Andrew Wildermuth*

Measured Life: Making Live, the "Modern System of Science," and the Animated Bodies of *Frankenstein*

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Abstract: This article considers Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* through what Sara Guyer calls "biopoetics," hybridizing biopolitical and romantic reading strategies, and positing that romantic writing arises in temporal, theoretical, and political parallel with the movement of power from the reign of the sovereign to the realm of biopower. I focus on how *Frankenstein* imagines the flesh of Victor as animated and directed forward through biopower, by way of the novel's juxtaposed medico-scientific and romantic discourse of life. Through close readings of the creation scene and Victor's final breaths aboard Walton's exploratory Arctic ship, I conclude that *Frankenstein* at last offers itself both as artifact and archaeology of modern power—or what Guyer calls "literature as a form of biopower."

Keywords: *Frankenstein*, romanticism, modern power, biopoetics, materialism

1 Introduction

Mary Shelley's magnum opus, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, was produced as the structures of what Michel Foucault refers to as "modern society" became firmly established and far reaching. According to Foucault, "Anatomo-politics" and "Bio-politics" form the two basic poles that propped up a modern "power over life" following the ancient reign of the sovereign: "The ancient right to *take* life or *let* live was replaced by a power to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death" (Foucault 1978, p. 138; original emphasis). After establishing the developments of these two poles of modern power "linked together," Foucault further intimates the relations between power and life:

> The setting up, in the course of the classical age, of this great bipolar technology—anatomic and biological, individualizing and specifying, directed toward the performances of the body,

***Corresponding author: Andrew Wildermuth**, M. A., North American Studies, Friedrich Schiller University Jena, Graduiertenkolleg Modell Romantik, Bachstraße 18k, Jena, Germany,
E-mail: andrew.wildermuth@uni-jena.de

> with attention to the processes of life—characterized a power whose highest function was perhaps no longer to kill, but to invest in life through and through. (139)

Here, I welcome Lauren Berlant's helpful rephrasing of Foucault's one-time formulation, reminding that biopower "does not substitute for but reshapes sovereignty, is the power to *make* something live or to let it die, the power to regularize life, the authority to *force* living not just to happen but to endure and appear in particular ways" (Berlant 2011, p. 97; original emphasis). I share Berlant's interest in biopower's nuanced and subtle materialization at the site of bodies, emotions, and events, and in how what seem to be wholly individualistic urges are inseparable from the discursive-material structures with which the subject is part and parcel. "The difference between sovereign agency under a regime of sovereignty and under a regime of biopower," writes Berlant, "can be thought of as a distinction between individual life and collective living on, where living increasingly becomes a scene of the administration, discipline, and recalibration of what constitutes health" (97).

With biopower and the distinction between "individual life and collective living on" in mind, I turn to consider romantic literature—itself aimed at life and living; dynamic systems; relations between life, power, language—and specifically to how its major works arise in both historical and theoretical parallel with what has largely come to be recognized as a new epoch, this *thing* called 'modernity,' alongside the development of a network of power that discreetly manifests and depends upon the site of the body directed through discourse, flushed with life. This article is therefore positioned alongside recent turns in romantic criticism that emphasize the political dimensions of historical romanticism, as well as its afterlives in contemporary literature and culture.

In this article I particularly build on Guyer's 2015 book, *Reading with John Clare: Biopoetics, Romanticism*. Along with two other texts referenced in this article (Mitchell 2021; Rohrbach 2016), Guyer's book is part of Fordham University Press's "Lit Z" series, co-edited by Guyer herself and Brian McGrath, which explicitly positions its titles as resurrection and correction of romanticisms, as well as an anticipator of related future liberatory critical theory. From the front matter of each of the series's 21 titles, the editors write of romanticism's ongoing relevance:

> At least since Friedrich Schlegel, thinking that affirms literature's own untimeliness has been named romanticism. Recalling this history, Lit Z exemplifies the survival of romanticism as a mode of contemporary criticism, as well as forms of contemporary criticism that demonstrate the unfulfilled possibilities of romanticism. Whether or not they focus on the romantic period, books in this series epitomize romanticism as a way of thinking that compels another relation to the present.

I specifically take up Sara Guyer's description of how the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries constitute an era in which life begins to "emerge as an object (both an aim and concern) of poetry and politics" and in which "*making life* is the

spirit of the age" (Guyer 2015, p. 2; original emphasis). Guyer resists reading this overlap as a mere "terminological accident," but, rather, through what she posits as a *biopoetical* critical lens, she argues one might see this as a "convergence of sociopolitical and rhetorical-lyrical preoccupations with making live" (3) and, following Foucault, a modern urge toward categorizing and managing *life*.

Guyer's conceptualization of biopoetics is applied in my close readings of the romantic classic, *Frankenstein*. As Guyer acknowledges in *Reading with John Clare*, *Frankenstein* seems like an essential text to read through overlapping romantic and biopolitical lenses—with its attention to vitality, science, population, and life. The novel overflows with descriptions of incessant rejuvenation and depletion of life force—spasms, faintings, hysterical euphorias, drenched sobbing. Adopting Foucault's language, I suggest we might read Shelley's text, and romanticisms more generally, as modern literature "directed toward the performances of the body, with attention to the processes of life"—and, as I argue in my close readings below, literature in which the modern *making live*, not the ancient *taking life*, is of central political and philosophical concern. *Frankenstein* examines bodies as the sites where discursive power networks—what the novel posits as the work of "modern poets" (19), "modern natural philosophy" (46), and "a modern system of science" (38)—animate and direct bodies forward, in useful ways. That is, the novel offers an early romantic intimation of biopower at the precise historical time, in the first years of the nineteenth century, when Foucault writes that "Anatomo-politics" and "Bio-politics" first merged (Foucault 1978, p. 138). This contemporaneous literary reckoning comes clear in Victor's narrative recollection of the psychic and physical states that overcome his being while the creature surveils him—the creature whom the novel understands as built by, and thus a literal personification of, the "modern system of science." Victor cannot understand this fundamental relation between his passion and discourse, and frequently contradicts himself as to his actions' origins, calling it in turn a personal, natural, or spiritual process. I am unsure, therefore, of Kathleen Béres Rogers's reading of Victor's "enthusiasm" as "egocentric, self-absorbed" and remaining within the boundaries of psychology (Béres Rogers 2019, p. 60). Instead, I argue here through biopoetical close readings that *Frankenstein* proposes it is in fact an inestimable modern, social, material-discursive energetic realm—I believe what through critical theory, we now call biopower—that informs, animates, and directs forms of flesh and text.

To demonstrate this thesis, I juxtapose close readings of two critical scenes from *Frankenstein*. Both scenes begin in extreme and scientific settings, only possibly reached in the modern epoch: the stormy laboratory and the stormy Arctic ship. First, I consider the narrative transference of Victor's "will to knowledge" to a paranoia of being stalked, as the creature—brought to be through "natural science"—comes alive in the laboratory. I focus here on how Victor's ensuing wild

fluctuations in animation are revealed to be inspired not by personal vendetta, but by the mysterious forces of modern power. In my second close reading, I turn to Victor's final scene in the novel: guarded by Captain Walton, life force leaves the young scientist on board the ship in the Arctic, but not before final jolts of life swell and recede. There, I conclude the study by reflecting on the novel as both actualization and critique of the techniques of biopower, effected in part through ambiguity regarding the origins of the novel's narrative and focalization. I aim to show that this is especially compelling in light of the novel's self-awareness as a romantic piece of literature, on the cusp of great global changes, that attempts to bring forth a life of its own—offering itself both as archaeology and artifact of the realms of modern power.

2 The Body Made to Live

The first sections of *Frankenstein* I consider are Chapters IV and V of the novel's first volume. Chapter IV provides Victor's recollection of the final time before the creature comes to life: this includes his rigorous study, the gathering of body parts and preparation of the lab, and, most importantly for the focus of this article, Victor's wild fluctuations in health described in precise and dramatic language. Then, I shift to Chapter V's documentation of the creature's being "imbued with life" and Victor's flight. Rather than focus on life entering the creature's flesh, I analyze how it is the states of his own body that Victor most prominently recalls: the immense series of depletions and rejuvenations of life force throughout his attempts to conquer life. Here, I pay attention to how, while the exact nature of the forces by which bodies are seized in *Frankenstein* remains somewhat mysterious—which I argue can itself be read as biopower—the novel leaves no uncertainty that these forces become materialized into the matter of its own characters' flesh and its own poetics. Following Sara Guyer, I read this through a biopoetical lens as a romantic rendering of and working through biopower. I suggest the novel directs the reader toward understanding the energizing forces of its characters' bodies not as isolated psychological experience, but as the bodily crystallization of modern material-discursive power networks.

It is at the modern university that Victor's "progress" begins, in his studies in Ingolstadt, regarding which he boasts "[m]y ardour was indeed the astonishment of the students, and my proficiency that of the masters," and describes being "heart and soul" in the study of "natural philosophy" (49). Victor expresses vast consolation in the efforts of modern research, earlier having remembered Professor Waldman's claim that scientists, renegades of the modern world, have "indeed performed miracles" and "ascend into the heavens: they have discovered how the

blood circulates, and the nature of the air we breathe" (47). Demonstrating limitless hope in the transcendent powers of science, Victor continues to develop his aspirations to "pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation" (47). Two years into his studies, Victor becomes struck by a particular interest which quickly accelerates into the plotline for which the novel is famous: "One of the phenomena which had peculiarly attracted my attention was the structure of the human frame, and, indeed, any animal endued with life. Whence, I often asked myself, did the principle of life proceed?" (50). The young scientist goes on to describe himself being "animated by an almost supernatural enthusiasm" in his pursuit of the essence of life (50). Only one page later, Victor tells of his ultimate success in "discovering the cause of generation and life; nay, more, I became myself capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter" (51). Victor is described by himself, through the objectifying habits of scientific analysis, as being physically overcome by the mysterious "variety of feelings which bore [him] onwards, like a hurricane, in the first enthusiasm of success" (52).

While the novel is overwhelmingly concerned with bodies and what moves them, the creation scene is especially dense with description of animated matter. Victor uses the expression "bestow animation," for instance, on three consecutive pages, including twice in the exactly repeated phrase "bestow animation upon lifeless matter" (51–3). But the growing and gathered bits of the creature's body are not the only, or even the primary, body described in the laboratory. While decorating itself in life-charged language, the text also explicitly refers to the matter of Victor's body glowing with or being rescinded of life during both his mysterious zeal for creation and in his real-time recounting this story to Walton aboard the ship, the documentation of which is supposedly the manuscript *Frankenstein*'s reader encounters. Victor describes his time in the laboratory, and the mysterious force that "urged [him] forward," as follows:

> I pursued my undertaking with unremitting ardour. My cheek had grown pale with study, and my person had become emaciated with confinement […]. Who shall conceive the horrors of my secret toils I dabbled among the unhallowed damps of the grave or tortured the living animal to animate the lifeless clay? My limbs now tremble, and my eyes swim with the remembrance; but then a resistless, and almost frantic impulse, urged me forward; I seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit. (53)

Victor thus uses the inspecting mode of the scientist's "classifications" and "discrimination" to recall his own body under the spell of scientific zeal. Like his "dabble" in the "damps of the grave" or the "tortured living animal," Victor's spirits and flesh are described under the scientist's prodding and documenting gaze. He writes, for example, that his cheek had "grown pale with study," his

"person had become emaciated with confinement," and that his "limbs now tremble" and tears "swim" in his eyes as he retells the story supposedly about another being's animation: the discursive logics of medical science, however, are here internalized, embodying the "distinctly modern, encyclopedic quest for the exhaustive taxonomy, classification, and the methodical aggregation of concrete entities" (Mitchell and Pfau 2014, n.pag.).

Victor continues this scientific self-documentation in this same paragraph to recall that his "eyeballs were starting from their sockets in attending to the details of [his] employment" (53). Thus, it is even in the act of "attending to details" of cutting-edge experiment that Victor's eyes, the organs that allow for categorizing and discriminating, begin to literally depart his body—on the verge of discovery, and on the verge of his moving corpse and the world. We might compare this to the description of his ambitious project on just the previous page, in which Victor spectates on the yet unanimated creature's "intricacies of fibres, muscles, and veins" (52); or of when the creature is finally alive, as the reader is told of his "watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set" (56). Indeed, the very first sign of the creature's life that both the reader and Victor observe is the opening of the creature's "dull yellow eye," in Chapter V's famous first paragraph describing that "dreary night of November" in the laboratory:

> With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs. (56)

It is not just the creature's and creator's eyes sitting on the edge of what holds them, but almost everything in this description, and in these two chapters at large, seems on the verge: Victor is filled with an anxiety that is "almost" agonizing; at one in the morning, it is on the cusp of a new day; the candle is almost, but not quite, burned through, causing "half-extinguished" light that permits the scientist to work and behold the "accomplishment of [his] toils." The novel is thus insistent on imagining Victor's wild mood swings through the scientist's discrimination of natural extremes. The creature comes to life by "spark" in a thunderstorm, and the Arctic and the Alps are often the sites of the novel's most climactic exchanges. Victor's body, too, is offered, through literary metaphor, as understandable through extreme weather and climate: for instance, Victor describes his being swept up into scientific enthusiasm as like "a hurricane" (52). He continues: "Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world" (52). This metaphor of Victor's mood-as-

climate-disaster is extended in the novel's final section, which I consider later, as Victor is penned by Walton—himself charting the extremities of the Arctic—as an erupting volcano.

Having established examples of how Victor's own body is described through the very discriminating scientific discourse that animates his project, I turn to consider his immediate flight from the creature whom he so long struggled to bring to life. Victor's psychic breakdown coincides with anxious inconsistencies in his account (mediated by fellow scientist-explorer Walton) of the forces that push him forward. When the creature finally opened his eye, breathed, and "convulsed," Victor recalls of his modern project: "but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart" (56). It is only when the creature's body is "endued with animation" that Victor fully realizes his horror and disgust. "I had gazed upon him while unfinished," Victor says. "He was ugly then; but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived" (57). This literary self-positioning in the European horror tradition, however, is about as explicit of an explanation the reader gets for why Victor so boundlessly despises his creature. Victor claims he hates his creature because it moves, and the creator thus tragically sees himself (Gigante 2014, p. 193). But with the above-analyzed descriptions of vigorous scientific study and experimentation in mind, I suggest there is something greater behind Victor's animation: there are dynamic networks of power, directing his movement, thought, and speech. There is biopower.

It is with this same careful examination and surveillance of the specimen body that Victor remembers his own abandonment of the newly enlivened creature, his great achievement brought on by scientific advance:

> I escaped, and rushed downstairs. I took refuge in the courtyard belonging to the house which I inhabited; where I remained during the rest of the night, walking up and down in the greatest agitation, listening attentively, catching and fearing each sound as if it were to announce the approach of the demoniacal corpse to which I had so miserably given life […].
>
> Sometimes my pulse beat so quickly and hardly that I felt the palpitation of every artery; at others I nearly sank to the ground through languor and extreme weakness. (57)

The movement of the creature, the very aim of Victor's years-long labor, literally propels the limits of Victor's own body, and with it the novel's plot, into a series of wild transformations and geographical relocations documented at the site of moving flesh. The text performs the protagonist's scientific obsessiveness toward the documentation of the body "endued with life" (closely foreshadowing Foucault's description of "the body imbued with the mechanics of life"), itself demonstrating and documenting the "modern system of science" (Shelley [1818]

1992, p. 38) that produced, or gave birth to, Victor's insatiable will to make live. As Robert Mitchell notes in *Infectious Liberty*, upon *Frankenstein*'s publication, the concept of "population" was indeed already "biopolitical," and "stitched together multiple (and often incompatible) models and theories of what a population was, how one gathered information about population dynamics, and how that knowledge related to political action" (Mitchell 2021, p. 68). In Victor's making life in the laboratory, I argue that modern power networks are "stitched together" to ultimately constitute the primary protagonist of *Frankenstein*: that which compels and makes possible the plot, that which organizes the story's intradiegetic oral and written production, fusing together biopolitical and literary production of life.

There exists an extradiegetic level, too, in which the novel positions its own romantic poetics as co-existing with these real-world power dynamics. A clear example comes when Victor recalls himself "impelled to hurry on" to flee the creature, and attempts to do so "by bodily exercise to ease the load that weighed upon [his] mind" when his "heart palpitated in the sickness of fear" and he "hurried on with irregular steps, not daring to look about" (58). Fascinatingly, while outlining this precarious physical grip on Victor's body, a six-line excerpt from Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) appears, which an original footnote of Shelley's even explicitly marks as the quintessentially romantic poet's work. Twice more in *Frankenstein* are contemporaneous romantic poets quoted: eight lines of Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" (1798) are quoted during Victor's travels north to Scotland with Clerval, again marked by an original Shelley footnote (151); and eight lines of "Mutability" (1816) by Shelley's husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley, are quoted, but are curiously the only case without a footnote (95). The citations of Coleridge's and Wordsworth's 1798 poems make the only footnotes in the entire novel, marking a distinct effort of text to place itself alongside life-discourse not only of modern science, but also of modern romantic literature—and, crucially, as Guyer and Mitchell argue, to reveal these two twin developments as taking place in and engaging the same precarious political environments.

This interweaving of modern literary and scientific discourse is further aided by the accompaniment of Henry Clerval. It is in the paragraph that immediately follows the insertion of Coleridge's verse, the novel's first example of romantic poetry, that Victor's flight is abruptly and unexpectedly interrupted by the "alighting" of Clerval, his childhood friend, at the university in Ingolstadt, who refers to this as his "voyage of discovery to the land of knowledge" (59). Unlike Victor, however, Clerval decides to attend university to study classics and "the oriental languages," himself a rambling and lively literary man whom Victor later calls "alive to every new scene" (149) and desiring of "the intercourse of the men of genius and talent who flourished at this time" (153). While Victor claims that Clerval's modern "literary pursuits differed wholly from those which had occupied" his own "tastes for natural science"

(67), they are also presented intimately traveling together and analyzing the power flows of the world. Clerval's linguistic studies are furthermore explicitly linked to power in the European colony, as "his design was to visit India, in the belief that he had in his knowledge […] the means of materially assisting the progress of European colonization and trade" (153). Both characters are engaged in, and physically propelled and marked by, modern networks of power over life.

Clerval's arrival is no exception to the series of events that physically mark themselves on Victor's body. Shifting from his "heart palpitat[ing] in the sickness of fear" from just two paragraphs before, Victor then recalls the cleansing nature of his childhood friend's accompaniment, imagined through quintessentially romantic discourse of home and family:

> Nothing could equal my delight on seeing Clerval; his presence brought back to my thoughts my father, Elizabeth, and all those scenes of home so dear to my recollection. I grasped his hand, and in a moment forgot my horror and misfortune; I felt suddenly, and for the first time during many months, calm and serene joy. (58)

But Victor's affliction continues, as his state of being fluctuates wildly in the presence of his friend. Upon Clerval noting to Victor "how very ill you appear; so thin and pale," Victor is again described as being physically crushed by his science-induced anxiety. Victor "trembled excessively" at his friend's concern, but is then reminded that the creature could still be in his apartment "alive and walking about" (59). Upon anxiously inspecting and finding his apartment "freed from its hideous guest," Victor describes his feelings:

> I could hardly believe that so great a good fortune could have befallen me […]. I clapped my hands for joy and ran down to Clerval […].
>
> I was unable to contain myself. It was not only joy that possessed me; I felt my flesh tingle with excess of sensitiveness, and my pulse beat rapidly. I was unable to remain for a single instant in the same place; I jumped over the chairs, clapped my hands, and laughed aloud. Clerval at first attributed my unusual spirits to joy on his arrival, but when he observed me more attentively, he saw a wildness in my eyes for which he could not account; and my loud, unrestrained, heartless laughter frightened and astonished him. (60)

Some mysterious force "which he could not account" for "possessed" Victor, and it is again at the site of the body—the movement of eyes, pulse, and hands—that this force is documented through a catalogue of various "animations." Victor, thus, continues to offer himself as specimen being worked on by a greater power, from which we are encouraged to, like Clerval, diagnose some malady: "Poor Clerval! what must have been his feelings? A meeting which he anticipated with such joy, so strangely turned to bitterness. But I was not the witness of his grief; for I was lifeless, and did not recover my senses for a long, long time" (60).

That Victor imagines the barometer of his spirits being tied to his ability to "witness," to sense, to inspect, is a repeated trope throughout the novel. In the midst of his scientific fury to make live, Victor says "I did not watch the blossom or the expanding leaves—sights which before always yielded me supreme delight," to demonstrate his lack of life (54). However, here in his time with Clerval, it is perceiving seasonal change that he employs as a gauge for his being "restored to life" (60):

> By very slow degrees and with frequent relapses that alarmed and grieved my friend, I recovered. I remember the first time I became capable of observing outward objects with any kind of pleasure, I perceived that the fallen leaves had disappeared and that the young buds were shooting forth from the trees that shaded my window. It was a divine spring; and the season contributed greatly to my convalescence. I felt also sentiments of joy and affection revive in my bosom; my gloom disappeared, and in a short time I became as cheerful as before I was attacked by the fatal passion. (61)

It is a sensitivity for "observation" and "perception" that make for the gauge of life. Life is described as a flowing and fluctuating process, which Victor sketches through both high-romantic and medico-scientific language. While the "fallen leaves had disappeared," a new life process had begun: "the young buds were shooting forth from the trees," which eclipses winter's death instinct. This cyclical revitalization is recorded in a "divine spring," which allows for both Victor's return to equilibrium, to natural balance and order, and to corresponding "sentiments of joy and affection": juxtaposing, marveling, and bringing under surveillance Victor and Clerval's related, yet rival, modes of rendering the modern world.

The novel famous for making dead matter move ironically resists a binary understanding of life, instead documenting the shifting life force of its characters and environments as related to the discursive networks that embody themselves as zealous movement, passion, obsession, and narration itself. The reader is thereby asked to read what bursts and plays on Victor's body, and in the text, not simply as a horror story in which an immortal chases a mortal, nor as individual obsession confined to the psychological realm. Rather, the novel's insistence on stimulating, inspecting, and juxtaposing the lines between modern-scientific and modern-romantic logics of life brings the reader into a literary encounter of the zone where bodies and discourse meet, where animated subjective passions confront networks of shared knowledge, to a realm of power that renders indecipherable, impossible, the "distinction between individual life and collective living on" (Berlant 2011, p. 97).

3 Life that Leaves the Creator

On board the Arctic ship, heading toward the glory of uncharted waters and the world's extreme end, Victor concludes reciting his story as he concludes his life. In

my reading of this scene, I shift to explore the narrative turn in which Captain Walton withdraws the novel's focalization from Victor and resumes it himself, as he returns to writing directly to his sister—the intimate letters of which the novel supposedly allows the reader to peek into. It is again the site of the enthused body in an extreme setting—a setting possible only through modern science and the narrator's will to be first at the world's end—that allows the text to return to the real-time narration with which the novel begins. Furthermore, I consider how Victor continues to describe the mysterious force that maintains his irrational chase of the creature, paralleling his earlier claims of fervent scientific ambition in the laboratory. While Victor struggles to explain the origin of this force, to the reader it is clearly the creature itself: the creature whom, as argued above, I read as a literary embodiment of biopower. I conclude that this deepens the novel's complex, interweaving understandings of how power materializes in bodies and shapes discourse of life, as the novel ultimately reveals itself as both actant in and artifact of the discourse of "the modern enquirers" (Shelley [1818] 1992, p. 49).

It is with no ambition but to destroy his creation that Victor recalls himself pulled to the top of the world. Victor's enemy, however, is he who keeps him alive, who makes him live. "My reign is not yet over," the creature etches into a tree so that Victor finds it. "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" (198). It is thus that the creature created through scientific apparatuses sustains his creator and demonstrates his power over him. Yet Victor, overcome by the desire to end his creation, seems incapable of understanding the creature's relation to the productive networks of control of body and mind—which Victor remembers as "a mechanical impulse of some power of which I was unconscious" (198). To the reader, however, irony grows as it becomes clear that the creature, an embodiment of biopower, keeps Victor alive as a means of directing his body forward, closer to him. In the Foucauldian language with which this article begins, I read this as a literary rendering of the modern power to "*foster* life, or *disallow* it to the point of death" (138; original emphasis). *Frankenstein* is again shown to be structured alongside the logics of biopower, asserting life not as an off-and-on switch, but as a modern material-discursive network that creatively animates, manages, and directs bodies forward in useful ways.

However, lacking awareness of his own actions' origins, Victor rigorously pursues the creature into "the utmost boundary of the horizon" (199), a process he rather understands through spiritual reference in thanking his "guiding spirit for conducting [him] in safety to the place where [he] had hoped" (199). Filled with what he recalls as faith, Victor's body remains alive for the creature's power play through an "almost endless journey across the mountainous ices of the ocean — amidst a

cold that few of the inhabitants could long endure" (200). Again, Victor describes these sentiments as a performance on his skin, and again, in addition to the spiritual, he reaches out to extreme natural imagery and metaphor as a means of conveying the severity of his situation. He continues: "Yet at the idea that the fiend should live and be triumphant, my rage and vengeance returned, and, like a mighty tide, overwhelmed every other feeling" (200). It is through the romantic language of spiritual ecstasy and documentation of uncontrollable, unmappable natural extremes that Victor attempts articulating the overwhelming forces that drive his body, thereby remaining ignorant of the modern nexuses of power that take part in his 'progress.' On the following page, for instance, he explicitly remembers his tears being produced by, and interfering with, what feels like a personal ambition to seize his creation:

> Oh! with what a burning gush did hope revisit my heart! warm tears filled my eyes, which I hastily wiped away, that they might not intercept the view I had of the daemon; but still my sight was dimmed by the burning drops, until, giving way to the emotions that oppressed me, I wept aloud. (200)

Actualizing romantic literary techniques of the sublime, Victor recounts the climax of his story by confusing emotional and physical states of pain and pleasure: "behold[ing] my enemy at no more than a mile distant, my heart bounded within me" (201). He writes his "hopes were extinguished" as

> [a] ground sea was heard; the thunder of its progress, as the waters rolled and swelled beneath me, became every moment more ominous and terrific. I pressed on, but in vain. The wind arose; the sea roared; and, as with the mighty shock of an earthquake, it split, and cracked with a tremendous and overwhelming sound. The work was soon finished: in a few minutes a tumultuous sea rolled between me and my enemy, and I was left drifting on a scattered piece of ice, that was continually lessening, and thus preparing for me a hideous death. (201)

It is in this precise moment, when his bodily states are described in the most extreme earthly situation fathomable, and in "infinite fatigue," that Victor recalls finally seeing Walton's pioneering boat—alongside a *thunder of progress*—which launches the novel into the narration's present tense in which Walton pens letters to his sister. This dramatic shift is further formally performed in the text with Walton's narrative interjection, center justified and inserted as its own paragraph:

> "WALTON, *in continuation*" (202).

It is thus with the end of Victor's life that his strength over the story dies. When in extremity life recedes from him, his focalization, too, dissipates. But both live on

intra- and extradiegetically through Walton's memory and the novel's own dynamic romantic poetics.

"You have read this strange and terrific story, Margaret," begins Walton's reclamation of the narration. He continues to explicitly describe how Victor *was*, the state of his body and being, as he told his story, as well as how Walton received the story and how he imagines his sister might do the same:

> And do you [Margaret] not feel your blood congeal with horror, like that which even now curdles mine? Sometimes, seized with sudden agony, [Victor] could not continue his tale; at others, his voice broken, yet piercing, uttered with difficulty the words so replete with anguish. His fine and lovely eyes were now lighted up with indignation, now subdued to downcast sorrow, and quenched in infinite wretchedness. Sometimes he commanded his countenance and tones, and related the most horrible incidents with a tranquil voice, suppressing every mark of agitation; then, like a volcano bursting forth, his face would suddenly change to an expression of the wildest rage, as he shrieked out imprecations on his persecutor. (202)

At this critical poetical and narrative juncture, upon turning to Walton's narration, the novel commits absolutely to its determination to trace the body through the animation of its parts and to chart it through metaphors of uncontrollable and unfathomable dimensions of power: "blood congeal with horror," "fine and lovely eyes were now lighted up with indignation," "like a volcano bursting forth," "wildest rage." This therefore makes a critical scene in my account of *Frankenstein*'s stitching together biopower and literary power. Upon assuming the focalization of the narrative, Walton immediately opts to describe Victor in exactly the ways that Victor had supposedly been describing himself, and other animated forms, throughout the novel: dramatically enlivened with or deprived of a field of fluctuating power that enters and leaves material bodies.

I suggest this uncanny continuation of voice and documentary style effects three important and overlapping possibilities in the text, all central to the novel's dynamic relation to biopower. First, the parallel narration casts intradiegetic doubt on Victor's subjectivity in the novel's narration. Has one scientist, Walton, simply overedited the documents of the other scientist, Victor, adding yet another specimen to his archive over whose life he exerts power through ordering, editing, omitting? Second, has Walton been so personally moved by Victor's enthusiastic, inspiring account of the power of science, so as to have adopted, or been infected with, Victor's passion and mode of description? Third, and relatedly, do these two ambitious scientist-explorers hold similar ways of categorizing, understanding, and describing the world because they are both so thoroughly embedded in medico-scientific discourse of life and techno-progress? That is, do Victor and Walton write the same because the same biopower speaks through them in the same ways? With the same cadence, the same diction, the same focus, both equally "anatomic and

biological, individualizing and specifying, directed toward the performances of the body, with attention to the processes of life" (Foucault 1978, p. 139)?

The provocative ambiguity of these questions maintains all three as viable, interdependent readings, while further demanding interpretation of the novel through critical perspectives of where discourse and power meet. This provides perhaps the most clear and compelling example of what Sara Guyer mentions as *Frankenstein*'s "analogy between what Foucault calls *biopower* and literary power—or literature as a form of biopower" (Guyer 2015, p. 2; original emphasis). *Frankenstein*'s relating literary power to biopower comes clearest at the novel's intersections of power and poetics: the narration, focalization, and figurative language—the novel entirely—reveal themselves as made up of precisely the ungraspable shifts of modern power that they themselves attempt to sketch, touch, and redirect. It becomes literature reaching out, in a time of unimaginable social change, through the dampness of "modernity's mist": into "the radical unpredictability of what was to come and of how the present would look from that inaccessible future vantage" (Rohrbach 2016, p. 1). While his narrative trustworthiness might remain in question, Walton states that this hybrid modern manuscript was a collaborative construction. Victor "discovered that [Walton] made notes concerning his history" and "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" (Shelley [1818] 1992, p. 203). Like they did to the corpse of the creature, Victor's probing "corrections and augmentations" give "life and spirit" to the manuscript. Once again, the process of writing and editing of language is, in the novel's and its namesake's final moments, imagined as a process strictly related to shaping modern *life*. Walton remembers Victor's response to finding the manuscript as follows: "'Since you have preserved my narration', said he, 'I would not that a mutilated one should go down to posterity'" (203). How could Victor let yet another *mutilated* thing see life—this time his own "narration," an ever-living text—past the misty modern present and into formable futures?

While Walton attempts to "reconcile" Victor himself "to life," Victor "repulses the idea" and demands to let natural forces overtake him. His story's life is enough. It is here in the world's most extreme end that Victor leaves. "Encompassed by peril" (205) in the Arctic storm, Walton somehow makes time to pen Victor's final moments: "he rouses [the sailors'] energies" (206); "a feverish fire still glimmers in his eyes, but he is exhausted, and […] speedily sinks again into apparent lifelessness" (206); "his eyes sparkled, and his cheeks flushed with momentary vigour" (207). He offers final morals to Walton, telling that it was "in a fit of enthusiastic madness that I created a rational creature," and defends his refusal to love the creature, before finally bequeathing Walton with the task to "undertake

my unfinished work" (209). The creator's last words: "Seek happiness in tranquility, and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries. Yet why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed" (210). On his deathbed, a tortured Victor still cannot abandon his possession by a hope in the possibility of progress through productivity—productivity propelled by mysterious networks of modern power, embedded in discourse, and embodied in the directed movement of matter made to live. Victor cannot abandon biopower.

4 Conclusion: The Curated Complex

I have argued that *Frankenstein* performs two primary moves that negotiate biopower. First, the novel is basically invested in descriptions of bodies of matter come to life, and intuits the existence of a mysterious realm of distinctly modern power, which is always related to discourse, that animates and directs these bodies forward. I suggest we can learn much from reading this mysterious, instructive, productive realm through what we now call biopower. Second, and relatedly, the novel makes explicit its own biopoetical situation in the dynamic material-discursive network of biopower—through, for example, self-reference to its own enthusiastic employment of romantic and medico-scientific discourse of life, through emphasis on the ambiguity of the curated narrative's origins, and through acknowledgement of its own contemporaneous real-world construction at a time of immense material-discursive "modern" change: the spread of capital, racialized colony, revolution, nation-state, technoliberalism (Mitchell and Pfau 2014). Taken together, *Frankenstein* positions itself in intra- and extradiegetic ways as built through, and at once counter to, what it knows as the enmeshed discursive networks of "modern enquirers" (49), "modern chemists" (48), "modern philosophers" (47), "modern masters" (46), "modern professors" (45), and "modern poets" (19)—and what we know as the biopower that lies in and around these networks.

Since its beginnings, *Frankenstein* has been read along these lines of modernity, life, discourse, and change, as Robert Mitchell shows in *Experimental Life: Vitalism in Romantic Science and Literature*, positioning the novel in new historicist readings of genre:

> Foucault notes that for eighteenth-century critics of the novel, this literary form was understood as establishing an 'artificial milieu' that was especially 'dangerous to a disordered sensibility' […]. From this perspective, Shelley's emphasis in *Frankenstein* on the disordering effects of fluid media would be an act of willful reappropriation, of folding into the content of her novel earlier concerns about this literary form. (Mitchell 2014, p. 181)

Mitchell adds that early reviewers of *Frankenstein* "presented the novel as a vector for the transformation of social institutions" (182). *Frankenstein* was reviewed by *The Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany*, for instance, as being part of "the modern school in its highest style of caricature and exaggeration" (quoted in Mitchell 2014, p. 181). Other early reviewers described *Frankenstein*'s partaking in contemporaneous disruption of social orders, writing of "'those monstrous conceptions' produced by 'the wild and irregular theories of the age,'" and even referred to the novel as "a new species of literary form" (182). Considering the text of *Frankenstein* repeatedly positions itself as a modern object, a constructed thing in the form of the modern novel, these early reviews come with little surprise. The reader has always been asked to confront the novel precisely as they confront the creature: a constructed modern thing. As Criscillia Benford writes, *Frankenstein* thus holds "a desire to remind readers of the reader's role in the process of meaning production. The inassimilable marks the retreat of the author's guiding hand" (Benford 2010, p. 340).

Crucial for consideration of the text's self-aware curation, as shown in the above close readings, is that the two primary constructors of the narrative the reader encounters are no outsiders to the very "modern system of science" that the text gestures toward. Rather, they are Victor and Walton, characters who readers are regularly reminded are rashly ambitious and manically powered by this mysterious engine. Victor, whose name means *winner*, is the first in human history to understand life itself, to become master of the mystery of mysteries. But this is only possible through the management of the modern university and networks of scientific discourse. Meanwhile, Walton aims to be the first human to reach the most extreme reach of the globe. Both characters and their missions therefore embody scientific apparatuses: the utilizers of, or those used by, distinctly modern tools to produce and progress. Following this logic, the letters that make up the novel are ambiguously dated to the year "17—." The account is modern, the reader knows, but to know more is unimportant. The modern is the cusp, is the difference. Compounding this is the text's extradiegetic imagination of itself within modern romantic discourse. *Frankenstein* repeatedly refers to romanticism, the genre that it would have fit into at the time of its conception, and of which it has since come to be a celebrated masterpiece. The above close readings show the primary vehicles of this are: repeated reference to "the modern poets" (19) and modern literary knowledge, including explicit quotations of romantics Coleridge, Wordsworth, and P. B. Shelley; the juxtaposition of the two modern academic paths of Victor and the literary, colonialist Clerval, dramatized in their wanderings; and, most importantly, the performance, to an even whimsical or satirical degree, of nineteenth-century romantic aesthetics in descriptions of the dynamic flow of life through bodies of matter.

Frankenstein can thus be viewed through a biopoetical lens as a text that, as Sara Guyer begins to intimate, addresses the construction and lives not only of moving bodies of flesh, but, too, of moving bodies of words: that is, of discourse. Read this way, *Frankenstein* confuses the life of the text and the being, the life of the created and the creator, the life of the subject and the sovereign. The novel's gaze maintains, as critics invested in analyzing biopower do, resolute attention to how bodily actions are situated in and propped up by the power networks that in part produce literature itself. Mark Hansen reflects on this social life of *Frankenstein* as a "machinic" text, one

> constructed from materials (most centrally language, but also materially concrete social institutions like the law, the family, and indeed technology itself) which are not set off against the real, but which form its very substance. Viewed in this way, *Frankenstein* self-reflexively interrogates the so-called romantic ideology: unlike the great lyrics of Wordsworth or Percy Shelley, *Frankenstein* stages the failure of language to generate a complete representational reduplication of reality (and thus to transcend it). (Hansen 1997, p. 578)

It is precisely these intra- and extradiegetic "machinic" lives of *Frankenstein*, its constantly revealing its real relation to modern power, that drives the novel forward and into the reader's shaking hands. All major characters encountered by the reader express their anguish at the inability of language to grasp the origins of their insatiable modern ambitions—but all the while they employ language alone to attempt this work. This is perhaps what Criscillia Benford calls "the nightmare the novel conjures, a world in which the inability to communicate effectively across lines of difference leads to the rejection of discourse and negotiation altogether in favor of violence" (Benford 2010, p. 340). It is this inevitable and impossible language that makes the flesh and joints of *Frankenstein*: the creature that turns on its creator, the novel that continually traces contours of its own doomed construction. And it is thus that a novel very literally about making live—and telling the story—becomes both artifact and archaeology of biopower.

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