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The Case of Euphonia: The Voice of "The Wonderful Talking Machine" and the Horror of the Artificial Man[1]

Keywords
euphonia, automaton, machine, uncanny, Frankenstein, likeness in difference, artificial man

Abstract
In the early 1840s, Joseph Faber presented his invention "The Wonderful Talking Machine," later known as Euphonia, which captivated and unsettled audiences alike. While its ability to imitate human speech in various languages represented a remarkable mechanical feat, its "uncanny" voice elicited unease. The paper examines the dynamic between Faber and his invention, drawing parallels with Mary Shelley's Victor Frankenstein and his "creature." We focus on the status of artificial creation and the unsettling nature of imitation, emphasizing the general ambivalence towards automata in the 19th century. By exploring the encounter between creator and creation, we examine the complexity of their relation and the horror that emanates from the blurring of the boundaries between man and machine when an effect of "likeness in difference" takes place.

Primer Evfonija: glas »Čudovitega govorečega stroja« in groza umetnega človeka

Ključne besede
Euphonia, avtomaton, stroj, das Unheimliche, Frankenstein, podobnost v razliki, umetni človek

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Povzetek
V začetku štiridesetih let devetnajstega stoletja je Joseph Faber javnosti predstavil svoj izum »Čudoviti govoreči stroj«, pozneje poznan pod imenom Euphonia, ki je obenem očaral in vznemirjal svoje občinstvo. Medtem, ko je njegova sposobnost posnemanja človeškega govora v različnih jezikih izkazovala izjemen mehanicistični dosežek, pa je njegov strašljivi glas sprožal nemir. Pričujoči prispevek preučuje dinamiko med Faberjem in njegovim izumom ter vleče vzporednice z Victorjem Frankensteinom Mary Shelley in njegovim »stvorom«. V ospredju sta status umetne stvaritve in zaskrbljujoča narava imitacije, ki jo postavljamo ob bok splošni ambivalentnosti do avtomatonov devetnajstega stoletja. Z analizo srečanja med stvarnikom in stvaritvijo je naš namen preučiti kompleksnost njunega razmerja in grozljivost, ki izhaja iz brisanja meja med človekom in strojem, ko nastopi učinek »podobnosti v razliki«.

One glance at a certain page of *P. T. Barnum's Advance Courier*, a nineteenth-century publication dedicated to the advertisement of various shows, wonders, and menageries, is perhaps enough to disperse the reader's attention in an instant. The page is overrun by headlines printed in thick, black letters, their power reinforced by flashy illustrations. Above such supposedly compelling titles as "Living Fiji Cannibals!," "The Mechanical Leotard," and another that asks "The 'WHAT IS IT'; Is It Animal? Is It Human? Or Is It an Amalgamation of Both?," we run into another—and perhaps for us the most curious one—advertising the rental of the "Wonderful Talking Machine" invented by Professor Faber. The accompanying illustration portrays a man wearing a tailcoat sitting in front of some kind of strange instrument resembling a fortepiano but not quite—a woman's head adorned with black ringlet curls protrudes from the installation on top—and the text below reads as follows:

> The Wonderful Talking Machine,
> OF PROFESSOR FABER,
> THE GREATEST INVENTION OF MODERN TIMES.

> Patient scientific labour of a whole life! LAUGHS, SINGS, AND SPEAKS ALL LANGUAGES, in the most ingenious manner, and is, in every sense, an exact tone, and PERFECT IMITATION OF THE HUMAN VOICE![2]

This curious and for many of its audiences unsettling apparatus had been exhibited in various places in Europe and the U.S. by then, after making its first appearance in the early forties of the nineteenth century. It was invented by Joseph Faber (1786–1866), who first referred to it by the principle of its function and simply called it "The Talking Machine"—it was nevertheless a machine that could talk—later deciding to furnish it with a name, "Euphonia."[3] Faber was a Freiburg native who studied mathematics at the Polytechnic in Vienna and later worked in several other métiers, among others, also as an astronomer in a Viennese observatory, then, after his sight failed due to an infection, he shifted his focus to the study of anatomy and mechanics and came up with a machine capable of replicating human speech.[4] Similar attempts had been made before; in fact, Faber was inspired by the writings of Wolfgang von Kempelen (1734–1804), an inventor famous for his "Chess-playing Turk," which was considered to be one of the greatest hoaxes of its time. In 1823, Faber read Kempelen's *On the Mechanism of Human Speech*, that the latter had published 32 years prior, and he decided to give it a try himself, which resulted in the creation of the first prototype of Euphonia.

2 Scan of the advertisement for "The Wonderful Talking Machine" from *P. T. Barnum's Advance Courier*, 1873, can be found in the article "The Greatest Invention of Modern Times and More," Graphic Arts Collection, Princeton University, October 23, 2017, https://graphicarts.princeton.edu/2017/10/23/the-greatest-invention-of-modern-times-and-more/. Some of the citations herein contain grammatical forms and spelling that might be deemed archaic.

3 Though by some accounts it was not Faber who named his invention "Euphonia" but P. T. Barnum when he added it to his vast collection and exhibited it in America. Apparently, he first saw it in 1844 and bought it twenty-nine years later, in 1873. More on P. T. Barnum's collection and its part in Euphonia's story can be found in "Barnum's Talking Machine," *Conjurers' Monthly Magazine*, April 15, 1907.

4 The opinion piece from *The Sun* from 1846 includes a short bio note on the inventor, presenting him as: "Mr. Joseph Faber, is sixty years of age; he received his education at the Royal Polytechnic Institution in Vienna; he is a Professor of Mathematics, and was for many years Premier Calculator and Land Surveyor to the Emperor of Austria. He has devoted more than twenty-five years to the discovery and construction of a mechanical combination which should possess all the powers of articulation." "Professor Faber's Speaking Automaton, or Euphonia," *Sun* (*Monday Morning*, London), August 17, 1846.

The automaton that appeared to be playing chess—Kempelen never claimed that it could actually do so and at all times insisted that it was indeed an illusion making it only appear to play chess autonomously (although no one could figure out quite how it worked)—and even managed to beat Napoleon himself once, was perhaps his most famous invention, however, in the context of the whole performance, it was really a double act. There was another Kempelen invention that he had a habit of presenting before the "Turk" took the central stage and that was his "The Mechanism of Human Speech."[5] It did not say much and according to the reports it had tremendous difficulties with French, only able to utter simple words and sentences such as "*papa, maman, Roma, ma femme, la reine, mon mari, le roi, Marianna, allons à Paris; ma femme est mon amie, maman aime–moi*."[6] In his treatment of this little speech of Kempelen's "Mechanismus," Mladen Dolar remarks cheekily that if we read it as "a list of free associations [in psychoanalysis], what would we make of the machine's unconscious?"[7] Apparently, "Mechanismus" was fond of its "mother," which seems quite ironic for an "unborn" machine.

Despite the apparent limitations to what "Mechanismus" was capable of saying, the knowledge of its invention, perhaps due again to its connection to the fame of another "automaton," for which it opened as an accompanying act, it has not receded into obscurity.[8] Many sketches, accounts, other writings on it,

[5] It was first exhibited in 1784. The *Monthly Review* commented: "it is certain that this ingenious man has carried the powers of mechanism to an amazing degree of perfection, as may be observed in another machine of his invention, which speaks and articulates distinctly, a considerable number of sentences, in different languages. This speaking organ is deemed a much more extraordinary invention than even the wonderful chess-player; notwithstanding the astonishing powers of the late." Quoted in Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1978), 353.

[6] This translates as: "mum, dad, Rome, my wife, the queen, my husband, the king, Marianna, let's go to Paris; my wife is my friend; mum loves me"; Mladen Dolar describes Kempelen's automaton duo in greater detail in *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 6–11.

[7] Dolar, 8.

[8] Although, to be specific, the chess-playing Turk of Kempelen was first of all not a thinking machine, as it appeared to be, as the game of chess was actually played by a player cleverly hidden inside of a box, and secondly, it also did not quite fit the definition of an automaton—the larger part of its entire "mechanism" was a hoax—making it seem, with its appearance and the noises coming out of it, as if it was run by a specific mechanism processing its actions, when in fact it was not.

and even reproductions of it can still be found. Perhaps surprisingly, Faber's Euphonia was just one such invention which in the long history of automata came close to breaching this border and remain almost utterly forgotten. Today there are not many sources left for it to be examined in great detail—a couple of newspaper advertisements and witness accounts, rare drawings, and one single photograph remain.[9] However, according to the newspapers and other advertisements of the time, it seems that Euphonia offered a much wider repertoire of words than Kempelen's automaton, and from descriptions of its appearance and rare images of it, we can deduce that it also possessed several other additional qualities not connected only to speech, such as a fully formed oral cavity and a head figure at the front, probably with the intention of making Euphonia appear much more anthropomorphized than Kempelen's "Mechanismus."

In *The Manchester and Salford Advertiser and Chronicle* from May 27, 1843, we can read an account from the Hamburg correspondent of the *Atheneum*, who undersigned himself shortly as "B."[10] It begins with a report that an invention by Mr. Faber called "*Sprachmachine*" appeared in Hamburg, attracting much attention with its "beautiful adaptation of mechanics to the laws of acoustics."[11] The author continues with a short description of the machine and its functions, insisting on the inventor's ingenuity. To this, B. adds that although his "own attempts to make the instrument speak sounded rather ludicrous, Mr. Faber was most successful."[12] This account highlights a couple of important features of Faber's "Speaking Machine," especially the inventor's design of creating an apparatus that would be able to "produce articulate sounds, or even to imitate the human voice"[13] by means of reproducing certain human organs used for speech. Its author writes that prior attempts were made, but "have not been very successful,"[14] however, he begins his account by writing high praises to Faber,

[9] The only known photograph of Euphonia was supposedly taken by Mathew Brady's studio while on exhibit at Barnum's Museum in New York, around the year 1860.

[10] "The Speaking Machine," *Manchester and Salford Advertiser and Chronicle*, May 27, 1843. This is the earliest newspaper mention of Faber's invention that I could find. This account was noted to be a copy of an original that was published in Hamburg on March 31, 1843 in *Atheneum*.

[11] "Speaking Machine."

[12] "Speaking Machine."

[13] "Speaking Machine."

[14] "Speaking Machine."

claiming that his invention "certainly merits every praise that can be bestowed upon unwearied perseverance and successful ingenuity."[15]

Three years later, in 1846, Faber exhibited Euphonia at the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly London. In *The Morning Advertiser* from August 26, 1846, we can read that Faber's invention "speaks any thing and every thing suggested by the audience in all languages, whispers, declaims, laughs, and sings various airs."[16] The advertisement also claimed that The Speaking Machine had been presented to the "Emperor and Court of Austria, the King and Queen and Court of Prussia, The Duke of Wellington, the Lord Chamberlain, Earl Spencer, Lord Eldon, Hawarden, &c.,"[17] in all these instances being met with praise and making a good impression.

A couple of days earlier, an account of the Euphonia's London show was published in *The Sun* on August 17, 1846, further praising Faber's work in its opening words, claiming:

> This is the most extraordinary production of ingenuity and perseverance that it has ever been our good fortune to observe. It is, without any cheat or fraud, in reality a speaking machine, and an object of the highest wonder.[18]

Euphonia was exhibited in many places—a year earlier, in December of 1845, Faber presented it at the Musical Fund Hall in Philadelphia where a certain Joseph Henry (1797–1878), an American scientist who claimed the discovery of magnetic induction, examined it as a potential ventriloquistic hoax but ended up leaving the exhibition deeply impressed, declaring it a "wonderful invention."[19] In one of his letters he commented that Faber's machine was much better at speaking than any other similar invention of the time, explaining that in-

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15 "Speaking Machine."

16 "The Speaking Automaton or Euphonia," *Morning Advertiser*, August 26, 1846.

17 "Speaking Automaton or Euphonia." Another visitor who left the London exhibition very impressed was Melville Bell, the father of Alexander Graham Bell, who then challenged his sons to build it. And they did. More in Frank Rives Millikan, "Henry and the Telephone," Smithsonian Institution Archives, accessed October 17, 2024, https://siarchives.si.edu/sites/default/files/pdfs/jhpp/JHP_Joseph_Henry_and_the_Telephone.pdf, 1–2.

18 "Professor Faber's Speaking Automaton."

19 Millikan, "Henry and the Telephone," 1.

stead of uttering only a few words, Euphonia was capable of speaking whole sentences composed of "any words what ever"[20] and saw great potential for its future application.[21]

In many of these accounts we find descriptions of how the Euphonia's mechanism worked to produce sounds and successfully imitate human speech. Returning to the opinion of one "B" from Hamburg, whose account was published in 1843 in *The Manchester and Salford Advertiser and Chronicle*,[22] we find that the machine consisted of parts that artificially imitated the entire human vocal tract. According to some sources, Faber knew its anatomy well—in order to study it with the intention of reproducing it, he may have dissected more than a hundred human heads. "B" described the result as follows:

> I can only give you a very imperfect idea of the instrument. To understand the mechanism perfectly, it would be necessary to take it to pieces, and the dissection is naturally not shown the visitor—less from a wish to conceal anything, than from the time and labour necessary for such a purpose. The machine consists of a pair of bellows, at present only worked by a pedal *similar to that of an organ, of a caoutchouc imitation of the larynx, tongue, nostrils, and of a set of keys by which the springs are brought into action*.—[The further description would be unintelligible without diagrams.]—The rapidity of utterance depends, of course, upon the rapidity with which the keys are played.[23]

Euphonia had bellows for lungs and its intricately designed head was certainly not there only for mere decoration. To be able to speak, the head was molded in great detail, and while the upper part of the face remained unmoving and the eyes stared ahead blankly, the main source of Euphonia's speech lay in its oral

[20] Joseph Henry's letter to Henry M. Alexander, January 6, 1846, in *The Papers of Joseph Henry*, ed. Marc Rothenberg et al., vol. 6, *January 1844–December 1846* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1992), 362.

[21] He saw in it the potential to serve as a sort of a telegraphic tool that would be able to deliver a sermon to different churches at the same time. However, that was before the invention of the telephone. He wrote of this idea that: "the keys could be worked by means of electro-magnetic magnets and with a little contrivance not difficult to execute words might be spoken at one end of the telegraphic line which have their origin at the other." More in Millikan, "Henry and the Telephone," 1–2.

[22] "Speaking Machine."

[23] "Speaking Machine"; brackets in original, italics added.

cavity, which was fully equipped with a jaw, cheeks, a palate, a tongue, teeth, and gums and extended to an artificial larynx. Above the mouth, framed by lips, it had nostrils, within which there was an additional small windmill-like part that helped it to pronounce certain sounds, like the letter "R," revolving and rattling when the air was pushed through the cavity.[24]

Some accounts, like the one appearing in the *Brighouse and Rastrick Gazette* in 1880, described the surprising presence, visibleness, and agility of the machine's tongue, which was "worked by a spring"[25] and moved within the opened mouth of the machine when it was at work. It seems like the audience was given a full and a very somatic demonstration of how human speech is produced, with an emphasis on certain parts and organs that were, in the case of the machine, a lot more pronounced than when encountering the everyday production of ordinary human speech—at least with most people.

The author of the opinion piece that appeared in *The Sun* in 1846 seemed to have greatly admired Faber's invention, as well as his ingenuity in using rubber as a material to replicate the fleshy parts of Euphonia's mouth and throat. He regarded it as a great and unprecedented scientific achievement which, according to the author, was thought impossible before Euphonia appeared:

> Professor Faber was the first man who analysed "Caouchouc," or India rubber; from this material he has formed the various organs of articulation, so as exactly to resemble those appertaining to humanity, and by means of keys, and bellows (for lungs); he has at last conquered every obstacle, and has succeeded in constructing an instrument which will plainly and distinctly speak all languages, sing, whisper, laugh, &c. This wonderful result is now achieved for the first time, although it has often, during the last few centuries, been pronounced an impossibility by *savans* of all countries.[26]

Not everyone was full of praise—a report from 1844, published in the *New York Daily Tribune*, found the artificial head of Euphonia rather comical, but in more

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[24] "Professor's Faber's Talking Machine," *Brighouse and Rastrick Gazette*, February 21, 1880.
[25] "Professor's Faber's Talking Machine."
[26] "Professor Faber's Speaking Automaton."

of a sinister manner, as if in turn a joke was being played on humankind, and wrote:

> The sounds issue from the lips of a Mask that as they open and shut reveal a tongue that plays like the living member, though not so "limberly." It is really laughable to see this bust placed upright with a turbaned head and whiskered face slowly enunciating in a whining tone, sounds which we have heretofore considered *as belonging exclusively to our species*.[27]

Exactly how the mechanism functioned is not clear.[28] However, it is known that the Euphonia had to be played like an odd instrument to effectively speak—it was operated by foot pedals and two keyboards. With one keyboard the operator of the apparatus manipulated seventeen keys, connected to Euphonia's "vocal cords" of which sixteen corresponded to sixteen different elementary sounds and a seventeenth key that could, when pressed, bypass the vocal cords altogether by opening and closing the machine's glottis that lay between them[29]—with another keyboard the operator manipulated music and that is how Euphonia was able to sing.[30] The pedals were the direct connection to the machine's "lungs" and the strings and levers functioned as its tendons and muscles.[31] The speed with which Euphonia spoke depended on the speed with which the keys were played by an operator.

A look at another impression that Euphonia left on one of the visitors, published "forty or fifty years"[32] later, in 1894, shows the other side of this machine, which

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[27] "Talking Machine," *New York Daily Tribune*, January 26, 1844; italics added.

[28] Although J. Faber was clearly not inclined to conceal any aspect of how Euphonia worked—he explained its mechanism both to his audience and to those who wanted to know more. The following advertisement emphasized how a demonstration of the Euphonia's mechanism was a regular part of the show: "The Exhibition is not limited to simple talking, but is enhanced by an explanatory description of the method of producing the various sounds, words, and sentences, visitors also being allowed to inspect every part of the Machine. It is not only interesting to the Scientific as illustrating the theory acoustics, but to the public in general, and especially to the young,—to whom it offers an inexhaustible fund of wonder and amusement." "Barnum's Talking Machine."

[29] Henry to Alexander, 362.

[30] John Hollingshead, "The Story of My Lifetime," *The Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, September 22, 1894.

[31] Henry to Alexander, 363.

[32] Hollingshead, "Story of My Lifetime."

for some had a slightly uncanny presence (this is probably the unfortunate reason that eventually led to the demise of its inventor). It was written by John Hollingshead, who visited the exhibition in 1846 when Faber presented it at the Egyptian Hall in London, and many years later wrote the short memoir with the telling title "The Story of My Lifetime," consisting of sixteen parts in total, of which his encounter with Euphonia was mentioned last. It seems that John Hollingshead felt haunted by Faber's invention and recalled it with the following words:

> In the centre was a box on a table, looking like a rough piano without legs and having two key-boards. This was surmounted by a half-length weird figure, rather bigger than a full-grown man, with an automaton head and face looking more mysteriously vacant than such faces usually look. Its mouth was large, and opened like the jaws of Gorgibuster[33] in the pantomime, disclosing artificial gums, teeth, and all the organs of speech.[34]

It was reported that the machine could speak several languages—at least we know that it spoke English, German, Italian, French, Latin, and Greek, languages which Faber was familiar with—it also laughed, sang, and whispered.[35] One spectator commented that Euphonia spoke better English than its German creator, who in turn humorously claimed that this was because it was American:[36]

[33] Probably a reference to the Giant Gorgibuster, the giant from the story Jack and the Beanstalk, which at the time was also produced as a pantomime play. It is safe to conclude that John Hollingshead considered Euphonia at best as grotesque.

[34] Hollingshead, "Story of My Lifetime."

[35] "Professor Faber's Speaking Automaton." Also, "The Talking Machine," *Illustrated London News*, August 6, 1846, 15.

[36] It is difficult to say whether this is true—perhaps partly as at least one machine might have been constructed in the USA. Faber nevertheless created at least two "talking machines" that we know of (and that were destroyed first in 1844 and then again in 1860, when he died) and in both, the principle and the mechanism seem to have remained the same. There may have been more, as the machine was purchased and toured by P. T. Barnum long after Joseph Faber's death in the 1860s. Some sources report on Euphonia later being operated by Faber's nephew ("Talking Machine," *London Times*, February 12, 1880), others mention another "Faber" who was supposedly a husband of Joseph Faber's niece (Altick, *Shows of London*, 356), and lastly, Mrs. Mary Faber, who operated and owned Euphonia in 1887 ("The Talking Machine Was There," *New York Times*, July 24, 1887).

> Mr. Faber, the artist, speaks only German, yet he has taught his machine to speak English, and speak it too better than German. And what is still more curious, it gives some of our difficult sounds better than Mr. Faber himself can pronounce them. The "th," for instance, which is the Rubicon in our language to a German, it gives like a native-born American. Indeed, we do not believe the "Native American Party" itself could tell a difference. On asking Mr. Faber how it came to pass his machine could speak better English than German, he replied: "why shouldn't it?—it is American born."[37]

According to another account, Faber spent several years perfecting the pronunciation of the letter "E" and devoted twenty-five years of his life to the construction of the machine.[38] A much later report from 1880, however, claimed, in contrast, that the Euphonia's pronunciation of "single letters of the alphabet" and monosyllabic words suited "its vocal powers better than connected sentences."[39] At that Tuesday's exhibition, Euphonia was reported to have said things like "Eliza," "London," "Paris," "I am tired," and in French: "*Comment vous portez vous*."[40] Today it is difficult to judge how proficient at speaking the machine actually was. Since its utterances were somehow generated by air expelled through bellows and then manipulated by the set of keys, the movements and shapes of the rubber mouth, and other such influences, including weather, which tended to make the rubber more or less agile, the result was a rather disconcerting voice slowly wheezing out of the "strange-looking" half-human apparatus. In order to speak, Euphonia had to breathe, and as the machine first drew the air inwards and the bellows expanded, it then pushed it out through its complex mechanism, producing words:

> Giving a rough outline of what is indeed a very complex piece of machinery, it may be stated that the human lungs are represented by a very powerful pair of bellows, the air from which passes through a passage contrived so as to take, upon the working of certain levers, the form of the throat while pronouncing the

[37] "Talking Machine," *New York Daily Tribune*.

[38] "After obtaining the power of pronouncing all the other vowels by mechanical contrivance, he spent seven years in finding means of artificially pronouncing the letter E." "Professor Faber's Speaking Automaton."

[39] "Professor's Faber's Talking Machine."

[40] "Professor's Faber's Talking Machine." This translates into English as "How are you faring?"

> fundamental sounds of most modern languages. At the end of this passage is the exact imitation of a human mouth made of indiarubber [. . .].[41]

In addition, this quite complex mechanism also enabled it to sing. Euphonia often sang "God Save The Queen"[42]—by all accounts an extraordinary performance—which according to one witness, has "never probably before or since been so sung"[43] and this comment was anything but an indication that this meant the machine's performance was warmly accepted. As Euphonia supposedly spoke in a rather eerie, "ghost-like," monotonic voice, it sometimes made its listeners uneasy—it sounded slow, flat, and "whining."[44] In his memoir, John Hollingshead commented that Euphonia's voice sounded as if it was slowly coming "from the depths of a tomb."[45]

In this light, we may easily understand why even the well-inclined commentator from the *Atheneum* (1843), who was, in general, full of praise for Faber's mechanical ingenuity, thought that the choice of the name was amiss and the talking machine was "not very appropriately called Euphonia."[46] Euphonia is namely the name of a genus in the finch family which refers directly to the singing voice of birds described as being "sweet-voiced" and, accordingly, the word "euphonic" in the English language carries the meaning of something being "well sounding": *eu*, εὖ, in Greek means "well" or "good," and *phōnē*, φωνή, means "sound." It seems that, in contrast, Euphonia could not at all be described as a machine that produced "a pleasant sound," since even the first report considered here, by one "B.," which in general praised the "Talking Machine," hoped for its improvement when writing that there was no doubt "that the machine may be much improved, and *more especially that the timbre of the voice may be agreeably modified*."[47]

[41] "Professor's Faber's Talking Machine."
[42] Also mentioned in "Speaking Automaton or Euphonia."
[43] Hollingshead, "Story of My Lifetime."
[44] "The Talking Machine," *New York Daily Tribune*.
[45] Hollingshead, "Story of My Lifetime."
[46] "Speaking Machine."
[47] "Speaking Machine"; italics added.

Faber perhaps did not see the need for such a modification or did not succeed in making Euphonia's voice more "agreeable,"[48] as the much later accounts kept mentioning the same problem—while the learned men of the age praised the ingenuity of its invention, the general public tended to react more dismissively to the wheezing speech coming out of the gaping head, reminiscent of a death mask, which opened the show on one occasion with: "Please excuse my slow pronunciation . . . Good morning, ladies and gentlemen . . . It is a warm day . . . It is a rainy day . . . *Buon giorno, signori*."[49]

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"For one shilling a head,"[50] the spectators were able to attend the exhibition of Euphonia at the famous Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly, London in 1846.[51] John Hollingshead's experience of the show is the only full account of Euphonia we have of what such an event was like:

> It wanted little imagination to make the very few visitors believe that the figure maintained an imprisoned human—or *half-human being,* being bound to speak very slowly when tormented by the unseen power outside. [. . .] As a crowning display, the head sang a dual version of "God Save the Queen," which suggested inevitably, *God save the inventor*. [. . .] Never probably before or since, has the National Anthem been so sung. Sadder and wiser, I, and the few visitors, *crept slowly* from the place, leaving the Professor with his one and only treasure—*his child of infinite labour and unmeasurable sorrow*.[52]

After the description of the shabbiness of the inventor and his working space, Hollingshead continued in a more chilling tone—he was convinced that Faber slept in the same room with his invention and called it "his [Faber's] scientific Frankenstein,"[53] claiming, that he could somewhat prophetically feel "the se-

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48 In reference to "Speaking Machine."
49 Altick, *Shows of London*, 354.
50 Hollingshead, "Story of My Lifetime."
51 Demolished in 1905.
52 Hollingshead, "Story of My Lifetime"; italics added.
53 Hollingshead.

cret influence of an idea that the two were destined to live and die together."[54] As they inevitably did.

Hollingshead described Faber as "a sad-faced man, dressed in respectable well-worn clothes that were soiled by contact with tools, wood, and machinery. [. . .] Not too clean, and his hair and beard sadly wanted the attention of a barber."[55] And he proclaimed Euphonia as Faber's "treasure" and as "his child of infinite labour and unmeasurable sorrow."[56] However, this memoir was written long after Faber's death in the 1860s,[57] and its author attempted to retroactively claim predictions of certain events that had already taken place decades before. What is known is that Joseph Faber had supposedly ended his life in bankruptcy and derangement after destroying his beloved machine—the treasured invention that had brought him no success, fame, name, or any big financial gain. Or, as Hollingshead described his last days:

> He disappeared quietly from London, and took his marvel to the provinces, where it was even less appreciated. The end came at last, and not the unexpected end. One day, in a dull matter-of-fact town—a town that could understand nothing but circus or a Jack Pudding—he destroyed himself and his figure. The world went on just the same, bestowing as little notice on his memory as it had on his exhibition.[58]

Hollingshead's reference[59] to Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's novel *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus* from 1818 does not seem so coincidental when one considers that the motif of the bedroom—the inventor talking and sleeping with

[54] Hollingshead.
[55] Hollingshead.
[56] Hollingshead.
[57] According to sources, we can suppose that after the 1860s, the machine, which had already been rebuilt at least once, was toured by J. Faber's nephew (or a husband of his niece) and later by P. T. Barnum. In *Mechanics' Magazine*, from as early as 1844, we can find a short note claiming that "Mr. Faber, the ingenious inventor of the talking-machine, at Philadelphia, totally destroyed it the other day, in a fit of temporary derangement." "Notes and Notices," *Mechanics' Magazine*, July 27, 1844.
[58] Hollingshead, "Story of My Lifetime."
[59] Even though it is erroneous since it equates Victor Frankenstein, the creator, with the creature, Frankenstein's monster. However, this tends to be somehow a general misconception regarding the name, as the creature is nameless in the novel.

his life's work and finally destroying it and himself—invokes the scene from the very novel in which Victor Frankenstein looks for the second time into the yellow eyes of his greatest invention, the fruit of his immeasurable labor, when it enters his bedroom—the artificially created man. And what he sees when the creature holds up the curtain of his bed with him lying in it fills him with horror, as the creature, in turn, fixes its eyes on him:

> I beheld the wretch—*the miserable monster whom I had created*. He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me. His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. He might have spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped and rushed downstairs.[60]

In the intimate setting of the bedroom, the "miserable wretch," the creature Victor created, constitutes itself as subject. While before, at the moment of the very creation, the inventor alluded to his invention as "it" and called it "the thing": "I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; *it* breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated *its* limbs,"[61] this "it" became, after the constitutive moment of the creature's returned "gaze" and again in their second encounter, in the "bedchamber," a "he": "he held up the curtain; his eyes were fixed on me; his jaws opened; he muttered, etc."[62] It is in this case that the "gaze" that returns is the gaze that speaks, and what it says leads the inventor to realize the true horror of his success: the body he has assembled from collected bones and limbs from ossuary and morgue, is very much alive, although tainted with death; it is something non-human that looks very much like a human—but again, not quite—which in turn evokes a strange, stomach-turning and uncanny sense of them—the inventor and its invention—as being somewhat alike.

This scene in the bedroom could well fit the description of Euphonia: eyes fixed forward, jaw dropped, mouth wide open, speech slowly wheezing out of it, the spectators feeling its breath on their faces—it is something that possesses attributes of something living, that breathes and speaks, but at the same time is

[60] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein: Or, The Modern Prometheus*, ed. Maurice Hindle (London: Penguin, 2013), 59.
[61] Shelley, 58; italics added.
[62] Shelley, 59.

clearly a contraption, a machine that is being played on; and the fascination that turns to horror stems precisely from its successful simulation of a living being and harbors the same old question: Is man perhaps, as La Mettrie famously proposed in his work *Man a Machine* from 1747, "so complicated a machine?"[63] Does the sight of a talking machine reveal the inherent automatism of the human body itself? And whether, in turn, if matter can speak, does that also imply that matter can think?[64]

Whether the story of Faber's final days was merely a product of Hollingshead's imagination or not, it certainly found its place in the afore existing framework of the cautionary tale of an inventor's attempt to play a hopeless game in the role of an omnipotent being, not unlike Shelley's Victor Frankenstein, consequently resulting in the reciprocal destruction of the inventor and his creation. With a little modification, the creature's words at the end of the novel could have been spoken by Euphonia, as the invention usurps the word that belonged to the domain of its inventor, and speaks for itself:

> I shall collect my funeral pile and consume to ashes this miserable frame, that its remains may afford no light to any curious and unhallowed wretch who would create such another as I have been. *I shall die.* I shall no longer feel the agonies which now consume me or be the prey of feeling unsatisfied, yet unquenched. *He is dead who called me into being;* and when I shall be no more, the very remembrance of us both will speedily vanish.[65]

[63] Julien Offray de La Mettrie, *Man a Machine: Including Frederick The Great's "Eulogy" on La Mettrie and Extracts from La Mettrie's The Natural History of the Soul*, ed. Mary Whiton Calkins (Chicago: Open Court, 1912), 89.

[64] "The metaphysics who have hinted that matter may be endowed with the faculty of thought have perhaps not reasoned ill. For there is in this case a certain advantage in their inadequate way of expressing their meaning. In truth, to ask whether matter can think, without considering it otherwise than in itself, is like asking whether matter can tell time. It may be foreseen that we shall avoid this reef upon which Locke had the bad luck to make shipwreck." La Mettrie, *Man a Machine,* 85. Mladen Dolar also develops this idea (speaking implies thinking) with the previously noted examples of two of Kempelen's automatons: a talking machine (Mechanismus) and a Turk, a chess master, which von Kempelen exhibited together. Dolar, *Voice*, 6–11.

[65] Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 224; italics added.

The self-destruction of the artificially created being, with which the reader is faced at the end, paints a strong contrast with the creation that takes place at the beginning of the novel. First, the roles of the creator and the creation convert from the latter being passive, to becoming an active emancipatory force, not only of its own un-making but of the un-making of its creator as well. A mechanism of substitutive action is at work here—what is created becomes the driving force of the destruction and the act of creating is dispelled as it is turned into its offset condition. In the novel, this is conveyed through the scene when Victor arrives at the University of Ingolstadt and refers to this self-possessive drive that starts haunting him as the "Angel of Destruction."[66] This drive, which he later describes as the perpetually increasing urge of a "resistless and almost frantic impulse,"[67] urges him forward in his obsessive pursuit:

> No one can conceive the variety of feelings which bore me onwards, *like a hurricane*, in the first enthusiasm of success. Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world. A new species would bless me *as its creator and source*; many happy and excellent natures *would owe their being to me*. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs.[68]

Ultimately it becomes evident that the creation not only results in but converts itself into its opposition, destruction, through the process of the created creature's affirmation of itself as a subject when in place of a "thing" it becomes a "he." As the creature affirms its place, it also constitutes itself as a converting agent that substitutes and consequently ultimately cancels the principal action of its creator.

However, throughout the novel, the creature is left essentially nameless, which leads to it achieving only a partial subjectivation as it is never successfully interpellated into a full subject as such, as pointed out by Jean-Jacques Lecercle, as through his analysis of the novel he provides the answer to why the creature initially becomes and consequently stays affirmed solely as Frankenstein's *monster* without ever being bestowed its very own name—the name that would have the

66 Shelley, 47.
67 Shelley, 55.
68 Shelley, 55; italics added.

power to turn it into a full subject[69]—and consequently being granted the status of human being. Instead of achieving humanization, it is interpellated into a monster—in its very beginning, even as it draws its first breath, it is ostracized from society, named by no one and proclaimed by its very creator, through a series of categorizations (from "creature," to "wretch," to "being"), as the Other—as a "monster." The proclamation as categorization of its creator (since it never receives a proper name, a *nom propre*, only an indication of class),[70] eventually turns into an internalized, self-proclamative action when, upon looking at itself in a pool of water, it confirms its monstrosity with the words: "The monster that I am."[71] As Lecercle explains:

> The problem of the monster is that, for lack of a name, he is not a full-fledged subject. He is monstrous because he is not properly instituted as a subject: he is the object of a wrong interpellation (both a wrong process of hailing and a wrong name, which makes him a fantastic character). This is the mark—this is my main thesis—of a failed because flawed process of interpellation.[72]

Lecercle refers to this process as the process of the defective interpellation into a subject, as "the monster achieves it *by himself*, in solitude, without social recognition,"[73] not meeting the conditions of becoming a fully interpellated subject in the Althusserian sense—being hailed and therefore subjectified. The carrier of this function thus lies in the name that is never fully given: "the monster is monstrous not because of his physical characteristics (his size and ugliness), but *because he is called so*."[74] Through this alienation it becomes an "impossible

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[69] Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Frankenstein: Mythe et philosophie* (Paris: PUF, 1988) and Jean-Jacques Lecercle, "What's in a Monster?," *Anglistik* 30, no. 3 (2019): 17–26, https://doi.org/10.33675/ANGL/2019/3/4.

[70] However, the creature is the only member of the "monstrous race." Lecercle, "What's in a Monster?," 19.

[71] Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 116.

[72] Lecercle, "What's in a Monster?" 21.

[73] Lecercle, 21; italics added.

[74] Lecercle, 18; italics added. Here, Lecercle (in his translation) also cites Jacques Lacan's stance on the power of naming: "If I call this person whom I address by whatever name I give him, I impose on him the subjective function that he must take up in order to answer me, even if his response is to reject it."

subject,"[75] the monster that cannot cross into categorization as a human being "because he is never given a proper name."[76]

On the other hand, the creation essentially introduces the logic of likeness to the process. In the novel it can be found at the very beginning of Victor's project of creating an artificial man, when he discovers that he is indeed "capable of bestowing animation upon *lifeless matter*,"[77] and eventually decides on creating, as he calls it, a being *like himself*.[78] In his aspiration, the creature is built up of separate parts that are forcibly assembled into an incoherent whole, and brought to life from already dead matter. There is, in fact, nothing about the creature's body that belongs to it alone. It is constituted from the very otherness, being marked by death, and therefore it is also affirmed as something essentially foreign. The creature's terrifying appearance is so dreadful to anyone that sees it that they cannot bear to look at it out of sheer terror and flee, as Victor first does in the scene in the bedroom, and many, with the exception of a blind man, follow afterwards.

If the urge to create an artificial man stems from the desire to take the place of the creator, to aspire to "becom[ing] greater than [his] nature will allow,"[79] to pursue hiding-places of nature,[80] and unveiling the great mystery of creation,[81] blurring the line between God and man, Shelley shows in her novel that this desire is ultimately a desire to imitate oneself. The creation of one's own likeness is accompanied by the idea of mastering oneself, of participating in one's own conception and taking control of oneself. But when this desire is realized and becomes concrete, when the created simulant comes to life and returns the gaze, it is turned monstrous and proves, within its own conditions, to be arti-

75 Lecercle, 23.
76 Lecercle, 25.
77 Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 53; italics added.
78 "I doubted at first whether I should attempt the creation of *a being like myself*, or one of simpler organisation; but my imagination was too much exalted by my first success to permit me to doubt of my ability to give life to an animal as complex and wonderful as man." Shelley, 54; italics added.
79 Shelley, 54.
80 Shelley, 55.
81 Shelley, 49.

ficially produced, unnatural, and therefore intrinsically alien—and ultimately leads to glimpsing oneself as the Other.

It could be said that this meeting point of the two, Euphonia and Frankenstein's creature, lies in the realm of the uncanny. Both being constructed, one from organic material, another from "strings and levers,"[82] and bearing no other identity than the one of an artificial being that, despite the urge to change this status, never happens to surpasses it. But it comes dangerously close and threatens the established difference, revealing its precarious position. If the monster's self-destructive act constitutes a truly autonomous and, in a certain sense, emancipatory action, with the creature taking over the possession of its own being and un-making it (therefore taking it away from the creator), Euphonia, at least in Hollingshead's story, seems to achieve something similar—even though it is a machine that needs to be operated in order to be in possession of any action whatsoever—through its creator's obsession, which drives him to the same end.

If Frankenstein's creature fits into the category of non-living because it is constituted as a conglomerate of dead bodies, Euphonia is non-living because it is, to put it simply, a machine that is constructed out of equally non-living parts: wood, screws, and caoutchouc. However, all of its parts, as mechanical as they can be, effectively function as a substitute for at least that part of the human body that is used in perhaps the crowning characteristic of humankind—speech, as the latter also carries the potentiality of thought. In both cases, the established likeness between the creation and its creator gives way to dread and repulsion, consequently evoking the very feeling of horror that comes from the recognition of likeness in difference—difference, instead of being preserved, through the act of recognizing the other as "alike" oneself, is converted into the feeling of that fundamental, most intimate dread that Freud refers to as the "uncanny." What is uncanny cannot be interpreted simply as something that is alien, strange, and unknown—to become truly uncanny, intrinsically terrifying, something must be added to the equation and what is added is its supposed opposite—"*heimlich*," the familiar. Therefore, what is truly uncanny is that which is both: something that was familiar a long time ago but has become foreign—like walking over a dried-up pond, as goes one of Freud's examples, "one cannot walk over it with-

82 Henry to Alexander, 363.

out always having the feeling that water might come up there again."[83] As Freud points out when commenting on Jentsch's interpretation, the "uncanny" is not something in which one does not recognize oneself, but is something in which one can recognize oneself as unfamiliar. This reversal is necessary in order to be overwhelmed by the uncanny, which is therefore revealed as the kind of unfamiliar that leads back to the familiar.

While in Shelley's novel a simple look at the creature results in repetitive outbursts of dread and its gaze is what turns it uncanny, the latter appears, in the case of Euphonia, through its voice, as its eyes are wide open, but unseeing. The machine thus gives the dreadful impression that it, in Hollingshead's words, "maintains an imprisoned human—or half-human being, being bound to speak very slowly when tormented by the unseen power outside."[84] The presence of the mask's empty gaze betrays the intention of covering up the source of the voice, but failing and instead additionally feeding the horror of the audience, which when the show is done creeps away slowly, unsettled, and in silence,[85] looking over its shoulder, as if something was stirred that should not be disturbed:

> Like one who, on a lonely road,
> Doth walk in fear and dread,
> And, having once turned round, walks on,
> And turns no more his head;
> Because he knows a frightful fiend
> Doth close behind his tread.[86]

Let us, at last, conclude with Euphonia's closing words that it spoke on one occasion in 1886: "I'm very tired. Thank you, gentlemen. *Adieu*."[87]

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83 Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, vol. 17, *An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works* (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 223.

84 Hollingshead, "Story of My Lifetime."

85 Hollingshead.

86 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," quoted in Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 60.

87 "A Talking Machine," *Liberal of Richmond Hill*, June 17, 1886.

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