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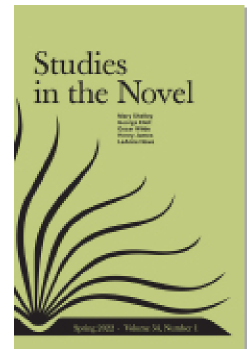

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HOMOSEXUAL CALM: PAUSING TO LISTEN TO QUEER SHAME IN *FRANKENSTEIN*

BENJAMIN BAGOCIUS

In Mary Shelley's nineteenth century, common male responses to male queerness are shame and panic.[1] Shelley's era inherited a tradition of sociopolitical unease around male queerness, for, according to sexuality scholar Alan Bray, sexual activity between men had been "widely regarded" in Britain with "deep horror" and institutionally condemned and persecuted as sinful and "abhorred" since at least the fourteenth century (7, 17).[2] While sex between men has been considered obscene and sinful for millennia, the shame associated with queerness may be newer. Psychologist Silvan Tomkins defines shame as an affect that "strikes deepest into the heart of man."[3] Though other affects such as "terror or distress hurt, they are wounds," Tomkins continues, "inflicted from outside which penetrate the smooth surface of the ego; but shame is felt as an inner torment, a sickness of the soul." Shame makes one "feel himself naked, defeated, alienated, lacking in dignity or worth" (Tomkins 133). Sally R. Munt locates the eighteenth century as a time when "queerness, sodomy, shame" merge "together in an alliance" which, she finds, "has prevailed over centuries" (28). Bray notices shame cropping up with queerness at least a century earlier, citing a pamphlet that announces Bishop John Atherton's and his lover John Childe's "Shameful Ende": their "execution for buggery" (15). Terminology for sexual activity with and desires for the same sex have undergone changes across history and discourse communities. Bray lists examples of such terms from the Renaissance and earlier such as "ganymede, pathic, cinaedus, catamite, bugger, ingle, sodomite" (13). We might also add terms that emerged later in history, including molly, man milliner, and more recently homosexual, faggot, gay, queen, butch queen, cunty, pansy, and queer. Though each discourse for same-sex desire emerges from distinct epistemologies, Munt finds that "grammars of shame...flow in and out of these conjunctions of the sodomitical...across historical periods, genres, forms, social structures and subcultures." "Patterns of shame," Munt continues, are "disturbingly long-lived," and "cultures retain

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far-reaching memories for continued and renewed use upon stigmatized groups," especially, in Munt's account, queer ones (28).

The homophobic uneasiness Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has famously called "homosexual panic"—the belief that same-sex desire is a threat both to a man's sense of self and to socio-political cohesion—is entwined with shame (*Between Men* 83). Male homosexual panic names the pervasive male fear of self-identifying, being perceived as, or associating with queerness under cultures of systemic homophobia. Sedgwick finds an "inseparability of homosexual desire" from panic and threat—"scandal, shame, annihilation"—since "at least the eighteenth century in England and America," which covers the time and region in which Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* (*Epistemology* 185, 205). Homosexual panic crushes the physical and psychic activity of all men but especially those who do not self-avowedly consider themselves to be queer or members of the queer communities of Shelley's time, such as mollies.[4] "The shape of the entire male homosocial spectrum"—or relationships among males across nearly every aspect of public life from education to medicine, politics, and religion—"is subject to control through homophobic" paranoia (Sedgwick, *Between Men* 90). Sedgwick describes homosexual panic as "ideological tentacles into" the lives of all men, including "nonhomosexual-identified men," precisely because activities and desires that count as "homosexual" remain undefined (*Between Men* 90).

Under ideologies of homosexual panic, men who feel or display a hint of what might be regarded by themselves or others as same-sex desire are prone to developing an ashamed "sense of self" (Sedgwick, *Touching* 37). Shelley's novel seems to have a pulse on what I am calling queer shame in the early nineteenth century, or the ways self-abhorrence can come to constitute the identity of men whose behaviors, desires, gender performance, or sexual activities are non-heteronormative, even as these men do not regard themselves members of self-consciously queer sexual cultures (for example, mollies). Despite queer shame's existence as an epistemological phenomenon across what Sedgwick has dubbed "The Age of *Frankenstein*," subjects often experience their queer desires as personal inadequacy, as a sign that they may be "lacking in dignity and worth," to use Tomkins's formulation (*Coherence* x, Tomkins 133). Building from Tomkins's idea that shame is "the affect that most defines the space wherein a sense of self will develop," Sedgwick and Adam Frank posit that, for men in homophobic cultures, shame can be the space wherein a sense of queer sexuality develops (6). Sedgwick calls queer shame constitutive of queer subjectivity as "the place where the question of identity arises most originarily and most relationally" (*Touching* 37).[5]

Ever since Sedgwick established *Frankenstein* as a "'classic'" novel of homosexual panic in homophobia's quintessential genre, "the paranoid Gothic," it is a commonplace of literary criticism to understand both Victor Frankenstein and his Creature as queer and ashamed about it (*Between Men* 91, 16). I call Frankenstein and his Creature queer to name the ways their sexual experiences

do not fit into heteronormative legibility, whether voluntarily or involuntarily. The term "homosexual panic" to describe the anxious states in which their queerness plays out may sound odd in a novel published in 1818, since the term "homosexual" would not be coined until the 1860s.[6] Yet I use the term "homosexual panic" to name the threat—and underlying shame—that same-sex desire increasingly carries since at least the eighteenth century, as Sedgwick and Munt argue, despite the varying discourses and their epistemologies that have structured same-sex desire and activity. Though homosexual panic may seem most pronounced close to the end of the nineteenth century, *Frankenstein* demonstrates its existence as an "endemic...state," becoming "the normal condition of male heterosexual entitlement" in the earlier part of the nineteenth century as well (Kosofsky, *Epistemology* 185).

Victor Frankenstein expresses his shame through nearly constant homosexual panic, and his Creature manifests shame as the embodiment of queerness demonized as an "abhorred monster" and a "malignant devil" (68, 160).[7] The two characters' guiding affect is queer shame—what the Creature calls the "abhorrence...with which I regard myself" (160)—for their failures to achieve heteronormativity and their resulting psychic and physical violence. Indeed, the shameful Creature, Frankenstein's "dreadful secret" (141), gains consciousness after the scientist experiences heterosexuality as a nightmare. When Frankenstein awakens from a dream about the "horror" of "implant[ing] the first kiss" on his fiancée Elizabeth's lips, his "dreadful secret" the Creature—whom he calls "my own vampire, my own spirit let loose"—comes to life (51). Frankenstein finds heterosexual orthodoxy horrifying, and he experiences queer subjectivity—his Creature—as monstrous. A hallmark of shame, Tomkins writes, is to "reduce facial communication....The individual calls a halt to looking at another person...and to the other person's looking at him" (134). This reduction of looking might explain why Frankenstein panics and flees when he sees his Creature awaken for the first time: "I rushed down the stairs" (36). Victor famously remains unable to face, let alone befriend, his Creature, who embodies queer subjectivity. Frankenstein and the Creature live the rest of their lives in almost continual states of panic and threat. Victor either runs from his Creature in shame or attempts to annihilate him in fear. The Creature—queerness—is unable to find a place of belonging anywhere without a threat to his life.

Panic and paranoia have been widely studied as male responses to queer shame in *Frankenstein*. As we shall see, nearly all men in the tale—from Frankenstein's father Alphonse, to his friend Henry Clerval, university professors, and the magistrate—respond to Frankenstein's and the Creature's queerness and its shame with homosexual panic as well. Indeed, Sedgwick points out that homosexual panic does not dominate "only over a minority population" (i.e., men who self-avowedly desire and have sex with men), but instead dominates "over all the bonds that structure all social form" and therefore regulates the psyches and behaviors of all men (*Between Men* 87). Borrowing a phrase from

Munt, we might say that "shame loops around and around, recruiting subjectivities" in nearly every male in *Frankenstein*, "consolidating discourses" in the form of homosexual panic (28).

What has received less critical attention than homosexual panic is Shelley's narration of a calmer response to queer shame: quiet listening. Robert Walton, the captain whose voice begins and ends the narrative and the only male character whose presence covers the entire novel, responds to Frankenstein's and the Creature's outpourings of shame not by panicking or fleeing, but by listening. We could call his response to queerness not homosexual panic but homosexual calm. Walton is the only man in the novel who abides with rather than panics in the presence of both Frankenstein's and the Creature's queer shame. Walton does not interrupt, change the subject, or even advise, embodying the magnitude of his attention to and absorption of queer despair that has no other outlet than his attentive body. Walton becomes a protagonist, ironically, by receding from narrative focus and making space instead for queer males to unlock the trauma queer shame has caused in their lives.

Walton may be open to listening to queer shame because, as Eric Daffron argues, he is also queer. Sedgwick points out that the only males immune to homosexual panic are a "historically small group of consciously and self-acceptingly homosexual men" (*Epistemology* 186). While Walton would not have identified as homosexual since this term had not yet been coined, he nonetheless seems at peace with the queer desires he experiences. Writing to his sister Margaret Saville, toward whom he directs the manuscript of *Frankenstein*, Walton shares, "I desire the company of a man who could sympathize with me; whose eyes would reply to mine" (10); Walton "thirsts for a more intimate sympathy," "bitterly feel[s] the want of a friend," and longs for "one who would sympathize with and love me" (10, 152). According to Daffron, Walton seeks an "explicit, mutually physical relation with another man" (429). Walton's queer desire may partly explain why he is so open to listening to stories of desire like Frankenstein's and the Creature's that do not align with heteropatriarchy. Walton's calmer quality of queerness makes him particularly gifted at listening. Instead of panicking and running away from topics of queerness as Frankenstein and the novel's other men do, Walton sits down with them. Walton listens and writes so carefully "the manuscript" he "hear[s] from" Frankenstein's "own lips" because Frankenstein's quality of speech is attractive to him (18). Unlike Frankenstein (and the novel's other men, as we shall see), Walton faces rather than flees queer shame. When Frankenstein speaks, his "whole countenance," to Walton, radiates "benevolence and sweetness that I never saw equaled"; Frankenstein's "words," "culled with the choicest art,...flow" into Walton's ears with "unparalleled eloquence" (15, 16). Frankenstein's "eloquence" ignites Walton's "strong desire" to sit with the scientist and "hear the promised narrative" (18, 17). Walton does not turn from queerness in disgust, but instead abides with it, finding it beautiful.

I call Walton's activity "queer listening."[8] Queer listening names the silent, calm attention one gives to another's story of crushed desires in heteropatriarchy that otherwise have little to no space in the discursive field. Queer listening destabilizes heteropatriarchy by inviting alternative tales of desire into discourse instead of panicking about them and shutting the tales down. *Frankenstein* unfolds *as a formalization of* queer listening at the historical moment of queer shame's coalescing into a cultural phenomenon. Upon queer shame's sociopolitical inception, Shelley proposes a correction to it: queer listening.

The passageway of queer listening across which Walton treks spans about 140 pages. Shelley devotes approximately seven times more narrative space to formalizing Walton's listening (about 140 pages of his manuscript documenting Frankenstein's and the Creature's shames) than she does to narrating Walton's affective experience (approximately nineteen pages of his letters). Shelley consequently suggests that how a man *feels* about a queer man is less important than *that he listens* to him. Across this narrative expanse, Walton shifts both his mental attention and bodily exertion from imperial masculinity to another goal: listening to two queer males, Frankenstein and his Creature. Walton's attentive body absorbs and dignifies their queer shame by documenting their suffering as the manuscript that constitutes *Frankenstein*. Through listening, Walton gains a discourse for queerness that includes shame but also delivers a reparative language for it. Queerness is fundamentally, as the Creature tells him, an expression of "excellent qualities" such as "honour" and "the majesty of goodness" (160). Walton's Arctic discovery is this noble language for queerness that he hears and transcribes for imperial, homophobic Britain. Walton gains this unimaginable insight and discourse—queerness is not monstrous but majestic—through his patience to sit through the entire novel and listen.

Both the content and form of *Frankenstein* reflect Walton's silent listening to queer shame and his activity of widening discursive space for queer masculinity by writing the queer accounts he hears. After listening to the shames Frankenstein "has related during the day," Walton writes them into the history of male experience. Walton "resolved every night...to record, as nearly as possible in his own words, what" Frankenstein "has related" (18). He honors the queer shame he has heard and ensures its accuracy by having Frankenstein look over the manuscript, certifying that the manuscript is not merely Walton's superimposition of his voice onto another's. Frankenstein "himself corrected and augmented" the manuscript "in many places; but principally in giving the life and spirit to the conversations he held with his enemy," the queer Creature (151). Walton labors to make the "conversation" between the two shamed queer figures as accurate to Frankenstein's experience as possible. He stops populating the discursive field with the language of imperialism—his account of the "passage near the pole to those countries," likely China and India, "to reach which at present so many months are requisite" (8)—and fills it instead with language honoring the experience of queer shame.[9] By shaping her novel as the activity of

a man whose patient listening provides space for queer shame to unfold, Shelley proposes a model for masculinity that does not panic but welcomes queer shame into cultural discourse in a spirit of care and patience. “While I have listened to the...tale,” Walton writes, “my thoughts, and every feeling of my soul, have been drunk up by the interest for my guest” (151). Through the figure of Walton, Shelley imagines a masculinity more attentive to listening to queer subjects than to panicking about them.

Shelley makes the overt link between queer male shame and the need to be listened to in order to heal and expand males’ emotional and bodily range of motion beyond panic and shame. Arguably the most shamed character for his manifestation of queerness, “‘the too horrible vice which is not to be named,’” the unnamed Creature is also the figure who most openly begs for a listener (Norton 15). The queer Creature’s first move in his life is to reach out to be heard, trying to speak to Frankenstein as soon as he gains consciousness: “His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds.” In homosexual panic, Frankenstein flees. The Creature “might have spoken,” Frankenstein recalls, “but I did not hear;...I escaped” (36). When Frankenstein and the Creature encounter each other atop Mont Blanc, Frankenstein still does not want to listen to this queer Creature who represents his “one secret” and that “a dreadful one” (136). Frankenstein uses shaming language to speak to his shameful Creature: “abhorred monster!” Frankenstein yells: “Fiend that thou art!”; “wretched devil!” (68). But the Creature repeats “listen” and “hear” more than six times in the paragraphs that follow: “Listen to my tale”; “Hear me”; “But hear me”; “Listen to me” and again “listen to me”; “still thou canst listen to me” (69). Since Frankenstein considers the Creature an extension of himself as “my own vampire, my own spirit,” we can read the Creature’s ache for a listener coming from a place in Frankenstein’s subjectivity as well.

Frankenstein may be less overtly open than the Creature is about his ache for a male listener because the scientist’s enculturation into heteropatriarchal orthodoxy is more ingrained. This entrenchment has taught Frankenstein that men are not meant to listen but rather to assert. Frankenstein begins the tale of his identity to Walton through the discourse of heteropatriarchal assertion, understanding himself as originating from “counsellors and syndics”—men whose “honour and reputation” rest on giving instructions, laying down the law, and “bestowing on the state sons who might carry his” heteropatriarchal “virtues and his name down to posterity” (18). Well versed in patriarchal declaration, Frankenstein’s conceptual repertoire for queer listening is non-existent. Yet Frankenstein still longs for a male figure who not only counsels but also listens for exceptions to the heteropatriarchal “law” across his young life before stumbling upon one in Walton.

Queer listening, in Shelley’s account, is neither self-insulated nor passive. Instead, this quiet activity throws masculinist ideologies off course by reorienting male bodies from imperial conquest to calm listening. The culmination of

Walton's listening is his openness to redirect his body's exertion from imperial pursuits to return home to his sister, Margaret Saville. After listening to Frankenstein's and the Creature's queer shame, Walton turns the imperial ship around, abandoning conquest to return home, not to reestablish heteropatriarchy, but to expand non-heteropatriarchal space. Rather than "bestowing on the state sons" and furthering heteropatriarchy, Walton aims toward developing the relationship with his sister: "I am wafted towards England, and towards you...my dear sister" (155). He decides to move away from homosocial space with its emphasis on masculinist conquest (the imperial ship), and toward heterosocial space with a woman but not with a patriarch. Queer listening is Shelley's feminist proposition both to heal queer shame and the heteropatriarchy that produces it.

Shelley's Feminist Refiguring of Men

Shelley finds the position of listener most productive in imagining masculinity beyond heteropatriarchy. Shelley writes that *Frankenstein* emerges from "a conversation between two men, Lord Byron and Percy Shelley, 'to which I [Shelley] was a devoted, but nearly silent listener'" (Shelley qtd. in Favret 180). Mary Favret notes that "listening...explains" Shelley's "own mode of literary discourse" (190). Shelley's novel builds a feminist literary discourse around male listening. Walton shifts his behavior from that of an imperialist to that of a listener who writes, aligning him with what might be understood as a feminine position of the ultimate listener-as-writer, Mary Shelley. As listener to men's stories, Walton takes on Shelley's receptivity to other's voices and thus assumes a feminine position. Shelley's feminist correction of masculinism is a man who follows the lead of a quiet woman. In following the lead of feminine reception, masculinity is refigured along feminist lines.

Shelley's interest in homosexual panic and her narration of reparative masculinity are inextricable from her feminism. As Daffron states, "Shelley had an interest and a stake in examining the perplexities of male sexuality" (417)—and, I would add, the homophobic, misogynist hallucinations that warp it. Daffron points out that in Shelley's journal entries of 1818 she demonstrates that she was well read and interested in "ancient homoerotic texts" and "sympathetic to ancient Greek eros" (418). She transcribed, for instance, her husband Percy Bysshe Shelley's translation of the *Symposium* and "read it aloud" to friends (Daffron 417). Her studies of ancient homoeroticism, Daffron finds, gave her insight into "current opinions of sodomy" of which she was "well aware." For example, in May of 1816, Shelley and her husband traveled to Switzerland to be near Lord Byron after he fled England "because," as Daffron relates, Byron "feared the rumors spread about his penchant for beautiful young men." Allegedly, Byron feared a woman, Lady Caroline Lamb, who apparently had told Lady Byron about her husband's "love for men." Byron supposedly responded "by threatening" Lady Lamb "and saying that now she knew his secret, he would persecute her" (Daffron 418). The description of Byron running away in fear from a queer

subjectivity he finds threatening evokes Frankenstein. Byron's alleged threat to a woman also demonstrates the ways homophobia incites not only male violence against other men, but also male violence against women. In June of 1818, one month after arriving in Switzerland to lodge near a homosexually panicked Byron, Shelley started to write *Frankenstein*.

At the moment of homosexual panic's early nineteenth-century inception, Shelley's novel offers a feminist corrective. *Frankenstein* dramatizes the idea that queer male shame is not only an insulated experience of male self-loathing; it also poses alarming consequences for women. The "fear of one's own 'homosexuality,'" Sedgwick writes, results in "a reservoir of potential for violence," especially "oppressive effects on women," "caused by the self-ignorance that this" homophobic "regime constitutively enforces" (*Epistemology* 15, 186). Shelley intertwines Frankenstein's and the Creature's queer self-loathing and rage with the deaths of female characters. Frankenstein's mother Catherine; Justine, the family's servant; Frankenstein's unnamed female companion; and even, finally, Elizabeth, Frankenstein's bride: all these women are sacrificed to homosexual panic. Shelley shares the view of today's feminist queer scholars that violence against women is inextricable from the homophobia that engenders male queer shame. Listening to queer shame, Shelley suggests, may reduce its destructive grip and may thus reduce rage and violence against both men and women.[10]

Even before Walton meets Frankenstein, we learn that Walton holds high regard for queer listeners. In an odd and almost forgettable passage, Walton shares his admiration for another man on his ship: "my lieutenant" (11). The lieutenant is a "man of wonderful courage and enterprise" who, while not queer himself, is a queer listener. Walton lauds this man for listening to experiences of those who suffer within heteropatriarchy. The lieutenant, Walton writes, "loved a young Russian lady" trapped in heteropatriarchy: her father had arranged her unwanted marriage to the lieutenant. The woman "entreated" the lieutenant "to spare her, confessing...that she loved another, but that" her other suitor "was poor, and that her father would never consent to their union. My generous friend," Walton praises, "instantly abandoned his pursuit" of marrying the woman. By listening to the woman's suffering at the hands of heteropatriarchy, the lieutenant changes his behavior and "instantly abandoned his pursuit" to marry her, much like Walton abandons his imperial pursuit after listening to Frankenstein's and the Creature's queer suffering. Since the woman's father refuses to consent to her new marriage, the lieutenant "quitted his country, nor returned until he heard that his former mistress was married according to her inclinations" (11). Walton respects the lieutenant for his capacity to pause and "hear" the experience of a woman whose "inclinations" are disregarded by the heteropatriarchy. Walton applies the lieutenant's calm listening to his own response to queer males who suffer under heteropatriarchy—Frankenstein and the Creature. Walton's queer listening destabilizes heteropatriarchal orthodoxy by opening discursive space for different desires.

Notwithstanding Walton's attributes as a model queer listener, some scholars critique him as a masculinist imperialist. For instance, Jessica Richard reproaches Walton for Romantic masculinism that recklessly places poetic delusions of imperial grandiosity over human life, much like Frankenstein places scientific ambitions above ethical considerations. Richard condemns the sailor as an irresponsible captain obsessed with "rewards of the masculine romance of conquest, penetration, and possession" (307). Angela Wright critiques Walton for imposing his own feelings and thoughts onto his sister Margaret Saville. Questions that Walton "poses to his sister" are "swiftly supplanted by assertions of what Walton wills her to feel and think" (Wright 105). Other critics, including Adriana Craciun, find that Walton's act of listening is less important than the fact that the tale he listens to conforms to the tastes of a nineteenth-century readership "schooled" in tales of "starvation, murder, cannibalism, and madness," common features of "Gothic romances, captivity narratives, shipwreck accounts, early ethnography, and travel writings" (435). One could argue that Walton listens to Frankenstein and the Creature not to dignify them, but to monetize them. Perhaps Walton aims to acquire a sensationalized story for publication in an industry that loves to market juicy polar-expedition narratives. In sum, Walton's character and motivations are shaped by problematic ideologies of masculinity.

Yet Walton also undoes these ideologies. To remain focused on Walton's questionable aspects could blind us from noticing a considerably long reparative thread that Shelley draws out through his character to reimagine masculinity. Despite reservations one could raise about Walton's ethics, I would argue that he nevertheless models the urgent work of responding to queer shame with patient listening rather than alarm. Walton's queer listening to shame thus contributes to recent queer studies conversations about "feeling backward" and gay shame recently launched by scholars such as Heather Love, David Halperin, and Valerie Traub. Love asserts that modern history is rife with literary accounts of queer subjects "feeling backward," which includes a range of unpleasant affects such as "self-hatred, despair, and shame" (146). But in the present-day era of gay pride, Love finds there are fewer people willing to listen—let alone look backward in time—to queer shame. Put another way, there are many queer subjects who feel backward, but fewer queer listeners to them. Since queer scholars, following larger socio-political trends, are "deeply committed to the notion of progress" for queer subjects, "the painful and traumatic dimensions of these [queer literary] texts (and the experience of reading them) have been minimized or disavowed" in the "compulsion" to "affirm queer existence" (Love 3–4). The queer studies conference Gay Shame, held in 2003 at the University of Michigan and organized by David Halperin and Valerie Traub, aimed to reclaim queer shame. Halperin and Traub, in their introduction to their 2009 edited collection from the conference, consider that "gay pride does not even make sense without some reference to the shame of being gay, and [gay pride's] very successes (to say nothing of its

failures) testify to the intensity of its ongoing struggle with shame" (3–4). "The only kind of gay pride that is endurable," Halperin continues, "is a gay pride that does not forget its origins in shame, that is still powered by the transformative energies that spring from experiences of shame" (44). Love, Halperin, and Traub call for queer readers and critics to gain a higher tolerance for affective and discursive discomfort and pause with uncomfortable stories of queerness as a way to support queer experience.

Love's study of "feeling backward" covers modernist literature, and Halperin's chief contributions lie in uncovering recent celebrations of shame, such as Gay Shame activism in the form of parades, processions, and protests from World War II to the present day. Shelley's *Frankenstein* is an earlier work that posits the idea that queer shame deserves sustained attention.[11] In contrast to *Frankenstein*, Love understands queer feeling and queer listening as separate formal properties. On one side is the queer feeling as narrated within the novel, and on the other side is the queer listener as reader or critic. But Shelley's novel combines the figures of queer feeler and queer listener into a unified story of queerness. The queer listener Walton listens to the queer feelers, Frankenstein and the Creature. Shelley's art thus models listening to and feeling queer shame entwined together as the arc of literary narrative. Halperin proposes a grand and almost aggressive discourse for queer shame, asserting that we must "*mobilize* our shame in such a way as to renew the *transgressive* and transformative energies that *power* queer and alternative cultures" so that gay experience might "*triumph*" (45, italics mine). Differently, Shelley's novel suggests that systemic reimagining of sexuality need not be confrontational and radical, but unimposing and quiet: listening. Listening to rather than silencing queer shame may reduce male aggression, rage, and violence by healing the queer shame that causes them. After all, during the pause of Walton's listening, violence and death pause too (no characters die while Walton listens to Frankenstein; they die before and after the listening). Listening to queer shame thus carves out one of the safest zones for queer male subjects and women living within a collective heteropatriarchal hallucination. To save queer men's and women's lives, heteropatriarchal machinations must be paused. Queer listening pauses these machinations.

Male Listening: An Impossible Bodily Site?

For a man such as Walton to pause, listen to, and document queer shame, bottled up inside queer males for years, is so unimaginable a way for a man to occupy space it seems like no space at all. Consequently, discovery of queer listening as an occupiable site—a space of embodiment—has neither been sought nor recognized by explorers Walton reads as a youth, voyagers who hoped to "arriv[e] at the North Pacific Ocean through the seas which surround the pole," or by critics of the novel (8). Shelley seems to know that Walton's embodiment of queer listening might appear so unimaginable that it could

go unrecognized as a discovery at all. Shelley emphasizes the almost incomprehensible feat of Walton's quiet attention by situating it within pursuits of a site—a passageway across the Arctic—that may not exist, suggesting that Walton's magnitude of queer listening—his ability to embody a heretofore uncharted site, a male body listening to queer shame—approaches the impossible. According to Christa Knellwolf, Walton journeys toward "the ultimate extreme of human aspiration," embarking "on a mission of transcending the limits of...ordinary humanity" (508). Walton is an unusual man, open to experiences whose endpoint or success is uncertain. Jessica Richard explains that British explorers had been hoping to discover the impossible—"an ice-free polar zone"—from Britain to North America, China, and India for imperial trading expansion since at least 1554 (298). The fact that no explorer had been successful in finding a passage through the Arctic and across the North Pole to Asia and North America did not so much confirm the non-existence of such a passage as spur some explorers to be the first to find it (Richard 298–99). Walton's failure to find an "open polar sea" free of ice adds him to the long list of unsuccessful Arctic explorers (Richard 298).

Walton might be an unsuccessful geographical explorer, but he is an expert queer shame explorer. Through his success at patient listening, Walton opens discursive routes into the uncharted suffering of queer male psyches. As listener, he embodies an entryway for males to discuss queer shame. *Not* opening routes of listening to queer shame is deadly. After all, *Frankenstein* charts the disaster of running away from, rather than pausing with, sharing out, and befriending, one's queer "daemon" (15). The daemon, or the Creature, represents a messenger who brings forth neither good nor bad news, but otherworldly messages that sound nonsensical within prevailing ideologies. Richard understands Walton's Romantic open-endedness as masculinist "hubris" (303). Thus, she overlooks the ways in which Walton's stamina for enduring "wandering, 'error', or 'trial'"—traits characteristic of Romantic figures, according to Patricia Parker—make him perfectly suited to do normative masculinity wrong and wander outside heteropatriarchal expectations (Parker qtd. in Richard 303–04). Though Richard critiques Walton for pursuing an end that may not exist, his open-endedness is a feature of reparative masculinity. Walton places greater value on wandering than on a specific endpoint. Thus he allows Frankenstein's and the Creature's stories to go on and on instead of inserting his own subjectivity into their narrative. The book takes the form of queer listening; it is as much a document to queer shame as it is to Walton's open and spacious silence before that shame, mirrored in the open and blank Arctic setting, as he welcomes other's stories to fill his experience. Instead of running away from discomfort, Walton lets the painful voice, eyes, countenance, and experiences of Frankenstein occupy his attention. Unlike Frankenstein, who runs in shame from the face of queerness, Walton lingers with both queerness and its shame. While listening to the tale, Walton notices that

> sometimes, seized with agony, [Frankenstein] could not continue his tale; at others, his voice broken, yet piercing, uttered with difficulty the words so replete with agony. His fine and lovely eyes were now lighted up with indignation, now subdued to downcast sorrow....Sometimes he commanded his countenance and tones;...then, like a volcano bursting forth, his face would suddenly change. (151)

Walton's high tolerance for abiding with discomfort and change is less a Romantic flaw than a strength. His receptive ears and his stamina to pause with queer, wayward, and uncomfortable stories give queer shame space to "burst forth." The principal male character whose presence spans the entire novel, Walton's quiet masculinity increases in grandeur, not grandiosity, page by page. A man's presence, Shelley shows, can be vast without being invasive.

The work of queer listening is crucial because it is so rare. Shelley narrates a lineage of men unpracticed in the hard work of queer listening. One might argue that it is Frankenstein's own refusal to share his shame more than an inability or unwillingness of other men to listen (such as his father Alphonse, his friend Clerval, or his professors Waldman and Krempe). Perhaps these men would be better listeners to queer shame than Frankenstein supposes if he were to give them a chance. Frankenstein confesses to Walton that he himself is partly to blame for his silence. Recalling the time he introduces two figures from his social world to each other—his childhood friend Henry Clerval and his university professor M. Waldman—Frankenstein confesses to Walton, "I could never persuade myself to confide to" Clerval "that event which was so often present to my recollection, but which I feared the detail to another would only impress more deeply" (44). And Frankenstein shares that Professor Waldman spoke to him "with a desire...of drawing me out" (44).

But Frankenstein's inability to share his shame and other men not listening to it are entwined within the same phenomenon of homosexual panic. The avoidance of queer discourse is not so much a result of personal failures as of systemic homophobic constrictions on discourse and thus on alternative realities for male subjectivity. Sedgwick argues that homosocial institutions—such as Frankenstein's patriarchal childhood and university—are ground-zeroes of queer shame and anxiety. Homosociality, Sedgwick writes, "describes social bonding between persons of the same sex" and is "characterized by intense homophobia" (*Between Men* 1). Homophobia is nearly inescapable in patriarchal spaces. "Homophobia is a *necessary* consequence," Sedgwick finds, "of patriarchal institutions," and "male-dominated kinship systems" are "brutally homophobic" (*Between Men* 3–4). Since all men in the "Age of *Frankenstein*" suffer to some degree from homosexual panic, including Frankenstein's friend and professor, their "silence on these [queer] issues"—systemic homosexual panic—"performs the enforcing work of the status quo more predictably and inexorably than any attempt at analysis" (Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 21).

Especially in homosocial spaces such as the university where Frankenstein, Clerval, and his professor convene, Frankenstein tends to stop his narration just short of expressing queer shame because he notices the discomfort his tales bring to male listeners. In other words, other men show just as much impatience with lingering with uncomfortable queer shame as Frankenstein does. For instance, when the above conversation with Clerval and Waldman turns to the particulars of Frankenstein's approach to the science he uses to experiment with his "dreadful secret," Frankenstein notices the men's discomfort. Waldman "perceived I [Frankenstein] disliked the subject...and changed the subject" to something more comfortable; Frankenstein "saw plainly that" Clerval, too, "was surprised"; Clerval "declined the subject," and "the conversation took a more general turn" (44). Discomfort with homosexual panic takes over all the men in this homosocial scene and prevents both queer sharing and queer listening.

Like the men at university, Walton also occupies homosocial space in the form of the ship. We would thus predict that Walton, like other men, would respond to queerness with panic. Yet Walton's experience is not exclusively homosocial since he maintains contact with a woman—"my dear sister," Saville (7)—from the first word of the novel to the last, through the letters and manuscript he writes to her. Walton's social experience is therefore more heterosocial than homosocial. Walton's ongoing ties to feminine subjectivity on the otherwise homosocial ship might explain why homosexual panic holds less of a grip on Walton than it holds on other male characters. As Sedgwick reminds us, the more homosocial a space is in "The Age of *Frankenstein*," the likelier it is to be homophobic and thus characterized by fear, panic, and threat. Walton is less susceptible to homosexual panic because his continuing relationship with his sister ensures that his experience is less homosocial, even less patriarchal, than other men's—for example, Frankenstein's and the Creature's—whose ties to the feminine are inconsistent rather than pervasive. Their connections to women eventually disappear entirely when all female relations die, leaving the two queer male characters bound to each other in a homosocial, homophobic, and deadly scenario. Frankenstein tells Walton, "I pursued my path towards the destruction of the daemon" as a "mechanical impulse" (146). Walton's ties to heteropatriarchy are also looser than other men's, since his father dies when he is young. In becoming a sailor, Walton disregards heteropatriarchal law, "my father's dying injunction," which "had forbidden" him "to embark on a sea-faring life" (8). As he sails away from heteropatriarchal rule, Walton's primary relationship with his sister gains strength, as evidenced by the length of the manuscript he writes to her. Not as enmeshed in homosociality as other men, Walton is less susceptible to homosexual panic; therefore, he demonstrates more patience for abiding with queer stories than they do.

Frankenstein, in contrast, remains trapped within heteropatriarchal ideology and thus within homosexual panic throughout his life. His earliest memories demonstrate his internalization of homophobia. When he begins to share

his biography with Walton, Frankenstein reveals that his discursive range for talking about identity extends no further than the heteropatriarchal ideology of "family," "ancestors," "father," and "bestowing on the state sons." Each of Frankenstein's opening paragraphs to Walton announces heteropatriarchy's grip on the scientist in its first sentence: "his marriage," "my father," "his daughter," "father," "father," "father," "father" (18–19). If Walton's endurance for listening were to stop at Frankenstein's introduction, then Walton, like other men, would hear only another story upholding heteropatriarchal orthodoxy rather than unlock the queer shame it causes. Whereas Shelley narrates other men's uncomfortable reactions whenever Frankenstein's story indicates queerness, Shelley leaves Walton's reaction to Frankenstein's story during its telling unnarrated. Walton's reaction is thus blank and suggests a radical peace, neither approving, surprised, nor disapproving, just unimaginably open to queerness.

Through Frankenstein's heteropatriarchal introduction of himself, we learn that his queer shame is buried under masculinist orthodoxy that associates a man's "character" with the "circumstances of his marriage" (18). This orthodoxy preempts its members from raising experiences and questions of queerness. Frankenstein therefore must engage with questions of queerness on his own, away from a community of support. He creates his "dreadful secret" far away from potential listeners in a "solitary chamber, or rather cell, at the top of the house, and separated from all the other apartments" (34). Famously, his queer Creature goes unnamed, for he represents queerness's unspeakable existence. Coming from such a discursively guarded, heteropatriarchal origin, Frankenstein requires time—the duration of the narrative—to stumble toward finding a discourse for both his queerness and shame beyond "monster," "fiend," and "devil." Frankenstein has internalized that queerness, let alone the shame that accompanies it, does not carry a message worth listening to. Walton's quiet listening, what he calls his capacity to "be patient" (156), gives Frankenstein the time and space to develop the story of his queer shame rather than keep it buried, inarticulate, and silent as he does in the company of other men.

Men Explain Things[12]

Heteropatriarchy promotes male talkers, not queer listeners. Frankenstein has learned impatience with queer—or slightly off—messages from his father Alphonse. When Frankenstein discloses his secret love for alchemy, Alphonse berates his son's desires: "My dear Victor, do not waste your time upon this; it is sad trash" (22). His father, coming from a lineage of "counsellors and syndics," has been rewarded with "reputation and honour" more by filling narrative space with his own perspective than by remaining silent so as to invite another man to voice his. Frankenstein immediately yearns for a longer exchange with his father, who apparently has moved on although Frankenstein has not. Frankenstein laments that "if, instead of this remark, my father had taken the pains to explain" why his interests are "sad trash," Frankenstein might have pursued

other directions for his interests. The "cursory glance" Alphonse gives Frankenstein's interest indicates his father's lack of curiosity about Frankenstein's interior orientations and an unwillingness to learn about them (22). Frankenstein states that he "often wished to communicate these secret stores of knowledge to my father, yet his indefinite censure...always withheld me" (22). Later, when Frankenstein admits the story of his secret shame—his relationship to his "daemon"—to his father, Alphonse listens for just a line and demands, "I entreat you never to make such an assertion again"; Alphonse "instantly changed the subject" (134). Frankenstein's shame seems incomprehensible to Alphonse, recalling Frankenstein's impatient reaction to the Creature's indecipherable speech, his "inarticulate sounds," when he gains consciousness (36). Frankenstein replicates the male lineage he knows of males shutting down rather than listening to queer interests.

Frankenstein moves from one male authority figure to another, none of whom pause long enough with Frankenstein's queerness to give it time to emerge. His experiences at university solidify Frankenstein's belief that there may be something shameful about his desires. Communications scholar Lisbeth Lipari observes that listening often goes unpracticed in university settings because listening tends to be less valued than speaking and defending. Listening is practiced "only, if at all, as a means of preparing one's next move," Lipari writes. "When listening is addressed,...it is done primarily with the aim of conquest or control. We either listen to our adversary's arguments so we may defeat them, or we listen in order to 'master' some material, facts, or theories" (Lipari 2). At university, Frankenstein meets Professor Krempe, who seems more interested in defeating Frankenstein's ideas than in listening to them. Krempe, like Alphonse, chastises Frankenstein's self-education in alchemy as "nonsense" (27). Frankenstein finds a more generous personality in Professor Waldman. But as Lipari reminds us, education culture tends to reward talkers over listeners. Waldman lectures more than listens, telling Frankenstein that he is "happy...to have gained a disciple" to whom he can give "instructions" (29). Of the eight times Shelley uses the word "lecture" in her novel, six times describe Waldman's style of exchange with Frankenstein (the other two times describe Professor Krempe and Clerval). Shelley shows that even kind men such as Waldman lecture at men instead of listen to them.

Frankenstein's friend since childhood, Henry Clerval, though kind like Waldman, often shows discomfort with listening, too. From a young age, Clerval aspires toward masculinist heroism, which includes more heteropatriarchal bravado than quiet listening. Clerval delights in repeating storylines of "chivalry and romance." As a child Clerval directs other children "to act plays composed by him," whose "principal characters" are manly heroes such as "Orlando, Robin Hood, Amadis, and St. George" who battle enemies and compete for property (21). Clerval's tendency to direct others through plotlines of heroic manliness reveals little interest in reparative variations of masculinity. Frankenstein's

recollection that Clerval rouses his young companions to "act plays," or perform masculinism, suggests that to a certain degree Frankenstein recognizes that masculinism is more public performance than inborn inclination. The distance between Frankenstein's inner questioning and his performative masculinity suggests a place that increasingly becomes occupied by shame for falling short of normative masculine orientations. When Clerval visits Frankenstein at college, he notices the "wildness in my [Frankenstein's] eyes for which he could not account, and my loud, unrestrained, heartless laughter frightened and astonished him." Clerval seems open to listening. "'My dear Victor,' cried [Clerval], 'what, for God's sake, is the matter? Do not laugh in that manner. How ill you are! What is the cause of all this?'" (44). But Clerval's order to "not laugh in that manner" conveys more of a demand, as if he were still directing one of his childhood plays, than a readiness to listen. Clerval's command that Frankenstein disclose "the cause of all this" expresses more anxiety and judgment than wonder. His staccato questions and exclamations indicate his greater propensity toward panicked demands than calm listening.

Clerval and Frankenstein's relationship is increasingly strained by anxiety. In fact, Clerval's arrival at Frankenstein's university coincides with Frankenstein falling into a "nervous fever" (39). The fever renders Frankenstein nearly silent to his friend for the "whole winter" (40), except for the times the scientist "raved" in his fever about the "monster" (39). But Clerval brushes off Frankenstein's feverish vocalizations of shame as "wanderings of [his] disturbed imagination" (39). When Frankenstein recovers, Clerval is more poised "to lecture" than to listen, for Clerval states, "I may speak to you on one subject, may I not?", which Frankenstein interprets as Clerval's attempt to "allude to" his secret shame, "an object on whom I dared not even think" (38, 44). Clerval, despite being an attentive nurse whose "unbounded and unremitting attentions...restored" Frankenstein "to life," is better at lecturing Frankenstein than listening to him once Frankenstein's illness subsides. To be sure, Clerval shows sensitivity to Frankenstein's distress, ceasing his insistence that Frankenstein speak about the "one subject" as soon as he "observed [Frankensten's] change of colour" due to shame (40). Though Clerval is a sensitive man, he still dominates the dialogue in nearly every scene after Frankenstein recovers: Clerval's "conversation was full of imagination;...he invented tales of wonderful fancy and passion" and "repeated my favourite poems" (46–47). Frankenstein, sensing Clerval's gifts as a speaker but his limits as a listener, does not feel comfortable sharing his shameful secret with Clerval, who is prone to either dismiss his friend's odd language, as Alphonse and Krempe do, or panic about it. "Although I loved [Clerval] with a mixture of affection and reverence that knew no bounds," Frankenstein tells Walton, "I could never persuade myself to confide in him" (44). The mistrust Frankenstein feels as a youth for Clerval persists into adulthood. Frankenstein's unease seems to have emerged from Clerval's high regard for masculinism, tendency

to panic, and propensity to dominate conversations, which renders him ill-equipped, Frankenstein fears, to listen to rather than dismiss queer shame.

Shelley compounds the connection between men unpracticed in listening on one hand and sustaining heteropatriarchy and queer shame on the other through Old Man DeLacey and his son Felix. Felix speaks profusely to his father, often "read[ing] to the old man," but he shows discomfort with listening. Shelley writes that the DeLacey father, like his son, is comfortable with speaking, for he "would talk in a cheerful accent, with an expression of goodness." While his daughter "Agatha listened with respect," much like Walton and Shelley herself, we are told that "it was not thus with Felix." Though Felix's "countenance was more sorrowful" than Agatha's, "his voice was more cheerful than that of his sister, especially when he addressed the old man" (78). Felix, like his father, is more comfortable with speaking to men than with listening to them. Felix is noted for "lively conversation" once his beloved Safie arrives; not surprisingly, this conversation focuses, like Clerval's, on masculinist preoccupations with domination and hierarchy: "divisions of property, immense wealth and squalid poverty; of rank, descent, and noble blood" (83). Old man DeLacey, who is blind and therefore cannot see the so-called "horror" of the Creature's "hideous" and "ugly" "countenance," listens to the Creature as he unloads his suffering: the "fatal prejudice" that "clouds" people's "eyes," so that "where they ought to see a feeling and kind friend, they behold only a detestable monster" (36, 93).

But this listening extends only a page and a half before Felix sees the Creature and attacks, "dart[ing] forward, and with supernatural force tore me from his father,...dashed me to the ground, and struck me violently" (94). According to Sedgwick, all men, particularly those who do not self-avowedly identify with queerness, are subject to panic when they perceive anything resembling queerness within cultures of homophobia: "Male homosexual panic became the normal condition of male heterosexual entitlement" (*Epistemology* 185).[13] Felix, by virtue of being male, is caught in the web of homosexual panic. As Sedgwick might predict, Felix panics when he sees the Creature because he represents queerness. Felix considers queerness threatening because he tries to destroy the Creature. His panic recalls Sedgwick's association of homophobic male entitlement with "annihilation" of "homosexual meaning" to which every man, and particularly non-queer ones, is subject (*Epistemology* 205). The Creature responds to Felix's homophobia not with violence to Felix, but with violence to himself. The Creature develops an even deeper sense of shame: "my heart sunk within me as with bitter sickness" (94), echoed more than a century later in Tomkins's definition of shame as the affect that "strikes deepest into the heart" as a "sickness of the soul" (133). Felix demonstrates no patience to pause with queer shame and listen. Instead, subject to homosexual panic like nearly every male in the novel, Felix tries to annihilate queerness and silence its shame. Heteropatriarchy's prevailing response to queerness is attack instead of patiently withstanding initial discomfort to hear a story of queer friendship unfold.

Frankenstein's tale of queer shame, he tells Walton, has "reached" its "*acme*" when he replaces one censoring patriarchal figure, his father, with another one, a magistrate, "a criminal judge" (142, 143). Alphonse dies "under the horrors that were accumulated around him" (142), as his son's unspoken queerness turns raging. The moment Frankenstein's primary patriarchal censor is gone, he seeks out another one in the magistrate to "exert his whole authority for the apprehension of the murderer," his "miserable daemon" (143). True to pattern, the magistrate's response is similar to Alphonse's. Frankenstein goes to the magistrate in a spirit of homosexual panic, of "detection and punishment," and the magistrate's reaction matches his. When Frankenstein first addresses the magistrate to announce that he has "an accusation to make," the magistrate "listened to me with attention and kindness" (143). But how much "listening" the magistrate exerts is questionable, since Shelley does not narrate the particulars of Frankenstein's tale the magistrate supposedly hears, focusing instead on the magistrate's indications of queer panic. Frankenstein "saw him sometimes shudder with horror," and "surprise...was painted on his countenance"; "my address caused a considerable change in the" magistrate's "physiognomy" (143, 144). When Frankenstein finishes sharing his tale, the magistrate avoids further engagement with Frankenstein and his "creature of whom you speak," writing off Frankenstein's experience as "delirium" (144). This scene recalls the moment the Creature first attempts to speak queerness—he "muttered some inarticulate sounds"—to Frankenstein, who flees in panic, as well as the moment when Frankenstein shares his queer story with his father, who tells him "never to make such an assertion again." When men hear queer shame, it sounds like alarming mutterings of "inarticulate sounds" from which male consciousness must run away. Men panic, dismiss, or attack rather than regard queer shame.

By novel's end, queer shame has become the good son of heteropatriarchy: it has escalated into violent conquest. Conquering subsumes Frankenstein's behavior and language. Frankenstein declares, "I swear to pursue the daemon, who caused this misery, until he or I shall perish in mortal conflict" (145). Frankenstein wants homosexual panic to guide all men, whom he commands to imitate his "mechanical impulse" toward violent conquest (147). For instance, Frankenstein demands that Walton "seek" the Creature "and satisfy my vengeance in his death" (150). Frankenstein also commands Walton's sailors to grip masculinism tighter. When Walton's crew requests to turn back to England, Frankenstein orders them to "be steady in your purposes, and firm as a rock. Do not return to your families with the stigma of disgrace marked on your brows." "Oh! be men, or be more than men," Frankenstein proclaims, for a man achieves greatness by moving his body toward conquest and impenetrability "firm as a rock," not by being open to change, "turn[ing] their backs on the foe" who must be "fought and conquered" (155). Frankenstein has learned to panic in the face of any deviations to orientation, sexual, geographical, or otherwise. His language shames the crewmembers who may be open to such alternative orientations.

Frankenstein's inability to listen to geographical deviations parallels his fear of sexual deviations. The icebergs from which it is difficult to "escape" (154) dramatize the ways Frankenstein freezes his mind and body into restrictive patterns from which he ultimately dies.

Walton: A Calmer Kind of Queer

Walton's queerness does not panic and shut down, but relaxes and opens. He sees queerness the way he sees geography, not as a threat, but as a form of surprise, openness, and wonder—just as "ice" does not remain impenetrable, but "should dissipate, and a free passage be opened" (154). Walton's willingness to be surprised matches his openness to different kinds of desire. Hence, Walton experiences queerness in a less combative register than other men. His calm queerness is part of his larger personality orientation to withstand discomfort patiently, connected to his stamina for listening to homosexual panic. After Frankenstein's tirade directed at Walton's crew, Walton steps in not to raise alarm and assert his opinion like Frankenstein, but to ask his crew for their responses. Walton invites them not to panic, but to relax and pause: "retire, and consider of what had been said," not by him but by Frankenstein. In moments of crisis, Walton invites the crew to pause and reflect instead of panic. He later writes to his sister "I have consented to return...to England" at the will of his crew (155). He asserts leadership not by domineering but by giving others space to reflect about their suffering, by listening to it, and by using what he hears to change his behavior. His capacity to exert calmness and listen to others in moments of crisis equips him to shift his goal from masculinist imperialism to the non-heteropatriarchal home, not to a wife and children but "to you, my dear sister" (155).

Walton's calm patience allows him to linger longer than other men with difficult situations. His patience enables him to pause for potential beauty to emerge where others see threat and run. He has a high tolerance for uncomfortable situations, and waits for discomfort to change into wonder. As we have seen, *Frankenstein*'s other men have little patience for uncomfortable experiences and "immediately change the subject" when a situation seems alarmingly queer. From the opening paragraph, we learn that Walton sees the same uncomfortable situations other men do, but he responds to them differently. While others regard Arctic expanse as "the seat of frost and desolation," Walton predicts "the sun is for ever visible" in this "country of eternal light." Where others see "disaster" in "snow and frost," he notices "radiance" glittering across the glacial landscape. Shelley situates Walton within a setting of melting ice, immersing him within a harsh environment that has the capacity to soften into fluidity and beauty. Walton senses there may be unimaginable warmth, "sun" and "light," along his icy route, suggesting that he may not experience warmth and beauty now, but potentially could in the future if he is willing to wait. He notices the eternal light of the Arctic, and endows it with the divine, "the phaenomena of

the heavenly bodies" that reveal "celestial observations," suggesting his openness to spiritual transformation, change of the most profound kind. Whereas the "cold, northern breeze" might fill other sailors with stiffness, it "fills [him] with delight," a light that predisposes him to wait and see if difficult situations might open to experiences of "wonder" (7).

The first time he sees Frankenstein, Walton reacts with alarm that changes to care. Walton initially proclaims "Good God!" because Frankenstein resembles the hideousness of the Creature as a "creature" whose eyes emit "an expression of wildness, and even madness" (14). Yet Walton does not clutch one "mechanical impulse" of panic like Frankenstein does. Instead, Walton's activity moves from alarm to courtesy. Shelley associates Walton's care with warmth, suggestive again of his capacity to relax into peace, and by means of this peace, he warms and relaxes others, such as Frankenstein and the Creature, to express their shame to him. "As soon as it was light," Walton writes to his sister, he beholds the wild and mad creature, Frankenstein. Walton begins by "rubbing [Frankenstein] with brandy," then he "wrapped him up in blankets, and placed him near the chimney of the kitchen-stove" where Walton feeds him "a little soup" (14). Walton's personality is warm. His warming of Frankenstein's body contributes to Frankenstein's opening. Frankenstein allows his shameful story to melt out of him because Walton moves from panic to care and eventually to perceiving this mad, wild, and queer creature Frankenstein as beautiful, whose "whole countenance is lighted up...with a beam of benevolence and sweetness that I never saw equalled" (15).

By the time Walton's character has practiced queer listening in the face of Frankenstein's queer "agony" and the "wildest rage" (151) for the duration of close to 140 pages, Walton encounters the queerest and scariest figure in the novel: the Creature, who holds the most shame as the epitome of unspeakable queer subjectivity. Unlike other characters in the novel, Walton is predisposed to withstand rather than flee from so-called horrifying queerness. Because other characters such as Frankenstein and Felix have low tolerance for enduring discomforts such as homosexual panic let alone queerness itself, they look at the Creature and panic instead of lingering long enough to behold something wondrous about queerness. Even Frankenstein states that he "compassioned" the Creature, "and sometimes felt a wish to console him; but when I looked upon him, when I saw the filthy mass that moved and talked, my heart sickened, and my feelings were altered to those of horror and hatred" (103). We already know Frankenstein has a low capacity for enduring queerness without panicking. We also know that Walton sees the same disturbing entities other men see (such as the desolate ice and the queer agony in Frankenstein's face and voice). Indeed, Walton's first reaction to the Creature is panic, just like his first reaction to Frankenstein is: "Great God!" Walton exclaims upon beholding both characters (157). But as we have seen, Walton practices homosexual calmness and thus abides with queer situations others might call "disaster" because, to him, these "evil forebodings" may disclose something about "wonders" and "beauty" (7).

Thus, Walton stands before the Creature, queerness manifest, as he stands before the "dangerous" ice and the "creature" Frankenstein: with patience instead of attack (13). "I called on him to stay," Walton reflects (158).

Rather than destroying the Creature, as Frankenstein has ordered him to do, Walton opens to the Creature in a way the Creature cannot conceive: he listens to him. Despite being overcome by "a vision so horrible as his face," Walton is the first and only character who both sees the Creature and does not run away or attack him. Walton admits that his first instinct is to "obey the dying request of my friend in destroying his enemy." But he moves on from these "mechanical impulses" toward "a mixture of curiosity and compassion" for the Creature which he expresses not by retreating in repulsion, but by "approach[ing] this tremendous being." Once again, Walton exerts his body to move in surprising directions. We might expect him to move his body in a homosexual-panic direction like other men by shutting his ears and forbidding a story of queer shame, especially since Frankenstein has primed Walton to hate the Creature. But Walton is so patient with distress that he muscles his body into stillness and silence. He becomes present for the Creature. The Creature "paused, looking on me with wonder" (158). The wonder is that Walton's masculinity has calmed in the face of queerness rather than panicked. Walton's decision to attend to instead of shame the face of queer shame is wondrous. As such, Walton's Arctic accomplishment is not the discovery of a new imperial trade route, but rather a quieter achievement: listening to queer shame.

Indeed, masculinist conquest cannot persist when men decide to listen to queer shame instead of to panic and destroy it. Queer shame becomes the ultimate object of study in the Arctic, as the Creature's presence occupies the novel's final scene. Other subjectivities evaporate, for the Creature "seemed to forget [Walton's] presence" (160). Just as readers tend to forget Walton's presence, the Creature forgets as well, as the scene becomes about his shame. Walton's subjectivity is almost forgettable because it is so radically open to moving aside so that queer shame might fill narrative space. In this vast narrative opening, queer shame, like other "evil foreboding," opens into beautiful truths about human subjectivity which panic blocks. Walton's calmer response gives the Creature time to describe his subjectivity not only in the discourse of abhorrence, but also in the language of majesty: "I cannot believe that I am he whose thoughts were once filled with sublime and transcendent visions of the beauty and the majesty of goodness. But it is even so; the fallen angel becomes a malignant devil" (160). The Creature is the personification of both queerness and beauty—the "sublime and transcendent"—that has nowhere to go in a culture of homosexual panic. In homophobic cultures, queerness—a "vision" of "beauty" and "majesty"—is "borne away by the waves, and lost in darkness and distance" (161). A culture that cultivates homosexual panic is thus a culture that prefers its males to live and die in "abhorrence" and "darkness" rather than in the "majesty of goodness."

The Creature has time to share that queerness is more "transcendent vision" than the "devil" because Walton's homosexual calm transcends homosexual panic. While the Creature discloses similar truths to Frankenstein atop Mont Blanc, Frankenstein responds by aiming to make queerness, the Creature, go away. He would rather live a life of panic and conquest than relax with queerness, an "angel" who wants to bond with him: "I pursued my path," Frankenstein decides, not toward majestic goodness but "towards the destruction of the daemon" (147). Walton's response is different. Shelley concludes the scene with Walton lingering with a socio-political choice. Men can either continue to attack queerness and refuse the beauty it delivers; or men can pause with queerness, allow it to deliver them from ugly masculinist destruction, and enjoy the beauty and majesty of this more peaceful reality. The discovery that queerness is not the epitome of ugliness but is instead a gateway to peaceful majesty is Walton's Arctic discovery that he contributes to imperial Britain.

Readers, like the Creature, may have forgotten Walton's presence, so consumed they may have become in listening to queerness tell its story as fundamentally beautiful rather than ugly. The irony is that perhaps the novel's main character whose listening behavior we are to emulate seems so minor: Walton. But his minor status is the point. Through Walton, Shelley reconfigures male subjectivity not as the assertion of ego but as the emptying of it to make space for queer suffering in a heteropatriarchal world that denies queer beauty and thus destroys itself. Walton wields his agency as patient abiding in the face of the novel's real ugliness: the ways homophobia deprives all male subjects—queer or not—of their birthright to relax and experience queerness as beautiful. Shelley's novel may be training early nineteenth-century male readers to become queer listeners, equipping them to linger longer with the discomfort of queerness. In this uncomfortable pause with queerness, "transcendent visions of the beauty and the majesty of goodness" unfold. We still live in the "Age of *Frankenstein*" to the degree that men panic before queerness rather than relax and receive the "ecstatic joy" and "a thousand sights of beauty" it delivers (81, 80). Men create a reality of "sublime and transcendent visions of beauty" every time they drop homosexual panic and choose instead to practice homosexual calm through an activity so radical it seems like a non-activity, almost invisible, nearly unnoticeable: listening.

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NOTES

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[1] I use the term "queerness" to refer to male sexual desires and activities, as well as gender expressions, that do not conform to prevailing ideologies of male desire, sexual activities, and gender expressions.
[2] Rictor Norton writes, "The first significant reference to civil laws against homosexuality in England occurs in 1376,...But it was not until 1533 that a statute was actually enacted against homosexuals" (15).
[3] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank consider Tomkins's work on shame specifically and on affects more broadly particularly generative for queer thought, for his work demonstrates a "plain absence not only of homophobia" and "heterosexist assumptions," but also is free of "any hint of heterosexist teleology" (7).
[4] Norton writes that, around 1700, "gay men began to gather together within a structured social organization which we can properly call a subculture." Norton names members of this subculture "mollies," "the word which most gay men used to refer to one another for more than 150 years....The nearest contemporary equivalent is 'gay', or, for those of a certain age, 'queen'" (9).
[5] "Queer shame" was a guiding concept in *GLQ*'s 1993 inaugural issue, which established shame as a foundational concept of queer theory (see *GLQ* 1.1 [1993]). For an excellent overview of the ways queer shame intersects with other avenues of queer thought, see *Gay Shame* (University of Chicago Press, 2009), edited by David Halperin and Valerie Traub.
[6] As Joseph Cady explains, "the words 'homosexual and 'heterosexual' were not coined until 1868 when they appeared in a May 6th draft letter to Karl Heinrich Ulrichs by Karoly Maria Kertbeny" and "appeared in print for the first time" a year later (33). Cady pushes back against Michel Foucault's claim that sexuality did not define male identities until the mid- to late nineteenth century. Cady argues that there was a "language for a male sexual orientation" in England at least as far back as the Renaissance, before the nineteenth-century terms "homosexual" and "heterosexual" and eighteenth-century terms such as "mollies" were coined. According to Cady, the Renaissance was an era with a "definite recognition of a distinct homosexuality," or a "categorical, sexual orientation" or "inner inclination" to men, often called "masculine love" at the time, and "acknowledged at least by those who were willing to face and discuss the subject frankly" (9, 10). The male characters in Shelley's novel inherit this centuries-long discursive legacy of male same-sex desire.
[7] I use the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein* rather than the 1831 edition. I follow Anne K. Mellor's viewpoint that the "the text of preference" for studies such as mine that trace both a "stable and coherent conception of the character[s]" and "Shelley's political and moral ideology...should be the 1818 edition" (205, 211). The 1818 edition demonstrates "greater internal philosophical coherence," is "closest to the author['s] original conceptions," and is "more convincingly related to" the novel's "historical context" than the 1831 edition, which "cannot do justice to Mary Shelley's powerful originating vision" (Mellor 205, 211). And yet, I believe with Mellor that the 1831 edition is most useful for studies that chart "text editing or the theory of the text itself" (211).
[8] I identify Walton as the queer listener because Shelley devotes overwhelmingly more narrative space to Walton's listening than to Frankenstein's and the Creature's more questionable listening. Frankenstein listens, albeit ineffectually, to the Creature's account of his experience for approximately thirty pages. While the Creature might be said to listen to the DeLacey family for a longer temporal duration (the winter season) than Walton listens to Frankenstein, Walton nonetheless listens for longer narrative duration than the Creature. Walton's approximately 140 pages of listening is thus about five times longer than both Frankenstein's and the Creature's pages of listening.
[9] Scholar Jessica Richard notes that a chief reason for the rise of Arctic exploration in Britain was the Treaty of Tordesillas, which, "in 1494, gave the Spanish and Portuguese primary control over the New World routes to the East"; consequently, "English and Dutch navigators had to seek alternative routes to the riches of India and China" (309).
[10] Susan Stryker focuses on transgender rage in *Frankenstein*, arguing that "a deep and abiding rage"—not queer shame—is the deciding affect in *Frankenstein* (237). Dana Luciano and Mel Y. Chen, following Stryker, point to the novel as a "site for...transgender rage" (198). My study investigates the queer shame that arguably might underlie cisgender male rage.

[11] *Frankenstein* is mentioned three brief times by two different scholars in Halperin and Traub's edited collection *Gay Shame*. Sedgwick mentions *Frankenstein* twice in her essay, "Shame, Theatricality, and Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*." Ellis Hansen refers to *Frankenstein* in a passing phrase in his essay "Teaching Shame," leaving the opportunity for the present article to linger with *Frankenstein* longer to unpack the ways it teaches queer shame and how and why to listen to it.
[12] This heading owes a debt to Rebecca Solnit's book *Men Explain Things to Me* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014).
[13] Felix was born and raised "in a large and luxurious city, called Paris" (84). He was also familiar with Livorno (called "Leghorn" in the novel), one of Italy's largest international port cities. As Rictor Norton states, "gay subcultures" thrived in areas of "large population, with proportionally larger numbers of gay men," which "provided" them "the opportunity and the publicity necessary for making contacts" (11). Given Felix's upbringing in and travel experiences throughout some of Europe's most populated and international centers, we might assume that someone like Felix would have been at least generally familiar with his era's common ideas or assumptions about homosexuality.

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