer words for the same concepts, when they are compared to English, posing challenges in adapting internationalization software to support the right number of characters that have to appear on the screen, also calculating how the texts can increase or reduce their dimensions by switching from one language to another. This often occurs even with the most common Western languages, highlighting the need for a general solution involving under-resourced languages. This approach enhances the readability of both in-game texts and user interface (UI) texts.

Nevertheless, making a videogame usable for customers in different regions takes more than simply translating and adapting the text. In fact, translators have to deal with differences in formatting and conventions for writing dates, times, numbers, addresses and currency. Implementing these aspects into the internationalization phase makes adaptation to the target country/culture easier.

Moreover, in order to fix bugs or add new features, most game releases receive regular updates. Often, these updates involve elements that will need to be localized. This leads to a process of "continuous localization" with a large variety of small localization changes, which require

continuous adaptation. To effectively manage these needs, translation technologies would have to facilitate these kinds of adjustments.

Finally, other important open challenges are related to improving some recent technologies, such as *CAT tools* and *machine learning translation* (Heyn, 1998; Muntés-Mulero *et al.* 2012). These two techniques are relatively new, so they need to be empowered with new features. In particular, *CAT* tools appear to be one of the best methods to align localization with the internationalization phase; also, an improvement of machine learning algorithms would allow even better perspectives into software and game localization. Furthermore, the importance to adequately support low-resourced languages has been highlighted by participants, who suggested crowdfunding campaigns as a possible solution.

Conclusions

At the end of this work, it is possible to draw some conclusions which, rather than answers, lead to further research stimuli. One point that seems clear is this: in the mid-90s, a period that saw the flourishing of the transmedia franchise for mainly economic but also artistic reasons, seeing also continuous innovation in the field of videogame consoles, the need was to rediscover iconic horror characters such as Dracula and Frankenstein who, as archetypes, have timeless appeal to storytellers.

Indeed, in 1994 the transmedia franchise, starting with Branagh's film adaptation, introduced some additional elements. The videogame altered the substance of the story, not only in terms of plot, but also of the user's experience, mainly through the gameplay, a new element compared to the novel and the film. So, the narratee experienced not only a different plot, adapted both for media needs and for artistic purposes, but also an immersive perspective, effectively becoming a player, a sort of actor within the narrative.

Therefore, the videogame transposition, aiming to reach a different target audience, ended up creating a separate version of the story, although, as we have seen, the two contemporary versions of the same videogame tell two different stories, and not only due to hardware differences but also because of the artistic freedom of the developers.

For this reason, the experience that the narratee-user-player makes of Mary Shelley's masterpiece in 1994, through the videogame for

Genesis and SNES as well as its version for Sega CD, was one of the very first cases of transmedia franchise, since the narratee is not limited to enjoying the same story on different media (cinema, console and even pinball), but, by virtue of the fact that the original novel is re-read and re-written in different ways depending on the medium in which it is transposed, there are alterations, additions and subtractions, both in terms of plot and the user's experience of the story, indeed adding new and different pieces to that *Frankenstein* universe that the narratee approaches.

From 1994 to today, even more so with the almost worldwide diffusion of the internet, the phenomenon of the transmedia franchise has been constantly evolving together with technological progress, reaching results, in the videogame world, which today are visible to all but which at the time were unthinkable, although they already existed in their early stages.

In the era of the dynamic web or web 2.0, crossmediality and transmedia franchises – in addition to being an enormously profitable phenomenon thanks to productions that can be virtually infinite (just think of the Star Wars and Harry Potter sagas, or the films and videogames based on Lego) – seem to respond to a new need, in the same way as hypertext sites like Wikipedia and social networks like Facebook, Instagram and TikTok: to promote knowledge, sharing and connection on multiple levels, giving us the idea (real or fictitious) of a hyper-connected universe where everything is connected and everything is easily accessible by jumping from one point of the spider-web to another. And the presence of different versions of the same story, though bound by being part of a single cohesive Multiverse, seems to be a recurring motif in most contemporary narratives, as if to reassure us that after all we swim in waters that we can manage and circumnavigate, and not in a boundless ocean. *Frankenstein*, in each of the 1994 versions that we have analyzed, although not a successful film nor a successful videogame, contained the first seeds of this phenomenon, confirming that Mary Shelley's novel, from its origins, is an extraordinary story, remarkably foretelling of our contemporaneity.

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