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# The Emergence of Psychology and the Creation of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein: An Examination of Innovation and Narration

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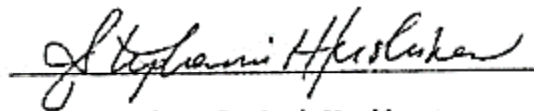
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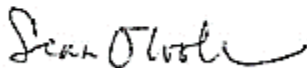
**The Emergence of Psychology and the Creation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*:  
An Examination of Innovation and Narration**

By Rachel Viliusis

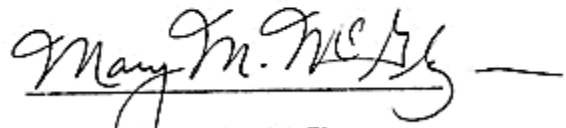
Submitted to the Committee on Undergraduate Honors at Baruch College of the City University of New York on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English with Honors.



Professor Stephanie Hershinow  
Faculty Sponsor



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## Abstract

Mary Shelley developed and wrote *Frankenstein* (1818) amidst the rich intellectual and scientific developments of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century. Shelley's understanding of developing intellectual theory is clearly influential to her novel—thematically reflected in the scientific innovation of her characters, as well as formally reproduced in her choice of narrative structure. In my study, I focus specifically on the newly-developing field of psychology, as its inquiry into the complex relationship between mind, body, and human consciousness is directly related to the novel, and to Shelley's scientific and literary interests. Shelley was not only immersed in conversations about the developing psychological theory of her time, but she also understood the process of scientific development on a larger scale: the necessity of psychological theorists to break from conventional thought while simultaneously seeking validation for their innovations. In order to illuminate *Frankenstein's* engagement with this process, I first situate the novel in its intellectual history, engaging with early nineteenth-century psychological theory and its related investigations into human consciousness. Then, through a formalist exploration of the narrative structure and stylistic detail of the first edition of *Frankenstein* (1818), I trace the influence of scientific theory of consciousness and human sociability within Shelley's novel. Through analysis of Shelley's engagement with developing psychological theory and her understanding of the contours of more general scientific development, I show that she employs a sophisticated epistolary structure alongside embedded tales to insert the reader into the narrative as an active participant in validating her characters' scientific reasoning, and, in doing so, to encourage her audience to validate Shelley's own innovative creation of the novel.

## Introduction

Due to the vibrant intellectual moment during which Mary Shelley developed and wrote *Frankenstein*, the critical interpretations of her work and of her personal life are vast. The novel is a complex tapestry interwoven with ambiguous oppositions – of normative tradition and innovation, of success and failure, and of isolation and social collaboration. These tensions present within the novel continue to be explored by literary critics from various methodological approaches, reinforcing the significance of *Frankenstein* as a novel whose conflicts and illuminations remain as relevant today as they were in the early nineteenth-century. The recent bicentennial of Shelley’s summer of creation (1816), and the continued production of both adaptations and widely relevant scholarship on *Frankenstein*, attest to the overwhelming influence of the novel on contemporary culture.

Shelley’s intellectual engagement with nineteenth-century psychological theory and its related study of consciousness is reproduced in the narrative style of the novel, as the novel enforces her literary depiction of these psychological states and their related subconscious desires. While the majority of academic study produced on psychology and *Frankenstein* is related to either a psychoanalytic study of Shelley<sup>1</sup>, or of Victor’s application of scientific theory, I focus on Romantic-era psychology as it is reflected in Shelley’s formal choices. I argue that Shelley’s understanding of early nineteenth-century psychological theory and its ongoing development influenced the complex narrative structure of the novel, and in turn, that the novel engages directly with psychological theory. Like many *Frankenstein* scholars before me, I will engage throughout

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Shelley (and the production and content of her novel) has often been studied in the lens of psychoanalytic theory. This psychoanalysis has often been related to Shelley’s role as a woman and as a mother, and the complications of her personal tragedies relating to motherhood. See Ellen Moers “Female Gothic: The Monster’s Mother” (1976), Mary Poovey’s “The Lady and the Monster” (1984), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s “Mary Shelley’s Monstrous Eve” (1979).

my argument with the specifics of early nineteenth-century scientific thought, but, at the same time, I am most interested in uncovering Shelley's diagnosis of the way scientific (and especially psychological) innovation succeeds or fails, and how this diagnosis informs the novel's tripartite structure and at times the bewildering intricacies of its narrative form. Part of an intellectual coterie that eagerly traded the latest news in radical thought across disciplines, Shelley was not only immersed in conversation about the developing psychological theory of her time, but she also understood the process of scientific development, and the necessity of psychological theory to break from normative thought while simultaneously seeking validation for its innovations.

The narrative conflict of *Frankenstein* famously revolves around creation and innovation. Shelley's understanding of contemporary psychological theory is evidenced through the text of the novel, as Victor's creation is actualized with the use of scientific theory of which Shelley was familiar – including the electrical theory of Galvani and Volta, and the original theories of consciousness introduced by Hartley and Darwin. But Shelley's treatment of this topic also stimulates discussion of the role that isolation and validation play in attempts at originality. Alongside this understanding on the practical level is Shelley's broader understanding of the development of psychology, which reflects upon the necessary negotiations between innovation and validation in any act of creation. The necessity of this negotiation is evidenced through Victor's ambitious attempt at creation, which ultimately leads to tragedy due to his stubborn refusal to collaborate with, or receive validation from, his social and scientific community. His self-imposed isolation ultimately leads him to abandon his creature, ensuring not only the failure of his attempts at innovation, but the establishment of the perpetually isolated states of both himself and his creation.

This broader understanding of the necessity of negotiation is reflected in Shelley's narrative choice of embedding tales within an epistolary framework. That is, the overarching tale of the novel is told through a series of letter correspondences, and within these letters, the embedded tales are recounted. Through the narrative structure of nested tales, which at all times necessitate an audience for each narrator, Shelley implicates the reader of the novel as judge and validator of the creation-tales which are told within *Frankenstein*, and as judge of the subsequent failures of her characters within the novel. The recurring seclusion and self-imposed isolation of the characters are the catalyst to their failures, and in our reading of their tales (which are in each case told retrospectively), Shelley therefore encourages us to question: to whom are we truly listening, how much should we trust their recount, and what are we shown through their isolated failures?

The overarching epistolary framework of the novel also brings into question the role that written correspondence, and the sociability of writing, plays within the dynamic of isolation and validation. Written correspondence implies a physical separation and mutual isolation between writer and recipient, and, at the same time, a desire to maintain a social bond through this shared writing experience. The novel is told through a selection of letters from our narrator, Walton, yet we have no clear indication that they ever reach their intended recipient, perhaps displaying an instance of the failure of written correspondence to maintain its social bond. Instead of these letters reaching Walton's sister as intended, they reach us, and therefore place the reader of the novel as the observer and sole recipient of the tale. This social link of writing and correspondence is woven throughout the novel, and we will see the ways in which it either fails, or succeeds, to connect each character to the society from which they are isolated.



While significant historical and biographical research has been conducted on the complications of Shelley's personal life (most often of her famous radical parents, her infamous poet husband, her multiple reproductive tragedies, and the death of her mother caused by her birth<sup>2</sup>) and the impact of these incidents on her novel, I am instead interested in the study of her novel as a reflection of her scientific understanding. I will focus directly on her historical and scientific environment as an influence upon her and the text, as opposed to directing our focus towards her intimate life. There has also been extensive psychoanalytic scholarship conducted on Shelley, and therefore about the contents within the novel as a reflection of her subconscious, with much of this work also relating to her personal tragedies. I will abstain from relying on these psychoanalytic interpretations, and instead I will trace these psychological relationships back further, pre-Freud, as a means of understanding the lively scientific moment in which Shelley lived and wrote, and how the theories of her contemporary moment influenced the production of the novel. By highlighting the intellectual richness of Shelley's historical moment and her knowledge of this pre-Freudian psychology, we may broaden the scope of scholarship by studying the way in which Shelley's intellectual and scientific foundation influenced the novel, and in turn, the way in which the novel intervened in scientific and psychological discourse, as opposed to simply linking the complexities of the novel to biographical fact.

I will outline this complex and multifaceted psychological history in chapter one, where I highlight the establishment of psychology in the early nineteenth-century as a break into its own distinct field, apart from the encompassing scientific framework of natural philosophy. The history of psychology is often discussed in terms of methodological advancement, with the introduction of laboratory science attributed to the foundational creation of psychology. While this is entirely

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Anne K. Mellor's *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (1988).

valid from a contemporary understanding of psychology as a hard science, I approach this history from a humanistic perspective, discussing the source of psychological inquiry as being closely tied to philosophical questions about the mind, the soul, and human consciousness. This overview will draw from the earliest intellectuals I show to be directly related to the development of psychology (preceding the later-nineteenth-century theories usually pointed to by laboratory scientists); including the electrical theorizing of Galvani and Volta, to the consciousness-based theory of Hartley and Darwin. In the following section, I relate Shelley's knowledge of psychological development to her understanding of the necessity of a balance between isolated innovation and social validation. Shelley acknowledged her own creative belief that an innovator ought never disregard outside validation and influence, and she therefore also understood the way in which psychology's break from a religious normative tradition still necessitated a search for scientific validation. Psychology as a budding field had to straddle originality of thought with scientific confirmation, just as Shelley believed inventors must never fully isolate themselves from normative influence. Next, I show how Shelley displays this awareness within her formal narrative choices. The structuring of embedded tales told within an epistolary framework directly obligates the reader to act as validator of the characters' isolated attempts at innovation, and to judge the production of the novel as its own creation. Through this framework, we will see the characters attempt (and fail) to negotiate between isolation and validation, and the ways in which written correspondence functions as a possible link between these oppositions.

In the chapters that follow from the groundwork discussion of psychology and Shelley, I will approach each tale of the novel individually, placing emphasis on the character focused on within each. Both Walton's and Victor's tales portray their innovative failures as a result of their inability to balance isolation and validation, with the monster's tale being an account of the direct

result of Victor's inferior and isolated creation. I will first discuss Walton's self-imposed isolation and the implications of his overarching epistolary structure as a filter through which the remainder of the novel is told. Next, I will discuss Victor's defective employment of isolation as a means of creating the monster and the significance of his evasion of maintaining correspondence with his social companions while isolated. Finally, I will focus on the monster's tale, in which Shelley explicitly delivers her message about the damning and violent result of isolated creation.

Through the narrative told in *Frankenstein*, Shelley engages with her understanding of the requirements of creation, and more specifically, thematically reproduces this understanding within her own literary invention. Shelley's creation of the novel is a negotiation between formal, structured technique, and the pioneering scientific advancements of her intellectual moment. In this way, the novel itself is its own experiment in creation, but one that is successful in its ability to negotiate between creativity and norms, and therefore between isolated innovation and social validation. Shelley juxtaposes the success of her own negotiated creation with the failures of the characters within the novel, and thereby provides the audience with a clear perspective on the elements necessary for success, and the isolated decisions which will ultimately lead to failure.

## Chapter I: Mary Shelley and Romantic Psychological Innovation

### A Brief History of Romantic Psychology

Mary Shelley based her entire novel – from conception to completion– on the most recent developments in the sciences of her time, her extensive knowledge and conversation within these fields providing her with the groundwork necessary to create a fiction focusing on a scientist and his creation. This scientific moment of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries was a contentious one, in that the emergence of the sciences as distinct disciplines was in fact a break from previously-established interdisciplinary classification known as natural philosophy – what had been a co-mingling of related scientific and academic fields including philosophy, biology, anatomy, theology, sociology, and psychology.<sup>3</sup> Victor’s references to “natural philosophy” throughout *Frankenstein* are in keeping with the eighteenth-century setting of the novel. Yet we will see how, in reference to the scientific split occurring in a simultaneous historical moment to the action of the novel, Shelley depicts the ways in which these disciplines function apart from natural philosophy within scientific pursuit.

In the interest of developing the increasingly-complex notions of the relationship between mind, body, and soul, the field that was later to become psychology broke from these intermingled sciences, and began what we can now see as a distinctive formation. In order to advance the scientific pursuit of understanding this mind-body-soul relationship, intellectuals attempted first to comprehend human consciousness. Yet, in order to study consciousness scientifically – a pursuit not attempted previously in history – scientists first needed to discover its source, necessitating the

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<sup>3</sup> My fundamental understanding of the history of psychology is largely indebted to David Hothersall’s *History of Psychology* (1984), and Dai Jones’ *History and Theories of Psychology: A Critical Perspective* (2001). As this history becomes more nuanced later in this chapter, Edward Reed and Cherie O’Boyle will also be discussed.

theorizing and experimentation central to what was to become psychological studies. The detachment of these distinct disciplinary sciences from the encompassing framework of natural philosophy allowed each field to develop further within their respective scopes, a necessary progression towards the understanding of consciousness with the advancement of the psychology and its pursuit of understanding the mind. To better understand the historical moment in which Mary Shelley established the scientific foundation of *Frankenstein*, we have to acknowledge that this scientific history is a muddled one, but, in the interest of clarity, I will emphasize the intellectuals directly related to Shelley's understanding of the sciences, regardless of their distinct field of study.

If you were to ask a twenty-first century psychologist when psychology emerged as a distinct science, chances are they will attribute the formation of the field to Wilhelm Wundt, who in 1879 founded the first laboratory dedicated to psychological studies.<sup>4</sup> Historians who consider the founding of psychology from a scientific perspective will often attribute the break of psychology out of natural philosophy as being born from a methodological debate: namely, the growing contention between conceptual thought experiment, and stricter, empirical scientific observation.<sup>5</sup> This argument is valid from a scientific standpoint, as it focuses on scientific development in relation to the methodology of empirical laboratory processes, the systematic adoption of which is widely attributed to Wundt. Yet while we can undoubtedly recognize a methodological split, I would stress that these emerging questions about the relationship between mind, body, and soul are largely tied to philosophical questions as well as scientific ones – revealing a legacy of philosophy behind these psychological inquiries. Examination into the

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<sup>4</sup> See, for an early account, E.B. Titchener's article "Wilhelm Wundt" in *The American Journal of Psychology* (1921). For a contemporary overview, see Hothersall and Jones.

<sup>5</sup> See David Hothersall's *History of Psychology* (1984).

function of the soul and mind in relation to human consciousness should not only be traced to the formation of psychology, not least because it has been studied as far back as Ancient Greece in fourth-century BCE with the works of classical philosophers.<sup>6</sup> In this way, the inquiries which inspired psychological study are not only related to the contemporary understanding of it as the science of the mind, but to philosophical investigations as well. Perhaps psychological inquiry owes more influence to the philosophies than scientific pursuit, since the study of mind-body-soul connection had been associated with the philosophies for far longer of a time than psychology's eighteenth-century attempts to study this connection through empirical science. Therefore, to study the history of psychology's break into a distinct field from only a methodological viewpoint would be a limiting, and indeed anachronistic, approach, a perspective which overlooks the contributions of the humanities towards the questions that psychology was, from the outset, interested in asking. I will limit my approach to the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century intellectuals working within the time period of this formation, and will not only explore scientists of strictly empirical study, but the philosophical and humanities-based contributions made towards the science as well.

Somewhat in opposition to this scientific history—which, again, sees a move from thought to laboratory experiment—is the humanistic perspective, a study of the contributions made by the more radical and far-reaching scientists whose theories ultimately led to a split between what Edward Reed has called “sciences of the soul” and “sciences of the mind.”<sup>7</sup> This split can be understood most succinctly as the development from science as a means of supporting and aligning with religious norms (science of the soul), to the establishment of scientific research as a secular

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<sup>6</sup> For those who are interested in the ancient explorations of this soul-body-mind connection, see Hendrik Lorenz's “Ancient Theories of Soul” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2009).

<sup>7</sup> This history of psychology as related to the humanities is largely indebted to Edward Reed, whose text *From Soul to Mind* (1997) thoroughly and masterfully illuminates the nuanced ways in which psychology formed as a distinct field. For an overview of the history of psychology as related to a literary perspective, see the introductory chapter of Sean O'Toole's *Habit in the English Novel, 1850-1900* (2013).

field (science of the mind). Psychology as “science of the soul” prevailed throughout the beginning of the nineteenth century amongst the majority of intellectual circles, as “psychology was considered the fundamental science by many philosophers, theologians, and educated laypeople because...they saw it as the science best suited to preserve religion in an increasingly scientific modern world” (Reed, 2). To historians who privilege the religious or mainstream historical timeline for understanding the discipline, both Thomas Reid and Immanuel Kant led the pious train of thought in inquiry that would later be immersed, in some degree, into psychology.<sup>8</sup> Psychology as a study based in religion remained the scientific norm until the scientists “of the mind” began to articulate their critiques of these notions – namely in regards to the confining and limiting nature of these religious sciences – and set out to create a field of psychology that followed strictly secular procedure.<sup>9</sup> Shelley’s writing of *Frankenstein* took place within this atmosphere of scientific innovation and deviation from social (and therefore, religious) norms; her knowledge of the secular innovations of Mesmer, Galvani, and Volta influenced her understanding of the sciences and of the active scientific negotiation occurring between secularity and theology.

This contentious transition from religious theology to secularity can, in part, be attributed to the growing scientific view, which inevitably influenced a larger social view, that the soul and the mind were combined and that the soul often uses the mind to control the body. Think of this approach as a kind of middle ground in the process of the secularization of psychology. To understand the scientists working within this contentious progression from theology to secularity

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<sup>8</sup> See Thomas Reid’s *Essays on the Intellectual Power of Man* (1785). For Immanuel Kant’s work, look to his three critiques: *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1787), *The Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), and *The Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790).

<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the most recognized critique of theologically-centered sciences was Charles Darwin (1809-1882), whose theories on evolution were considered to be such a contradiction that Reed frames them as an “attack on the theocentric science of nature” and even are said to have “led to an unprecedented intellectual war” (1997, 2). Darwin’s theories undoubtedly continued the trajectory of maintaining the secularity of science, but the contributions of the earliest psychologists of Shelley’s time instigated this split even before Darwin famously did.

is to understand the ways in which these developments occurred. That is, there was not a direct, nor even linear, split from soul to mind, but a scientific movement away from the way in which psychological sciences had previously attempted to align with ideals of the church. As this theory of a soul-mind connection began to grow in acceptance, various established scientists from outside the realms of strictly psychological research began to support this notion within their respective scientific fields. The attempt to locate proof of this connection was most often studied by delving into the science of electrotherapy, which I will discuss shortly. As the exploration of these electrical processes became more prominent (even amongst communities not previously researching into the field of psychology), it gained further validation amongst the scientific elite as a worthwhile inquiry. At this moment within the scientific community, the soul and the mind are no longer separate entities, but complementary to one another. With this soul-mind connection seen as less threatening to the theocentric-dominated scientific community than the much more radical notion that there is no soul (or that science must be entirely separated from the soul), the theory gained traction and acceptance among the scientists working within the newly-developing field of psychological research. The cultural and scientific acceptance of the transition from science of the soul towards science of the soul *and* mind cultivated a scientific atmosphere that provided more opportunity for intellectuals to deviate from what had previously been regarded as scientific norms, and ultimately to delve into the study of consciousness.

However, the narrative of this gradual transition from theology to secularity cannot be streamlined without becoming reductive, as this time period contained multitudes of social, political, and scientific backlash against this movement towards secular science. The political backlash against secular science (a backlash directly tied to elite religious institutions) further clouds the history of the formation of psychology and often creates a historical narrative which



favors the contributions of religious scientists as opposed to the work conducted by significant, but secular, intellectuals. Those not aligned with religious, institutionalized norms of scientific thought were considered by their peers to be radical thinkers, and therefore were often suppressed from conversation and publication. I propose that the solution to clarifying this muddled scientific history is to study the prominent intellectuals of the time who were not necessarily labeled as psychologists, but who engaged with the theories relevant to science of the mind – radical intellectuals, philosophers, biologists, and, as we will later see, fiction writers. I will refer to the work of these outlying intellectuals as “alternative psychology,” exploring the intellectual and scientific environment which influenced their progressive theory, and ultimately, Shelley’s novel.

In *History of Psychology*, a cultural account of the way in which the field of psychology developed, Cherie O’Boyle explains that the scientific advancements of the early nineteenth-century were fundamentally an attempt to comprehend, in a practical manner, the source of consciousness: “As long as consciousness remains impossible to measure and psychology is the study of consciousness, there can never be a science of psychology. The task of those studying consciousness of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, then, is to find ways to measure” (2011, 161). And measure they did, or at least endeavored to, with each scientist and experimentalist investigating different branches of what they theorized was the source of consciousness. Central to the discussion within alternative psychology was the notion of a “fluid materialism,” commonly referred to today as “Vitalism,” which argued that an underlying and as-yet undiscovered substance of some sort – most often theorized as being electrical in form – was responsible for regulating the human mind and body, and, therefore, consciousness itself.

The radical intellectuals of the moment engaged with previous theories of consciousness, attempting to posit their own theory as to its source. Inspired by previous work conducted by

Benjamin Franklin that posited electricity as a fluid force significant to human experience,<sup>10</sup> the pioneers of alternative psychology expanded upon electrical theory by relating it directly to human and animal experience. Franz Mesmer's theories of animal magnetism and what came to be known as mesmerism stemmed directly from these electrical theories, which focused on the study of electrical affects upon the mind. Luigi Galvani was a pioneer in his experimentation on the direct, physical impact of electricity on bodily tissue, both living and dead. Alessandro Volta investigated comparable notions, yet reached the pioneering conclusion that electricity was not generated from living creatures, which debunked the notion that fluid materialism stemmed from within, yet he did not disprove the possibility that it did indeed exist. Responding to these circulating notions of a fluid materialist source, Joseph Priestley then offered his own theory on the subject, claiming that it is the "associationism" of ideas within the mind that is the underlying force of consciousness<sup>11</sup> – that sensory inputs are combined with human ideas, which then produces complex thought and human rationality. Priestley built upon the work of David Hartley as well, a scientist whose radically materialist viewpoint claimed that ideas were simply associations in the mind, not pictures that appear, and that ideas must therefore be of the same substance as physical objects.<sup>12</sup> In this way, Priestley managed to reconcile the scientific middle ground between the significance of electrical force and neural processes, which led alternative psychology to its most groundbreaking and controversial position, in the form of Erasmus Darwin's theory of consciousness as the fluid source of neural processes.

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<sup>10</sup> Benjamin Franklin's Fluid Theory of Electricity of the mid-1700's undoubtedly pioneered the conceptualization of electricity as a palpable "fluid" force. In fact, it was not until Joseph Priestley published *History and Present Status of Electricity* (1767) that Franklin was credited with being the originator of the idea, as cited in Steven Johnson's *The Invention of Air* (2008).

<sup>11</sup> Priestley built these associationist concepts upon theory of the original philosophical proponent, John Locke, who suggested that the human mind is a "tabula rasa" (a blank slate), and that sensations and sensory inputs – and reflections upon these inputs – are what shape experience and, inevitably, shape human rationale and personality. See Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690).

<sup>12</sup> See David Hartley's materialist treatise *Observations on Man, his Frame, his Duty, and his Expectations* (1749).

Whereas the previous electrical scientists had searched for the material, electric force which regulated consciousness and neural processes, Darwin argued that consciousness serves as the actual force that regulates our neural motions. Focusing mainly on Hartley's investigations into associationism and its related theories of consciousness, ideas, perceptions, and thoughts, Darwin established his own philosophy of ideas and consciousness, which ultimately solidified the presence of alternative psychology within the dominant scientific conversation. Darwin's understanding of "fluid materialism" deviated from the original theory of an underlying electrical substance into that of conscious ideas – that ideas within the mind are the literal motions of fibers in our organs, and that the patterns of these movements are inherent to our everyday human experience. The body is in control, and regular bodily processes are what regulate and transport ideas throughout consciousness. If electrical fluid materialism was heretical for the church in that it denied the existence of a soul (and with it the existence of an overarching figure controlling the means of life), then Darwin's notion that fluid materialism is in fact your own body controlling itself was undoubtedly sacrilegious – debunking the notion of a soul with finality. Needless to say, Darwin's belief in "associations as determined by the bodily mechanisms, not by the ideas themselves, and certainly not by the transcendent soul" (Reed, 40) caused an uproar within the orthodox scientific community, and struck fear within the religious establishment over the implications of such an argument. Political, religious, and social backlash ensued from the majority of works published by Darwin, with his works and personal life often publicly censured and mocked by the political establishment and those who possessed a conservative religious viewpoint.<sup>13</sup> Although the conservatives mocked Darwin and his work in an attempt to ostracize

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<sup>13</sup> Not only was Erasmus Darwin considered a radical for his scientific thought, but he was also a political liberal who supported both the French and American Revolutions, and who actively opposed slavery. A member of The Lunar Society of Birmingham (1765-1813), an intellectual club condemned for their democratic and atheistic views, Darwin was often a target of religious and political censure and ridicule. His atheistic scientific pursuits only exacerbated this

him socially and professionally, his theories did not fail to bring about major transformations upon the scientific – and literary – communities that received them.

Literary writers were not restricted by the same institutional censorship as the prominent thinkers of the time, allowing an additional path for the distribution of psychological and scientific ideas – fiction publishing. Fiction in particular provided thinkers like Shelley with a kind of plausible deniability: she could engage with, represent, and, at times, critique groundbreaking ideas while retaining a respectable distance from straightforward endorsement. Therefore, scientific theories publicly deemed as heretical and anti-establishment within their own communities (such as those of the alternative psychologists previously mentioned) could be published as fictions, with the aim of skirting censorship by the authorities. Mary Shelley accomplished just that, devising and writing *Frankenstein* under the influence of dialogues among alternative psychologists of the immediate decades leading up to the publication of her novel. These alternative scientists included the original pioneering electrical materialists such as Galvani and Volta, and the more refined consciousness-based discussions of Hartley and Darwin (among many other approaches in between). Informed by the theories of these particular scientists, Shelley incorporated their scientific innovations into the novel, exploring the insights as well as the dangers of employing these sciences, in conjunction with one another, during an attempt at scientific creation.

In addition to her own prior knowledge, Shelley's access to the radical scientific thought that inspired *Frankenstein* came through conversations with her travel companions, all of whom were intellectuals and quite radical thinkers in their own right. Shelley and her soon-to-be husband,

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backlash, including the infamous and ruinous parody produced of *The Botanic Garden* (1791), which was published and publicly distributed at the instruction of George Canning, a politician. See King-Hele's "The 1997 Wilkins Lecture: Erasmus Darwin, the Lunatics and Evolution."

Percy Shelley, stayed near Geneva during the summer of 1816, becoming companionable with their neighbors, Lord Byron and John Polidori. The summer of 1816 has become infamously referred to as “the year without a summer,” during which a volcanic eruption in Indonesia blanketed Europe with ash, causing abnormal and incessant rain that made it nearly impossible to engage in any outdoor activities. The group passed the time indoors by reading ghost stories together, and discussing the most recent scientific and philosophical principles.<sup>14</sup> During these conversations, and at the suggestion of Lord Byron, the companions agreed to engage in a story-writing contest. Mary Shelley’s participation in this contest, amid the radical intellectual and scientific conversation of their companionable group, is where the original concept of *Frankenstein* was born. In her introduction to the 1831 edition of the novel, in which she retrospectively recounts the tale of her creation, Mary claims that as Percy, Byron, and Polidori began their tales, she was trapped within what she called “that blank incapability of invention which is the greatest misery of authorship, when dull Nothing replies to our anxious invocations” (167). Eager to begin her writing, Mary was suddenly inspired by the theories discussed in a conversation of her companions, regarding the most recent of scientific discoveries:

Many and long were the conversations between Lord Byron and [Percy] Shelley, to which I was a devout but nearly silent listener. During one of these, various philosophical doctrines were discussed, and among others the nature of the principle of life, and whether there was any probability of its ever being discovered and communicated. They talked of the experiments of Dr. Darwin... who preserved a piece of vermicelli [that is, a microscopic

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<sup>14</sup> See Anne K. Mellor’s biography *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (1989). For a history recounted by Shelley, I have referenced her introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, in which she retrospectively explains her inspirations for the novel. I have also visited her personal correspondences, specifically around the period of June 1816, the summer in which she wrote the novel. See Bennett’s *Selected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley* (1995).

worm] in a glass case, till by some extraordinary means it began to move with voluntary motion. Not thus, after all, would life be given. Perhaps a corpse would be re-animated; galvanism had given token of such things: perhaps the component parts of a creature might be manufactured, brought together, and endued with vital warmth. (168)

Mary Shelley, upon reflection on the experimentation of Darwin,<sup>15</sup> was inspired to consider the possibility of resurrecting life out of death by scientific application – an endeavor that, in light of Darwin’s most recent results experimenting with vermicelli, was seemingly not outside the realms of possibility. Building on the foundation introduced by Darwin of the possibility of resurrecting microscopic life, Shelley applies this logic to her established knowledge of Galvani, deducing that with electrical impulse perhaps this microscopic resurrection may be applied to a more ambitious, human-like production.

Shelley attributes the resulting novel to a trance in which she perceived the aftermath of a combination of these sciences – the creation of a resurrected, human-like form possessing consciousness. It was only once attempting to fall asleep, with the conversations regarding galvanism and Darwin’s vermicelli circulating through her mind, that Shelley fell into a “reverie” in which she saw the “pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together,” and the creature with the “yellow, watery, but speculative eyes” (168). Thus, according to Shelley, the premise for *Frankenstein* was born, as she endeavored to recreate the fear that she experienced from this vision for an outside audience. Based on her knowledge of foundational eighteenth- and nineteenth-century psychological thought, Shelley possessed the theoretical

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<sup>15</sup> Mary Shelley’s reference to Darwin’s experimentation with vermicelli is drawn from his scientific poem *The Temple of Nature* (1803) in his additional notes titled “Spontaneous Vitality of Microscopic Animals.” It has long been noted that Shelley’s reference to “vermicelli” (a type of pasta) is a miswording of Darwin’s discussion of “vorticella” (the subject of his experiment, the microscopic worm). In keeping with Shelley’s discourse, I will continue to reference the vermicelli. See King-Hele’s *Erasmus Darwin and the Romantic Poets* (1986).

groundwork to imagine such a creation, and to extend and alter these scientific theories so that they may fit into her formation of a tale that would rival those of her companions. Shelley made use of the novel to discuss these pioneering ideas about the relationship between mind, body, and soul – as well as the possible source of this relationship. In the case of the monster’s creation, Shelley reconciles the differing perspectives on this relationship: Victor provides the creature with the electrical spark that necessitates life and existence (in alignment with the original electrical materialists), yet the creature then develops as a conscious being without the assistance of Victor (in alignment with Darwin’s take on conscious thought and understanding as inherent to all individual beings). Shelley manages to reconcile these opposing scientific theories in a manner that is only conceivable within science fiction writing, as she is unrestricted by the current bounds of physical scientific possibility.

Through this dramatic and frightening recount of her moment of inspiration within a waking reverie, and the inclusion of this retelling as the introduction to her 1831 edition of the novel, Shelley structures her own creation-story in a parallel manner to the embedded tales of creation that are to follow within the novel’s pages. Not only was Shelley interested in reconciling these psychological theories as a means of exploring human consciousness and creation, but she also aimed to include a tale of creation as horrific and fascinating as those contained within her novel. In “The Reading Monster,” Patrick Brantlinger argues that Shelley’s choice to include her personal tale of creation as the introduction to her 1831 novel is in direct reference to the tales written within the novel itself: “The introduction also parallels the main story, both in narrating a creation, a metaphoric birth, and in embedding one story within another, the nightmare within the larger essay” (469). Shelley’s decision to include an introduction of her creation is an additional tale that the reader may consider as a parallel to those contained within the novel, and perhaps we

must therefore doubt Shelley's tale just as she trains us to be skeptical of those told by her characters. Contained within Shelley's retrospective recount of her own creation is an establishment of the substantial influence of the eighteenth-century psychology of her time, and in keeping with the Gothic tone of *Frankenstein*, a pointed attempt to frame this creation around a frightening and mysterious trance.

While I bring a skeptical eye to the dramatic and frightening reverie which Shelley claims to have been inspired by, it is undeniable that her knowledge of, and rumination over, psychological theory provoked her consideration of the scientific creation of a monster. To question whether the waking reverie truly occurred or is simply a dramatic horror story of her moment of inspiration, is interesting in that it encourages us to consider Shelley's aptitude with and inclination towards the Gothic dramatic standards of storytelling. Yet the source of her inspiration still remains embedded within her knowledge of psychological theory, making the possible falsity of her tale only a minor consideration within the broader scope of studying her influences. If anything, we have to marvel at Shelley's ability to create yet another character in herself: another troubled creator grappling with the influence of dangerously radical scientific thought.

Having established Shelley's knowledge of psychological theory as inspiration for the content of the novel, I will now explore how Shelley's understanding of the formation of psychology as a distinct field contributed to the structure of the novel. Shelley's consideration of psychological theory undoubtedly influenced the content of *Frankenstein*, as Victor employs these very theories in his creation of the monster. Moving forward, however, I will broaden my scope to discuss the more structural understanding Shelley had of the formation of psychology as a dynamic present between scientific innovation and validation, which she then translates into a general



understanding of creation as a negotiation between a creator's isolation and social approval necessary for the dissemination of original research.

### **An Understanding of Creation: A Necessary Negotiation**

Mary Shelley was not only acquainted with the scientific innovations of her time, but was well aware of the dynamic between innovation and broader acceptance that fueled the development of psychology as a field, and the necessity that these early psychological scientists negotiate this fine line. The ultimate validity of psychology as a distinct scientific field – both within the scientific community and the greater intellectual community – depended on the aptitude of the emerging psychological sciences to reconcile between innovative isolation and social validation. The isolation of emerging psychology took a literal form in that these scientists often had to conduct their studies in secrecy so as not to be found heretical by theological and political authorities, but this was also a figurative isolation in that these scientists and their theories were forcibly ostracized from the validation and support of the scientific and greater intellectual community.

Shelley understood these demands on innovation, and was consistently immersed in conversations about creation – not only in regards to emerging psychological theory, but also the limitations on artistic creation. In Shelley's 1831 introduction, as we've seen, Shelley acknowledges her understanding that all innovation must derive from the invention that has preceded it, linking individual creativity with social influence:

Every thing must have a beginning...and that beginning must be linked to something that went before...Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of

void, but out of chaos; the materials must, in the first place, be afforded: it can give form to dark, shapeless substances, but cannot bring into being the substance itself. In all matters of discovery and invention, even of those that appertain to the imagination...Invention consists in the capacity of seizing on the capabilities of a subject, and in the power of moulding and fashioning ideas suggested to it. (167)

According to Shelley's discussion of her novel, despite how innovative a creation may appear, there is no denying that it emerges out of an existing framework and that it will need, in turn, to be socially validated. In discussing her own creative process of writing the novel, Shelley also draws a connection to the creation-stories that are contained within the novel, contrasting her successful negotiation of innovation and validation with the failures of her characters to do so. Victor's entirely isolated creation of the monster defies Shelley's understanding of proper invention, and is therefore a bastardization of invention that can never yield a positive result. To possess creativity and originality is necessary for creation, but without alignment with or inspiration from social norms, then individual innovation alone "cannot bring into being the substance itself." This is a direct reference to the failure of her characters to acknowledge the importance of social norms, and, therefore, their subsequent inability to innovate successfully.

Chris Baldick discusses the relationship between the creativity of an individual and the resulting production in "Assembling Frankenstein," focusing in particular on part-to-whole aesthetics in Shelley's novel. Shelley's negotiation between the individual (parts) and the group (the whole) – both within the novel and within her own conceptualizations of innovation – is, as Baldick explains, given repeated emphasis throughout the text: "...the beauty of the whole can arise only from a pure vital principle within, to which all subordinate parts and limbs will then conform. The parts, in a living being, can only be as beautiful as the animating principle which

organizes them...” (175). Aligned with Shelley’s belief that disseminated principles of creativity and innovation may only be actualized by combining them with preceding invention and validation, Baldick illuminates the way in which this part-to-whole transition is present within the innovative creation of the monster. Victor’s creation of the monster is a physical conglomeration of separated limbs into a human form, reflecting literally Baldick’s interpretation of Shelley’s aesthetic organization. Shelley has Victor’s resurrection occur out of the combination of separated body parts (which is by no means the easiest way of approaching this creation), as opposed to simply imbuing life into a whole corpse – this assemblage requires a significant and precise aesthetic process. While Shelley allows Victor’s moment of creation to be successful in that it employs this part-to-whole transition, this is not to say that her understanding of the necessity of social validation, and of negotiating these distinctions, has been overlooked. Quite the contrary, in fact, as Victor creates the monster in isolation from both his intimate companions and the scientific community, and thereby foregoes outside validation entirely.

The result of Victor’s disregard for collaboration therefore catalyzes the conflict of the novel, as the monster is born of unnatural means. This original error not only haunts Victor, but likewise dooms the monster to isolation for the entirety of its existence – leading to mayhem as it confronts its inability to connect to society as it desires. While the formation of psychology as a distinct field may be considered as a reversal of this part-to-whole transition identified by Baldick, in that it was a break from the grouping of natural philosophy into its own distinct field (a loose whole-to-part transition), Shelley understands the necessity of negotiation between individuality and social validation – whether performed by psychological scientists, or creators of human life. For Shelley, it is not the unidirectional movement from part-to-whole that is necessary, but the dynamic present between them as the creator negotiates between their innovation and necessary

validation. Whether this creation was of an entirely new scientific field, or of a fictional horror-novel, Shelley understood the importance of dynamic compromise in creation. This awareness is reflected not only on the thematic level of the novel, in the failures of her characters to achieve successful creation, but also in the greater formal structuring of *Frankenstein* itself.

### **An Elaborate Literary Structure: Narration as Validation**

*Frankenstein* is a novel of nested narratives encompassed in an epistolary structure—in the form of a series of letters written by a single character. Robert Walton, this letter writer and overarching narrator, writes, then, on behalf of the other characters, recording their tales as they are told. The structure of these embedded tales appears as such: Walton – Victor – the monster – Victor – Walton. That is, Walton’s letters recount Victor’s story of his life, which in turn includes Victor’s confrontation with the monster, who tells his own story. While each tale of the novel is told in first-person from the apparent perspective of the character speaking, the reader must always keep in mind that each tale is being filtered through the lens of the character listening to it, who is the following speaker in the structure – such that the monster’s inset tale is being retold by Victor, and Victor’s tale (of both himself and the monster) is retold by Walton to the reader. Shelley’s narrative structure of nested tales, which at all moments in the novel imposes a relationship between the speaker and the listener, reflects upon her knowledge of the necessity of negotiation between social influence and isolated individualism. In Nancy Yousef’s *Isolated Cases*, a study of Romantic-era individualism, Yousef supports the notion that Shelley’s narrative structuring of embedded tales is an intentional means of communicating her own ideas, beyond the simple act of relating the action of a novel: “the fact that each character has a story that must be told, is but one

way that the novel deploys formal exigencies for theoretical or philosophical purposes” (168). Shelley’s use of narrative structure reflects what she believes to be an essential component of any successful creation, whether of a new scientific field or of the innovations of her characters – that there must always be a second observer to validate what is being presented. Yet Shelley complicates this structure further, using it to show us what unsuccessful creation looks like, in the failure of her characters to maintain stability between this essential balance.

To approach this embedded narrative structure through the lens of diegetic narrative levels illuminates the complexity of Shelley’s formal choices, as she interposes and morphs different diegetic forms throughout *Frankenstein*.<sup>16</sup> At the overarching epistolary level, Walton appears as a homodiegetic narrator, “A narrator who is part of the diegesis he presents; a narrator who is a character in the situations and events he recounts” (Prince, 41), as Walton is in direct contact with both Victor and the monster onboard the ship, and is also a participant in the action of the novel. Yet when the novel enters into the embedded tales of Victor and the monster, which are metadiegetic narratives, Walton then becomes a heterodiegetic narrator, one who is not at all part of the diegesis that he presents, but rather an entirely absent narrator. Shelley allows the diegetic positioning of Walton’s character to morph throughout the narrative of the novel, as she engages in her own creative experimentation to successfully overlap and parallel textual messages between the characters. Shelley furthers this innovative use of structure by not only complicating Walton’s diegetic narration within the novel, but also by complicating the embedded metadiegetic narratives of Victor and the monster. These embedded tales of Victor and the monster are not only metadiegetic, but function as pseudo-diegetic as well, which is when “A second-degree narrative

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<sup>16</sup> See Gerald Prince’s *A Dictionary of Narratology* (1987) for a succinct definition of terms. Additionally, see Gerard Genette’s *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1983) for a more comprehensive theory of narrative.

[is] brought up to the level of the primary narrative and taken in charge by its narrator; a metadiegetic narrative functioning as if it were a diegetic one” (78), when “metadiegetic status is forgotten, as it were” (Prince, 50). That is, during the diegesis of Victor’s and the monster’s tales (respectively), these characters speak for themselves in first-person and recount their own tales; creating a sensation where the reader “forgets” that this first-person recounted tale is in fact being told by the overarching narrator, Walton, in his own transcript. Shelley’s use of multiple embedded narratives not only sows doubt in Walton’s overarching structure and the tales contained within, but allows Shelley to convey multiple simultaneous messages. At each level of diegetic narration, each character may express their own respective message, but simultaneously, this message directly parallels the others told within the closely interwoven tales of other characters. These interwoven messages regarding creation, creative process, and the limitations of innovation not only belong to the characters, but to Shelley’s experimentation with what exactly a novel can do.

With the creation of *Frankenstein*, Shelley’s own successful negotiation between the existing conventions of literature, on the one hand, and innovative isolation, on the other, is clear, in that she manages to reconcile the norms of style and structure laid down by the popular Gothic novel, while writing a text inspired by the scientific developments of contemporary alternative psychology—in effect, inventing science fiction through this negotiation. The Gothic novel is a genre that, as scholars have long noted, is particularly conventional in structure and theme, and which attempts to address the very questions with which *Frankenstein* is entirely concerned. Deidre Lynch, in a recent essay on Gothic fiction, unravels these questions motivating the genre: “the Gothic remains a vehicle for engaging...questions about the relationship of knowledge to belief...questions about the relationship of knowing to feeling, or imagination to delusion, and

questions about the powers of the mind” (49).<sup>17</sup> Shelley’s novel conforms to the Gothic tradition, especially in regards to the existential questions raised by the characters, and the questions raised by the reader when encountering the novel itself. Shelley also remains aligned with typical literary elements of the Gothic novel (sublime environments, gloom and horror imposed by supernatural events, heightened emotional stakes, etc.). Yet these conventional elements are combined with the introduction of developments in psychology, as Shelley creates *Frankenstein* out of a successful balance between the norms of Gothic style and the creative addition of alternative scientific theory.

Drawing on the conventions of the eighteenth-century novel, and especially those of the Gothic tradition, the framing narrative of *Frankenstein* takes an epistolary form – which adds an additional bond of sociability to Shelley’s already dense structure of validation-seeking. That is, as the overarching listeners to the tales told in the novel, and the recipients of Shelley’s novel in its epistolary form, the narrative structure solidifies this bond between narrator and listener, sender and recipient, and creator and validator. The epistolary form is a tale created by providing the reader with purported documents (such as wills, newspaper clippings, and, especially—hence the form’s name—letters),<sup>18</sup> and in the case of *Frankenstein*, the overarching epistolary structure is composed of Walton’s letters to his sister, Margaret. It is important to note that written correspondence as a form implies a physical separation and mutual isolation between writer and recipient (otherwise, correspondence would be unnecessary); at the same time, letters demonstrate a desire to maintain a social bond through this shared, and ideally mutual, writing experience. The epistolary form of written correspondence therefore allows isolation and socialization to remain in

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<sup>17</sup> See Deidre Lynch’s chapter “Gothic Fiction” in *The Cambridge Companion to Fiction in the Romantic Period* (2008). For additional information on the Gothic genre as particularly conventional, see Eve Sedgwick’s *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (1986).

<sup>18</sup> See Janet Altman’s *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (1973) for additional information on the epistolary form as a fiction genre.

suspension, a bond which allows negotiation between the mutual isolation of the participants, and their social exchanges created through writing.

Shelley's use of this form implicates the reader as the recipient of her novel, and therefore as validator of her creation. This form is especially provocative in its outreach because, in addition to Shelley as the author, we must simultaneously consider the role of Walton as the character writing these letters. There is no indication that Walton's letters ever reach their intended recipient, his sister Margaret (as we have no access to her responses); in possessing the novel, we are in possession of Walton's personal and one-sided correspondence. As the reader, we therefore replace Margaret as the recipient of these letters, and are provided with a glimpse into Walton's isolation and attempts at maintaining a social bond.

I have been identifying this dynamic of validation and innovation as it is present first in the early formation of psychology as a field, and second in Shelley's reflections on this dynamic through her narrative structure. Readers familiar with scholarship on the novel may be better acquainted with how these bonds have been highlighted through the use of contemporary, post-Freudian psychology. In light of psychoanalytic literary criticism, the social bonds at play between the individual and the social can be understood as based on fundamental psychological principles. Psychologically, Shelley's formal narrative structure implies a social bond between character and reader, further integrating us into the embedded narratives. Peter Brooks, in his essay "What is a Monster?", illuminates the significance of narrative structure on the reader of a text, drawing on post-Freudian psychology to enforce the importance of these literary and social bonds. One such bond is the transference relationship established between narrator and listener, in which an unconscious transfer of emotional states occurs, figuratively embedding the listener (emotionally and creatively) within the tale that is being told. Brooks writes:



Each act of narration in the novel implies a certain bond or contract: listen to me because... The structure calls attention to the motives of telling; it makes each listener – and the reader – ask: Why are you telling me this? What am I supposed to do with it? As in the psychoanalytic context of storytelling, the listener is placed in a transference relation to the narrative. (369)

Brooks' influential psychoanalytic perspective on the novel reinforces my interpretation of the social relationships of negotiation that Shelley's narrative structure presents to the reader.<sup>19</sup> Assuming that the reader has been emotionally and subconsciously inserted into the narrative of the novel, just as the characters listening to the tale have, then Shelley implicates us as active participants within the bounds of this relationship. Through Brooks' psychoanalysis of the relationship between reader and narrative, he reinforces the necessary dynamic and consistent negotiation which occurs between the individual creator and the social validator. Brooks affirms my point by reminding us that "Storytelling in *Frankenstein* is far from an innocent act: narratives have designs on their narratees that must be unraveled" (370). These designs of interlocutory relationships and their associated "motives of telling" are directly linked to Shelley's use of the reader as validation of both her creation and the creation-stories of the characters placed within the novel. Such use of this narrative relationship also allows Shelley to reinforce her understanding of the necessity of negotiation between isolation and validation, as the reader is not only able to acknowledge these creations, but also to judge the methods and manner in which these respective creations differ from each other. By placing the reader as a subjective witness to the tales as they are told, and making us the sole recipients of Walton's letters (the entirety of the novel itself),

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<sup>19</sup> For a more thorough exploration of narrative transference not in direct relation to *Frankenstein*, see Brooks "Narrative Transaction and Transference" (1992). Brooks also references the principle of "the narrative contract", a literary interpretation of the psychoanalytic transference relationship, which was introduced by Roland Barthes in *An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative* (1966).

Shelley affords us the perspective of judging the ways in which the creation of her novel, of Walton's manuscript, and of Victor's monster, either succeed or fail in their attempts to negotiate between isolated innovation and social validation.

The reader's simultaneous consideration of Shelley's overall creation and the embedded creations contained within the novel, reinforces the complex relationships of language and storytelling as a form within "the medium of transmission, transaction, and transference" (Brooks, 370). Through the transferential relationship occurring between narrator and listener, the reader is forced to reconcile between the truth and ambiguity, subjectivity and objectivity, and sociability and isolation, with each addition of embedded tale and letter correspondence of the novel. From this point forward, I refer to this transferential relationship as a social link, social chain, or social bond, as the sociability of written correspondence and storytelling appear as such throughout the novel, each correspondence serving as a social reinforcement between characters who may have otherwise been isolated from society. Brooks references a metaphor of a chain as relations established through language, and therefore I consider these links of sociability relevant to the structure of storytelling and written correspondence, as these links are present at each tale of the novel and occur simultaneously from character-to-character, and novel-to-reader. At each level of addition to the novel's tale-within-a-tale structure, the reader is implanted further into this social bond, and is contracted in this bond of sociability with multiple narrators at once – Shelley herself, the original character relating the tale (the monster, Victor), the character relating the original telling of that tale (Victor), and the letter correspondence of Walton to us as the recipient of his letters.

The complexity of these social bonds may only be illuminated through closer analysis of the tales themselves, which I will now approach individually according to the character whose tale

is recounted. By studying these tales according to character, I explore the way in which each character's access to the social bonds of correspondence, and their aptitude for negotiating between isolated creation and social validation through use of this correspondence, will ultimately affect the success of their respective innovations.

## Chapter II: Walton and the Failure of Epistolary Form

Moving forward from the groundwork discussion of Shelley's knowledge of contemporary psychological theory and her reflections upon these developments through the narrative form of her novel, I will now focus specifically on the role that Walton plays as the character through which the epistolary form is written. As we've seen, Shelley's use of the epistolary structure is typical in regards to the Gothic genre of the novel. Yet this structure is far from normative as filtered through the subjective lens of the overarching narrator, Walton. Portrayed as unstable, erratic, and entirely isolated from society by choice, Walton's subjective fashioning of the entire narrative brings into question not only the reliability of the narration itself, but of epistolary narrative as a form. Walton's fashioning of his epistolary tale is an attempt to solidify a social connection between himself, on an isolated seafaring quest in the Arctic, and his sister Margaret, who is back home in England. Through these letters, Walton repeatedly expresses his most intimate inner-thoughts to Margaret and often enthusiastically references the close bond between them, concluding his letters with attempts to forge further connections of intimacy: "Farewell, my dear, excellent, Margaret. Heaven shower down blessings on you, and save me, that I may again and again testify my gratitude for all your love and kindness. Your affectionate brother, R. Walton" (9). Yet Walton fails to retain this connection between his insistently isolated quest and his social community, as it can be concluded that these letters likely do not ever reach Margaret. Our presence as readers of the novel validates this assumption, as we hold the one-sided correspondence in our hands, the novel itself.<sup>20</sup> With our knowledge of Shelley's use of narrative

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<sup>20</sup> It is also worth noting that there is no possibility of Walton being able to post these letters to Margaret while he is on board a seafaring vessel in the Arctic, with his ship encompassed by ice and snow. Therefore, Margaret's receipt of these letters would likely require the success of Walton's voyage, and his safe return to England. But once Walton has returned home, there is then no social purpose to sending these letters.

structure as an overtly self-conscious social link between herself and the reader, then we must ask: what is the significance of Walton's epistolary structure failing to reach its intended recipient, and, instead, reaching us?

Upon receiving these letters directed toward Margaret, the reader who intercepts them must question the validity and security of letter-writing as a form, in questioning *why* we have access to these letters if we are not the intended recipient. In "The Reading Monster," Patrick Brantlinger addresses the significance of the reader imposing themselves upon Walton's personal correspondence, arguing that, similarly to other literature within the Gothic tradition: "*Frankenstein* seems to pose a *caveat lector* question by its own questionable narrative structure: who is reading this 'hideous progeny' and with what possible dire consequences?" (472). In taking Margaret's place as the recipient, we are now participants in the judgment of the content of his letters, and the tales contained within.

Shelley complicates Walton's role as overarching narrator through her characterization of him as not only isolated by choice, but erratic and emotionally troubled within this isolation. Walton is undoubtedly mentally unstable, often preoccupied with his previous failures and his loneliness, which send him into alternating fits of depression and manic excitement. These drastically-alternating emotions occur often and in succession, such that during the course of one letter Walton claims that "I feel my heart glow with an enthusiasm which elevates me to heaven" (8) before then dejectedly admitting that "my hopes fluctuate, and my spirits are often depressed" (9). As we will see, these agitated fits reflect Walton's preoccupation with seclusion and loneliness, and his desire to engage in social behavior with a companion. Shelley draws attention to Walton's instability of mind as the result of his perpetual isolation, as Walton *chooses*, entirely of his own volition and with no apparent influence, to embark upon a journey to the North Pole. Walton

purposely isolated himself from his community in his endeavor to innovate (in this case, to discover uncharted territory), yet, in isolating himself, we will see that Walton truly desires nothing more than a social companion.

Walton recognizes the folly of secluding himself away from community and family, and obsesses over locating a companion in his yearning to escape this self-imposed isolation. In this letter, Walton in fact rejects writing as a thoroughly accurate form of communication and of social connection and acknowledges that what he truly needs is a physical companion:

But 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...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...I bitterly feel the want of a friend. (10)

Walton explicitly admits of the failure of thoughts being transcribed onto paper, relating within his own correspondence that his entire structure of communication is in fact a poor choice. Whereas a physical companion enables instant reciprocity and social exchange, the sociability of epistolary form not only comes with delay, but the possibility that the letters will never be received. Yet, the reader must always keep a skeptical eye on this narration, especially in consideration of Walton's troubled mind, as Walton's written words will often contradict his actions. Upon receiving a promising companion, at Victor's boarding of the ship, Walton is ecstatic to be given a friend to bring him out of his own isolated mental state. But we must question then, why is it that Walton transcribes Victor's tales entirely in isolation, and away from Victor himself? Walton claims to prefer human company over the medium of written communication, yet, in his recording of the tale, he privileges isolated writing over social connection. In addition, Walton claims that transcribing one's own thoughts to paper is a poor medium of communication, yet then undertakes

the task of transcribing *someone else's* thoughts to paper through the transmission of Victor's tale. We will see how these instances of contradiction continue, as Walton's letters will often contain claims that he, in his actions, does not follow.

The language that Walton employs in reference to Victor is troubling, and his solitude and loneliness lead to a quick and drastic fixation on the newcomer. Walton's obsessive language and idolization of Victor are not only concerning with respect to Walton's mental state, but also because they again bring into question the accuracy of his narration. Immediately after Walton meets Victor, Walton is already troublingly fixated on Victor, referring to him as: having a countenance "of benevolence and sweetness that I never saw equaled" (15), "conciliating and gentle...a noble creature...attractive and amiable" (16), who speaks with "unparalleled eloquence" (16), that is "like a celestial spirit, that has a halo around him, within whose circle no grief or folly ventures." (16), and a "glorious creature" who is "noble and godlike in ruin" (152), among many other such statements. If Walton admires Victor in such grand and extravagant ways, then it would be nearly impossible for Walton to retain an objective view on Victor's story, rather than aligning with his struggles throughout the tale. Therefore, in recording this tale, Walton may be at fault for creating a subjective and biased narrative, one which favors Victor's nobility over the supposed savagery of the monster.

In addition to the doubt instilled in the narrative through Walton's subconscious and subjective fashioning, the reader must also consider Walton's problematic motives for recording such a tale. In this first letter of the novel, Walton mentions his passion for writing, and relays that his journey to the Arctic was a result of the overwhelming shame and disappointment he endured from his failure to become a famous writer. Walton recounts the significance of his passion for writing, and the dejection of his failure: "I also became a poet, and for one year lived in a Paradise

of my own creation; I imagined that I also might obtain a niche in the temple where the names of Homer and Shakespeare are consecrated. You are well acquainted with my failure, and how heavily I bore the disappointment” (8). Walton then reaches out for validation of his desires, questioning Margaret, which is therefore a question for the reader: “And now, dear Margaret, do I not deserve to accomplish some great purpose?” (9). Whether or not Walton accomplishes his great purpose is to be seen, but we do know for certain, as we hold the novel in our hands, that Walton definitely did try to. The narrator of our entire tale is not only mentally erratic, but perhaps has ulterior motives for his recording of Victor’s story – a second attempt at literary fame. If Walton’s greatest disappointment is his failure to become a hailed writer, we must consider the possibility of ulterior motives in his seizing on an opportunity to record this story, and the dramatic distortions which could occur upon recording the tale for a reading audience. This is especially concerning when, as I will discuss later in the chapter, Walton records Victor’s story entirely in isolation, and without Victor’s knowledge.

In addition to Shelley’s unstable and erratic characterization of Walton, Shelley further troubles Walton’s narration through the distanced modes of transcription with which he writes. Walton’s transcribes Victor’s tale across too excessive of a subjective distance to be accurate towards the original telling of the tale, as evidenced by the metadiegetic narrative contained within Walton’s fluctuating position from direct involvement as a homodiegetic narrator to his absence as a heterodiegetic narrator. Walton creates additional levels of removal from the original narrator by transcribing these tales across various modes of text – note-taking, which is translated into journal recording, to then be re-written as a completed manuscript embedded within letter correspondence. These complications in method are in addition to the levels of removal between the embedded tales, where we note Walton’s distance from Victor’s (retrospective) dictation, as



well as the transcription of Victor's verbal recounting of the monster's tale, which had been told to Victor by the monster himself. These narrative distances instill doubt in the relationship between the embedded tales, and at every level of removal from the original narrator, this doubt intensifies.

Walton explains these methods of transcription in his letters written to Margaret, yet in his zeal fails to perceive the problematic nature of these recordings, promising that he will periodically update his letters in relation to his journal entries: "I shall continue my journal concerning the stranger at intervals, should I have any fresh incidents to record" (16). Following the translation of these events contained within the journal into letter correspondence, Walton divulges his method of narrative structuring: "I have resolved every night, when I am not engaged, to record, as nearly as possible in his own words, what [Victor] has related during the day. If I should be engaged, I will at least make notes" (18). Shelley not only encourages doubt through the distancing inherent to these embedded tales, but she also distances Walton's relationship to his own manuscript, as he transcribes across separated modes of writing: the notes, the more thorough records, the letters that repackage those records. Walton's disclosure that he writes the tale at night, following Victor's verbal relation during the day, adds another distancing element of time. In remaining aligned with the conventions of the Gothic, Shelley also invokes the sinister distortions and fear which come with darkness and nighttime, with the imagery of Walton isolated in his cabin at night, maniacally working on his hidden manuscript. Through the embedded metadiegetic narrative structure, Shelley directly parallels these references to creation throughout *Frankenstein*, as Walton's isolated, manic transcription of his manuscript explicitly parallels Victor's similarly isolated and frenzied creation of the monster. In addition to the distortion of time between dictation and transcription, Walton's transcription occurs in solitude, a physical distance from Victor as the original source, which undoubtedly undermines the possibility of accuracy. This furthers Shelley's

argument about the dangers inherent to isolated innovation, as Walton self-isolates in his transcriptions, as opposed to conducting them in Victor's presence.

Not only does Walton appear to be unaware of the inaccuracy introduced by the mediation involved with his recording, but he likewise fails to acknowledge the threat of unreliable correspondence from other characters. This is clear when Walton assures Margaret that he has received "proof" of Victor's tale – proof that pointedly comes in the form of a letter, yet is only a *replication* of a letter multiple levels removed from its original writer. In this way, Walton fakes the social validation necessary to bring credibility to his tale, ensuring the reader that this "proof" is enough, while we know it certainly is not comparable to a reciprocated (or even original) social correspondence. As skeptical readers, we must return to Walton's previous assertion that transcribing thought to paper is a poor medium of communication. The validation Walton claims to rely on is a *replication* of a letter, which is copied by the monster from inside of his hovel (at a physical distance from the original recipient, Safie), who holds these personal letters in her hand. The unreliability of the multiple levels of removal is evident, and yet Walton validates the entirety of Victor's (and thereby, the monster's) tale through this one piece of correspondence. In addition to seeing the silhouette of the monster from the ship, Walton assures Margaret (and the reader) that: "[Victor's] tale is connected, and told with an appearance of the simplest truth; yet I own to you that the letters of Felix and Safie, which he shewed me...brought to me a greater conviction of the truth of his narrative than his asseverations, however earnest and connected" (151). This documentation is, at first glance, a positive indicator of Walton's care for accuracy. Despite Walton's obsession with Victor as a pure and noble being, he still desires confirmation of Victor's tale. Yet Walton's receipt of the letter is of a false validation, in that it is multiple levels removed from direct correspondence. This copy, already one level removed from the original recipient in

that it is simply not the original letter, is then distanced further by the monster attempting to recreate it entirely in isolation from the original recipients, and is then transferred from monster to Victor, who then transfers it to Walton, who then discusses it in his own letter. Walton chooses to accept this “letter” as a validation of his own tale, and advocates to the reader for its sincerity, despite knowledge of the already-poor medium of writing as communication.

Already attesting to the dangers of isolated creation with her use of epistolary form, Shelley further complicates the relationship of the embedded tales towards the conclusion of the novel. With the already-complex structure of embedded tales becoming convoluted through the addition of subjective letters – original, replicated, and unreceived – Shelley further attests to the unreliability of this form at the hands of Walton by allowing Victor to intrude upon Walton’s isolated creation. Walton has been transcribing Victor’s tale without his knowledge, and when Victor belatedly discovers the manuscript, he accuses Walton of inaccuracy:

Frankenstein discovered that I made notes concerning his history: he asked to see them, and then himself corrected and augmented them in many places; but principally in giving the life and spirit to the conversations he held with his enemy. “Since you have preserved my narration,” said he, “I would not that a mutilated one should go down to posterity.”  
(151)

It is only upon Victor’s discovery of these writings that he is even aware of their existence, attesting to the total isolation of Walton in his pursuit of creation. That is, he has written them not only in Victor’s absence but also without his permission. While collaborative in that Victor “corrected and augmented” many portions of these writings that had been “mutilated,” it is significant that Shelley allows Victor access to the *notes* concerning his own history, and not the actual manuscript. Victor may be able to amend the liberties taken by Walton, but only in regards to the preliminary notes,

retaining Victor's distance from the other transcriptions which ultimately form the manuscript and preventing him from ensuring that Walton's final manuscript remains accurate. It is also questionable that Victor does not react with anger, or even shock, at his discovery of Walton's hidden recording, but chooses to assist Walton in creating it – insinuating that perhaps he desires Walton to record his story, and therefore record his innovative attempt.

Although Victor may not be afforded the opportunity to validate Walton's ultimate creation, Victor's ability to access these notes, at the very least, attests to his social privilege of being able to access writing. Victor exists within the bounds of social writing and correspondence, which afford him the privilege to collaborate with Walton in regards to the recordings of conversations that he exchanged with the monster. Significantly, the principal notes augmented by Victor are in giving "life and spirit" to the conversations between him and "his enemy," the monster, providing Victor the opportunity to retrospectively absolve himself of blame, and perhaps further cast the monster as "the other" within the text. Shelley again explicitly parallels Victor's and Walton's respective creations, with Walton's manuscript offering Victor the ability to imbue "life and spirit" into his transcribed conversation with the monster, just as his scientific creation literally imbues "life and spirit" into dead matter with the re-animation of the physical monster. Shelley allows Victor to interfere in Walton's manuscript with adept and practical experience, as Victor is already an expert at approaching that which is "mutilated" – whether a manuscript or a dead slab of human corpse – and imbuing it with "life and spirit".

While Walton is undoubtedly unreliable as the narrator of the novel, Victor's engagement with the notes implicates him as a co-conspirator, and as a collaborator in framing the way the monster is perceived in the final manuscript. The monster's tale within the novel is *entirely* present as Walton's transcription of Victor's account of the conversation between himself and the monster.

Victor's recitation of this tale to Walton is an obvious instance of subjective distancing – but that Victor *returns* to Walton's notes on this encounter to further edit the conversation threatens to remove the voice of the monster from the tale. Victor's concerns with "posterity" underscore this threat of contamination, in that he is editing the exchanges between himself and the monster in anticipation of them being read by observers to come. That Walton uses the language of "the enemy" likewise encourages the assumption that Victor did not edit these conversations for accuracy, but for ensuring that he is viewed in as positive a light as possible in opposition to the monster. Shelley's reflections on the sociability of writing—that is, the multiple audiences to which an otherwise solitary message is subjected—is evident in this moment of collaborative effort, in that Walton and Victor are privileged with the ability to use written correspondence as a means of shaping public perception.

By novel's end, following Walton's dejection at his failed seafaring journey, and his inability to retain a friendship with Victor, he enters into an additional fit of depression, during which he claims: "I had rather die, than return shamefully..." (155). Yet, there remains hope in Walton's final letters, where he admits: "My tears flow; my mind is overshadowed by a cloud of disappointment. But I journey towards England, and I may there find consolation" (157). Perhaps Walton has realized the damning nature of self-isolation, and that the subsequent failures of his expedition are the result of this failure to negotiate. Therefore, he returns to his homeland in search of social consolation. Or, perhaps, if we are to be exceedingly suspicious of Walton and his intentions, his completion of the manuscript (which he very pointedly finishes with "THE END" as opposed to his usual farewell signing to Margaret) is finally a successful innovation, and he may therefore return back to England to receive validation for this attempted creation.

Regardless of whether we see Walton's return to England as a hopeful search for companionship, or a self-interested search for validation of his newest creation, it is evident that Shelley employs his overarching narration to stress the necessity of balancing one's isolated pursuits with social validation. The necessity of this balance is further evidenced within Victor's embedded tale in which, like Walton, Victor's obsession with innovation prevents him from successfully engaging in correspondence as a means of keeping his social link between isolation and validation.

### Chapter III: Victor and the Ambivalence of Correspondence

Victor's tale of innovation is enmired in his overwhelming anxiety about the preoccupation with maintaining correspondence. This angst is especially fueled in periods of self-imposed isolation, reflecting Victor's *desire* to remain linked to sociability, despite his failure to do so. Victor's consistent receipt of letters, and his inconsistency with response, reflect his emphasis on innovation as opposed to sociability. While Victor is explicit about his own failures, his tale is one in which the constant sending-and-receiving of letters, and the concurrent angst which accompanies them, reflects a recurring struggle between balancing isolation and sociability.

Victor begins his tale (which, again, we receive as a transcription of a conversation with Walton) with the introduction of his politically-elite and upper-class familial environment, attesting to the careful social-grooming with which he was raised. Victor opens his tale by explaining that "my family is one of the most distinguished of that republic," and that his ancestors were "counsellors and syndics; and my father had filled several public situations with honour and reputation" (18). Victor pointedly begins his tale with the establishment of his family's value as being entirely contingent on society and social connection, referencing "public" positions and respectable "reputation" as being significant to the worth of his lineage. The importance of this introductory disclaimer is understood through the tale that follows, with Victor's reference to his childhood sociability a means of emphasizing his subsequent loss of social connection upon his pursuit of scientific advancement. Yet before we see evidence of Victor's abandonment of social connection, we learn first of childhood influences that are of an entirely social nature. Victor's primary education is not only socially normative in instruction, but is conducted in a social environment in which he learned and collaborated with his siblings and friends.

The catalyst to the ruin of Victor's social grooming, and introduction to isolation as a tool of originality, is significantly a moment of physical isolation from community. During travels which take him away from his country and community, Victor happens upon examples of pseudoscientific knowledge, "a volume of the works of Cornelius Agrippa" (22), which later serves as a catalyst to his unwholesome scientific pursuits. As an acknowledgment of her own isolated travels, during which she created the novel, Shelley recreates her moment of inspiration in context of Victor's own inspiration and break from traditional, social education. While both Victor and Shelley's moments of inspiration occur when in the physical presence of others (Victor travels with his family, and Shelley is amongst her intellectual companions), both inspirations occur in seclusion from the limiting norms of their home communities. Victor and Shelley are both travelers who become inspired by alternative sciences while physically separated from home, an isolation which provides them the opportunity to access new and even dangerous information. (Victor's elite home-schooling would have never subjected him to outdated pseudoscience.)

These moments of inspiration occur during the travels of both Shelley and Victor to the Grand-Genève, an agglomeration encompassing Geneva and the surrounding areas of France. Shelley is stationed near the Western border at Coligny, and Victor near the Eastern border at Thonon, when storms isolate them from both community and home-nation. It is during Shelley's travels that she is inspired to create the novel, and in her personal correspondences nearby Coligny, she writes that: "An almost perpetual rain confines us principally to the house..."<sup>21</sup> Victor's travels within the novel bring him away from community and nation to the baths near Thonon, where

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<sup>21</sup> The inherent sociability of written correspondence is further illuminated through my contemporary use of Shelley's early nineteenth-century letters as a means of understanding her past circumstances. I access Shelley's personal and written correspondence through Bennett's *Selected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley* (1995), in which Shelley's letters are left almost entirely untouched. This quote selected from her correspondence to Fanny Imlay of June 1, 1816.



“...the inclemency of the weather obliged us to remain a day confined to the inn” (22). It is in this explicitly paralleled *confinement* from the immediate outside world, and from the norms of home, that Victor accesses an alternative education, in the form of the outdated work of pseudoscientific alchemist Cornelius Agrippa. This newfound science, and the consequent harsh censure of it by his father, instills in Victor the possibility of pursuing intellectual advancement outside the realms of a social education, a pursuit that seems possible *only* when conducted in isolation.

Following this inspirational moment of isolation, Victor begins his pseudoscientific studies with newfound zeal, conducting his socially-defiant investigations entirely in secrecy. Yet Victor still clings to the possibility of reconciling these isolated studies with social approval, acknowledging his desire and inability to retain his grounding in both spheres of study: “...I often wished to communicate these secret stores of knowledge to my father, yet his indefinite censure of my favourite Agrippa always withheld me...and I was left...to pursue my studies alone” (23). Victor’s desire to use “communication” as a means of reconciling this social (and scientific) link between “secret” knowledge and his father’s normative knowledge is unsuccessful, and this failure ultimately provokes Victor to choose isolation over society so that he may pursue his studies. When faced with a possible negotiation between the isolated studies of pseudoscience, and the normative (but social) studies of his family and community, Shelley emphasizes Victor’s catalyzing mistake – by having him choose a side, as opposed to reconciling both options.

It is within a similar bout of isolation at university that Victor admits the passing of two years “...during which I paid no visit to Geneva...” (30); Victor neglects his social foundations in a manner uncharacteristic of him in his formative years. These isolated pursuits are not without repeated reference to his awareness of his inability to retain social connection, in that he repeatedly

draws attention to his failure to maintain written correspondence. Victor reflects upon this, and the ways in which social accountability is reflected in one's ability to retain these connections:

And the same feelings [his obsession with creation of the monster]...caused me also to forget those friends who were so many miles absent, and whom I had not seen for so long a time. I knew my silence disquieted them; and I well remembered the words of my father: "... You must pardon me, if I regard any interruption in your correspondence as a proof that your other duties are equally neglected." (34)

According to Victor's father, whose political renown characterizes him as a man well-versed in the norms of social respectability and connection, to fail in maintaining correspondence is to fail at one's duties entirely. This is especially reflective of the distinct change in Victor's behavior towards society, considering Victor's opening lines of his tale, in which he references his social upbringing and the normative education that was provided to him through this sociability. Shelley's particular wordplay of having Victor admit that "I knew my silence disquieted them" further reinforces the growing tension between the contrasting notions of silence and disquiet; the appropriately-socialized family remains in a concerned uproar in opposition to Victor's silent disregard of them. Victor acknowledges the presence of this social link and his consequent failure at maintaining the social grooming of his upper-class upbringing, yet, in his pursuit of innovation, he disregards both his familial connections and his social duties.

This familial concern over the maintenance of correspondence is woven throughout Victor's tale, as Victor's isolated state is a cause of alarm to his family and friends. At Victor's extended seclusion during his creation of the monster, the paradoxical birth of an additional social companion, Victor's family attempts to re-establish the social link with Victor. Upon Victor's distraught mental state at the actualization of his creation, and loss of social aptitude through years

of perpetual isolation, both his closest friend Clerval and his betrothed Elizabeth communicate their desires for Victor to re-forge his broken social ties. The narrative repeatedly emphasizes the demand for Victor to return correspondence “in his own hand-writing” (40), attesting to letter-writing as a strictly personal validation. Shelley refers to the inherent doubt of accuracy present between a dictation-transcription relationship through this reinforcement by Victor’s family of the personal nature of letter-writing, making it a social violation of sorts to dictate to another to write on your behalf.<sup>22</sup> Clerval reinforces this demand of social responsibility, explaining to Victor that: “...your father and cousin would be very happy if they received a letter from you in your own hand-writing. They...are uneasy at your long silence” (40). A letter received from Elizabeth reiterates Clerval’s assertion, a letter in which she repeatedly references the family’s desire to read Victor’s *own* handwriting, and not a transcription of his communications: “...it is not several months since we have seen your hand-writing; and all this time you have been obliged to dictate your letters to Henry. Surely, Victor, you must have been exceedingly ill...” (40). For Victor to have relied on Clerval to dictate his letters insinuates to Elizabeth that he has been unwell, as otherwise the dictation of letters should not have been socially acceptable, in that it instigates a distrust in their contents. Elizabeth repeats this concern, probing Victor for a confirmation of truth: “Clerval always writes that you are getting better; I eagerly hope that you will confirm this intelligence soon in your own hand-writing; for indeed, indeed, Victor, we are all very miserable on this account” (40). If Victor’s family, at the height of social grooming and etiquette of correspondence, consider the transcription of Victor’s words to be troublesome, and even

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<sup>22</sup> This blatant reinforcement of letter-writing as a personal act reflects upon the possible invalidity of Walton’s epistolary form, in which his letters contain a subjective transcription of the dialogue and accounts of other characters.

irresponsible, on his behalf, then as readers of the novel we must question the validity of the entire novel being recorded as such.

Familiar with the isolated environment which permitted him to create his original monster, Victor immerses himself in isolation yet again at the creation of his monster's mate, this time upon a solitary island – a physical disconnect from society. This innovation comes at the request of his first monster for a mate, and a promise that at the creation of a companion, the monster and his new mate will go and live entirely outside of society *together*. In this isolated state, Victor repeats the dangerous cycle of obsession and seclusion, and, therefore, his innovation again takes priority over his sociability. Yet in this second attempt at creation, there are multiple dynamics present between companionship and isolation, as Victor isolates himself for this creation in the attempt to create a second monster, a companion for his first. This second attempt at creation also varies from the first, in that Victor attempts to initiate a correspondence from his isolated island, writing letters “...addressed to the most distinguished natural philosophers” (113). This correspondence is not of a social link to his community but is instead a search for scientific information that will assist his creation, and therefore serves as a possible outreach for validation. Victor does not attempt to remain connected with his family, and yet, this correspondence offers a hopeful possibility of Victor attaining scientific validation, as this creation is not conducted entirely in isolation. With letter-writing as a form possessing an inherent sociability, Victor's attempts to reach out to the scientific community are an attempt to achieve his lost balance between isolation and invention – which he failed to do at the creation of his first monster.

Victor remains preoccupied with the expectation of receiving the letters that may further his innovation, yet he is apprehensive about receiving correspondence from his family: “I waited for my letters with feverish impatience: if they were delayed, I was miserable, and overcome by a

thousand fears: and when they arrived, and I saw the superscription of Elizabeth or my father, I hardly dared to read and ascertain my fate” (116). Upon reflection of the dangerous consequences of his first innovation, and perhaps influenced by the social act of correspondence with natural philosophers, Victor destroys his half-formed creation and dismisses the monster from his presence. Upon rejecting the monster’s company and therefore dispelling the necessity of a second innovation (since Victor was creating another monster only as a mate for the first), Victor immediately receives a “packet” of letters – a fortification of the broken link between himself and his community, and an opportunity to redeem his failures in maintaining these connections. This packet contains an invitation to return to society, an offer Victor immediately accepts: “[the packet] contained letters from Geneva, and one from Clerval, entreating me to join him...He entreated me, therefore, to leave my solitary isle...This letter in a degree recalled me to life, and I determined to quit my island...” (122). Victor’s decision to destroy his creation, and therefore to exit isolation in favor of community, is an effort on the part of negotiation, and a realization that perhaps community may afford greater personal validation than an isolated creation. Yet in making the decision to rejoin society, Victor entirely disregards the isolation of his creation in favor of his own self-interested choice, and therefore rejects the isolated (and lonely) monster’s ability to attain a social companion for himself. This may again be seen as a failure to negotiate between isolation and society; Victor as a creator owes a responsibility to his creation, yet, in this instance, fails to consider the monster’s own desire to remedy his isolated state with the addition of a social companion. Where Victor had the opportunity to bestow the monster with a social bond and thus rectify his deviant isolated creation of the monster which then doomed the monster to isolation, Victor ultimately destroys this possibility by abandoning the monster to isolation yet again, and therefore catalyzes the resulting antagonistic bond between them.

While Victor abandons his first monster at the moment of creation, the social links of writing ultimately reunite monster and creator. Victor carelessly leaves behind his formulas and scientific notes for the monster to discover – thereby revealing his location and that of his family, endangering their lives and ultimately leading to the murder of his family members. These writings were not letters, which would have implied a social link and bond between Victor and the monster, and therefore perhaps the possibility of connection between them. These notes of Victor are of an entirely private nature, a writing conducted by and to himself, instead of created to engage with another sociably. These notes communicated enough information to lead the monster to an engagement with Victor, but without promise or implication of any resulting bond; therefore endangering Victor's family with the monster's use of the private information contained within. When the DeLacey family quits their cabin following the (peaceful) intrusion of the monster, the monster laments that his sole, fragile link of sociability has been broken: "My protectors had departed, and had broken the only link that held me to the world" (97). It is at the destruction of this link that the monster recalls Victor's lab notes, which incidentally reveal Victor's location, providing the monster with the opportunity to employ these writings as a renewal of sociability and an attempt at reconnecting to society. Yet Shelley critiques the monster's use of private notes as a social outreach, as this form of writing is not intended to forge social link and sociability as a letter would. As Shelley differentiates between Walton's private notes and his publicly-received letters, we must therefore also question the way in which Victor's private notes function (or in this case, fail to function) as the monster's outreach towards sociability.

The monster, at his forced return to an entirely isolated state, desires a father-figure as a reinforcement of the social bond which was broken at the loss of the DeLacey family. In this desire lies a search for a secure social link that was lacking when forged only through his one-sided and

tentative relationship with the DeLacey family: “I learned from your papers that you were my father, my creator; and to whom could I apply with more fitness than to him who had given me life?” (97). Victor’s irresponsible discarding of these papers elicits suspicion from the reader as to Victor’s subliminal motives, in that the reckless abandonment of the recordings of an innovation of a lifetime imply that perhaps Victor *desired* to be followed, to share the genius of the innovation that he has produced. Victor has, throughout the entirety of his life thus far, been imbued with the understanding of writing as a social link, and as a tether between isolation and society. To discard these writings in plain sight of his creation is to remain tethered to the monster through the sociability of a writer-reader relationship, even if this relationship is simply a tentative connection as opposed to the sociable link of letter-writing.

At the monster being provided this tentative link with his creator, he tracks Victor down and forces Victor to bear witness to his story – therefore embedding his own tale within those of Victor and Walton. In the following chapter, I will further explore the way in which Victor’s isolated and deviant means of creation of the monster manifests in the monster’s inability to access the social realm of correspondence in the manner that Victor, Walton, and normative society do. Therefore, Victor providing the monster with this conveniently-placed link to society is the necessary catalyst that allows the monster the opportunity to assert his presence within the novel, and to disclose firsthand what it means to be the result of failed negotiation.

## Chapter IV: The Monster and Exclusion from Sociability

Once we recognize Walton and Victor's privilege to access the realms of correspondence, it is clear that the isolated and unnatural creation of the monster manifests in the incapacity of the monster to access social realms at all – especially not with respect to the privileged mode of written correspondence. With the social link inherent in writing as a connection between isolation and society, the monster's inability to access social writing, therefore, is a barring from any outreach to society. As a direct result of Victor's isolated creation of him, the monster is thereby condemned to exist within isolation. Shelley uses this deviant creation, and the resulting failure of the monster to establish any social link, as a reflection on the necessity of balanced innovation. Despite the multiple chapters dedicated to recounting the intellectual development of the monster, with all of his educational advancements and autodidactic improvements explained in detail, Shelley does not once depict the monster learning how to write. The reader does ultimately learn of the monster's ability to write, however, but the circumstances of the sudden use of this craft illuminate the significance of the reasoning behind *why* he writes, to *whom* he writes, and *how* he is permitted to write. The monster is permitted to write only as a one-sided correspondence, as a replication and an indication of his presence, barring him from access to social and mutual correspondence. If writing functions as social validation in this novel, both on the personal level and in regards to scientific innovation, then the inability of the monster to correspond with society directly relates to his condemnation to exist in isolation.

Not only is the monster barred from engaging in social correspondence, but he is further disadvantaged by his inability to review his own account within the novel, or object to any falsities of Victor's retelling to Walton, or of Walton's recording of Victor's retelling. Whereas Victor was



able to retrospectively edit the notes on his tale, the monster is afforded no privilege of doing so. This is a further limitation on the monster, which exacerbates the fact that his social ineptitude, and accompanying restriction from correspondence, already cast doubt upon the accuracy of his tale. Whereas the reader of the novel is permitted to enter into (relatively-sound) social relationships with Victor and Walton, as we can (supposedly) see their process – their writing and editing – embedded in the text of the novel, the relationship we enter into with the monster must be continuously questioned, as he possesses no agency attending to the actual text. This unavoidable doubt is a disadvantage to the monster himself, in that he is restricted from an *additional* social relationship – a narrative link between the reader and himself.

Shelley prevents the monster from engaging in correspondence throughout his tale, which prevents him from resolving the perpetual conflicts he encounters and therefore condemns him to social isolation. The frustration of the reader learning, at a later portion of the novel, of the monster's ability to write lies in the knowledge that the hypothetical use of writing may have assisted the monster throughout his aborted attempts at engagement with others. Indeed, since the monster's physical deformities prevent him from ever entering into and being accepted by society, the epistolary form's inherent separation between writer and recipient offer an ideal way to avert the conflict that his physical presence evokes, with writing highlighting the eloquence of his speech and the kindness of his mind, as opposed to the grotesque and frightening presence of his body. As a result of Victor's failure to provide the necessary social validation of his creation, the monster is evidence of the way in which, in Baldick's words, "the beauty of the component parts and the ugliness of the finished combination" (173) is physically actualized. The ability of the monster to engage in written correspondence offers an opportunity to overcome the hideous conglomeration of his parts. The monster would have been able to write an eloquent letter to the DeLaceys, perhaps

warning of his physical appearance and giving notice of his peaceful intentions before entering their cabin, thus preventing the mayhem that inevitably followed his abrupt physical presence. Indeed, Father DeLacey, who is blind, companionably accepts the monster for his kindness and his eloquence – it is only the visual recognition of the monster that alarms the family, which then destroys the brief but potentially-solid bond that they may have shared. Shelley declines to allow her monster to engage in correspondence with the family, thus denying the monster the opportunity to socialize in a normative manner. Yet in his inability to engage with society through written correspondence, the monster is condemned to attempt, and fail, at full engagement with society.

In “The Reading Monster,” Brantlinger discusses the way narrative structure functions as a deformity throughout *Frankenstein*, its own nightmarish creation paralleling that of the monster. Testing the limits of this parallel, Brantlinger asserts, “Though able to read and to speak with great eloquence, the Monster may or may not be able to write” (472). In fact, the monster does indeed prove his ability to write in two instances within the novel. Perhaps Brantlinger’s assertion, while it is inaccurate, is aiming at a point similar to my own – that the monster *is* capable of writing, yet not in the manner in which the socially-privileged characters of the novel can. The monster can indeed write, as we will see, yet not as a successful mechanism of sociability. Therefore, to study the two isolated attempts of the monster to access social correspondence is to further understand the way in which Victor’s deviant creation has restricted the sociability of the monster.

The first instance of the reader’s access to the monster’s writing is during his recounting of his own tale, at his discussion of recording Felix and Safie’s letters – the same letters which Walton later collects from Victor as proof of the “truth of [his] tale.” The monster recounts this case of writing: “I have copies of these letters; for I found means, during my residence in the hovel, to procure the implements of writing; and the letters were often in the hands of Felix or Agatha.

Before I depart, I will give them to you, they will prove the truth of my tale..." (86). This letter transcription is an attempt at mimicking sociability, even intimacy, and just as the monster learns through mimicking social cues from literature and the physical aspects of sociability from his observations of the family, this copying of writing is an attempt to replicate the bonds of the DeLaceys. Yet this attempt is less successful than his other imitations, as the monster does not possess the means of writing his own social letters (that is, he has no correspondent), therefore making these copies a social dead-end. This moment of letter-copying illuminates another social restriction placed upon the monster, as he is barred from the most sociable form of writing – that of correspondence. The monster, throughout the entire novel, does not write or receive any letters of his own, but must copy, from a hidden “hovel,” the affectionate correspondence of the lovers he watches from afar. Nancy Yousef illuminates the ostracizing distinction between the experience of letter-writing from the cottagers perspective, and that of the monster: “...the contrasting situations of the cottagers on one side of the wall and the creature on the other invites a reckoning of the difference between experiencing language as communicative interaction and observing it from outside the interactions of which [the monster] is a part” (163).<sup>23</sup> Yousef reinforces the notion of writing as sociability, as a “communicative interaction” which the monster is unable to engage in, and therefore he must opt to observe it and replicate it as an outsider. For the monster, the DeLaceys are a standard of social norms and of the ideal family life. His literal copying of their interaction, and ultimate failure of being integrated into their family unit, once again solidifies the inability of the monster to enter society. Through the act of copying and the offer of this replication to Victor, the monster attempts to “prove” the truth of his tale, yet more significantly, to “prove” his noble attempts at solidifying social bonds before the repeated failures to establish these links

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<sup>23</sup> See Nancy Yousef's *Isolated Cases: The Anxieties of Autonomy in Enlightenment Philosophy and Romantic Literature* (2004).

turned him murderous. These copied letters do not just document the facts of his story, but are also the key to his tragic life.

Following the monster's inability to initiate himself into companionable society, the only other instance in which Shelley displays the monster's ability to write is in a moment of antagonism towards Victor, as the monster and Victor engage in a perilous chase across the tundra. The monster leaves carved writings throughout the natural environment for Victor to read as the chase ensues. Whereas the first instance of writing was an attempt at replicating normative social bonds, as a hopeful means of integration into them, the second and last instance of writing comes from a resentful and isolated space, at which time the monster is aware of his condemnation to exist outside the realms of society. Yet as we now are aware that writing implies sociability, despite any resentful or unintended purposes, it is clear that the monster writes to Victor ultimately as a provocation encouraging Victor to pursue him – a paradoxical and complex attempt at forging sociability. Of course, the true intentions of the monster in this final chase are unclear, even contradictory, when considered from the narrative point-of-view of Victor, as Victor at one point states, "sometimes [the monster], who feared that if I lost all trace I should despair and die, often left some mark to guide me" (146). Yet then Victor claims, in reference to the monster's additional writings, "What his feelings were whom I pursued, I cannot know" (147). Perhaps Victor's confusion about the monster's intentions reflects less upon Victor himself, and may be understood as an additional instance of failure on the part of the monster to engage with social exchange, to *communicate* his intentions through language. Even as the monster employs his aptitude for writing as a means of retaining social contact, he is *still* misunderstood.

Nevertheless, the reader must always consider Walton's admission of inaccuracy, and Victor's admission of editing the conversations between himself and the monster on various

occasions. The embedded structure and subjectivity of the narrative makes the prospect of finding truth in these instances nearly impossible, in that the reader will never truly know the limits of our relationship to the narrative, and with what character we are truly engaged at any particular moment. In this way, Victor's "recounting" of the monster's carvings must always be read from a skeptical view, as the relaying of these writings is entirely up to Victor's subjective interpretation. Significantly, Victor decides to recount the words of the monster immediately following his statement that he just cannot seem to understand the feelings being expressed by the monster:

Sometimes, indeed, he left marks in writing on the barks of the trees, or cut in stone, that guided me, and instigated my fury. "My reign is not yet over," (these words were legible in one of these inscriptions); "you live, and my power is complete. Follow me; I seek the everlasting ices of the north, where you will feel the misery of cold and frost, to which I am impassive. You will find near this place, if you follow not too tardily, a dead hare; eat, and be refreshed. Come on, my enemy; we have yet to wrestle for our lives; but many hard and miserable hours must you endure, until that period shall arrive." (147)

Victor's reference to the "marks" of the monster further incriminates his account as being subjective and modified, as the writing of the monster is reduced not only in his insinuations of the "unclear" meaning, but in its literal written form. The writing of the monster is clearly a formal and structured alphabetical sentence—even Victor admits that the "words were legible"—as opposed to his primary reference to a "mark," which would imply the more rudimentary carving of a shape or symbol. The monster is able to form structured sentences within a recognizable alphabet, yet Victor refers to them as more primitive and uncivilized "marks," carved into the natural environment.

As the monster's only social contact and pseudo-companion throughout the novel, Victor is perceived by the monster as being his source of "power," perhaps because Victor is the only social validation of the monster's existence. This lonesome belief of the monster is reinforced at the end of the novel, when the monster threatens to commit suicide (and likely does so) upon the death of Victor. The physical death of Victor thus represents the metaphoric (and soon to be literal) death of the monster, in that once Victor is gone, there remains no social link or validation of the monster's existence.

While this chase scene is in many ways relayed through Victor's subjective interpretation, it is significant to note the clear way in which this chase keeps Victor locked in a social link with the monster, while paradoxically drawing Victor even further away from society. Perhaps this distancing from society is a result of the monster's inherent exclusion from it, a sort of contamination of Victor as he again returns to the realm of isolation because of his innovation. Yet as we have seen evidenced by Victor's suspect motivations and intentions throughout the novel, the possibility remains open that Victor has *always* desired the very isolation the monster ultimately provides. Frances Ferguson, in "The Gothicism of the Gothic Novel," reflects upon this possibility, and discusses the ever-present dynamic between Victor and the monster; the incessant interplay between isolation and companionship, and between flight and pursuit:

Victor has abandoned his family so as to make a creature to keep him company, and...abandoned (and fled) his creature so as to be alone to search for friends...this amiable isolation, like Victor's persistent inclination to think that his creature murderously stalks him...makes creatures and friends in Quixotic fashion. (105)

This dynamic present between the monster and Victor is especially evidenced by Victor's incessant return to natural environments and barren landscapes. This immersion in nature not only

illuminates his inherent desires to remain alone and within seclusion, but these environments also happen to be the same stomping grounds of the monster whom he claims is “his mortal enemy,” who had fled to these environments as a result of his ejection from society.

The macho-bravado of both Victor and the monster is reflected in their language of antagonism and violence, yet Shelley imbues their flight-pursuit relationship with a subtle touch of contradictory emotional companionship on the part of the monster. This subtlety brings into question Victor’s amendments to the manuscript, in that we are reminded of the suggestion that he has changed the language of the monster to make him appear more hostile than he had truly been. This possibility is also reflected by Victor’s repeated assurances that he does not understand the monster’s intentions, following his contradictory assumptions of the monster’s thoughts. Perhaps this is a slip of accuracy on Victor’s behalf, as he attempts to cover his tracks of amending the monster’s words. These subtle moments of thoughtfulness appear repeatedly in the monster’s carvings, at such moments when he writes: “Prepare! Your toils only begin: wrap yourself in furs, and provide food, for we shall soon enter upon a journey where your sufferings will satisfy my ever-lasting hatred” (148). The monster’s desire for companionship is evident in these moments as the monster warns Victor of the comforts he will need to survive (that is, warm clothing and food), so that Victor may follow him ceaselessly. This care prompts a painful recognition of the monster’s still-present love for Victor, and not-so-subtle desire to have Victor as comfortable as possible while forcing him into conditions of “suffering” – a flight which has no ultimate destination for the monster to reach, except the goal of having Victor endlessly forge the bond of sociability in pursuit of his creation.

While the monster’s isolated creation restricts him from ever entering into the realms of society he so ardently desires, his final moment of written correspondence does indeed bring him

a bond of sociability, and, although it is born of resentment, antagonism, and forced pursuit, it still functions as an instance where Victor and the monster are engaged in a mutual relationship. Quite unfortunately for the monster, this final moment of attaining Victor's attention ultimately ends in death for the both of them, with the physical death of Victor signifying the destruction of the monster's only hope at sociability, the end of the sole tentative link he possessed to the social world. Without this remaining tether to the hope of overcoming his isolated creation and entering into the realms of sociability, the monster ends his own life, thus bringing an end to the novel itself. A creature born of isolation is doomed to live in isolation, and to therefore die in isolation.



## Conclusion

Despite the distance of more than two hundred years between Mary Shelley's creation of *Frankenstein* and our current moment, her radical creation still remains influential in our contemporary culture and our literary-historical legacy. Through her engagement with psychological principles of consciousness and the inherent human desire for sociability, and the sophistication of her literary depictions of these psychological desires, Shelley's novel inserts the reader into the narrative as an active participant in its intertwining tales. Her radical experiment of creating a novel combining complex formal techniques and pioneering science is ultimately successful, producing an intelligible narrative while simultaneously defying our preconceptions of what a literary novel can do. We are obligated to question Shelley, her characters, and the production of the novel itself – therefore questioning ourselves as readers and our own preconceived notions and psychological states we bring to our reading of the text.

By approaching the novel through a historically-informed perspective focused on Shelley's intellectual moment, followed by a formalist exploration of the text's narrative choices, I have attempted to defy a long-established trope within Shelley scholarship. That is, instead of referencing her personal life and tragedies, and reflecting these onto my study of *Frankenstein*, I have broadened the scope, and attended to the complexity of the novel itself and its dynamic relationship within Romantic intellectual life. I have attempted to explore the way that Shelley's intellectual grasp on vast scientific and historical developments informed her writing of the novel both in form and content. These biographical readings I have found so limiting in my studies also tend to be revisionist in their account of Shelley's life, considering that she herself assures us that the novel “was the offspring of happy days, when death and grief were but words, which found no

true echo in my heart” (169). The novel is a production of creativity and intellect, and therefore not a simplistic reflection of tragedy and grief.

Mary Shelley was a cultured intellectual and insightful writer, whose array of knowledge and insights allowed her to craft a novel of such intricacies – a novel which successfully engages with her social and intellectual environment, yet provides the contemporary reader the insight to peer into ourselves, our own society, and our own intellects. Throughout my argument, I have been hesitant to use one of the most powerful quotations of Shelley in reference to her novel, as it has become widely clichéd within Shelley scholarship. Most lovers of literature will recognize Shelley’s declaration to her novel: “I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper” (169).

However, I must insist that I am not a cliché. I mention this quote now, in closing, only in rebellion against the myriad of scholarly approaches which interpret this line as evidence for Shelley’s reflection on the calamities of her life – say, the death of her own progeny which are echoed in the birth of the novel, and her role as the grief-stricken mother of both. Such criticism devalues the intellectual thought behind her creation, retrospectively attributing it to her emotional significance as a woman, as a mother, and as a wife. Instead, in my interpretation of Shelley’s novel, I see this line as one of appreciation and good humor, indeed the following line is “I have an affection for it.” The novel is a creation born of deep knowledge, carefully articulated through reflection upon rational and scientific theory. A complex arrangement of literary convention and innovative creativity, perhaps it may indeed be hideous to those who do not understand its complexity, but as Shelley hoped, *Frankenstein* does indeed go forth and prosper, even more than two centuries later.

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