Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is a text read by completely different groups of readers, and therefore it may be a tempting medium for research on interpretive communities. The paper analyses the possible strategies of elite and popular interpretations. For a typical elite strategy it uses the myth of Prometheus as interpretive subtext of the novel, while as an example of typical popular interpretation it makes use of Kenneth Branagh’s film-adaptation. The differences can be regarded as the result of loss of meaning, since the sophisticated connections that can be elaborated in a professional reading simply disappear in a popular one; but a popular reading involves not only loss, since new meanings appear through an intertextual process of popular interpretation that adapts the text to horror genre conventions more closely. Features that seem adequate to the popular genre tend to be highly emphasised, while, as a negative correlate of this very same process, features that are unfamiliar with the popular genre are simply omitted.

Stanley Fish (1980) paved the way to a differentiation between interpretive communities on the ground of how they interpret, but their separation might be based also on what they interpret. Interpretive communities might be groups that will interpret a special kind of text, and are trained in that special activity. However, if the development of the canon of the interpretive strategies that are legitimate in a given community presupposes the existence of a type of text to the interpretation of which those strategies can be applied, there will possibly be a text in that class. The mutual relation between text type and interpretive strategies indicates the possibility that a text more or less prescribes which operations should be performed for its interpretation. A text might have its own requests, and interpretive communities might recruit their members among those who are willing to fulfil its requests or perform the prescribed operations. Those who prefer other kinds of operations will join other interpretive communities to interpret other kinds of texts.

Through a very suggestive experiment of social psychology Stanley Fish has proved that a group of students trained in the interpretation of seventeenth-century religious poetry is able to interpret any random list of proper names as a religious poem.
(Fish 322–328). But it happened in an extremely sterile environment of experimentation; an authority (professor Stanley Fish personally) declared or at least suggested that what the students saw on the blackboard was a poem of the kind they had usually interpreted together. People trained in the interpretation of religious poetry usually read religious poetry, and therefore they are able to interpret anything as religious poetry.

A text really read by completely different groups of readers may be a tempting medium for research of interpretive communities. Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* might be a case in point. On the one hand, professional readers will read it, and they do not regard this activity as a restful or slightly shameful outing into the realm of popular culture, but as a legitimate act of a scholar; on the other hand, it has reliable sales in the market of horror novels. How can one make visible the difference between the two ways of reading? The book will probably have a meaning for non-professional readers as well, but we can use the hypothesis of loss of meaning as a starting point. At first sight it can be easily supposed that reading a book as a horror novel generates simpler, almost transparent meanings, while professional readers will do their best to detect fine, sophisticated, multilevel significances. I should, however, make it clear in advance that the achievement of popular reading might be regarded as the result of an intertextual method of interpretation, which generates additional meanings in comparison with professional reading. I call it intertextual because the influence of many horror stories contributes to the development of such new meanings.

Let us first investigate the loss of meaning as at least an aspect of popular reading. The loss of the subtitle *The Modern Prometheus* is the most eye-catching indication of such a process. The Hungarian translation does not contain any subtitle, and one should not blame the excellent translator for that, but the publishing houses, whose target market obviously was that of the horror books, which can be proved by any passing look at the cover prints. A professional reader as myself tends to be glad to have such a subtitle and makes the myth of Prometheus figure as the starting point of interpretation. I should, however, admit that such interpretative signals might only confuse some non-professional readers. Why tell people strange Greek names if they do not even know who on earth Prometheus is? As a telling example I shall quote a semi-professional reader called Stephen King, who offered a concise interpretation of the novel from the viewpoint of the subtitle: “The evil in *Frankenstein* is suggested by its subtitle, ‘The modern Prometheus’. Prometheus, bringer of fire, ended up chained to a stone, his eyes pecked out by ravens – punishment for stealing what belonged to the gods. Frankenstein comes to a similar end – not in fire but in ice – for his temerity in usurping the power which belongs to God alone: the power to create life” (King 1978, viii). We can detect some minor inaccuracies in this rather personal version of the myth. Vultures, not ravens, were mauling; they did not peck out his eyes but

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1 George Levine (1979, p. 3) wrote on *Frankenstein*’s popular transcriptions in general: “invariably we find that the book is larger and richer than any of its progeny and too complex to serve as mere background.”