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Last Words: Voice, Gesture, and the Remains of *Frankenstein*

David L. Clark

*The end begins with a voice.—A voice and nothing more.*¹

Victor Frankenstein is dead. The strident, self-exculpating, and melodramatic voice that dominates the novel is in fact the voice of one who is already dead. “And where does he now exist?” (167), Walton asks.² Where indeed? The creature is also gone, although his demise remains promised and presumed rather than witnessed and remembered. His voice and Frankenstein’s are voices without places and without bodies except in the mediated form of the memories that Robert Walton commits to letters to his sister. For all we know, Walton too has passed away, leaving behind a written reliquary that speaks autonomously for him, and for those whose lives and deaths he recalls, whether he is dead or alive. That the novel’s narrative is utterly careless of whether Walton tracks the creature into the “darkness and distance,” or, leaving the creature to kill himself, he returns to England and reunites with his beloved sister, is the most definitive sign that his words live on without being, strictly speaking, alive or answerable to life. *Frankenstein* helps us imagine two forms of possible closure but refuses both. Toward the end of the novel, prior to the point that Walton abandons writing letters that are addressed and dated, he confesses to Margaret Seville that he “cannot forbear recording” his story, even though he knows that “these papers may never reach you” (213). But by the conclusion of that tale, when Walton gazes blankly out at “the wasteland” (221) into which the creature has flung himself, nothing of that pathos or regret remains to haunt his compulsion to write. The novel’s last two sentences, which are barely enough to close the frame around the creature’s *apologia pro vita sua*, feel dispossessed and affectless, so that the narrative doesn’t end as much as cease functioning. This indifference both to the fate of the writer of the letters and of the letters themselves is telling in a novel that is a story principally *about* life, which is to say about the discovery of the origins of life, the invention and administration of what Foucault would call “a technology of power centered on life,”³ not to say the sovereign determination of life monstrously unworthy of life. We could say that *Frankenstein* is the tale of the paroxysm of the biopolitical, its plot a macabre story of two creatures, one human, the other not, each of whom license “life-affirming killing.”⁴ But whatever

stake that Walton has in telling the story of the “communication” of life (to recall Shelley’s remarks in her 1831 Introduction [351]), as a set of remains *Frankenstein* is “a living-dead machine,” as Jacques Derrida says, “sur-viving, the body of a thing buried in a library, in cellars, urns, drowned in the world-wide waves of the Web, etc., but a dead thing that resuscitates each time a breath of living reading, each time the breath of the other or the other breath, ... makes it live again by animating it.”⁵ Derrida has Daniel Dafoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* in mind but the philosopher’s gothic rhetoric makes *Frankenstein* seem more eerily apposite. Indeed, read through Shelley’s novel, Derrida’s remarks from *The Beast and the Sovereign* come across as oddly—ironically?—reliant on figures of vitality (“a breath of living reading,” “making live”) when figures more compellingly at odds with the primacy of the organic (“a living-dead machine”) seem truer to the radical, Benjaminian impetus of his concept of survival as *survivance*.⁶ In any case, *Frankenstein* makes Frankenstein’s of us all, if not by making life out of assembled lifeless remains, as the natural philosopher is said to do, then, with each reading of the narrative, quickening what is “neither life nor death pure and simple.”⁷ The novel is, in other words, not only Walton’s epistolary recollections of the lives and deaths of Frankenstein and his creature but a figure for and a theory of that which *survives* Walton, beyond his life and beyond life—a world without us, without those who say that they are human and alive.

Survival and the living-on or *survivance* of words—last words in particular, and the lastness of words, spoken and unspoken—is the question that will preoccupy me here. It is a question to which Shelley certainly returns.⁸ In 1826 Shelley possesses the authorial confidence both to sign her name to *The Last Man* and to inhabit her own story as its frame narrator; but that shift should not obscure how, in 1818, Shelley’s nominal anonymity rhymes with the ways that she puts a certain impersonality to work in her novel: the detachment of writer from novel reproduces the complex fission of voice and body, gesture and meaning, world and human, within the narrative, as we shall see. The letters making up Shelley’s first novel are addressed to one woman (rather than anticipatorily received, as in *The Last Man*, by two, Mary Shelley and the Cumaean Sibyl) but that implied audience only serves to throw into relief that they are not marked, finally, as retrieved by anyone. Notwithstanding the fact that they share initials, Margaret Seville is no “Mary Shelley,” since, unlike in *The Last Man*, she is barred from inhabiting a framing space of her own. She is a ghostly premonition of the auto-fictional role that Shelley herself will assume in the later novel, but her virtual and voiceless presence within the narrative, far from being meliorative because locating the novel in the web of human things, only underlines the text’s complicated refusal of refuge in the social. To be sure, the elemental addressee of the letters remains “the big Other, the Symbolic Order itself, which receives [them] ... the moment the sender externalizes his message,” as Žižek says,⁹ but that reading does little to mitigate the narrative effect of the novel’s blunt indifference to whether Walton’s recollections are ever taken up by the fictional world in which they are set. The last thing that Walton exclaims to his sister, before ceding the narrative to Frankenstein’s monologue, is that he looks forward to picking up the “manuscript” “in some future day!” (63), identifying himself not as author but as reader of the words

that he writes, as if he were principally a character in his own text. Of that happy hereafter, brother and sister together taking “the greatest pleasure” (63) in reading the story, we hear nothing further. Walton opens the frame of the novel with this hopeful scene of domestic aesthetic bliss but does not dare or care to close it unequivocally. The point is that nothing definitive *becomes* of the letters or, for that matter, of Walton or his sister. Their fate remains unknown; for his part, Walton eventually abandons anything resembling a salutation or a valediction, and he concludes his last letter with unexpectedly becalmed and wide-eyed sentences that are much closer to a “blank opening unto futurity” (to recall a phrase from Tres Pyle)¹⁰ than anything approaching a good-bye, much less finale. After having said farewell no less than three times, the creature’s lamentations and recriminations conclude, offering Walton a chance to speak up once more. But rather than excoriating his reviled guest or expressing satisfaction in seeing him off to die, the narrative yields to quite another kind of speech, as if the novel had, at the very last moment, found a voice and omnisciently taken over for Walton. Walton’s unhoused gaze and voice float away from the ship, turned as they are impassively toward the “darkness and distance” (221), while his vessel and body head toward home in England. In that strange depersonalizing moment of *Gelassenheit*, absent the drama and melodrama of the preceding pages, we approach “the experience without poetry,” as Rei Terada says, “that Keats was able to know at the end of his life.”¹¹ The ending leaves the letters simply *there*, suspended in an inoperative space, not so much *en route* as in-between, neither having arrived nor not arrived, “borne”—metaphorically, if not literally—“away by the waves, and lost in darkness and distance” (221), to recall the novel’s spacy final words. The point is that Shelley asks us to read the letters as unread, which is to say, without knowing if they were either sent or received and without knowing if the addressor lives or dies. *Frankenstein’s* detachment from itself, the way in which it stalls its own uptake, or rather invites readers to take it up *as stalled* (a phenomenon that I elsewhere call “scarcity”),¹² makes it function like a *Rückenfigur*, a compositional strategy common to certain canonical Romantic paintings whose organizing human figure is facing away, directing the gaze of the viewer, as if wanting to share the visual field, while also isolated and aloof from her. But this is a strange quarantine, for without any confirmation of the fate of the letters, we become the default recipients, anonymously transformed into addressees like inquisitive but accidental readers of a post-card that is endlessly passing through the mails without ever arriving at its destination. In this way, the novel is both encrypted and transparent, undeliverable and deliverable, an assemblage of words and voices that obey the skewed logic of the supplement. At the moment we take up the letters, and only then, we become their fitting recipient, but we take them up not knowing whether anyone else in the novel’s world has.

Once Frankenstein’s death ensures that he can say nothing else, Walton hears the creature speak and indeed, after a telling moment of confusion, unable to determine at first if what he hears is a voice, and unable to locate that voice in a body, speak eloquently, passionately. Letting Frankenstein’s voice die is what makes the creature’s reported voice live. The creature appears to grasp that he is living under the aegis of that implacable biopolitical calculus: “He is dead who called me into being” (216),

he declares, standing before Frankenstein's corpse, meaning not only that the one who gave him life is now gone but also that his creator's demise hails him into a new, hitherto unheard of existence, one that flickers into life before quickly being subsumed by the plot that requires him to die because he is deemed and deems himself to be abhorrent, unworthy of life. A certain narrative logic in the novel makes it impossible to imagine Frankenstein and the creature speaking together in Walton's presence or, for that matter, in anyone's presence: within earshot of the captain, their voices must follow each other not only in time (first Frankenstein's last words to Walton, then, and only then, the creature's words) but also in space (first Frankenstein speaks in Walton's cabin, and then, once dead, the creature is "permitted" to speak in the same space, in the company of his creator's corpse but not of his creator). At any point in the novel do we ever hear of Frankenstein and the creature in a conversation that is heard by a third? No; their conversations are theirs and theirs alone. Frankenstein can fearfully *imagine* such a colloquy taking place, as when, for a hallucinatory moment, he fears that Mr. Kirwin, the local magistrate, is about to usher the creature into his Irish jail-cell, where, presumably, he would get an earful about Frankenstein's offences (185–6). But that is precisely not what happens. In a novel that brims with improbabilities, it is telling that this is the scene that feels so preposterous. The absurdity of that feared encounter only serves to underline the novel's refusal to have conversations between Frankenstein and the creature take place in the presence of any auditor—except, of course, the reader, who, strictly speaking, doesn't over-hear the two men either except via the figurative translation of writing into speech. Shared spoken words are the pact that irrevocably joins the creature and Frankenstein together, while safely quarantining them from the rest of the novel's world.

On deck, at midnight, after the death of Frankenstein, Walton hears sounds that will resolve into the voice of the creature. Never before in the narrative have we heard the creature say anything that hadn't first been remembered, reported, and reworded by his creator. We pass from one vocal imaginary to another in the novel's narrative. Shelley sharpens the nowness of this break in the text by narrowing the delay between the events that are unfolding and Walton's record of them. "I am interrupted," he writes, moving suddenly into the present tense, disturbing the narrative with a disturbance, namely the noises coming from the direction of Frankenstein's corpse.

What do these sounds portend? It is midnight; the breeze blows fairly, and the watch on deck scarcely stir. Again there is a sound as of a human voice, but hoarser; it comes from the cabin where the remains of Frankenstein still lie. I must arise, and examine. Good night, my sister. (217)

Hailed by sounds that bear the likeness of a human voice, Walton bids Margaret farewell for the last time in the novel. Social graces like opening and closing salutations will subsequently evaporate as the creature's speech, new to Walton and new to us, surges into the foreground and impairs his correspondence with Margaret, separating him from his relationship to her in decisive ways from which he neither recovers nor shows any interest in recovering. When he writes, "Good night, my sister," he is also saying

goodbye to goodbyes. He continues to write, of course, but most of his remaining remarks, culminating in the strange last two sentences of the novel, feel less and less addressed, as if the monstrous intrusion of “a sound as of a human voice” disrupts his own voice, impeding it from continuing to sound sociably human.

At first, if only for a moment, Walton does not hear a voice or a semblance of a voice but “sounds” emanating from “the cabin where the remains of Frankenstein still lie,” not *phōnē* or *logos* but *psophos*, something closer to the barking and braying of animals, those soulless creatures who, Aristotle claimed, and Descartes reiterated, vocalize without intent or imagination.¹³ Still, these noises emanating from the vicinity of Frankenstein’s corpse are not heard as mere animal bellowing (I am here reproducing the assinannies of an abiding philosophical tradition for which non-human animals reflexively cry in pain but do not possess a voice or express ideas¹⁴) but vocalizations on the very threshold of intentionality and meaningfulness. These sounds “portend,” as Walton says, and what they foretell, what they give voice to, is the becoming-voice of a voice; in the first instance, they do not mean something but instead bear the promise, the sound, of meaningfulness. That is what makes them “a *sound* as of a human voice.” These sounds do not only augur a particular event or signal a warning about, for example, the presence of the creature on Walton’s ship, of whose voice, initially “suffocated” but then full-throated, Walton will indeed hear plenty in a moment; they also perform portentousness—that is, they refer, mark, substitute, repeat, and temporalize the capacity to refer, to mark, to substitute, to repeat, and to temporalize, as if spoken language speaks first of itself, allegorizing itself, and thus beginning in sound where it has already begun. Auspicious sounds are irreducible to noises; they perhaps resemble “the voice ... like a stream” heard in Wordsworth’s “Resolution and Independence”; even and especially if the boundaries between distinct words disappear (“nor word from word could I divide”), the speaker in Wordsworth’s poem still hears what Simon Jarvis calls “the intonation contour” or “the leech-gatherer’s prosody,” that is, the sound that a voice *as* voice makes, even if the individual words or, for that matter, the particular language being spoken, is indiscernible—the sound, for example, that a sea-captain might hear through a cabin door without being able to pick out words and yet know that those sounds are neither the wind in the rigging nor the creaking of a wooden ship but a voice.¹⁵ And if certain sounds portend a voice then a voice remembers sounds, for what but the most idealized of voices, an unearthly and disembodied speech purged of all material resonances, “the voice of conscience,” for example, is truly without sound, without a certain “hoarseness” that remembers the prehistory of speech in noisy animality or at least what is imagined to be animality?

Now the difference between sounds said to be without sense and an emerging voice, as between nature and culture, tenuous as that distinction is, repeats a similarly unstable difference *within* the voice that Walton discerns; for when he hears “a sound as of a human voice,” he hears two voices, stereophonically, as it were. On the one hand, he hears the likeness of a human voice, and, on the other hand, a human voice against which a likeness can be heard *as* a likeness, as a distorted, noisier, and hoarser echo of the former. In this scene, the animalistic likeness is what is substantial and

effective. It interrupts and hails Walton, it moves him to seek out its source—while the original or human voice is wholly spectral, not so much unheard as unspoken, all the better to be unassailable. That pure voice is impossible to locate because experienced as everywhere there are, were, or could be beings who call themselves human. Where the human is, so too the voice (the capacity to speak, to respond, to mean, to portend), each ideality confirming the other. Against the hoarseness of its likeness, that human voice is presumably sonorous and clear, and especially clear about the human; the human voice would—if it were to be heard—demonstrate, exemplify, sound, and sound out, first and foremost, the general singular and the givenness of the human. Such is the enduring power of the metonymic relationship between the human and the voice, not unlike the relationship conjoining the human and the hand, a question to which we will turn in a moment. Under these conditions, replete with many unarticulated presuppositions that we cannot explore here, one could say that, according to a certain anthropocentric law, “the human voice” is a pleonasm, except of course Walton tells us that he hears sounds that are also a voice, even if they aren’t altogether human—not entirely a nonhuman voice, and not *not* a voice either. Through the figure of the voice, Walton narrows the distance between the human and its likeness without actually saying that they are the same thing. In Walton’s ears the voice endures a kind of fission, but the difference is not so defined that the creature’s sounds cannot be called a “voice,” and indeed, a “voice” whose sounds “portend.” In other words, before Walton sees the creature face to face and attaches the disembodied sounds to a body that he then denounces as life unworthy of life, he divides the sound of a human voice from its likeness without making its humanity completely inaccessible. After seeing the creature in the flesh and hearing the words come out of his mouth such subtleties and instabilities are erased. What exactly then is the sound *of* rather than *as of* a human voice? The sliver of a conjunction is all that stands between the two kinds of spoken language, as much a passageway as a dividing line. Would a human voice be thinkable if not for hearing it differentially *through* the other? Now, the human voice isn’t in all rigor Walton’s particular voice either. He would nevertheless claim unequivocally to be speaking *in* a human voice, and perhaps never more vehemently and anxiously than when matched against the voice of the creature; but the human voice is rather, in general, the abstraction of the sound and shape of all voices that attest to being human when spoken. But if there is a general singular human voice, isn’t Walton’s voice too not “a sound as of a human voice,” which is to say an iteration, mediation, and likeness of the dreamed-of original? Has anyone in all rigor ever heard or spoken in “a human voice” and nothing more, even and especially when saying something like “I am human, you are not” or “I am speaking to you *as* a human being and I am telling you that you, sir, are not human,” which are the normative syntagms that are at the core of Frankenstein’s vengeful narrative and that Walton reproduces so thoughtlessly, as if having lost his voice to his eloquent and garrulous guest? Yet all that one could do vis-à-vis the human voice is *claim* to be speaking on its behalf or in its name in the form of a surrogate or semblance, sounding as of a voice that you have never actually heard, not as such, nor, it should be added, would necessarily want to hear,

for fear that perfection would extinguish what it perfects.¹⁶ A human voice and nothing more might well come in the form of what Marc Redfield describes as “a fully intended, absolutely transparent speech act—as unmediated and instantaneous as Robespierrean justice.”¹⁷ The difference between a human voice and the likeness of a human voice reproduces a difference within the human voice, making it originally a likeness of itself: here “voice” stands as a figure for the way in which the human appears *to* itself and *for* itself, that is, *monstrates*, stands out, shows, or portends. In other words, the “human voice” is the figure for the human’s marking of itself *as* human, and thus its re-marking. Walton listens for and insists upon the difference between his voice and the voice that he claims and needs to claim is the spectral double of a human voice, when his own voice is itself its own other.

To Walton’s ears, ominous noises quickly become a vocal likeness, the source of which he traces to the creature, whose first audible words, addressed to Frankenstein’s remains (“That is also my victim!” [218]), come in the form of a pained exclamation that also “seemed suffocated.” Perhaps what makes this voice so touching, at least at first, is that the creature is choked with feeling—not at all the stone-cold sociopath that Frankenstein had made him out to be. What inhibits the creature’s voice is *his* voice; choking is what at that moment singularizes his speech, brings him sharply into a new audibility after all of Frankenstein’s editing, monitoring, and translating efforts. It is telling that the first indication that we get of the inimitable timbre of the creature’s voice is that it is stifled or at least seems so. The creature struggles to speak while the corpse that he addresses cannot respond at all: “he may not answer me,” he says (217). Seeing the creature beside himself in rage, grief, and guilt, and hearing his strangled voice, at once emphatic and choked, Walton is struck dumb (“the words died away on my lips” [218]), as if bearing witness to the sounds of the creature’s throttled words momentarily robs him of own speech, leaving his words stillborn—this, moments before the creature describes himself as an “abortion.” It is a remarkable aural scene, populated by three figures who are, respectively, either dumb, unresponsive, or muted. Walton’s speechlessness symptomizes two seemingly antithetical things. First, his inability to say the words that are on his lips expresses his sympathetic identification with the creature, his dead words mirroring the creature’s muffled cries. Second, feeling “a mixture of curiosity and compassion” for the creature Walton discovers that he suddenly possesses the strength to deny “the dying request of my friend, in destroying my enemy” (217). Walton manages briefly to break free of Frankenstein’s spell, but quieting the man’s otherwise commanding voice leaves him unable to say anything. He feels pity for the creature but possesses no language with which to speak of it except as an hysterical loss of speech. Muteness is the price Walton pays for refusing in particular to be ventriloquized by Frankenstein’s Socratic notion of justice, which calls for an uncompromising division between friends for which one feels compassion and enemies for which one should only feel violent contempt. But that ethos, inculcated in Walton while listening to Frankenstein’s long narrative, proves to be irresistible, the sign of which is that Walton recovers the power of speech at the instant that he dismisses the creature’s “wild and incoherent self-reproaches” (218) as hypocritical and exculpatory rather than pitiable and interesting. His own voice recovered, Walton

immediately denounces the creature for failing to listen “to the voice of conscience” (218), as if he were now in a position to eschew British moral philosophy for German, the tug of sympathetic feelings for the power to judge the creature from the inviolable position of “the bearer of moral injunctions and commands, the imperative inner voice, inescapable and compelling in its immediacy and overwhelming presence, a voice one cannot silence or deny,” as Dolar notes.¹⁸ Walton speaks up when he speaks for that voice and gives himself over to it. He gives voice to a voice that is as soundless as it is impregnable. One wonders if the appeal to this unearthly law offers Walton an escape from the complexities of the human, all too human voices with which he has been encumbered. As Werner Hamacher notes in a discussion of “the voice of conscience” in Kant’s *Metaphysics of Morals*, “What man as a rational being cannot avoid hearing and perceiving, what thus marks an absolute limit to his powers and faculties—and defines him by this inability—is a ‘fearsome voice:’ a non-human voice, not his own voice, not the autonomous voice of himself but the voice of something ‘other (than man as such).’”¹⁹ “*Other than man as such:*” for a moment, Kant’s phrasing makes the moral law sound alien, even monstrous. But that other voice offers or seems to offer Walton a panoptic vantage point from which to discern the differences between human voices and their rebarbative imposters. “Seems” is the operative word, since his appeal to an inhuman arbiter only entangles him all the more in the human world, for the “voice of conscience” that he evokes is only a screen for Frankenstein’s designs on him, including his mendacious claim that murdering the creature would not be for “selfish and vicious motives” but instead “induced by reason and virtue” (216). Walton never speaks more slavishly for Frankenstein than at this moment, when the natural philosopher is sublimated into an avatar of the moral law.

A loop threaded through the figure of hearing voices has been closed: we have moved *from* Walton following a disembodied voice that comes from the direction of Frankenstein’s remains *to* Walton castigating the creature for failing to follow a disembodied voice that, it turns out, also comes from the direction of Frankenstein’s remains. Whose voice is that? To answer that question, Walton must return to the cabin where Frankenstein’s corpse lies and, by doing so, attach those sounds and that inhuman voice to a body. Whose body? Walton presumably knows that the creature is nearby but at this point he has no reason to assume that he is already onboard, much less holding a fraught vigil over his creator’s corpse. Could the “sounds” be emanating from “the remains of Frankenstein”? How ghastly. Acousmatic voices, voices heard off-stage whose origins are indeterminate, as Michel Chion points out, “naturally” remind us of “the voice of the dead.”²⁰ What Walton hears, as he quickly discovers, is of course the creature, but the novel momentarily indulges in the haunting possibility that the sounds could be coming from a corpse. That a dead body might make “a sound as of a human voice, but hoarser” isn’t necessarily any more outlandish than the idea of a creature composed of the body parts of human and nonhuman animals learning French but ending up, of all things, speaking English. You almost feel sorry for Walton who at this instant faces the grim possibility, however fleeting, that Frankenstein, dead though he is, has not yet finished talking. And he isn’t alone. One of the last things that the creature will subsequently tell Walton, before lighting out for the “darkness

and distance,” is that he pictures Frankenstein surviving his own death, continuing “to think and feel,” as he says, “in some mode unknown to me” (221).

If a corpse could talk, would we understand it? So much depends on the enigmatic space of separation marked by Walton’s “as of,” which brings to mind the “deconstructive ferment” and force of virtualization that Derrida observes at work in Kant’s *als ob* (“as if”).²¹ The “as of” in “as of a human voice” opens a zone of difference, doubles, analogies, and the uncertainty of the same-not-same. Walton listens to the disembodied voice emanating from the room where Frankenstein’s remains lie the way that Descartes looks at the humanoid figures outside of his window, unsure, based on his perceptions, if he observes men or “automatic machines” clothed as men, human beings or their simulacra.²² The comparison to Descartes is hardly fortuitous, for he was a philosopher who was entranced by automata from a young age, and whose name and reputation were, by the eighteenth century, trolled by a story—undoubtedly dreamt up by those who were disgusted by his “materialism” and the barrenness of his philosophical system, offences for which Frankenstein could also be held accountable—about his fondness for a “talking” doll that he had manufactured to take the place of his beloved, deceased daughter, Francine. Where he went, the doll followed, bourne in a small coffin, of all things. One night on a ship bound for Sweden, so the story goes, superstitious sailors overheard the sound as of a human voice coming from the philosopher’s cabin, where he was supposedly alone, and, upon investigating its source, discovered the android. Fearful of its uncanny powers, the sailors cast it overboard. In some versions of the tale, the loss of Descartes’s mechanical surrogate spelled the end of his reason for living.²³ Is the midnight scene in *Frankenstein* an anamorphic reproduction of this philosophical fable about a philosopher who was, by the turn of the nineteenth century, often denounced in terms that might well be applied to Frankenstein, that is, “a cold scientist for whom a lifeless mechanism was ... as good as a real person”?²⁴ Is this uncanny scene at the end of Shelley’s novel a *dream* of that already fantastical story about Descartes? It brims with many Frankensteinian syntagms, including: overhearing a disembodied, inhuman voice coming from the bowels of a ship; the repulsion and violence with which the source of that voice is met; the automata eventually lost to the “distance and darkness” of the polar seas; the fathering of a “child” without a mother; the manufacture of a being in a place of death; the intensely affective bonds joining creator and created; their intertwined fates, culminating in their mutual destruction, neither able to survive in the world without the other; and finally, and perhaps most evocatively, the ill-fittedness of the voice to the source-body. One wonders if what flashes up here at the conclusion of Shelley’s novel is the uniquely unsettling threat of hearing the sounds of a recorded or mechanically produced voice, the haunting words of the one who is absent, dead, or otherwise spoken-for by speech? We could say that there is something pre-phonographic about this scene, except by Shelley’s day, and indeed before she was born, there were already devices capable of imitating human voices, including a contraption built by Wolfgang von Kempelen, an Austrian court official, whose *Sprech-Maschine* wowed audiences in St. Petersburg by saying phrases in French, Italian, and Latin.²⁵ The apocryphal story told about Descartes’s talking doll may well have been impossible to tell if it hadn’t been

for the invention of just this sort of gadget. What is revealing is that in 1780 auditors experienced this recital as if they were characters in or readers of a gothic novel, the equivalent of someone today witnessing something remarkable and breathlessly telling others that “it was like being in a movie:” “We looked at each other in silence and consternation,” one attendee recalls, “and we all had goose-flesh produced by horror in the first moments.”²⁶ The stagy fervor of this response suggests something significant is at stake. The source of the frisson and recoil in hearing “a sound as of a human voice”—the pleasure taken in the repugnance—is not that an ingenious device, through some triumph of technology, encroaches upon a realm where it shouldn’t properly be but, quite to the contrary, that the human voice is so readily susceptible to thoughtless, repeatable, machinic reproduction that it must itself already be machinic. The *Sprech-Maschine* demonstrates exactly what its name suggests, the techne or gadgetry of spoken language. The head-shaking surprise of the eighteenth-century listeners comes not principally from encountering a lifelike machine but from hearing, as if for the first time, the machinic life of one’s own voice, now no longer unproblematically one’s own. Hence the muteness of the auditors who stand before the machine (“We looked at each other in silence”), struck dumb by the dumbness of their own spoken words. The device splits voice from speaker, and in such an obvious and irrevocable way as to suggest that they were never substantially joined in the first place. Not only is speaking shown to be composed of so many discreetly reproducible sounds, different for each language (it seems important for von Kempelen’s automaton to be multilingual, the better to make the arbitrariness of the signifier audible), but also the words that are formed by those sounds can mean something in the complete absence of an intelligence for which they would be meaningful. In other words, the words and phrases coming out of the mouth of the *Sprech-Maschine* signify without being significant, just as they sound out words and phrases without a speaker. The automaton threatens to destabilize the difference between “man” and “machine” (which materialists like La Mettrie had renounced, on the supposed authority of Descartes), but as Kant grasps in *The Metaphysics of Morals* this danger is not contingent and external but a possibility structured into human experience. As Kant argues, human beings not only treat each other as things; they too often reduce *themselves* to things, and not just any kind of thing, but “a speaking machine” each and every time they tell a lie.²⁷ What haunts Kant’s work, and perhaps accounts for his elaborate exploration of the question of lying, not to mention his absolutizing prohibitions regarding telling a lie, is the prospect of never knowing with certainty whether one was listening to a human being speak or a lifelike machine, a voice or “a sound as of a human voice.” What makes turning one’s ear to “the sound as of a human” voice so irresistible and disturbing is that it makes palpable the workings of an automatism that menaces all language that clamors to be heard, namely the separability of words from understanding, volition, or agency, and thus the chance that machines, corpses, or monsters can speak.

Tracking down the sounds that he has heard, Walton enters the cabin and sees the creature standing before Frankenstein’s corpse. At first, neither Walton nor the creature acknowledges each other. The three figures momentarily form a curiously static tableau. But because he is as yet unobserved, Walton is afforded a uniquely

intimate perspective on the creature: “As he hung over the coffin,” Walton recollects, “his face was concealed by long locks of ragged hair; but one vast hand was extended, in colour and apparent texture like that of a mummy” (217). Walton gives us to see the creature not only in the throes of grief, loss, and self-excoriation, all familiarly human affects, but, more important, in an initial, brief, and wholly unguarded moment, a glimpse of how he looks and sounds in close quarters when he believes that he is completely alone. At no other point in the novel’s narrative are we afforded this perspective, which is equivalent to looking in on the conduct of a newly discovered life form, behaving in ways that are part of its *Umwelt*, not meant for human eyes or ears—a moment when the creature is allowed his finitude and self-separation, where he may be what he is.²⁸ A perspectival reversal takes place: with Walton, we peer at the creature’s alien singularity as the creature once did the De Lacey’s. It can be no accident that this unusual point of view—unusual because we glimpse, with Walton, the lineaments of a world without us—is possible because Frankenstein is removed from the equation, as if only his radical absence makes it possible for us to look with Walton into the private arena of the creature’s life and to see him, as it were, being him, in all his otherness. Under Walton’s momentarily unmet gaze, the creature is alone with his thoughts, words, and feelings. That his face is obscured gives visual expression to that isolation; the creature is visible to Walton, but what he sees is not for Walton—or anyone—to see. Under these unprecedentedly esoteric conditions in the novel, the small gesture that the creature makes extending his “one vast hand” takes on an unexpected weightiness. Fleeting as it is, the hand should mean nothing, yet it feels like it could mean anything.

The body language directly recalls a slightly earlier moment in the narrative, when Frankenstein offers Walton his out-stretched hand “before his eyes closed forever” (216). Hands joining hands of course affirms the value of human connectedness even in the midst of great adversity and especially when Frankenstein is calling for solidarity against an inhuman threat. Frankenstein’s hands grasp Walton’s in a gesture of greeting and reciprocity that claims, right up until the man’s last moment, that he and Walton remain alive together, *vivre ensemble*. We might compare this intimate *parole* between men to Frankenstein’s reluctance to provide a hand-written letter to Elizabeth, notwithstanding her express wish that he do so. In the absence of face-to-face contact, Elizabeth longs for the prosthetic extension of Frankenstein in the form of his holograph, but as we know, another artificial device has captured his arduous attention and ferociously blocks her access to him. Frankenstein never clasps hands with the creature the way he and Walton do in their final moments together. And yet hands do figure complexly in their tortured relationship. Their hands *do* things, including horrid things. The creature is of course Frankenstein’s handiwork; it is by his skilled hands that the creature is given hands, hands that were presumably once someone else’s hands, then no longer, and then made again into hands once they are made part of the larger assemblage that is his body. (Are they in fact “his” hands? They are the hands that he has but how he has them is singular. As David Collings argues, the creature bears “a relation to his body that no *human being* ever endured.”²⁹) Frankenstein’s hands are the same hands that brutally unmake the creature’s mate, thereby setting the plot

of their conjoined lives on its perilous and fatal course. Frankenstein assures Walton that even after his death his hands will guide the captain's hands as he assassinates the creature. For their part, the creature's hands are murderously destructive, leaving their trace on the bruised bodies of his victims. Hands *speak* and, like all speech acts, suffer infelicities and misunderstandings. When the creature appears to Frankenstein in his bedroom in Ingolstadt, it is the creature's hands, not his voice, that most capture his attention. "He might have spoken, but I did not hear," Frankenstein recalls; "one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped, and rushed down stairs" (84). The natural philosopher acknowledges that the creature may have been trying to communicate with him but represses that knowledge by muting his voice, just as he admits to not knowing with complete certainty if the creature's outstretched hand constituted a threat; it "*seemingly*" seeks "to detain" him, meaning that that single hand might have been extended for quite other reasons. One wonders if the real threat here is that the creature already has language before he learns *a* language, namely French, and that his yearning to address Frankenstein is the outward expression of an inner necessity that Werner Hamacher describes as a "longing for language ... that exceeds every given language."³⁰ The creature is not some inarticulate life-form but already part of a symbolic order, driven to address his creator using the sounds and gestures to hand. But Frankenstein is as blind to those characteristics of the creature as he is deaf. Subsequently barred the opportunity to converse with Frankenstein, the creature communicates with him through the murders that he commits. Like speech, the killings seek and elicit a response. That dreadful colloquy is, as it were, the engine of the narrative of the communication that Walton has with this sister; the latter sputters out when the former comes to an end. With Frankenstein's death, the creature announces that he will die by his own hand.

Hovering in the background of the creature's hovering hand are many other eery hands: the nightmarish vision of the enormous armored hand that Walpole said inspired *The Castle of Otranto*, for example, or Macbeth's indelibly stained hands, toward which the handle of the dagger-apparition is inexorably drawn.³¹ (The complexly macabre deixis of John Keats's "This living hand" is still two years in the future.) And yet even amid the supernatural and gothic trappings of the scene in *Frankenstein* (the midnight hour, the corpse in the coffin, the mysterious sounds), the creature's "extended" hand seems inert, a posture that approaches a propositionless monstration or showing-forth. "Extended" how and for what reason? The gesture is at once purposive and unclear, prodigious and an act whose intention is occluded. Given its size, color, and unusual, mummified texture, it is a hand that is hard to miss, even if it is not meant to be seen by either Walton or, of course, Frankenstein. The hand is literally suspended, but so too is its meaning, as if calling for a kind of deceleration of thought as the novel ends. Walton subsequently tells us that he overhears the creature "utter exclamations of grief and sorrow" (217), but that vocal commotion, which he hears *after* observing the bestilled hand, only serves to throw into relief the blankness and silence of the creature's frozen attitude. Words that Walton only hears as hypocritical howlings are prefaced by an unobtrusive gesture that all but escapes his attention, as if the creature were speaking in two tongues,

one for Walton's world and the other for a world that lets the creature be.³² We recall that he had once longingly imagined such a locale, far from Europe (157); perhaps this gesture, along with his vegan practice, is all that remains of that dream. Already "extended," the hand threatens to float free from the creature's body, as if it possessed a significance irreducible to his body, otherwise convulsed with distress. It exclaims nothing. A kind of blazoning takes place, the disarticulation of the creature's form into an obscured face, ragged hair, grieving cries, and a hovering mitt.

Questions proliferate. Has Walton interrupted the creature *en route* to doing something with his hand? Is this a farewell? A greeting? A blessing? A gesture of remorse? A blow? These possibilities wash up against the mutism and inactivity of the gesture. What does seem clear is that the outstretched hand doesn't constitute a threat, although it is hard not to interpret it as such given the way in which Walton shrinks in fear and revulsion from what he observes of the creature. As at so many other points in the novel, Shelley is testing us, confirming that we remain vigilantly wary of the novel's untrustworthy narrators. Instead, for a moment, she asks that we let the creature's gesture stand, asks us to refuse to know in advance what a body, what a hand, can do. Primed by Frankenstein, Walton perceives only menace in the creature's appearance and reacts by menacing him in return. He is, after all, responsible for what Tres Pyle calls "British Romanticism's most famous threat—'*I'll be with you on your wedding night.*'"³³ But this is not like that. There is nothing declarative much less overtly hostile in the hand. If it could be said to say anything it might be something more neutrally descriptive, an address to no-one, "I'm with 'the remains of Frankenstein'" — which is, oddly enough, what the natural philosopher feared the creature would one day say, but in the form of gleeful satisfaction rather than the quiet, private gesture that Walton here observes, unobserved. What then is it that we see? It is the detachment of the gesture, its queer indifference to everything that the novel encourages us to see in it, that is remarkable. The hand is extended—extended and nothing more. Is it possible to think that just-enoughness? To borrow a phrase from Maurice Blanchot, it is "the immobility of its position that repudiates all depth."³⁴ What does this hand, neither taken nor given, seemingly advancing and withdrawing at the same motion, portend? No one is present to grasp the hand, certainly not in the manly way that Walton accepts the dying hand of Frankenstein; nor, it should be emphasized, is anyone present to detect it being offered—or rather, "extended," since the creature does not and cannot volunteer his hand in anticipation of it being received but instead, as it were, cantilevers or projects it without support at the outer end. A starred fragment from Maurice Blanchot's *Le pas au-delà* helps illuminate the suspended fixedness of this moment in *Frankenstein*: "♦ A hand that extends itself, that refuses itself, that we cannot take hold of in any way."³⁵ There is much to say about this prickly shard of writing, but what bears emphasizing here is the way in which Blanchot's language captures the nature of a relation without relation, a relation that immediately and irrevocably cancels itself. A hand is outstretched, yet refuses to be grasped, and, more radically, refuses the very idea of grasping and clasping, of reciprocity or mutuality, of giving or taking—a hand that takes away and gives away both giving and taking. Is that the all but inexpressible nature of the creature's gesture? Without expectation of a return, without even the

“without,” that is, *sans* the sense that something is missing or negated, it is a gesture that refuses or interrupts even the gestural, as if the creature’s hand, separate from the creature, were capable of bidding *adieu* to the world of Frankenstein and *adieu* to the very idea of *adieu*.

Walton talks to or at the hand in telling ways. Characterizing his concluding meeting with the creature as “this final and wonderful catastrophe,” he confirms that he wants what he sees and records for posterity to look theatrical, that is, to appear as a story shaped for and given to human sight. “Great God!” he exclaims, “what a scene has taken place!” (217) Walton makes the cabin where the remains of Frankenstein lie into a kind of studio, an *atelier* where the creature must play out the final, thrilling act of his performance as the monster. He is certainly dressed for the part, his suspended hand appearing “in colour and apparent texture like that of a mummy” (217). As a thing composed of dead, desiccated, or embalmed flesh (such are some of the meanings of “mummy” available to Shelley), the creature is pictured as disappearing, fated for sacrificial death because in some sense already deceased. Walton reacts angrily to the creature’s presence and words, but his staging of the scene reminds us that he also marvels and wants others to marvel at the capacity of this insurgent, dark-skinned body to endure mortal pain, and yet speak eloquently and even stoically of that agony. But at the heart of this scene and scenography, the arrested hand stands out, visible but not meant to be seen. Is that why Walton falls momentarily blind, as well as mute? “I shut my eyes involuntarily,” he writes, “and endeavoured to recollect what were my duties with regard to his destroyer” (217). Not looking returns him to his senses, giving him an opportunity to listen to “the voice of conscience”—or at least its likeness—again. Walton claims that it is the monster’s “horrible” and “loathsome” face that robs him of his sight. Yet that face, he has just told us, is obscured, “concealed by long locks of ragged hair.” If not the face, then, perhaps there is something in the creature’s extended hand that is unbearable to observe. Walton’s closed eyes return the gesture to itself, letting it be unseen, as if his body were automatically negating his desire to compel the creature to yield to his human, all too human gaze. But like a camera shutter, the same reflex also preserves the imprint of this particular image on his mind—“as if that look must be the last,” we might say, recalling a verse from “The Triumph of Life” whose strange power Jacques Khalip has parsed so well.³⁶ The fact is that Walton sees a hand doing something that is not for his eyes to see; he sees *that*. What better way to capture this folding together of blindness and sight than for his eyes to close, thereby seeing but not seeing in the form of a hungry glare? Closing his eyes, he at once shrinks from and tarries with the creature’s moment of sheer self-sufficiency. Whatever takes place over Frankenstein’s coffin arrests itself and in doing so looks away from and suspends itself from the august philosophical tradition which identifies the hand with the human. Hegel argues that human beings manifest themselves *as* human and as thinking beings not only in spoken language, but also in the use of hands:

Next to the organ of speech, it is the hand that most of all by which a man manifests and actualizes himself. It is the living artificer of his fortune. We may say of the hand that it *is* what a man *does*, for in it, as the active organ of his self-fulfilment,

he is present as the animating soul; and since he is primarily his own fate, his hand will thus express this in-itself.³⁷

The creature's inhuman hand, neither reaching out nor taking in, not a blow or a blessing, suspends this otherwise ancient, powerful and mutually reinforcing identification of handedness and humanity. Walton can only see that unhandeness as a monstrous abomination, as part of a larger picture of disgust, both fascinating and scenic, on the one hand, and repulsive and worthy of the death penalty, on the other. But in reacting this way he only reiterates the ferocious biopolitical regime that is at work in *Frankenstein*, in which the human must be sifted from the less than or other than human to remain human, and where, by analogy, the hand that does absolutely nothing can only be a dead or undead limb, a waste and a wasting away. That is the ultimate import of the enigmatic fragment from Blanchot about the hand that is also the site of its declination. Before Walton arrives on the scene to make a scene, before the creature once more embraces the role of the proud, wronged, and scrimshawed monster, and for the moment that Walton sees what he was not meant to see, the creature's hand is unshared and unexpressed. Radically inoperative, it abstains from productivity. Doing and saying nothing, it is soulless but in a manner otherwise than a privation. Like the creature's voice, the hand is a likeness, "as of a human," but a likeness that isn't immediately and solely an impoverished reflection of the *anthropos*. It is extended to the side of the vast, imperious, and unforgiving world of the creatures who call themselves human. Peter Brooks argues that "the symbolic order of language seems to offer the monster his only escape from the order of visual, specular, and imaginary relations, in which he is demonstrably the monster."³⁸ But the creature's hand points without pointing, as if eschewing even that minimal concession to signification, to a different get-away, an escape not only from the regime of sight but also from the regime of "man," including and especially the symbolic order with which self-manifestation of the human is so closely identified. It says "no" to Hegel & Co. If the creature's gesture does not reject the symbolic order as much as stalls it, that is because it belongs to that order but in mode of the refusal of its anthropocentrism. What remains to be read in the creature's gesture remains to be read, the fleeting afterimage and echo of a world without us.

The end begins with a voice.—A voice and nothing more.

James A. Heffernan notes that filmed versions of Shelley's novel focus on what the creature looks like, whereas "a faithful [cinematic] re-creation of the novel's central narrative ... would never show the monster at all—would only give us the sound of his voice over shots of what he perceives."³⁹ But in what language would that voice be? In the novel's last pages, the creature speaks to Walton in the same language—English—that Frankenstein had only minutes before been using with Walton, even though this is not a language that he has learned or could have learned. Shelley after all makes a point of having the creature tell us that he has one language, namely French: "I ... understand that language only (147)," he says to the blind Parisian, De Lacey, for whom, at that moment, he is only a disembodied voice. And yet when, with Frankenstein's death, he speaks through Walton in his "own" voice, he has perfect

English, indeed, seemingly unaccented English, unlike Frankenstein. It is as if the creature had absorbed the language once he boarded Walton's ship, breathing in some form of novel virus hovering in the arctic air. Of all the improbabilities that enliven this novel, which include the creature's innate moral imagination, not to mention his rapid acquisition of the French language, his capacity to speak English is perhaps the most fantastical. But the truth is that we do not hear the creature speak at all. Instead, what we are given to read and hear is an unexplained and inexplicable *dubbing* of his voice. For reasons that I can't explore here, this dubbing is at once seamless, naturalized, and all but unnoticeable *and* unexpected, wildly imposed, even bizarre. At no point in the novel is the *survivance* of language more legible than at this moment, when the creature endures the superimposition of his last words. Whence comes this translation? Who or what is speaking when the creature speaks? Of this depersonalizing experience of the foreign, the novel says nothing.⁴⁰ Like lip-synching in cinema, the substitution of an "alien" voice is disorienting not so much because the spoken words are ill-fitted to the speaker (even though they most certainly are) but because this translation brings out the acousmatic uncanniness of all voices, whose origins in the body are impossible to fathom. The instant that they are spoken, whether aloud nor not, those words have survived the life with which they are so intimately associated. "The source of the voice," Dolar argues, "can never be seen, it stems from an undisclosed and structurally concealed interior, it cannot possibly match what we can see."⁴¹ "I see a voice," Bottom announces to comical effect in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, when everyone knows he can do no such thing.⁴² The source of the voice, like the seat of life, recedes even as it is approached, leaving us to fathom an assignable non-place, both necessary and impossible to discern. When it comes to novels, authors stitch voices to bodies and characters that are then required to be the expressive origins of those voices. Words demand a speaker to say and think them. That way there can never be the vocal or gestural equivalent of "thoughts without a thinker," that is, words and signs circulating in a narrative that survive life, at once wild, undomesticated, and monstrous.⁴³

Notes

- 1 I here recall Mladen Dolar's rendering of Plutarch's remarks in *Apophthegmata Laconica*, a collection of sayings of the Spartans: "A man plucked a nightingale and, finding but little to eat, said: 'You are just a voice and nothing more.'" See Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 3; and Plutarch, *Plutarch's Moralia*, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt (Cambridge, MA: 1949), 3:398–9.
- 2 All references to Shelley's text in this chapter are to the following edition: *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus*, ed. D. L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2012). Page references to this edition are cited parenthetically in the text.
- 3 Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 144.

- 4 I borrow this phrase from Nick Mansfield, "Derrida, Democracy and Violence," *Studies in Social Justice* 5, no. 2 (2011): 240.
- 5 Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume II*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 131.
- 6 As Derrida argues, "Survivance in a sense of survival that is neither life nor death pure and simple, a sense that is not thinkable on the basis of the opposition between life and death, a survival that is not, in spite of the apparent grammar of the formation of the word (*überleben* or *fortleben*, living on or to survive, survival), [that is not] above life, like something sovereign (*superanus*) can be above everything, a survival that is not more alive, nor indeed less alive, or more or less dead than death, a survivance that lends itself to neither comparative nor superlative, a survivance or a surviving (but I prefer the middle voice 'survivance' to the active voice of the active infinite 'to survive...')." See *The Beast and the Sovereign*, 130–1.
- 7 Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, 130.
- 8 Throughout this essay, my understanding of Romantic "lastness" has been immeasurably enriched by Jacques Khalip's brilliant exploration of the concept (which has the force of refusing conceptuality) in *Last Things: Disastrous Form from Kant to Hajar* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018).
- 9 Slavoj Žižek, "Why Does a Letter Always Arrive at Its Destination?" *The Symptom* 16 (2011). <https://www.lacan.com/symptom16/why.html>.
- 10 Forest Pyle, *Art's Undoing: In the Wake of a Radical Aestheticism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 47.
- 11 Rei Terada, "Looking at the Stars Forever," *Studies in Romanticism* (Summer 2011), 301.
- 12 See David L. Clark, "Goya's Scarcity," in *Constellations of a Contemporary Romanticism*, ed. Jacques Khalip and Forest Pyle (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 86–121.
- 13 Aristotle's remarks about animal sounds and human voices are principally to be found in *De Anima*, Book II, 420b5–10. See *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton University Press, 1984), 420b5–10, 204–5.
- 14 "Assinainties" is a neologism coined by Derrida: "[T]his agreement concerning philosophical sense and common sense that allows one to speak blithely of the Animals in the general singular is perhaps one of the greatest and most symptomatic *assinanities* of those who call themselves humans." See *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, trans. Marie-Louise Mallet (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 41.
- 15 William Wordsworth, "Resolution and Independence," in *The Collected Poems of William Wordsworth* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), 228; and Simon Jarvis, "Thinking in Verse," in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romantic Poetry*, ed. James Chandler and Maureen N. McLane (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 112.
- 16 "Perfection extinguishes what it perfects" is a phrase that I happily borrow from my late friend and mentor, Balachandra Rajan, *Form of the Unfinished: English Poetics from Spenser to Pound* (Princeton, IA: Princeton University Press, 1985), 129.
- 17 Marc Redfield, *The Rhetoric of Terror: Reflections on 9/11 and the War on Terror* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 93.
- 18 Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, 85.
- 19 Werner Hamacher, *Premises: Essays on Philosophy from Kant to Celan* (Cambridge,

- MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 103. Hamacher cites Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Practical Philosophy*, 560.
- 20 Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 46.
 - 21 Jacques Derrida, "The Future of the Profession or the University without Condition (Thanks to the 'Humanities' What Could Take Place Tomorrow)," in *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader*, ed. Tom Cohen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 31–4.
 - 22 Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in *Philosophical Works*, vol. 1, trans. and ed. by E. S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), 155.
 - 23 For an overview of this fable about Descartes, see Minsoo Kang, "The Mechanical Daughter of René Descartes: The Origin and History of an Intellectual Fable," *Modern Intellectual History* 14, no. 3 (November 2017): 633–60.
 - 24 Susan Bordo, "Introduction," in *Feminist Interpretations of René Descartes*, ed. Susan Bordo (University Park, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 4.
 - 25 See Alice Reininger, *Wolfgang von Kempelen: A Biography*, trans. Peter Waugh (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).
 - 26 Cited and translated by Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, 7.
 - 27 Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Practical Philosophy*, 553.
 - 28 My phrasing here owes a great deal to a talk by John Paul Ricco, "Isolation, Loneliness, Solitude: The COVID-19 Pandemic Has Brought Us Too Close Together," Centre for Ethics, University of Toronto, May 29, 2020.
 - 29 David Collings, *Monstrous Society: Reciprocity, Discipline, and the Political Uncanny at the End of Early Modern England* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2009), 199. Emphasis mine.
 - 30 Werner Hamacher, *Ninety-Five Theses on Philology*, trans. Catharine Diehl (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 22.
 - 31 For a discussion of the armored hand, see Frederick S. Frank, "Introduction," in *The Castle of Otranto and The Mysterious Mother* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2003), 13–15. For *Macbeth*, see Act 2, Scene 1, l. 33–4. In *The Complete Works*, ed. Alfred Harbage (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), 1116.
 - 32 Bonnie Konig argues that Antigone speaks in an analogously multi-channeled way. "Words that Kreon hears as mere self-indulgent lamentation," Honig points out, are also "seeking, soliciting, constituting publics elsewhere." See Bonnie Honig, *Antigone, Interrupted* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 90.
 - 33 Pyle, *Art's Undoing*, 83.
 - 34 Maurice Blanchot, *The Step Not Beyond*, trans. Lycette Nelson (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 75.
 - 35 Ibid., 106.
 - 36 Khalip, *Last Things*, 74–102.
 - 37 G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 189.
 - 38 Peter Brooks, "What Is a Monster? (According to Frankenstein)," in *Frankenstein/Mary Shelley*, ed. Fred Botting (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 101.
 - 39 James A. Heffernan, "Looking at the Monster: *Frankenstein* and Film," *Critical Inquiry* 24 (1997), 147.
 - 40 An analogous silence about translation shrouds the language of the conversation

between the poet and the remains of Rousseau in Percy Shelley's "The Triumph of Life." As Khalip asks, "what language do the poet and Rousseau speak in this strangely asocial meeting?" See Jacques Khalip, *Anonymous Life: Romanticism and Dispossession* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 184.

41 Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, 60.

42 William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in Act V, Scene 1, l. 190. In *The Complete Works*, ed. Alfred Harbage (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), 171.

43 "Thoughts without a thinker" is Bion's evocative phrase: "If a thought without a thinker comes along, it may be a 'stray thought,' or it could be a thought with the owner's name and address upon it, or it could be a 'wild thought.' The problem, should such a thought come along, is what to do with it. Of course, if it is wild, you might try to domesticate it... What I am concerned with at the moment is the wild thoughts that turn up and for which there is no possibility to trace immediately any kind of ownership, or even any sort of way of being aware of the genealogy of that particular thought." See Wilfrid Bion, *The Complete Works*, ed. Chris Mawson (London: Routledge, 2014), May 28, 1977, vol. X, 175.

