

Apotheosis Now: A Hegelian Dialectical Analysis of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

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Abstract

More than a nineteenth-century Gothic monster story, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* provides much fertile ground for the exposition of the text with contemporary philosophic inquiry. Utilizing such philosophic analysis, some scholars assert that the critical moment in the text occurs in Victor Frankenstein's refusal to grant the monster's demand for a mate, which commences a downward trajectory in the text that culminates in a textual failure to achieve any elevated moment. By analyzing *Frankenstein* using the master-slave dialectic from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, I argue that the critical moment occurs, instead, in the development of the conclusion of the text where both Victor Frankenstein and the monster face their demise, and that throughout the text there is an upward trajectory all the way to the text's conclusion, where *Frankenstein* takes Hegel's master-slave dialectic to its zenith, or telos.

The one is independent, and its essential nature is to be for itself; the other is dependent, and its essence is life or existence for another. The former is the Master, or Lord, the latter the Bondsman.

But just as lordship showed its essential nature to be the reverse of what it wants to be, so, too bondage will, when completed, pass into the opposite of what it immediately is: being a consciousness repressed within itself, it will enter into itself, and change round into real and true independence.

It must cancel this its other. To do so is the sublation of that first double meaning, and is therefore a second double meaning. First, it must set itself to sublimate the other independent being, in order thereby to become certain of itself as true being, secondly, it thereupon proceeds to sublimate its own self, for this other is itself.

— George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*

More than a nineteenth-century Gothic monster story, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* provides important philosophic insight into the nature of slavery. Well-established commentary regards *Frankenstein* as an exposition of the social ills of Shelley's day. Under this reading, the text is viewed primarily as a critique of European imperialism that exploited and thrived on slavery. I will argue however, that *Frankenstein* contains more than just social critique: the text contains a confluence of social criticism and contemporary philosophy regarding slavery, including most notably Hegel's master-slave dialectic as set forth in his work, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. *Frankenstein* contains notions of freedom central to Hegel's master-slave dialectic (*dialektik*) and unfolds in a manner that parallels Hegel's dialectical process. *Frankenstein* even takes the Hegelian master-slave dialectic to its zenith, the telos, in arriving at spiritual freedom.

Many scholars of *Frankenstein* focus on the text as a social critique of imperialism and racial hysteria associated with the institution of slavery. After all, *Frankenstein* was published in 1818 during the heyday of the British anti-slavery movement, after the abolition of slavery in 1807 but before the emancipation of slaves in England in 1833 [1, p. 33]. One commentator, Spivak, argues that "it should not be possible to read nineteenth-century British literature [specifically *Frankenstein*] without remembering that imperialism,¹ understood as England's social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England" [15, p. 262]. Another critic, Ball, proposes that *Frankenstein* "looks back to the anti-slavery discourse of its recent past" and "address[es] the modern legacy of West Indian slavery and colonialism" [1, p. 31]. Malchow states that the text is a social critique of the hysteria experienced by English society in anticipation of emancipating the slaves [8, p. 90].²

Shelley's text, however, explores both the social and philosophical implications of slavery. *Frankenstein* represents a confluence of social critique and important contemporary philosophy,³ including theories regarding slavery such as Hegel's master-slave dialectic.⁴ Although there is no record that Shelley read Hegel, she was well versed in contemporary philosophy including Kant;⁵ and Kant, of course, heavily influenced Hegel. Contemporary philosophical discourse such as Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is clearly cognizant of the dynamics involved in slavery as evidenced by the *Phenomenology's* famous discussion on the

master-slave dialectic. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* was published eleven years before Shelley's text. It is not surprising that important aspects of Hegel's philosophy regarding slavery can be found in Shelley's text.

In order to fully appreciate the Hegelian undercurrents in *Frankenstein*, it is important to understand Hegel's dialectic: the thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. According to Hegel, for every posited thesis, there will be an antithesis, viz. an opposing proposition or negation. This negation of the negation brings about the synthesis, involving both a casting off and a retaining of parts of the thesis and antithesis. The newly synthesized proposition rises up or transcends to the next level.⁶ This dynamic then continues until it reaches an end or goal, which according to Hegel is a state of unified self-consciousness or Spirit (*Geist*⁷). As a philosophic exposition on the dynamics of slavery, Hegel's dialectic involves the struggle between master and slave where the former enslaves the latter upon threat of death. Initially, the master is self-sufficient and free, the slave dependent. However, when forced to manipulate nature (for Hegel, specifically agriculture) to create goods for the master, the slave experiences creativity while the master conversely "experiences stagnation living off the work of the slave" [3, p. 101]. Through the slave's creativity, his closeness to the Spirit, or wisdom, as well as his struggle under threat of death, the slave becomes independent while the master, defined only through the work of his slave, becomes dependent. The end-result of the process is the recognition (*Anerkennung*) between master and slave of interdependence between the two.

In *Frankenstein*, the struggle between Victor Frankenstein and the monster unfolds in the same manner as does the dynamic of Hegel's master-slave dialectic. The text initially presents Victor Frankenstein as an impressive heir-apparent to the role of "master" in the master-slave relationship. Victor is a member of the master class, the son of a well-respected aristocrat whose family is "one of the most distinguished of that [Genevise] republic" [11, p. 17]. For generations, Victor's ancestors were magistrates and counselors. Victor thus exhibits a master's optimism and is especially energetic in his love of natural philosophy. The text emphasizes Victor as a representative of the power and wealth of the social elite, from which the societal masters in the master-slave relationship come. *Frankenstein's* early favoring of Victor as the master, vis-à-vis the master-slave relationship, establishes the text's initial proposition, or the "thesis" portion of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, that Victor is the dominant master.

Despite being a member of the master class, Victor struggles to establish his special calling within that master class. Victor's father prohibits him from pursuing alchemy, which his father refers to as "sad trash," instead directing him to "study modern chemical science" [11, p. 21]. Victor disobeys, however, opting to pursue his studies in secret—studies that degenerate into an obsession with alchemy. Young Victor's secretive obsession marks the beginning of his enslavement. By demonstrating Victor's early addiction to alchemy as well as his struggle with autonomy from his father, the text foreshadows his future enslavement in terms of Hegel's master-slave dialectic.

In *Frankenstein*, the seeds of Victor's enslavement lie in his vanity. Young Victor has grandiose plans for personal greatness and fame: he seeks to create "a new species" that "would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me" [11, p. 32].⁸ The vanity and arrogance typical of masters fuel the profligate creation of the new species, the

first of which is to be the daemon: “when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing” [11, p. 35]. By referring to the daemon as “it” or “thing”, the text relegates the daemon to the status of an object. According to Hegel, a self-consciousness—the subject (master)—sees another self-consciousness—the object (slave)—which gives recognition or awareness to the master of his dominant position and existence. The master sees himself as a subject and the slave an object, allowing the master the detachment to initially dominate and exploit the slave. Later however, the master-slave relationship progresses dialectically and evolves to a state where the master and slave sublimate (*aufheben*)⁹ each other. Eventually, the master gives “recognition” to the slave as a subject, a being, and not merely as an object.¹⁰

Victor’s failure to recognize the daemon commences the objectification necessary for him to dominate the daemon. Abhorring the daemon “thing” immediately after its creation, Victor alienates the daemon by fleeing from his presence: “the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room” [11, p. 34]. Not only does Victor fail to establish recognition of his creation, Victor’s emotional and physical condition deteriorates as a result of creating the daemon: “When I thought of him, [the monster] I gnashed my teeth, my eyes became inflamed” [11, p. 60]. The words “gnashed” and “inflamed” suggest torment and degradation, conditions not unlike those experienced by toiling slaves. By portraying Victor in slave-like terms in relation to the daemon, the text presages Victor’s enslavement to the daemon.

Victor Frankenstein’s allusion to Dante later in the text solidifies Victor’s status as a slave to the monster. Realizing the full implication of what he had wrought in the daemon’s creation, and the greater havoc that might result in the creation of the monster’s female counterpart, Victor confesses, “The promise I had made. . . weighed upon my mind, like Dante’s iron cowl on the heads of the hellish hypocrites” [11, p. 101]. Here, the text alludes to Dante’s *Inferno*, signaling Victor’s emotional descent into the figurative depths of Dante’s Hell, the epitome of enslavement. *Frankenstein* specifically places Victor with the hypocrites in the sixth *Bolgia*¹¹ of the eighth level of Dante’s Hell, *Malebolge*. Because the hypocrites in Dante’s *Inferno* are unable to experience spiritual progress, the allusion implies that Victor is also burdened by falsity and precluded from spiritual progression. By indirectly causing the murder of his loved ones through the creation of the monster, Victor suffers from guilt, another potent form of enslavement. Thus, the text’s description of Victor as the burdened master is consistent with Hegel’s view that the master’s will to enslave actually causes his own stagnancy and leads to the undermining of his dominance. By relating Victor to the “hypocrites,” the text also suggests pretense by the master: Victor, the master, believes he is all-powerful. In reality, however, he is an emotional slave to the daemon. Furthermore, the monks’ hoods worn by the hypocrites are dazzling on the outside yet lined with dull lead on the inside [11, p. 101]. The appearance-reality aspect of the hoods illustrates the deceptive nature of the master-slave relationship: mastership actually burdens and degrades rather than frees and uplifts.

Further, whereas the master in the text experiences regressive enslavement, the putative slave conversely experiences progressive freedom. In *Frankenstein*, the slave experiences a radically different type of freedom than that experienced by Victor and those of the master class. While Victor’s freedom derives

from asserting societal class distinctions such as wealth and social status, the daemon's freedom derives from his association with nature. Experiencing nature, free from the superficiality and artifice of society, the daemon exclaims, "My spirits were elevated by the enchanting appearance of nature; the past was blotted from my memory, the present was tranquil, and the future gilded by bright rays of hope, and anticipation of joy" [11, p. 77]. According to scholars of Hegel, nature is the foundation upon which the synthesis occurs: "absolute Spirit reveals itself at the level of nature" [4, p. 40]. Not surprisingly, in the text the daemon thrives in and is enabled by nature. In nature the monster is able to blot out the cruel and horrific memories of society, which allows him to live with freedom of conscience, another form of freedom that Victor, the master, is unable to attain.

In nature, the daemon for the first time experiences freedom derived from creativity, which according to Hegel is one of the hallmarks of freedom experienced by the slave [6, p. 118]. The monster becomes a self-taught scholar. He learns French and reads books like *Paradise Lost* and Plutarch's *Lives*. He becomes an intellectual, just as the young and innocent Victor was in the beginning of the text. Nature, thus, is associated with enlightenment for the daemon:

Soon a gentle light stole over the heavens, and gave me a sensation of pleasure. I started up, and beheld a radiant form rise among the trees. I gazed with a kind of wonder. It moved slowly, but it enlightened my path. . . [11, p. 68]

For the monster, learning is associated with "light" because as the daemon experiences nature for the first time he is overcome by a heaven-like epiphany. By describing nature as "radiant" and as creating an "enlightened path" for the daemon, the text suggests that the monster experiences wisdom and enlightenment through nature.

The monster's experience of freedom is similar to Hegel's notion of freedom derived from the master-slave dialectic. In the dialectic, the slave is forced upon threat of death to manipulate nature. During the process, the slave experiences creative freedom through labor [6, p. 117]. The daemon, however, does not manipulate nature as much as he becomes uplifted within it. Once within nature, the daemon for the first time experiences creativity; by working within nature, the daemon experiences mastery of the intellect. This is in stark contrast to Victor's failed attempt to master nature, as demonstrated in the physical grotesqueness of his creation. *Frankenstein* thus illustrates Hegel's notion that the slave "becomes for himself, someone existing on his own account" through the monster's self-learning and intellectual reshaping of himself [6, p. 118]. Victor, however, emotionally exists solely through the daemon as a result of the emotional burden of having created the monster. Through the development of the creative freedom that the monster experiences (which Hegel asserts is one of the essences of freedom) and the converse development of the slave-like deterioration that Victor Frankenstein experiences, the text establishes the theme of the role reversal between master and slave: the daemon is truly free and thus the master, while the putative master, Victor, is the slave.

Bugg argues that "Shelley's inversion of 'master' and 'slave' engages in an important aspect of contemporary abolitionist rhetoric" [2, p. 664]. Under a Hegelian reading, however, the role reversal between master and slave reflects the dynamics of the dialectical process, in particular the negation of the thesis by

the antithesis. The proposition that the daemon, i.e. the initial slave, is truly free and thus the master in the master-slave relationship is the “antithesis” portion of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, which negates the earlier thesis in *Frankenstein* that Victor Frankenstein is master.

In *Frankenstein*, the attaining of creative freedom propels the daemon’s quest for recognition from his master. Having developed his intellect and experienced freedom in nature, the daemon seeks out his creator as one would seek out a long lost father. With his newfound literacy, the daemon reads Victor’s lab journal and discovers to his dismay that his creator curses his birth. The daemon thereafter laments, “no Eve soothed my sorrows, or shared my thoughts; I was alone. I remembered Adam’s supplication to his Creator, but where was mine? He had abandoned me” [11, p. 88]. The daemon, far from receiving recognition, realizes his creator loathes him. This lack of recognition causes the daemon to pursue the creation of a mate, which may yet fulfill the daemon and alleviate his state of alienation within the world: an “Eve” who can complete the recognition process in lieu of the creator. The daemon’s dialectical journey for recognition culminates in his demand for a female partner:

You must create a female for me, with whom I can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being. This alone you can do; and I demand it to you as a right which you must not refuse. [11, p. 98]

The daemon’s self-declaration of his existence as a subject in the phrase “I . . . live” and his assertion of his “right” to a partner signifies his transformation from an object into a subject. Heretofore, Victor fails to recognize the monster as a “being,” instead referring to him as “the monster,” “the daemon,” “the wretch,” or “it.” Immediately following the request, chapter IX of the text surprisingly begins with Victor’s acknowledgment of the daemon as a being: “The being finished speaking” [11, p. 98]. By agreeing to create the female counterpart, Victor momentarily accepts the daemon as an equal. The daemon rushes off, however, afraid that Victor might change his mind, illustrating the ever tenuous recognition relationship between Victor and the daemon.

The text’s juxtaposition of the daemon with Adam, the original man, highlights the penultimate case for the daemon’s recognition as a being: “Remember, that I am thy creature: I ought to be thy Adam but rather I am the fallen angel” [11, p. 66]. However, Victor’s eventual renegeing of his promise to fulfill the daemon’s request for a mate and the reference to the daemon as “the fallen angel” serve to display Victor’s continuing objectification and non-recognition of the daemon.

The daemon’s quest for recognition from Victor Frankenstein tragically ends unfulfilled. Although the daemon initially refers to Victor, the creator, as “my natural lord and king,” Victor ultimately fails to recognize the daemon [11, p. 66]. Without recognition of the slave by the master, the master himself ironically cannot achieve freedom. According to Hegel, the recognition-relation between master and slave is essential for completion of the dialectical process. With the dialectical process incomplete in the text, the daemon responds to Victor’s refusal to create a mate by usurping Victor’s status as a master, which accelerates the theme of the role reversal. The monster seeks to dominate and enslave Victor by murdering Victor’s loved ones, thereby perpetuating the master-slave struggle to the death:

I will revenge my injuries... I will cause fear; and chiefly towards you my arch-enemy, because my creator, do I swear inextinguishable hatred. Have a care: I will work at your destruction, nor finish until I desolate your heart... [11, p. 98]

Without completion of the dialectical process, the cycle of objectification continues, only now the daemon undertakes the objectification of Victor. The full extent of this role reversal between master and slave is illustrated in the following passage:

Slave, I reasoned with you, but you have proved yourself unworthy of my condescension. Remember that I have power; you believe yourself miserable but I can make you so wretched that the light of day will be hateful to you. You are my creator, but I am your master—obey! (116)

By describing Victor as “unworthy” of “condescension,” the text asserts the daemon’s rising, authoritative “power.” In doing so, the text elaborates on an important thematic element of the master-slave dialectic: that “just as lordship showed its essential nature to be the reverse of what it wants to be, so, too bondage will, when completed, pass into the opposite of what it immediately is” [6, p. 237]. That is to say, the slave will dialectically evolve into mastership, just as the master will dialectically evolve into enslavement. Through use of diction reflecting conflict and tension such as “power” and “hateful,” the passage adds to the continuing theme in the text of role reversal between master and slave.

The role reversal between master and slave culminates in the enslavement of Victor Frankenstein by his monomaniac obsession with revenge. Victor no longer lives for himself: he lives only to destroy the daemon and to avenge his murdered loved ones. When Victor pursues the monster northward towards the Arctic, the monster leaves behind messages for Victor on the bark of trees. One such message reads, “My reign is not yet over... you live and my power is complete” [11, p. 142]. Here, the text depicts the monster as an authoritative figure with command over Victor. By utilizing the phrase “my reign is not... over” the text suggests the daemon’s authority and Victor’s subjugation. Additionally, by using the words “you live,” the text reveals the daemon’s mockery of Victor, which, when considered with the phrase “my power is complete,” signifies the former slave’s transformation into the new master as result of Victor’s monomania.

Most importantly, however, the two passages of the text quoted above (pages 116 and 142, respectively) portray the arrogance of the daemon as the new authority figure, the new master who repeats the mistake of objectification that Victor Frankenstein, as former master, makes. Here, the Hegelian thesis and antithesis repeat without any synthesis or transcendence. Hegel’s famous passage regarding the repeating of errors in history is relevant to the text: “What experience and history teaches us is that people... have never learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it.” Master and slave at this point in the text seek to dominate one another in a circular fashion rather than to ascend in transcendental fashion.

If *Frankenstein* were simply a critique of imperialism and the ills of slavery, as argued by Ball, then a more appropriate ending to the text would surely be

that the monster would live on in prosperity in some locale of his choosing after breaking free from the tyranny of his master. Through Walton's retreat southward, which symbolizes an end to the "imperial quest for glory... comparable to Frankenstein's own," the text would have come full circle [1, p. 38]. Shelley would have illustrated the immorality of imperialism and slavery. This is not the case in the conclusion of the text, however. At the end of the novel both Victor and monster succumb, the former by self-induced ordeal and grief and the latter by fleeing even further northward to the frozen desolation of the Arctic. The conclusion appears to leave readers with an unhappy sense.

Literary critics too have been struck by the seemingly unhappy sense in the conclusion of *Frankenstein*. Even when analyzing the text through a Hegelian master-slave analytical lens, Hatlen still finds in the text a failure to break through to a higher meaning. Hatlen calls *Frankenstein* a "grotesque parody" of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, concluding that there is "no rapture" in the text. He suggests the struggle for liberation in the text between Victor and the monster "ends in failure" without any "proclaiming of a new order." Utilizing Greimas and Jameson's signification modeling, Hatlen recognizes that the text does implicitly point "beyond the struggle... to an alternative world of equality and cooperation." For Hatlen, this alternative world would have been brought about by a generative female figure which in the text never materializes because of Victor's refusal to create the daemon's mate. Sherwin, utilizing a psychoanalytical lens instead of a Hegelian one, similarly finds that "except for the idea of the creature... the novel does not achieve sublimity." Sherwin believes that "Mary Shelley might well have titled her novel 'one catastrophe after another'" [13, p. 883].

This unhappy sense that the text presents in its conclusion, however, provides an opportunity for great insight under a Hegelian dialectical reading of *Frankenstein*. Contrary to conventional criticism, the text may well be read to reach the point of critical mass precisely in its conclusion, and not, as argued by numerous critics, in Victor Frankenstein's refusal of the daemon's demand for a mate.¹² Indeed, the text's conclusion actually takes Hegel's master-slave dialectic to its zenith, to the telos or finale.

The events occurring just prior to and leading up to the unhappy sense of the text's conclusion, i.e. the succumbing of Victor and the daemon, actually parallel the stage in Hegel's dialectic called the "Unhappy Consciousness." The point in the text just prior to Victor's death aboard Walton's ship—when Victor requests that Walton pursue and destroy the daemon—epitomizes the separation between master and slave, which in Hegelian terms is also the separation between subject and object: that is to say, Victor's request epitomizes the divided self-consciousness which has not achieved sublation. According to Hegel, the dialectical development to achieve Spirit is the struggle to seek realized self-consciousness. Self-consciousness has an independent and dependent aspect. In relation to the master and slave, the master's is an independent self-consciousness whereas the slave's is a dependent self-consciousness. The master is independent of being determined by an "other." The slave, however, is dependent on being determined by an "other." According to Hegel, lack of unity between the independent and dependent self-consciousness leads to conflict within the self-consciousness. Hegel calls the divided self-consciousness, which is unable to reconcile with the other, the stage of "Unhappy Consciousness." This prelude to the conclusion is thus an instance of Hegel's divided

self-consciousness between slave and master, i.e. Victor and the daemon.

In Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the Spirit, or self-consciousness, progresses dialectically in history starting from Stoicism, moving onward to Skepticism, the Unhappy Consciousness, and the Articulation of Reason before finally attaining the stage of the Objective Spirit and Ethical Life. In this ethical life, universalization of self-consciousness occurs. Just as in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, where the Unhappy Consciousness is a stage in a progression to a higher order, so too will the separateness of the consciousness of Victor and the daemon in the text ultimately be but a stage in a progression towards the attainment of a higher state of being. In this way, the text foreshadows the progression to the higher stage: the way is paved for a development from a state of divided self-consciousness between the daemon and Victor to one of recognition and realization of interdependence.

The death and subsequent succession of Victor by Walton establishes a new trajectory in the text that culminates in attainment of Hegelian "recognition" between master and slave. Walton functions as an alter ego of Victor. His thoughts, words and actions mirror Victor's:

I commenced by inuring my body to hardship...I voluntarily endured cold, famine, thirst, and want of sleep... [I] devoted my nights to the study of mathematics, the theory of medicine, and those branches of physical science from which a naval adventurer might derive the greatest practical advantage. [11, p. 8]

Walton's rigors are strikingly similar to Victor's. Just as Victor experiences physical degradation as result of his obsession with the creation of life, so too does Walton suffer physical degradation in order to pursue his obsession with exploration of the uncharted Arctic. Walton later laments, "I have longed for a friend; I have sought one who would sympathize with and love me. Behold, on these desert seas I have found such a one" [11, p. 147]. Walton has been looking for a friend like himself all his life; he finds a mirror in Victor Frankenstein. Victor is a pioneer, like Walton, with an intellect and passion for knowledge equal to Walton's.

Some literary critics have perceived the relationship between Walton and Victor in a negative light. One such critic, Anne Kostelanetz Mellor, proposes that "Walton seeks an alter-ego, a mirror of his self who will reflect back his own joys and sorrows... Rather than a relationship of genuine altruism and self-sacrifice, or a partnership of independent yet mutually supportive persons, Walton's concept of friendship is in fact another form of egoism. He is therefore given the friendship of his genuine alter-ego, Victor Frankenstein, a 'friendship' that, being none, is found only to be lost" [9, p. 110]. Many, including Mellor, argue that Walton's friendship with Victor is one of incompleteness. According to such arguments, Walton serves as the foil to Victor, and is therefore used, by way of contrast, to highlight the failure on Victor's part to complete his quest. After all, Walton and Victor's final decisions starkly contrast: Walton heads southward to safety whereas Victor insists on pursuing the daemon northward until death. According to Ball, Victor's unwillingness to give up his search for the daemon in the north represents the push for colonialism in the West Indies, whereas Walton's decision to turn back perhaps demonstrates Shelley's opinion that imperialism was inherently wrong [1, p. 38].

Under a Hegelian reading of the text, however, Walton's purpose is neither to illustrate imperialism's social good nor its evil. Thus, Walton should not be perceived as a negative character. Rather, in acting as an alter ego and surrogate for Victor, Walton completes the monumentally significant task of recognizing the daemon. Victor does not deem the daemon as a being, an equal. Instead, Victor deems the daemon worthy only of death. His unwillingness to end his pursuit of vengeance signifies what Hegel would call a failure of dialectic recognition-relation. As the master, Victor Frankenstein does not achieve synthesis and spiritual ascension because he cannot recognize the slave as an equal. Instead, Victor continues to refer to the daemon as his "adversary" and "it," signifying his continuing objectification of the daemon (151).

Acting as Victor Frankenstein's alter ego, however, Walton successfully achieves what Victor could not: recognition of the daemon. Victor Frankenstein's dying wish for Walton is that he vanquish the daemon:

The task of his [the monster] destruction was mine, but I have failed. When actuated by selfish and vicious motives, I asked you to undertake my unfinished work; and I renew this request now, when I am only induced by reason and virtue. [11, p. 151]

Walton, however, cannot bring himself to fulfill Victor's request when he finally encounters the daemon, which mysteriously reappears to view Victor's deceased body aboard the ship. Instead, when the daemon attempts to escape, Walton "called on him [the daemon] to stay" [11, p. 152]. Furthermore, in the conversation between Walton and the daemon that ensues, Walton refers to the monster as a "being" [11, p. 153]. Both Walton's request that the daemon "stay" and his reference to the daemon as a "being" constitute Walton's recognition of the daemon in the Hegelian sense. Achieving recognition requires, of course, both a master and a slave present at the moment of recognition. Because Victor is already deceased and unable to undertake the recognition process, Walton thus completes the process of recognition.

Victor's alter-ego, Walton, completes Victor's previously-failed recognition and overcomes Victor's shortcomings in a way different than contended by some literary critics. Although Walton is indeed a foil to Victor as Walton serves by way of contrast to highlight traits lacking in Victor's character, he is ultimately much more than just a foil. In the text, he supplies critical traits that are missing in Victor: namely, the universal morality and ethics, which according to Hegel, are the attributes of those achieving sublation and synthesis. When beseeched by the crew to turn back in order to save the ship because an enormous iceberg traps it, Walton represses his personal obsession with arctic exploration, thus allowing him to weigh his personal goal with the goal of the entire crew, a metaphor for society, and opt for survival of the ship. According to Hegel, the unity of the objective good with the subjectivity of the will is unattainable at the level of individual morality. Achievement of the good with the subjective can only occur by transcending to the level of the ethical life, a synthesis of both the objective and subjective. Objectively, the ethical life is embodied in government and its institutions, as a manifestation of the collective self-consciousness of its citizens and their individual subjective freedoms. Subjectively, the ethical life is manifested in the will of the individual which is aware of inner universality. Under a Hegelian understanding, then, Walton's heading southward after consideration of the crew's plea for survival is more than just a repudiation of

imperialism. It reveals Walton's transcendence to the level of Hegel's ethical life. Walton acts for the universal common good. Walton is thus able to do what Victor in life could not, namely, to address the daemon as a subject, a being, rather than as an object, a thing. Utilizing the traits of universal morality and ethics, Walton is able to facilitate transcendence in the relationship between Victor and the daemon.

For Hegel, proper recognition must be reciprocated. In the text, the daemon in turn completes recognition of Victor Frankenstein. The key development in the text is undoubtedly the daemon's famous soliloquy uttered to Victor's lifeless body: "That is also my victim! Oh Frankenstein! generous and self-devoted being! what does it avail now that I ask thee to pardon me?" [11, p. 153] The daemon's reference to Victor as a "being" and a "victim" constitutes what Hegel would describe as recognition by the new master, the daemon, of the slave, Victor Frankenstein. Here the daemon recognizes Victor as a being worthy of pardon and not merely an object to be dominated. There is in the text thus a "mutual recognition," i.e. the acknowledgement of existence on an equal level between master and slave. This mutual recognition, for Hegel, is a fundamental condition in achieving self-consciousness and thus spiritual enlightenment. In *Frankenstein*, this mutual recognition is absent in the original iteration of the master-slave relationship between Victor as the master and the daemon as the slave, for Victor first abandons and later seeks retribution against the daemon. Mutual recognition is also absent when the new master, the daemon, seeks to dominate the putative slave, Victor, by murdering Victor's loved ones as punishment for refusal to create the mate, as discussed earlier. In each case, the master views the slave as a mere object.

In *Frankenstein*, this recognition proper in the Hegelian sense establishes the basis for the culmination of the sublimative process: the synthesis, the final stage of the master-slave dialectic. According to Hegel, the synthesis of the master-slave dialectic is the transcendent realization and truth of the interdependence of master and slave:

It must cancel this its other. To do so is the sublation of that first double meaning, and is therefore a second double meaning. First, it must set itself to sublimate the other independent being, in order thereby to become certain of itself as true (*wahr*¹³) being, secondly, it thereupon proceeds to sublimate its own self, *for this other is itself* (emphasis author's). [6, p. 229]

If the antithesis of the thesis is a form of negation of the original proposition, then the sublimative process giving rise to the synthesis is a negation of the negation. For Hegel, the final negation of the negation found in the synthesis is the transcendent understanding of the interrelatedness of the master and of the slave, and of their independent and dependent self-consciousness. The result of the final sublation is that the "other" (i.e. the slave) is itself (i.e. the master) and vice-versa: the master is the slave. The synthesis is thus realization of the interrelatedness and interdependence of beings. In *Frankenstein*, this is precisely the upshot of the daemon's soliloquy. The daemon's request for pardon and his seeking death in the northernmost Arctic bring to light an underlying interdependence between master and slave. By poignantly illustrating the enormity of the daemon's suffering and despair regarding his former master's death, *Frankenstein* reveals a latent, powerful, and heretofore unrealized bond

between the monster and Victor. The text, through pathos, reveals that the monster truly needs Victor, his old master and creator. Such a bond, the tearing apart of which leads to the seeking of death, epitomizes interdependence. What thus occurs in the daemon's search for redemption is precisely the synthesis of the master-slave dialectic, the ultimate understanding and recognition of the interdependence between the daemon and Victor, between master and slave.

The daemon's seeking redemption in *Frankenstein* further represents the attainment of the ultimate form of freedom, what scholars of Hegel would describe as spiritual freedom. To achieve this spiritual freedom, the slave must experience fear of the master and go to his natural death in preparation for fear of God:

The fear of the human Lord is preparation for the fear of God, which is the true 'beginning of wisdom.' ...The 'first experience' of Self-Consciousness is the self-identification of those who are willing to go to their natural death for the sake of their freedom. They are the first agents of spiritual freedom. [4, p. 40]

Victor Frankenstein, as master, represents death for the daemon in the Hegelian sense because Victor is the monster's creator, similar to role God plays for man. The daemon seeks his natural death in the following passage: "I shall quit your vessel. . . and shall seek the most northern extremity of the globe" and "I shall die. . . I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly, and exult in the agony of the torturing flames" [11, p. 156]. The monster's fleeing to the northernmost part of the Arctic is symbolic of him rising to heaven. In contrast to the text's earlier depiction of Victor's descent into a figurative hell, the use of "ascending" and "exult" suggests a spiritual ascension and transformation within the monster. The text thus underscores the daemon's exercise of free will. According to Hegel, free will is the basis and origin of "right" (*Recht*), in the sense of goodness or justice.¹⁴ The daemon exercising his free will to seek the path of transcendence and justice thus represents the attainment of the zenith of the master-slave dialectic, i.e. the telos of spiritual freedom.

Ultimately, a Hegelian reading of the conclusion in *Frankenstein* illuminates what should have been conspicuous by its absence throughout the text for Victor Frankenstein and earlier in the text for the daemon: the universal will and ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*). Hegel explains the nature of the ethical life as follows: "in this identity of the universal will with the particular will, right and duty coalesce, and by being in the ethical order a man has rights in so far as he has duties, and duties in so far as he has rights."¹⁵ Therefore, attendant with Victor's claim to the rights of mastership throughout the text are the corresponding duties of mastership. Not understanding this, Victor hides his interest in alchemy and secretly creates the daemon. After creating the daemon, Victor neither takes responsibility for nor recognizes his creation. Indeed, the fatal flaw of Victor as protagonist in the text is his lack of ethical life. Similarly, with the daemon's assertion of his rights as a being and to a mate are corresponding duties and responsibilities. Not understanding this, the daemon callously murders Victor's loved ones as reprisal for Victor's denial of the right. However, in the conclusion of *Frankenstein* both Walton and the daemon finally realize the nature of the ethical life: that intertwined with the rights of mastership are corresponding duties and responsibilities of mastership. Thus both Walton and the daemon

attain apotheosis in execution of the duties required of those living Hegel's ethical life. Embodying the ethical life, Walton—a critical ethical character of the text—turns back from his quest for the North for the good of the entire ship, as previously discussed. When he confronts the daemon, Walton likewise does not seek to destroy the daemon, as requested by Victor, but instead recognizes him in the Hegelian sense. The daemon, too, in the conclusion of the text, finally understands that incumbent upon beings are the corresponding duties of the ethical life. Carrying out his duty, the daemon recognizes Victor and then undertakes redemptive action in furtherance of the ethical life and in recompense for his transgressions. By doing so, the daemon achieves synthesis and transcends to the highest level, to the telos, where he experiences spiritual freedom.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* provides scholars and literary critics alike with a rich, vibrant, and enduring tapestry into which are woven many thematic strands. While the social readings of the text provide important insight, a Hegelian reading leads to an upward trajectory in the text that allows for greater luminescence. Indeed, nowhere is *Frankenstein's* luminescence brighter than in its ability to take Hegel's master-slave dialectic to the synthesis of interdependence and ethical life, and to the telos of spiritual freedom. Through its conclusion, the text's rising trajectory actually achieves apotheosis. Thus the conclusion in *Frankenstein* is far from unhappy. In the Hegelian sense, it is glorious.

Notes

¹While Spivak's essay specifically addresses imperialism, this paper also addresses slavery, an institution rising out of European imperialism.

²Malchow refers to the widespread fear that the emancipation and integration of Blacks in Britain and its colonies in the West Indies would incite violence and rebellion. This hysteria, derived from the popular misconception that blacks were monstrous beings not unlike the daemon in *Frankenstein*, is mirrored in the fear of the daemon shared by Frankenstein, the DeLacey's and society in the text.

³Dianna Reese's reading of *Frankenstein* is based on Kant's ethics, Rousseau's politics, and the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* (1789).

⁴The master-slave dialectic is discussed in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807).

⁵*Philosophie de Kant* is a text listed in the *Journals of Mary Shelley* [12].

⁶In the dialectical process, the synthesis is subjected to an opposing force, yet another antithesis, in an evolution towards the truth. Hegel calls this the "negation of the negation."

⁷The English translation of *Geist* means either "mind" or "spirit." R.C. Solomon interprets Hegel's *geist* as a "general consciousness, a single "mind" common to all men" [14, p. 642].

⁸While Victor's desire to create a species may seem capricious, it actually parallels the popular sentiment in Shelley's era in which men of wealth pursued the creation of colonies, which thrived on slavery through imperialism [1, p. 38].

⁹Sublation is the process of synthesis. To sublimate is to negate, to cast off some part but to retain some part, and then to take the melded product to the next level.

¹⁰Hegel's sublation and recognition between master and slave differs from European enslavement of Africans in that the slave in the latter never escapes object-hood. *Frankenstein* is not simply discussing literal slavery, in which one-sided dominance by the master would eliminate the possibility of role reversal between master and slave.

¹¹The sixth (of ten) *Bolgia*s (trenches) in the eighth level of Dante's Hell, where Dante encounters the hypocrites.

¹²Hatlen, Reese, and Sherwin are essentially all in agreement that, as stated by Hatlen, the "pivotal moment" in the text occurs in the daemon's demand for and Frankenstein's refusal of a mate.

¹³The English translation of *wahr* means "true." For Hegel, truth requires negation and sublation.

¹⁴Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* (1821).

¹⁵Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* (1821), p. 155.

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