Words as Witness : remembering the present in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein

Words as Witness: Remembering the Present in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

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In times of radical change, a double bind underwriting modes of knowing increases as habits in perception are destabilized. The agency of *cognition* is greatly dependent on techniques of *recognition*, while the ability to rethink or recognize is bound up in and facilitated through processes of aesthetic organization, with representation important amongst them. In a context of radical change, what challenges might language and literature face as possible modes of cognition and representation? Originally published in 1818, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* emerges from an era defined by radical change. I want to reconsider its capacity for addressing change by reading it as a technography – writing that is both *about* technology while also functioning in the capacity of technology – with regard to its techniques of usage, how language as a theme in the novel has been and might be interpreted, and how these together relate to the novel's historically situated reflections on techno-social transition.

Keywords: *Frankenstein*, dual revolution, language as technology, modernity, technography, techno-social transition

In his introduction to *The Age of Revolution 1789-1848*, Eric Hobsbawm writes:

> Words are witnesses which often speak louder than documents. Let us consider a few English words which were invented, or gained their modern meanings, substantially in the period of sixty years with which this volume deals. They are such words as "industry," "industrialist," "factory," "middle class," "working class," "capitalism" and "socialism." They include "aristoc-

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> racy" as well as "railway," "liberal" and "conservative" as political terms, "nationality," "scientist" and "engineer," "proletariat" and (economic) "crisis." "Utilitarian" and "statistics," "sociology" and several other names of modern sciences, "journalism" and "ideology," are all coinages or adaptations of this period. So is "strike" and "pauperism." (13)

Hobsbawm directs attention toward the socio-historical specificity contextualizing a particular set of terms and associate meanings that might otherwise be taken for granted in a later cultural context, or for which quasi-essentialist and transparent meaning might be assumed. He thus begins his history of revolutionary change by introducing the legacy of cultural concepts in the form of language traces; or as he put it, words as witnesses. Most prominently, they are witness to techno-social transition rooted in the French and Industrial Revolutions. Hobsbawm thus initiates a cognitive experiment of imagining the world without these terms, which is also to say "without the things and concepts for which they provide names" (13).

Originally published in 1818, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* also emerges from this age of revolution, characterized as much by radical transition in epistemic sense-making practices as by technical processes of organization and material production. What type of witness does Shelley's *Frankenstein* bear? While some of the terms Hobsbawm notes are lacking and others not, most of the related material phenomena are in some form present in *Frankenstein*, even if by negation, though we are also dealing with different types of witness. While Hobsbawm's terms are collected in the framework of historiography, the language witness Shelley constructs is conscious of its literariness and its particular existence as a witness through language. The words are articulated with attention to what they are capable of doing based on what they have done in the past, what they did at the present moment of their congregation, and what they might do sent back into the world as a novel aesthetic arrangement.

As both a cognitive and a social technology, language concomitantly produces and is a product of aesthetic organization. And if the real praxes of aesthetic organization are inextricable from the specific media through which they take form, and no less embedded in the historical trajectories that articulate those specific media, language is equally subject to and helps to shape the contingencies of techno-social transition. How, then, does *Frankenstein* bear witness to the changes in the order of material phenomena, perceptual habit and symbolic expression?

Known for its portrayal of out-of-control technologies, *Frankenstein* is concerned with the *techne* of proto-democratic systems and technical

automation of human labor; but also more inclusively with novel modes of societal organization and their justification (institutionalism) or the lack thereof (slavery), with ideological shifts toward secularization and individualism (Enlightenment humanism), and with the epistemic shifts of rationalist empiricism (German idealism) that are inherent to the transitional conjunctures of the late eighteenth century. With such an abundance of the truly novel that Shelley's *Frankenstein* is witness to, a common misreading has been to understand too narrowly the scope of out-of-control technologies this story addresses. Interpretations of *Frankenstein* as a literary record of techno-social transition have addressed developments in scientism, industrialism and institutionalism, and include a broader range of transformation across material and social praxes, as well as philosophical and ideological concerns of the time.

While the political upheavals of post-revolutionary France and Europe may be more ideological at first sight than the material shifts of industrialization, it remains important to recall how material and ideological change are co-present and co-evolve in each of the revolutionary strands Hobsbawm recalls (revolution in France, industrialization in England), and further to recognize the manifold ways in which material changes of industry and political revision dovetail in localized techno-social transitions like framework knitting in Nottinghamshire or the local organization of labor-group resistance, as well as broader historical conjunctures like the transition from entrenched agrarian systems to emerging urban societies.

Beginning with a reflection on the vast scope of techno-social transition in institutional modernity and the discontinuities generated therein, my intention is not to create a catalogue, nor to substantiate a particular set of historic phenomena as tenably constituting the focus of Shelley's novel. I do so, rather, to make a proposition: that the scope and depth of techno-social change up to and around 1800 produce novel entities as things in the world that are largely unrecognizable. What is under investigation here, then, is the challenge of thinking and representing radical change through the medium of language. How might change be articulated? What are the strategies to re-present that which has so little history of presence? I want to consider *Frankenstein*'s capacity for addressing such questions as a work of technography – as writing both about and in the capacity of technology – with regard to its techniques of usage, how language as a theme in the novel is presented as a technology for cognition, and how these together relate to the novel's historically situated reflections on techno-social transition and epistemic shift.

Shelley's Technography

Jansen and Vellema describe technography as an "ethnography of technology" that descriptively examines human-technology interactivity; "an interdisciplinary methodology for the detailed study of the use of skills, tools, knowledge and techniques in everyday life," as well as "for the integrative study of socio-technical configurations" in relation to technological change (169). Further, it may include any writing about technology "that implicates or is attuned to the technological condition of its own writing" (Connor 18). *Frankenstein* can be understood as technography and read technographically in differing but related capacities.

According to Jansen and Vellema, technographic analysis should be divided into three categories: making, distributed thinking, and rule construction. For the dimension of *making*, a technographic study will consider "the use of skills, tools, knowledge and technique in the process of making" (172). The second dimension, distributed thinking, seeks to identify and characterize the particulars of task-related knowledge "transmitted in a group or network through time and space" (172). The final category enquires into the construction of "rules, protocols, routines and rituals" that "lead to or follow from task specialization and skill-based association" (172). One readily recognizes technography as engrained in the epistemic modes generated with transitions to technological and institutional modernity as well. Its categories of making, knowledge dissemination and rule construction might be rearticulated accordingly: (1) *production*, (2) distribution and (3) regulation.

My technographic reading of *Frankenstein* will be organized according to the three dimensions as follows. (1) Language as production technology first examines the structural and formal characteristics of the text. The focus here will be on framing, intertextuality, and stylistic convention. Next it considers language-as-technology as a theme in the story. (2) Distributed knowledge examines group or type specific models of cognition as represented through three distinct narrative voices, genres of writing and philosophical iterations of the modern self. (3) Rule construction or regulation will address *Frankenstein*'s symbolic depictions of paradigm shift, moving from a logic of narrative discourse in which knowledge is generated, distributed and regulated through storytelling, to the scopic regime of institutional order, whose primary regulatory mechanisms are schematic compartmentalization and visuality.[1]

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[1] For a historicized definition of visuality, see Mirzoeff.

Representation: Language as Technology

The technographic dimensions of production, distribution and regulation are already legible in some form from the outset through references embedded in the story's subtitle. *The Modern Prometheus* refers at once to classical mythology from the book's more distant past, and brings it into a present context of technological change with an indirect reference to Benjamin Franklin's experiments with electricity; a reference that is made by way of Kant, who referred to Franklin as a *modern Prometheus*. Mobilizing the Prometheus myth in reference to Franklin provides an ideational framework for thinking the then current state of scientific experimentation and advance as radically disruptive. The plot logic invoked through this intertext also implies an imminent future in which the consequences of present action will result in revolutionary change: as progenitor of the human race and life-giver through the originary technology of fire, Prometheus has been associated with the pursuit of scientific knowledge and the consequences of obtaining it by breaking the frame of possibility.

To consider how language is presented as technology in *Frankenstein*, in its capacity to make or produce, we want to examine further its use of skills, tools, knowledge and technique. While the fundamental mode of production is representation, there is also an accentuated textual presence of formal structures and diegetic meta-structures (like the subtitle's intertextuality) that greatly influence the diegesis, and thus the way story meaning is generated. Shelley's technical attention to and manipulation of and through language and text, her frequent use of "narrative and literary techniques . . . can be said to form part of her authorial signature or voice" (Allen 9).

Among the techniques Shelley employs, layered frame narratives and polyphonic character of narrative voice significantly contribute to the complexity of the text's narrative structures. Polyphonic narrative framing, or the *mise-en-abyme*, has the conventional function of story exposition, plot compression and mirroring. However, it also functions to blur narrative boundaries, destabilize the authority of narrative voice, and, in so doing, contribute more generally to the diversely rich depiction of rupture, disjuncture, inconsistency, multiplicity and discontinuity so central to the story. *Frankenstein* is a story of the radically new, both in its diegetic plot and in its symbolic reflections on the world. Insofar as its (or Shelley's) contradictorily dynamic ossification of natural language into a work of print literature textually, formally and conceptually enacts the historical loss of narrative or discursive continuity through trans-

formations wrought by technological and institutional modernity, the text is performative in its telling. With consistency, *Frankenstein* performs disjuncture as a theme in the storyworld, in the structures of the text, and in its communications with entities exterior to it (readers, but also intertexts and historical events).

Frankenstein's significant intertexts are taken from classic literature (*Paradise Lost*), mythology (*Prometheus*), natural sciences (Darwin and Franklin), current events (the Luddite revolts and advent of mass literacy) and philosophy (Hegel, Kant, Rousseau, Bentham) to cover a broad range of conceptual material that is sometimes complementary or consistent, and other times produces internal contradictions of logic. The distinctive range of stylistic elements is similarly rich, both in quantity as well as in the capacity for generating internal resonance or dissonance. Resonance and dissonance may take concomitant effect within one specific style, or between diverse styles. For example, the Gothic novel is identifiable when language takes a hyperbolic, emotive form, where figurations of horror and supernatural phenomena appear, in figurative tropes like the *Doppelgänger* or structural tropes like the frame narrative. And yet these elements of Gothic literature never seek to constitute a pure form. An incident of horror, such as the creature's animation, might evince linguistic emotive hyperbole ("How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe"), but can just as readily switch genre codes and register to technical exposition ("His limbs were in proportion"), psychological reflection ("The different accidents of life are not so interchangeable as the feelings of human nature") or historical account (Shelley 55).

Graham Allen has noted that stylistic analysis of *Frankenstein* should be mindful of how the novel was received at the time of publication. On the one hand, the manner of language or lexical choice can be highly idiomatic: Shelley's language emerges from and reflects a particular set of language-use characteristics that are historically and culturally specific (as natural language use generally is). By the same token, the text displays such a high degree of hybridity and style shifting that the bits with potential for striking an idiomatically natural tone can lose some of their naturalness, or authenticity, due to the stylistic diversity and artifice to which they contribute. On the other hand, there is the question of how the novel's contemporary readership would have generically categorized the book. Allen notes that in the "earliest reviews we see that the novel was received as another example of what many call 'the Godwinian novel'" (20).

Identifiable in the Godwinian (or Jacobin) novel is a stylistic distinction in which the appearance of the monstrous, marvelous or sublime aims not merely to affectively dazzle or shock the reader, but to incite critical reflection, thus potentially taking on the function of social critique or political satire. The Godwinian novel "presents radically ambivalent human beings whose stories retain our sympathy at the same time that they challenge our sense of reason and the possibilities for rational action in the social world" (Allen 27). The description is readily applicable to each of the main characters in *Frankenstein*. However, there is an important distinction to be made between the potential ideologies or worldviews Shelley's style cultivates and those of her parents' legacy. Resonating throughout the writing of Godwin and Wollstonecraft is the Enlightenment tenet of reason with particular ideological intention. Whatever ambivalence characters or situations might evince at the diegetic level, their respective works are underwritten by a logic in which the reader, with her capacity for rational thought and sense of ethical propriety, will be receptive to depictions of personal struggle and social inequity in a manner that should unambiguously motivate identification on behalf of the reader with a need for real social reform. Thus while the central character of a Godwinian novel might be fraught with ambivalence in an authentically human manner, there is far less ambivalence in the real social ethos the novel promotes. As such, the worldview promoted by the Godwinian novel is unambiguously one of Enlightenment humanism, where the world is always knowable, where reason always has the capacity to recognize injustice, and rational action always has the capacity to function as a corrective measure.

While Shelley's central characters are radically ambivalent and worthy of sympathy, and while their story might challenge the reader's sense of reason and promote rational action in the real world, the worldview promoted by *Frankenstein* is far less idealistic with regard to the power of reason. *Frankenstein* is misunderstood if read as a cautionary tale about playing God, *not* because of some ineluctable moral order or ideal, nor due to the limits of knowledge. In his presumptuous attempt to reduce the knowable world to a collection of calculable truths, the Enlightenment humanist (Victor) fails to recognize the limitlessness of knowledge: its malleability, multiplicity and endlessly situational contingency. One might not only know the world in a variety of ways; some complementary, others exclusive. The plural and conflicting ways the world might be known are also co-extant.

The constant that stands out here, and that Victor's failure to recognize leads to his demise, is that all knowledge is situational, as are tech-

niques of knowing. There is no universal truth of the world independent of human perception yet attainable through it. Rather, there are diverse ways of representing the many and multifaceted valid perceptions in the world that often antagonistically coexist. Justine's trial and execution is one prominent exposition of this. Justine did not kill William, we are told; a condition Victor is cognizant of while acutely aware of his own guilt in the matter. And yet the potential fact of Justine's innocence is, like the truth of Victor's knowledge, meaningless. Victor reasons that no one would believe the truth, were he to tell it. Thus while Justine's innocence is true in the context of Victor's private knowledge, neither the truth nor the knowledge have any functional value. And if truth and knowledge are devoid of function, are they not also devoid of meaning? The answer is yes and no: they are meaningful for Victor's inner life, and may even effect change in him, yet meaningless for the world around him that maintains a different truth.

The antagonisms *Frankenstein* produces, in the storyworld and ideationally in the reader's reflections, proliferate without pointing toward resolution. The text resists ideologically prescriptive readings for resolving antagonisms, be they in the storyworld or the world the story reflects on. In a manner attuned to social and psychological realism, they live.

If *Frankenstein* constructs a scene of Enlightenment humanism, it does so only to subsequently deconstruct it. As Barbara Johnson suggested, the story is less interested in marking the capacities or limits of human knowledge than it is in exposing knowledge, in particular scientific knowledge, as a fiction: "Far from marking the *limits* of the human, Shelley's monster is nothing but the perfect realization of the humanist project par excellence: mastery of the knowledge of man" (5-6). The fundamental problem, or fiction, is that where Enlightenment humanism grants the rationalist capacity to seek out the unknown in the world and transform it into something recognizable, it fails to recognize that the unknown is not merely out there in the world waiting to be discovered: "That which the humanist remains blind to in its efforts to know man is the nature of his desire to know man" (Johnson 6).

Thus in its conflation of styles and "clash of generic forms (realist, Gothic)," *Frankenstein*

> radically disrupts a series of oppositions upon which human beings tend to establish their sense of reason, logic and order: the rational and the irrational, the real and the fantastic, the plausible and the implausible, fact and fiction, the empirical and experimental against the imaginative and immaterial. In this sense, then, *Frankenstein* can be understood as a novel [. . .] in

> which the basic oppositions upon which we rely in constructing our sense of order and rationality are disturbed. (Allen 32)

As with the Gothic characteristics in *Frankenstein*, its Godwinian characteristics are inscribed with or alongside elements that disrupt or contradict fundamental features of the genre's internal logic. The ideology and worldview cultivated through *Frankenstein* are such that the indeterminacy and ambivalence generated through formal aspects of writing and symbolic re-presentation effectively mirror the fact of indeterminacy and ambivalence present in the real world. This effect is achieved by processes of implementing, manipulating and controlling stylistic features of language: by integrating and meaningfully rearranging texts, discourses and potentially recognizable forms whose origins are external to the diegesis, whether particular intertexts or generic styles, Shelley makes them *mean* differently. Altering how such elements contribute to meaning through written language in a particular work of literature, and in her unconventional manner of re-presenting language and literature to effect internal difference, Shelley alters the effect these intertexts, styles and genres have on the knowable world. This is one way to technographically read Shelley's framing of language as technology and generative medium: language is a thing that might be manipulated through a variety of contextualized procedures, and the application of which will generate meaning in highly specific ways.

By scrutinizing Shelley's emphasis on *processes* of implementing, manipulating, controlling and producing meaning through language, I also want to facilitate a more dynamic understanding of the terms *representation*, *recognition* and *remembering*. To a considerable degree, Shelley's framing of language as technology relies on manipulating the conditions of preexisting language-oriented skills, tools, knowledge and techniques. Beyond the necessity of literacy (which is also a diegetic theme in the novel and whose rates were exponentially rising at that particular moment in history), these include the dense complexity of intertextual allusions, the multiple narrative frames enabling a polyphony of narrative voices and accommodating shifts in generic and stylistic convention – from Walton's letter writing, to Victor's expository account of recent events, to the creature's brief but comprehensive autobiography – as well as the construction/deconstruction of Enlightenment rationalism represented both through the character of Victor and his creature as uncanny other, as well as through traces of the Godwinian novel.

Frankenstein might not be exceptional in its mobilization of such techniques. What is exceptional is their particularity, their combination,

and the highly explicit *presentation* of subjecting these iterations of narrative knowledge production to a universal procedure of disjunction and recombination. The mode of production for Shelley's technography, then, takes what was or had been present in language and *represents* it in a manner that is *recognizable* and yet challenges the reader to rethink the conventions of representation when confronted with the particular iterations, departures and novel reorganization of narrative rules and rituals that construct Shelley's story of Walton's written record of Frankenstein's oral recounting of the creature's recollections; each struggling to ascribe sense (again, through and with explicit emphasis on the artifice of language) to the unthinkable conditions of their respective yet intertwined existence. If we place the notions of representation, recognition and remembering as they are outlined here in relation to Jansen and Vellema's categorical criteria for technography, we will find further consequences for each.

Frankenstein is very much about radical alterations to and wrought by the historical use of skills, tools, knowledge and techniques of production with the advent of technological modernity. Shelley's method of representing what was already present in language, but with a difference, seeks to produce a style of communication capable of exceeding what had come before and thus adequately address the world it is witness to. Its reliance on preexisting knowledge thus also transmits (or produces) new knowledge particular to the time and place of those it addresses.

The meta-diegetic dynamic of historic novelty, or confrontation with the unfamiliar, that attempts to find an adequate language for communicating the experience of unfamiliarity *per se* is mirrored diegetically in the narrators' respective attempts to communicate that which exceeds the limits of language and knowledge at their disposal. Not only is the language inadequate; so are the channels of distributing knowledge.

The creature relays its story to an audience that consistently fails to recognize the significance of what is communicated. Victor relays his story to a man trapped in the desolate arctic seas; his only company is a crew of men with whom, he explains, the possibilities for meaningful exchange are highly restricted. Walton presumably conveys all three stories by letter to his sister, a character who makes no appearance nor has any voice. And while historically there is a massive expansion in postal networks at the time, the improbability of Walton's letters making their way back to civilization from the "vast and irregular plains of ice" that "stretched out in every direction" and "seemed to have no end" (23) is characteristic of Shelley's technique of negation: constructing a possibility for the existence of something only to invalidate it the very

next moment. Thus, in addition to the technique of subjecting the logic of intertextual references, the function of narrative frames, and the validity of narrative voice all to an aesthetic principle of disjuncture, the presentation of language as communication technology rendered defunct is equally prominent among Shelley's techniques for novel modes of representation in the production of meaning at the meta-diegetic level.

Where the previous pages have focused on language-as-technology as a conceptual trope identifiable in the formal and stylistic aspects of Shelley's writing, and thus from a meta-diegetic perspective, what follows places emphasis on language-as-technology as a theme identifiable within the diegetic storyworld. The characters are privy to language-as-technology in the storyworld and have a relation to and through its presence. Here too, the technographic dimensions of production, distribution and regulation play an important role, both functional in the story and for its analysis.

Language as Godlike Science

While recounting its brief history of existence to its creator, the creature explains how it learned about human history and society in a dual scene of language acquisition. A silent witness and secret companion, it briefly resides in a hovel attached to the De Lacey cottage, where, through a boarded-up window with a "small and almost imperceptible chink through which the eye could just penetrate" (103), the creature is able to observe domestic life:

> I found that these people possessed a method of communicating their experience and feelings to one another by articulate sounds. I perceived that the words they spoke sometimes produced pleasure or pain, smiles or sadness, in the minds and countenances of the hearers. This was indeed a godlike science, and I ardently desired to become acquainted with it. But I was baffled in every attempt I made for this purpose. Their pronunciation was quick, and the words they uttered, not having any apparent connection with visible objects, I was unable to discover any clue by which I could unravel the mystery of their reference. By great application, however, and after having remained during the space of several revolutions of the moon in my hovel, I discovered the names that were given to some of the most familiar objects of discourse; I learned and applied the words "fire," "milk," "bread," and "wood." I learned also the names of the cottagers themselves. (108)

In a kind of anachronistic inversion of Hobsbawm's history-language-cognition experiment, the creature's first words bearing witness to a history of development have an ahistorical quality to them. Witness to everything essential and nothing specific, they are the elements of physical necessity (rudimentary technology and nourishment) and fundamental features of language (the practice of naming as representation and abstract thinking). Yet while focus is drawn to the essential and fundamental, this initial framing of language acquisition also stages the theme of language as a multi-faceted, complex technology. First, we can recognize the technicity of language: it is medium for communication, a mode for identification, a tool for effecting change. Language is a way of knowing the world, the things in it, and oneself in relation to these.

Here we get a glimpse of Shelley's technographic description of language in accord with the three dimensions indicated by Jansen and Vellema. The creature is able to observe how language does things in the world. It recognizes that knowledge is transmitted through language in time and space – even knowledge about language itself; thus the creature's capacity to learn it by observation. And learning it is contingent on the creature's capacity to recognize, remember and reproduce language's rules, protocols, routines and rituals. In a characteristic manner, Shelley brings attention to language-as-technology by thematically framing it in the diegesis, and also making it perform by weaving diegetically external discourses of language-as-technology into the fabric of the story.

By referring to language as a *godlike science*, Shelley is able to inscribe language-as-technology into the often antithetical epistemes of Enlightenment scientism and pre-Enlightenment Christian creationism. In the rationalist tradition, language is a scientific thing that can be studied, mastered and applied to manipulate other things in the world. In the biblical tradition, it is a sacred thing that calls the world into being. Representing these two stories of language in a conjoined manner not only manages to recall together two conflicting logics of language. Shelley is also able to recall the myth of Prometheus, who with divine technology usurped bestows life or greater agency onto humans, making them more godlike. Furthermore, the myth is doubly reflected through the conditions of the creature's language acquisition.

When the Safie comes to live at the cottage, Felix helps her learn French by reading to her daily. By secretly listening and repeating, the creature is able to acquire and abscond with this godlike originary technology. Language-as-technology has two double frames here. First, there is the frame of doubled language acquisition, with both Safie and the

creature learning concomitantly, yet under conditions that are at once the very same (regarding time, place, source and method) and radically different (regarding relations, conditions of shared knowledge, and, ultimately, function). Then, there is the frame of language-as-technology where, during the scene of double language acquisition, (at least) two types of knowledge are transmitted: technical knowledge for language comprehension and use of language as a technology, and knowledge about the world acquired through the technology of language.

As Felix reads to Safie from Volney's *Ruins of Empire*, the creature listens:

> Through this work I obtained a cursory knowledge of history and a view of the several empires at present existing in the world; it gave me an insight into the manners, governments, and religions of the different nations of the earth. I heard of the slothful Asiatics, of the stupendous genius and mental activity of the Grecians, of the wars and wonderful virtue of the early Romans – of their subsequent degenerating – of the decline of that mighty empire, of chivalry, Christianity, and kings. I heard of the discovery of the American hemisphere and wept with Safie over the hapless fate of its original inhabitants.
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> These wonderful narrations inspired me with strange feelings. Was man, indeed, at once so powerful, so virtuous, and magnificent, yet so vicious and base? He appeared at one time a mere scion of the evil principle and at another as all that can be conceived as noble and godlike. To be a great and virtuous man appeared the highest honour that can befall a sensitive being; to be base and vicious, as many on record have been, appeared the lowest degradation, a condition more abject than that of the blind mole or harmless worm. For a long time I could not conceive how one man could go forth to murder his fellow, or even why there were laws and governments; but when I heard details of vice and bloodshed, my wonder ceased and I turned away with disgust and loathing. (115)

At this point in the multiply framed scene of language acquisition, language-as-technology takes a distinctly different focus with regard to its functions. There is no reference to it as technology for communication, nor for naming things, nor for effecting change in other people through its use. Where language is a technology of communication and communion in the earlier passage, here it is a technological medium for the dissemination of knowledge about the world. An initial knowledge of social organization, national identity and political power opens to a knowledge of cruelty, inequity and suffering, finally resulting in an irresolvable deliberation on human behavior. Language-as-technology in the function of mediating knowledge reaches its limits when the crea-

ture can no longer make sense of what it is hearing, due not to lexical incapacity, but to the inability to identify with what it hears. In this moment, language-as-technology mediates knowledge of an exterior world that might be discovered and re-presented through it, but also of an interior world of self-discovery.

As Shelley presents it in these scenes, language-as-technology can be understood as bifurcated in its functions. Its two primary functions are communication and cognition. The one is society oriented, the other self oriented. Although there are further bifurcations within these, the two primary functions generally operate in unison. Greater knowledge of and in language should enable those who command it to negotiate communication and navigate identity in community with greater facility. However, this is not the effect language-as-technology has on the creature.

The Monstrosity of Knowledge

The greater the creature's knowledge of and, in particular, through language, the greater its sense of alienation from the world around it. This becomes evident in a quick progression between two degrees of alienation. First, the creature becomes alienated from language-as-knowledge-technology. Upon learning of human cruelty and vice, "wonder ceased and I turned away." Here, wonder can mean both curiosity and cognition: the creature's inability to recognize itself in this scene of representation exposes the limits of a certain type of knowledge, and language-as-technology temporarily ceases to function. The creature is alienated through language-as-technology not due to language, but because it finds no place for itself in the field of representation to which it is exposed. This constitutes a between space, where the creature is suddenly outside of language-as-knowledge-technology. The next instance has a more radical effect, where language-as-technology leaves open access to cognition, or "wonder," but in so doing, alienates the creature both from itself and from society:

> 'Every conversation of the cottagers now opened new wonders to me. While I listened to the instructions Felix bestowed upon the Arabian, the strange system of human society was explained to me. I heard of the division of property, of immense wealth and squalid poverty; of rank, decent, and noble blood.
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> 'The words induced me to turn towards myself. I learned that the possessions most esteemed by your fellow creatures were high and unsullied

> descent united with riches. A man might be respected with only one of these advantages, but without either he was considered, except in very rare instances, as a vagabond and a slave, doomed to waste his powers for the profit of the chosen few! And what was I? Of my creation and creator I was absolutely ignorant, but I knew that I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property. I was, besides, endued with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome; I was not even of the same nature as man. (115)

Here, language-as-knowledge-technology allows the creature new self-knowledge through preexisting knowledge of the (self as) radically other, with the effect of alienating the creature from both self and other. As this knowledge becomes increasingly evident, so too does the nature of what is lost in this moment of alienation through language-as-knowledge technology: the possibility of community. Once again, the re-presentation of what was previously familiar but is newly organized has the paradoxical effect of concomitantly allowing and disallowing function at the same site. In this scene of language acquisition, it is as if an increase in the capacity to know of and through language decreases the capacity to employ it in a meaningful way. In a sense, language becomes an improper object; ill-suited to social communion or even to thinking about society and self. Such a complex and prominent presentation of language-as-technology, only to have it turn back on and cannibalize itself, calls further attention to Shelley's rich representation of language-as-technology.

Peter Brooks has claimed that, more than any other element, it is "in the question of language, both as explicit theme of the novel and as implicit model of the novel's complex organization, that the problem of the monstrous is played out" (593), and that "in the Monster's use of language the novel poses its most important questions" (592). Even beyond language as an explicit theme in the novel and the self-reflexive mode of its complex organization, one can find in certain meaningful extradiegetic parallels to historical events that *Frankenstein* addresses a similar focus on language; or evidence of language-as-technology playing an important role in the historical order of things. Like members of the Luddite Uprising who sought in vain dialogical engagement and diplomatic solution with those who governed and oppressed them, the creature will ardently seek communication through language as a technology of engagement and inclusion (i.e. in the function of community).[2] But language fails the creature in its attempts to "become linked to the chain of existence and events, from which I am now excluded" (Shelley 149).

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[2] See Gardner.

Despite the thematic centrality of language in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, however, and despite the perspicacity of Brooks' Lacanian reading, I wonder if slightly too much has been taken for granted in appointing language absolute priority of place. For example, by claiming that "[t]hrough the medium of language, a first relationship is created" (593) between the creature and Victor, are we not neglecting the role of the specular so prominently addressed in Victor's language at the moment of the creature's animation? Beyond the fact that there is no communication between the creature and Victor, Victor's justification for rejecting the creature as a failure based on its physical appearance is out of character up to that point and initially reads as insufficient given the circumstances. Even prior to these considerations, I would question whether it makes sense to read in this scene the establishment of a relation between Victor and the creature. Reading Victor's reaction through the lens of psychoanalysis, it looks more like disavowal followed by hysterical fits of repression (Victor's episodes of bed-ridden unconsciousness begin here). Moreover, we can say nothing of the creature's reaction, as it is not described, and the creature has vanished by the time Victor regains consciousness.

On the one hand, Brooks' reading of the creature as monstrous through a theory of monstrous lack in language is convincing in its historicization of language's stake in the techno-social moment of revolution: from agrarianism to industrialism, from the authority of the Word to the authority of reason. Claiming that the "Monster . . . uncovers the larger problem of the arbitrariness, or immotivation, of the linguistic sign," Brooks situates Shelley's representation of the monstrous with regard to "the displacement of the order of words from the order of things" (594), as Foucault has also put it. In this regard, "the 'godlike science' of language depends, not on simple designation, on passage from the signifier to the signified, but rather on the systemic organization of signifiers" (Brooks 594). As suggested in the previous paragraph, and perhaps also in the highly specular and yet also elliptic manner through which the creature acquires language-as-technology, Brooks' Lacanian frame of thinking technologies of language and vision is highly specific in its ordering and function of each, and thus perhaps somewhat limiting. It partly derails, I think, the potential legibility and intelligibility of Shelley's fuller range of representational techniques regarding both language and vision together. In the following sections, I want to consider their representation, and representation of other things through them, in terms that avoid facile displacement and replacement; in terms of degrees of difference, of in-between spaces, of presence and

absence, of structures for cognition and recognition, where recognition can mean recalling, rethinking, or identifying.

In addition to a rather binary on/off model of recognition as a question of the creature's being within or without language, prior to this we addressed Shelley's framing of language-as-technology as containing native bifurcations in process and purpose (communicative and cognitive), and her ability to evacuate or enable through reorganization. Regardless of the model we apply, I want to draw attention to mirroring as a universal technique Shelley mobilizes for her representations of all three narrators, each one's desire for recognition, and the strange conditions of re-presenting this desire in and with regard to language-as-technology.

Each narrator expresses a desire for recognition. Each articulates the importance of recognition in a social capacity for and through the functions of both forms of language-as-technology: Walton, Victor, and the creature all desire someone to converse and communicate with. They each articulate how language as a mode of communion is necessary for their sense of self, and for thinking oneself in relation to others. Respectively, they each articulate desire for this form of recognition, sympathy and community not only in terms of language, but in terms of sight and vision: someone to return a gaze, to share a vision, to recognize oneself in. Accordingly, the task of thinking these similarities and differences of and through recognition will take into account their representation within language; but as it is not only the conventional mode of discursive language-cognition that Shelley mobilizes to frame representation and recognition for her readers, rethinking the habitual acts and borders of convention will continue to be important to the analysis.

Recognition: Genre as Technique

Frankenstein critically addresses diverse modes of recognition, both in the conventional sense of *familiarity*, or the ability to identify what one is confronted with, and with the less conventional notion of *rethinking* modes of identification. In the historical context of *Frankenstein* and its deliberations on techno-social change, notions of selfhood play an important role; in particular, the writing and renegotiations of individual identity slightly preceding and concomitant to loss of the transcendental signified. There are a number of relevant intertexts and genres here. My focus will be on thinking genre through letter-writing, autobiography and scientific observation. As intertextual points of reference, Hegelian

models of being and related texts should facilitate an exposition of how group-specific types of knowledge are generated, distributed and regulated (the three technographic dimensions). Shifts in structural and formal distinctions will also concern our evaluation of Shelley's exercise in novel forms of presenting thinking and rethinking.

Although each of the three characters provide frames to and mirrors for understanding the others, and while incorporated in each of them is a Hegelian dynamic of development and perpetual change, their legible differences allow for the identification of three levels of development, or three different trajectories of the first man: the first man in something like a state of nature and subject to animal needs and desires (the creature), the first man as desiring recognition and fundamentally social with benevolent tendencies (Walton), and the first man in a "battle to the death for pure prestige" (Victor) (Fukuyama 143).[3] There are various elements working to crystallize the different trajectories of the first man while connecting them at the same time. As we shall see, the shifts in narrative voice that accompany the changes from one biographical account of being to another will make the distinctions in levels of development and trajectories of social being poignantly recognizable.

While on an expedition to the North Pole, Walton encounters Victor Frankenstein, who is crossing the frozen landscape in pursuit of what he describes as his monstrous creation. In the fifth letter to his sister, Walton explains that what follows will recount Victor Frankenstein's fantastic tale, told to him by Victor while recovering on board Walton's ship. Here the organizational form of the text changes with the genre shift from letters to conventions of the novel and confessional autobiography. Victor will assume the positions of (false) first person narrative voice and focalizer, maintaining these for the majority of the novel. In the middle of the text of *Frankenstein* there is significant introjection on behalf of the creature, who briefly assumes control of narrative voice and focalization.

With these shifts, the frame narrative is among the more conspicuous techniques Shelley employs at a formal level. Through it, three major shifts in narrative voice are constituted. All three are biographical in tone, but vary in style, recounting to a reader or listener the life experiences of another. In the diegetic frame, each account is addressed to a specific audience: Walton to his sister Margaret, Victor Frankenstein to his chronicler Walton, the creature to his creator Victor Frankenstein.

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[3] See Part III of Fukuyama regarding Enlightenment humanism and the Hegelian subject's struggle for recognition.

Empathic Sensibility – Robert Walton

At *Frankenstein*'s outermost narrative frame, the story begins with a series of letters written by Robert Walton, a seafaring explorer, to his sister, Margaret Saville. Under the generic heading "Letter I," the story begins:

> You will rejoice to hear that no disaster has accompanied the commencement of an enterprise which you have regarded with such evil forebodings. I arrived here yesterday; and my first task is to assure my dear sister of my welfare and increasing confidence in the success of my undertaking. (13)

Already legible at the diegetic level in these first lines are the notions of glory-seeking and the need for recognition juxtaposed with a simple but meaningful act of benevolence in the form of social communion, where siblings are joined through the act of narrative exchange. Beyond the diegetic level and embedded in the genre of letter writing, biographical writing hints at individualism, with Rousseau's legitimation and popularization of secularized autobiographical-memoir-confessional writing in the latter part of the eighteenth century.

As a genre-specific narrative frame that situates internal to it the autobiographical accounts of Victor Frankenstein's life as well as his creature's, Walton's letters to his sister recount his own adventures in an initial framing of the struggle for recognition which will mirror both Victor's and the creature's struggles for recognition in ways both similar and different. Like Victor, Walton seeks a discovery of "wondrous power," in pursuit of which he "may tread a land never before imprinted by the foot of man," and "whose enticements are sufficient to conquer all fear of danger or death" (13-14). Alongside articulations of the inspiration of vainglory are Walton's valorization of risk to himself and others in the service of humanity, where he shall confer "inestimable benefit" "on all mankind to the last generation" (14).

The framing mechanism of Walton's letters act as a kind of structurally inverted mousetrap. Like a *mise-en-abyme*, it provides the reader with clues to decode the meaning of events in the narrative it mirrors; but where the textual conventions of *mise-en-abyme* allow for a mirroring of story events *within* the plotting of those events – a small-format story embedded within larger-format story of the text's frame narrative – Walton's letters function both as frame narrative to Victor Frankenstein's story *and* as mousetrap *mise-en-abyme* at the periphery of its narration. As such, it is interesting for the way it dramatizes dislocation and

decentering as themes that will be continually foregrounded throughout the book.

Regarding Hegelian intertexts and thematic mirroring, Walton's letters establish the symbolic topos of humanist individualism. With the combination of self-possessed agency and self-reflexive awareness as characteristics that enable human development and necessitate the struggle for recognition, Walton makes explicit reference to glory found in non-monetary achievements and the need to be recognized as a man by other men. Towards the end of his first letter, he explains that "life might have been passed in ease and luxury; but I preferred glory to every enticement that wealth placed in my path. Oh, that some encouraging voice would answer in the affirmative" (15). This sets the tone of the next letter, where focus shifts from glory-seeking to self-worth as other-determined.

The second letter opens with a reflection on the passage of time and description of his crewmembers as men of action and courage, though lacking in their capacity for reflection. Intuitive as his description of the crew may seem (what else would we expect if not men of action?), it allows for the contrast to himself that follows. While he too is courageous and able, Walton's needs are also more refined than those of his crewmembers:

> I have one want which I have never yet been able to satisfy; and the absence of the object of which I now feel as a most severe evil. I have no friend, Margaret: when I am glowing with the enthusiasm of success, there will be none to participate in my joy; if I am assailed by disappointment, no one will endeavor to sustain me in dejection. I shall commit my thoughts to paper, it is true; but that is a poor medium for the communication of feeling. I desire the company of a man who could sympathize with me, whose eyes would reply to mine. You may deem me romantic, my dear sister, but I bitterly feel the want of a friend. (17)

We see in Walton both the Hegelian subject as a man of action who seeks achievement and glory, who requires recognition, and whose needs are more refined than those of the good but simple crew. In these ways, Walton provides an important partial reflection of Victor's story to come. What we do not see in him are two things that significantly distinguish him from Victor and the creature. First, like Victor, Walton is not a first man in a state of nature whose base needs and desires may be accompanied by non-material needs, but are free of engrained ideologies through social convention. This is the position the creature will occupy, though in constructively problematic ways. And while Walton's

desire for recognition verges on the desire for society *per se* (companionship), Victor will exchange the recognition he has in the form of social companionship for the self-determined ambition of the fanatic; or, in the battle to the death for pure prestige.

Enlightened Individualism? Victor Frankenstein

Under the heading "Chapter I," the opening paragraph of Victor's autobiographical account is as follows:

> I am by birth a Genevese, and my family is one of the most distinguished of that republic. My ancestors had been for many years counsellors and syndics, and my father had filled several public situations with honour and reputation. He was respected by all who knew him for his integrity and indefatigable attention to public business. He passed his younger days perpetually occupied by the affairs of his country; a variety of circumstances had prevented his marrying early, nor was it until the decline of life that he became a husband and the father of a family. (30)

Like Walton's self-description, a number of indexes to Hegelian being are immediately legible; particularly in relation to the *bourgeois dilemma*, and to man in a state of self-awareness.[4] However, where Walton's opening address positions him as a liberal humanist subject in relation to glory-seeking self realization (or Hegelian freedom), desire for recognition, and marks the impulse for social communion, Victor's opening positions the liberal humanist subject predominantly in terms of reflexive self awareness through genealogical cognizance and social status: *I am by birth . . . and my family . . . most distinguished.*

Victor's auto-subjective recounting of ancestry situates him in a larger historical and social context, marking a particular state of being-mind. And while his account signals authority in social status through heritage, it is a heritage distinguished from the bourgeois selfishness Fukuyama addresses in favor of a "self-understanding of liberal society which is based on the non-selfish parts of the human personality, and seek to preserve that part as the core of the modern political project" (145). The integrity of Victor's ancestry is characterized first by public commitment and next by the private pleasures of familial responsibilities, marking the subjective space of "I" as characteristically civil and social.

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[4] See Fukuyama chapter 13 on the struggle for recognition and the bourgeois dilemma.

To further accentuate her individual characterization of man in or through a state of self-awareness, Shelley supplements the thematic content of ancestry with formal textual and grammatical structures that equally prioritize an auto-subjective positioning of self in (genealogical) relation to other. Of the paragraph's four sentences, the first two begin with first-person pronominal subjectivity: "I" and "My." The third and fourth sentences shift subjectivity to a related other: "He." At stake here is a specific form of self-recognition through other: not one of mirroring (as in a primitive form of the first man), but one of continuity on temporal and material axes (via genealogy). In relation to thematic content (which is ideational), the functional signifier communicating self-recognition continuity over time and space is ancestral lineage.

Regarding formal procedures (which are structural), the concept of subjective continuity is linguistically represented through syntax, repetition and modification in the application of personal pronouns. Initiating the autobiographical narrative, *I* takes priority of place. A quality of the singular or exceptional might be read in the fact that it is stated at the very beginning, but is not repeated again. A formal extension of *I* (or self) by means of possession, *my* initiates the second sentence. It occurs three times between the singular use of *I* at the beginning and subsequent use of *he*. *He* – indicating an other, yet one linked to *I* – initiates the final two sentences and occurs three times following the last use of *my*. On the one hand, subjectivity is accentuated here in the formal repetition of personal pronouns. On the other, relational continuity is expressed through a controlled progression of change from the first person pronoun in the opening position, to the possessive pronoun in a middle-secondary position, and to the third person pronoun in a third and final position.

Such formal and ideational distinctions position Victor as distant to the (Locke-Hobbes-Rousseau) *first man* in a state of nature. Victor as man is situated in regard to a heritage of civility and refinement, and with a highly accentuated reflexive sense of self: a self seemingly incapable of intimating that there are fully legitimate ways of knowing and being in the world beyond its own. As becomes clear in plot progression and character development, Victor's sense of self is organized in an utterly self-centric manner. A suggestion of this characteristic is identifiable in the paragraph above, in that the other men he holds up to reflect upon himself as an individual and social being are inscribed with superiority and entitlement. Presented expressly as possessions of Victor's (genealogically and grammatically) – *my* family, *my* ancestors, *my* father – Victor's *others* appear to be characterized with a greater degree of self-

ness than otherness. As such, a contrast is provided to Walton's other-based sense of self, with his others characterized through distance: his sister by means of geography and gender, his crew by means of hierarchy and cognitive-communicative capacity.

If the proximity of the other increased with the shift from Walton's auto-subjective *first man* narrative frame to Victor Frankenstein's, it becomes still more extreme with the shift to the nameless creature's doubly embedded autobiographical narrative. In contrast to both Walton and Victor, the creature has neither identifiable familial relations nor approximate social equals that might offer a mirror of othering and thereby a sense of self. This difference – or the triple bind of differing in the lack of difference through similarity – is accentuated by inverted doubling ideationally and formally between Victor and the creature.

The paradoxical effect of lacking any other on the creature's behalf is a state of unmediated, enveloping alienation. Without the apparatus of other-based self-recognition, the creature occupies a position of radical otherness *per se*, and thus of monstrosity. Where Victor's positioning as a liberal human subject is aesthetically negotiated in thematic content through the notion of ancestry and in linguistic form through the use of subjective/personal pronouns, these categorical indexes become ellipses (or null-sum containers) for the creature, who has no ancestry, no name, no social context.

Native Otherness – the Monstrous State of Nature

The use of first person narrative voice in Walton's, Victor's and the creature's autobiographical accounts signals knowledge and authority in each. And while they mirror one another in various ways, we have seen how the stories they tell and style of telling signal clear distinctions in states of being; or in three *moments* of becoming. If Walton at the outermost frame represents an empathetic, socially sensible and intellectually refined liberal spirit, and Frankenstein represents a state of acute self-awareness, embedded as a kind of core at the center of these is not an identifiable subject that might be addressed as he, she, you, or I, but a nameless thing: an *it* (conceptually, a potentially non-mediated state or moment of *pure being*).

Although the characters and character biographies distinctly foreground a particular moment in Hegelian being/becoming, development, and consciousness, they cannot be reduced to anything like stasis in a particular state. Each is represented as a dynamic location of realization,

negation and transformation. The creature moves from pure undifferentiated being, to consciousness, to self-consciousness. Frankenstein moves from other-based self-consciousness to a negation of that state; and while he is in some ways more limited than the other two, he also inhabits a moment of absolute mind that transcends material nature and social institutions. Walton is portrayed as deeply engaged in a battle for prestige but, in a self-sublating moment, transcends the desire for recognition in favor of social morality (all three transform in moments of self-sublation or *Aufhebung*). At the innermost frame, contained within the double frame narratives of Frankenstein and Walton, and expressed in the form of two self-determining introjections, narrative voice and focalization shift to the creature. Through the embedded narrative of the creature's autobiography, Victor learns of his extraordinary creature's life. Centralized in a receding trajectory of pure being (abstract), life (negative), and mind/spirit (concrete), the creature's autobiography is a story of development in three stages.

The first is a state of undifferentiated sensory experience, material immediacy, and animal necessity:

> It is with considerable difficulty that I remember the original era of my being; all the events of that period appear confused and indistinct. A strange multiplicity of sensations seized me, and I saw, felt, heard, and smelt at the same time; and it was, indeed, a long time before I learned to distinguish between the operations of my various senses. By degrees, I remember, a stronger light pressed upon my nerves, so that I was obliged to shut my eyes. Darkness then came over me and troubled me, but hardly had I felt this when, by opening my eyes, as I now suppose, the light poured in upon me again. I walked and, I believe, descended, but I presently found a great alteration in my sensations. Before, dark and opaque bodies had surrounded me, impervious to my touch or sight; but I now found that I could wander on at liberty, with no obstacles which I could not either surmount or avoid. The light became more and more oppressive to me, and the heat wearying me as I walked, I sought a place where I could receive shade. This was the forest near Ingolstadt; and here I lay by the side of a brook resting from my fatigue, until I felt tormented by hunger and thirst. This roused me from my nearly dormant state, and I ate some berries which I found hanging on the trees or lying on the ground. I slaked my thirst at the brook, and then lying down, was overcome by sleep. (98)

This first state, as a kind of being in itself without internal differentiation between the senses, is free of reflection. Shelley's highly controlled technical arrangement of pronouns is again remarkable, as is her use of the passive voice to present the creature as a pre-conscious, non-agential

thing that is acted upon. The first word of the first sentence of the chapter, which is also the first word of the creature's tale, is not I – the subject of the tale – but *It*. For the telling of its own biography, Shelley has the creature begin with a third-person neutral object pronoun. It is meaningful as an initial gesture not marked by subjectivity and agency, but also regarding the act of recollection: the creature is unsure of its initial state of being, as it was not conscious of being at that stage. The next sentence does something similar, syntactically and grammatically shifting agency to a thing (or the creature's native *thingness*) that acts upon the creature: "sensations" occupies the active subject position, where the creature is an object ("me") acted upon. These linguistic techniques for coding the creature as a non-agential object *vis-à-vis* non-human agents that, in a position of agential and grammatical priority, manipulate it are dominant throughout the passage.

"I" necessarily occupies an active agent position throughout the passage as well. When it does, Shelley uses various linguistic techniques to compromise the authority of *I* (mostly in favor of *it*). This is evident in the first sentence, for example, where there is necessarily an *I* who remembers, but with difficulty and robbed of syntactic priority: where conventions of language commonly place the active-agent-as-subject towards the beginning of the sentence, the appearance of *I* is deferred. This technique is repeated with a similar effect by slightly different means in the second sentence. *I* as an active-agent-subject appears only following the coordinating conjunction, secondarily linking the clause in which it is the subject to a prior clause, in which the same *I* is subordinated to the object position of "me" – thus giving syntactic priority to "A strange multiplicity." The effect is created again later in the same sentence by giving priority to "it" in the subject position, "was" as a non-active verb, and "long time," which together precede "I" both in a function of adverbial temporality but also of symbolic authority (via syntactic priority) in the following manner: *it was a long time before I . . .*

Shelley's use of linguistic technique through pronominal syntactic arrangement repeatedly subordinates *I* as an active-agent-subject to a position of lower symbolic value. In correlation, the creature's ability to identify various impressions (by recollection) is described as contemporaneous with and corresponding to its capacity for differentiating between and identifying the functions of its various senses. Here too, Shelley is careful to limit the emerging agency and will of the creature as it becomes capable of simple tasks. The development from an undifferentiated non-agential thing to a being with sensations and needs is signified in a highly controlled manner through developmental patters in

linguistic structure and choice of terms that organize object relations and value. The increasing repetition of "I" as a subject pronoun suggests a presence of being in which the creature achieves more clearly internal differentiation, and begins to be differentiated from other things. However, the state of being is still to be understood as limited in agency and only minimally able to reflect on its position in relation to the world of things for the time being.

In Shelley's arrangement of auxiliary and action verbs, the main verbs take on an adjectival-descriptive function to generate a particular quality in the *I* presented to the reader: overcome, tormented, hanging, resting and receiving. It is an *I* that is primarily acted upon, gaining experiential knowledge in a passive manner. Shelley's constriction of an emerging subject to a being with limited agency and awareness is thus symbolized in her particular choice and use of compound verbs as well as by repeatedly counter-balancing the subject-pronoun *I* with the object-pronoun *me*. Shelley's linguistic strategy is again mirrored in the plot of story and character development.

In this first stage of being, the creature describes itself as "a poor, helpless, miserable wretch" that "knew, and could distinguish, nothing" (98). "No distinct ideas occupied my mind; all was confused. I felt light, and hunger, and thirst, and darkness; innumerable sounds rang in my ears, and on all sides various scents saluted me; the only object that I could distinguish was the bright moon" (99). Soon after this description, the creature is able to distinguish light from dark, night from day, cold from heat, insects from plants, and one animal from another. With these developments, the distinction between its self and other things becomes increasingly intelligible. Finally, with the creature's mastery of fire subsequent to these experiences, a new self-reflecting subject with a greater capacity for abstract thought emerges.

In Hegel's hierarchy of development from being to becoming, he refers to the lowest level of existence as *being*, which is followed by *life*, which in turn is subsumed under *mind*. For the creature's development, Shelley marks the essential transition from the first stage to the second, and thus from being to becoming, by introducing the trope of fire as an originary technology. Thus, if the title of Shelley's novel suggests that Victor Frankenstein is a Promethean figure bringing the spark of life to humanity, his creature's discovery and mastery of fire symbolically frame its entry into a field of existence as analogous to the Hegelian concept of *life*.

Dialectical Synthesis?

There are various philosophical intertexts one might map onto Shelley's triad of narrators, marked structurally by the complex of frame narratives and shifts in narrative voice, and linguistically (textually, grammatically) by the initial pronominal distinctions *You*, *I*, *It* the moment the narrator voice is assumed. Among them, David Shishido's mapping of Hegel takes into account the historical conditions of slavery as a point of reference for the master/slave dialectic. In the final moment, with the reader returned to the outermost narrative frame, Shishido suggests that apotheosis is achieved in an encounter between Walton, the "critical ethical character of the text" (123), and the creature. Unlike Victor, Walton can recognize the creature's ethical being, as a result of which the creature achieves synthesis, and thus the highest state of becoming.

Overall, Shishido provides convincing evidence for this line of argumentation. His reading is relevant here due to its resonance with historical techno-social transition relative to the dual revolution, the real historic conditions of slavery, the philosophical traditions of German idealism with Hegel and natural rights with Paine, as well as the more diffuse epistemic shift from the discursive authority of the Word, characteristically pre-secular and agrarian, to the syntagmatic authority of the sign, characterized by institutional schematicism and scopic identification or regulation. Like Hegel and Paine, Kant and Bentham provide historically relevant intertexts here. While Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* – which distinguishes between image as "a product of the empirical faculty of productive imagination" and schema as the organization of "sensible concepts" like "figures in space" that are a product of the imagination "through which and in accordance with which the images first become possible" (273-74) – is more abstract than Bentham's utilitarian panopticism, both are deeply invested in non-discursive modes of producing, distributing and regulating knowledge and power; that is, in the three technographic dimensions relative to the scopic regime of institutional modernity.

Finding additional features in Shelley's text to substantiate Shishido's claims would, I think, pose little challenge. However, the relative ease with which synthesis allows for the resolution of realistic psychological antagonism, and the multiplicity and ambiguity Shelley develops in an exceedingly complex manner throughout, is, I think, suspect. In the end, such a resolution would conceptually disarm the text of its political urge to continually reevaluate and rethink as it evacuates *Frankenstein*'s reliable patterns of generating complexity as opposed to seeking simplifica-

tion. With the creature representing the new mass laboring class, this kind of reading also only partially corresponds to the ethical tone of Shelley's text.[5] The growing proletariat receives support in Shelley's and her husband's writings, and from Byron's political engagement, for example; but I would again stress how Shelley both constructs and deconstructs the rationalist ideals present in the Godwinian-Jacobin novel. As with Brooks, though, I would also argue that Shelley's work not only permits multiple correct interpretations, even where they produce conflicts in logic; it encourages them.

One possible way of problematizing or re-cognizing the historicized Hegelian dialectic model as resolution might be to map the novel's character trajectories together with the character-specific narrative styles. If giving the creature a voice of scientific reason (as clinical self-observation and reflection, whose objective position is symbolized in the priority of the pronoun *It*) functions to sublate some crucial but flawed element in Victor, the fanatical rogue scientist, is it not also antithetical to the Chthonic and domestic-oriented indexes for femaleness inscribed in the creature? Moreover, would such a reading hold up alongside the broader pattern of ambivalence toward the unfinished project of Enlightenment found throughout Shelley's writing and the ontological demands of Romanticism?

Remembering: Syntagmatic Technicity

In accord with the technographic dimension of knowledge distribution, the previous section drew attention to Shelley's distribution of type-specific models for self-knowledge and the technique of recognition through the intertextual integration of Hegelian philosophy; and to how these models are formally distinguished through shifts in genre and narrative voice, or linguistically through the technical application of pronouns and syntactic arrangement.

I now want to focus on how *Frankenstein* can be read in accord with the third technographic dimension of construction and regulation. In so doing, I am primarily interested in symbolic depictions of paradigm shift in *Frankenstein*, where narrative or discursive sense-making practices, rules and rituals can be seen as giving way to the potential constitution of scopic and syntagmatic practices, rules and rituals.

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[5] See Edith Gardner or Warren Montag for Marxist readings.

To recall Jansen and Vellema, the third dimension examines the "rules, protocols, routines and rituals [that] lead to or follow from task specialization and skill-based association," how these "shape problem solving and performance," "enable organizations to work," and enquires into the "conditions under which actors are included in specialized, skill-based association" (172). Accordingly, the following terms will be used to distinguish between these three related areas of inquiry: rules and rituals, performance impact, conditions for inclusion.

With regard to the reappearance of the disjunctive order of signs alongside the Enlightenment conception of Man, Foucault claims that "[m]an has existed since the beginning of the nineteenth century only because discourse ceased to have the force of law over the empirical world" (264-65). At this moment, the status of literature also changes: "it ceased to belong to the order of discourse and became the manifestation of language in its thickness . . . the hesitation that it manifests between the vague humanisms and the pure formalism of language is, no doubt, only one of the manifestations of this phenomenon, which is fundamental for us and makes us oscillate between interpretation and formalizations, man and signs" (265). The movement from a logic of narrative continuity in what Foucault referred to as Classical knowledge, to the epistemic order of the sign – structural, schematic, interchangeable, and, importantly, non-linear – is present in the various ruptures, disjunctures and ellipses in *Frankenstein*, as well as in the central theme of manipulating and rewriting boundaries. Symbolizing the discontinuous, interchangeable and non-linear arrangement of things in markedly novel organizational clusters, the creature's body poignantly articulates the concept of *remembering*.

One of the most striking characteristics about the creature's body is what Bouriana Zakharieva referred to as its composite status. In its materiality, it conjoins individually isolated members of disparate other bodies that, in their material dismembering and remembering, are both present and absent. Concerning its function, if it can be animated, the remembered body of the creature will synthesize life and death, incorporating within it an opposition of things that conjoin to create something that is neither the one, nor the other, nor both, nor neither; but all of these possibilities at once. Regarding its historical symbolism, I should recall that the other prominent pairings potentially intelligible over the course of the story and at the site of the creature's body are those enabled through revolutionary change: industrial production and mobilization of the masses.

A technographic reading of the creature's body makes evident how it finds greater resonance in the paradigm of syntagmatic technicity, with its characteristics of discontinuity and schematic arrangement. The rules and rituals leading to the body's production constitute a site of rupture as well. Where the technologies of production were inadequate for the task at hand, Frankenstein must improvise in a way that will radically change the rules and rituals. Similarly, Frankenstein's departure from and novel reconstruction of rules and rituals will radically impact the body's performance capacities and ability to work. Finally, rupture is found in the conditions for inclusion at the site of the creature's body.

Epistemic shift away from narrative continuity or discursive authority (of the Word) toward technological and institutional modernity's episteme of structural technicity (the sign and syntagm) is further evident in Victor's renegotiation of the boundaries separating life and death:

> Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world. A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs. Pursuing these reflections, I thought, that if I could bestow animation upon lifeless matter, I might in the process of time (although I now found it impossible) renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption. (51-52)

The manipulation of boundaries between life and death has several implications for remembering secular modernity. First, there is the possibility of structural and relational malleability *per se*. This primary meaning may appear to lack complexity, but is not to be underestimated: the redrawing of familiar and formerly definitive lines around which a considerable part of society is organized has the potential to subdue and to excite. In her rich expositions on social boundaries and their cultural significance, Mary Douglas states that the figuration of society is a powerful and potent thing: "There is energy at its margins and unstructured areas. For symbols of society, any human experience of structures, margins or boundaries is ready to hand," with thresholds symbolizing "beginnings of new statuses" (141). Shelley exhibits a similar sensitivity to the plurality and proliferation of boundary structures in society and human experience, and to their social significance. In the context of broad techno-social transition, the redrawing of boundaries and, accordingly, their potential as organizers and bearers of social meaning is

paramount for the construction of, and regulation through, rules and rituals.

We might also consider how the relation between life and death is conventionally characterized by a temporal order that is non-reversible, linear, or at most cyclical. As such, it is reflective of narrative continuity. If the temporal order and structural relations between life and death become malleable and interchangeable, what might the epistemic consequences be for narrative continuity? Shelley provides a seemingly adequate metaphor for thinking this conundrum in the creature's education and emergence into self-awareness. By watching and experiencing the world around it, the creature learns about and can reflect on the world. By reading and reflecting on its own creation (via Victor's journals) and existence (via the stories of others), the creature can function in the world, and gain a better understanding of it, but also identifies radical difference in its relation to the world through words. As noted earlier, when learning about human history and society, suddenly "the words induced me to turn towards myself" (115). The creature's (representational) excision from narrative continuity radically excludes it from society and alienates it from itself.

In addition and concomitant to these layered meanings as examples of remembering are the prominent framings of the creation myth, in which human life is formed on the authority of the Word, and its displacement through Enlightenment scientism or humanism, symbolized by Victor who usurps God's authority (in the role of Prometheus), and the introduction of *light* into a world of darkness (once again, replacing the Chimera of non-secular discursive authority with Apollonian, Enlightenment clarity). And yet, despite Victor's fantasy of Apollonian grandeur, and in a manner characteristic of Shelley's ambivalence, Victor equally resists codification as an Enlightenment hero:

> One secret which I alone possessed was the hope to which I had dedicated myself; and the moon gazed on my midnight labours, while, with unrelaxing and breathless eagerness, I pursued nature to her hiding places. Who shall conceive the horrors of my secret toil, as I dabbled among the unhallowed damps of the grave, or tortured the living animal to animate the lifeless clay? My limbs now tremble, and my eyes swim with remembrance; but then a resistless and almost frantic impulse, urged me forward; I seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit. It was indeed but a passing trance, that only made me feel with renewed acuteness so soon as, the unnatural stimulus ceasing to operate, I had returned to my old

> habits. I collected bones from charnel houses; and disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame. In a solitary chamber, or rather cell, at the top of the house, and separated from all other apartments by a gallery and staircase, I kept my workshop of filthy creation; my eyeballs were starting from their sockets in attending to the details of my employment. The dissecting room and the slaughterhouse furnished many of my materials; and often did my human nature turn with loathing from my occupation, whilst, still urged on by an eagerness which perpetually increased, I brought my work near to a conclusion. (52)

Here again Victor is in the Promethean position of lightening thief, usurping divine authority through scientific mastery, mechanistic control, and calculated restructuring. Yet here the depiction is antithetical to Enlightenment humanism and to the robust optimism of scientific reason. Far from pouring torrents of light into the dark world (of pre-Enlightenment medievalism), a sense of Christian guilt resonates in Victor's language as he labors under the Chthonic gaze of the moon in his singular vacillation between schematic scientific order and the cyclical impulses of nature, with her powers of generation and corruption.

The passage distinctly mobilizes Christian symbolism – nature as the space of occult and profane knowledge, the clay man, a soul evacuated from the human frame in the presence of death, the atmosphere of judgment, the sepulchral and hellish charnel house – alongside images of industry in its uncanny conflation of life and death. Once again, structural control and an impression of spatial schematics are prominent. Despite its recourse to religious imagery and descriptions of terrific feeling, language in this passage does not display the emotive flair characteristic of the novel's more Romantic passages (descriptions of natural landscapes, for example), but is measured, clinical, and deadened like the narrator's self description (rigid, breathless, senseless, eyeballs starting corpse-like from their sockets).

The passage accentuates structural technicity and remembering, or movement from discursive authority to techno-industrial institutional modernity, as it moves from descriptions of life, death and nature (breathless eagerness, the living animal and lifeless clay) to mechanistic, automated action (frantic impulse propelling a passive self, passionless, senseless pursuit, trance and habit), and man-made habitats associated with modern institutions (the cell, workshop, dissecting room and slaughterhouse). Comparably, Shelley uses terms for action or labor associated with agrarian or pre-revolution industriousness, and juxta-

poses them with terms of engagement associated with post-agrarian institutionalism. *Toil*, for example, has its roots in Anglo-Norman *toiller* (to mark, fall, mix or stir) and Middle English *tilen* (to till). Victor *pursues*, as if hunting, tracking or trapping; *animates*, which is etymologically associated with breathing; *collects*, as if foraging; *attends*, as if tending animals; and *creates*, as if he were a craftsman. And as the domestic space of the chamber, house or apartment turn to the workshop and dissecting room, so to do the terms for a more domestic style of labor turn to *employment*, *occupation* and *work*, with *many materials* and *perpetual increase*.

In *Frankenstein*, the intimation of an ideal space of pastoral wholeness is at times legible by inference or in descriptions of Victor's youth, but it is with only this slight exception a space of invisibility in the novel; inaccessible to sight and not characterized through the image. In the predominant trope of remembering without access to memory, in disjuncture, discontinuity and rearrangement, a space of pre-industrial and pre-secular continuity approximates legibility. This is a form of legibility constituted through ellipsis: not through what is visibly present, but through what is invisibly represented. In *Frankenstein*, presence characterized by native, originary loss: at the body of the creature that disorients, in the "workshop of filthy creation" from which it emerges, or in the evacuation of agrarian domesticity at the De Lacey cottage concomitant to the creature's appearance in the visual field. Inconsistencies in voice and narrative, discontinuities in time and space, ellipses in consciousness, language, vision and logic, and the more general rearrangement of disparate parts: all can be read as co-constituting the trope of remembering, as silent witnesses to an age of revolution.

Like the presence of mind in a creature with no sense of a past, who is ultimately defined through radical discontinuity, fissure and disjunction, it is the lack of continuity that underwrites and significantly arranges the presence of radical change at all levels in Shelley's technography.

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