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## Moral and Social Issues within Humanity in Frankenstein And The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

Traditionally Gothic writing deals with supernatural issues set in isolated regions. However, imbalanced human emotion is at the central cusp of horrific and terrifying events. The key focus in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of The Ancient Mariner* is that both critically explore moral and social issues within humanity. These authors implement conventions beyond being solely about science and fantasy worlds. This is to convey a deeper message impacting the reader's views on their own society's injustices. In this essay I will be discussing three main concepts. Firstly, the exploration of the human psyche using nature as an antidote. For example, Victor Frankenstein's ego thrusting him to steal the secrets from nature to animate dead beings. This resulting in his deadly comfort in nature which ultimately kills him mentally and physically. Whereas Coleridge's Mariner in- animated a creature and became plagued by guilt. Secondly, in the latter part of this essay I will be arguing science and Gothicism are mere distractions from the immoral prejudice issues at hand. For example, both texts explore the master and slave relationships when the Mariner kills the submissive bird he is in power however he becomes the slave to God. Thirdly, the use of cautionary tales in both texts warns the readers about science vs religion within society. Though the gothic genre began to lose its popularity due to scientific advancements and the abolishment movement. Shelley and Coleridge were certainly influenced by the supernatural to orchestrate the hidden message about the hierarchy of power and usurping one's role to dominate the inferior races. Furthermore, both author's use their protagonists to illustrate the dangers of tampering with the natural orders of life and death and the consequences it has on one's mental state.

Victor Frankenstein penetrates the 'citadel of nature' (Shelley Ch 2 Pp32)<sup>1</sup> to find the key to creating an unnatural being. Shelley portrayed nature as the utmost sublime force in the universe to show the flawlessness of mother nature. Contrastingly, Victor defines humans as 'half made up.' (Shelley, Letter IV Pp 24) The suggestion here is that human beings are imbalanced. Therefore, the reader cannot place humans on the spectrum of sanity. Victor interferes with the natural order of life and uses taboo methods to mimic God and create life artificially through forced mechanisms. Furthermore, the main human flaw is hubris through this Shelley conveys the lengths an egotist will go to discover the 'mysteries of creation' (Shelley Ch3 Pp 38)<sup>1</sup> But Victor eventually is aborted by nature's sublime depths the further he consoles in its landscapes and he further prevails in isolation and falls into the contraption of a forced suicide by nature. The 'abrupt sides of vast mountains' (Shelley Ch10 Pp74)<sup>1</sup> tower around him like death and the 'icy wall of the glacier overhung' him. The mountains entrap Victor and he subconsciously uses nature as his therapy by avoiding humanity and seeking nature's depths for restoration. However, the further he 'feels pleasure in dwelling' (Shelley Ch 2 Pp 31)<sup>1</sup> in nature he becomes more secluded and remotely trapped in his crime of usurping a role incapable for the mind of a man with a 'child's blindness' (Shelley Ch 2 Pp 32)<sup>1</sup> He constitutes a fantasy world where he is a deity only to be worshiped by his 'species' and the earth around him. In 1816 also known as the 'Year without a summer' Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* in isolation and she was cut off from society. She was highly affected with weather depression as there was mourning and suffocation shrouding her in Geneva. To a similar extent, the initial collapse in Victor's prowess is when he erodes into the 'vast mountains' and becomes lost in the abyss.

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Victor envisages pouring a 'Torrent of light into our dark world' (Shelley Ch 4 Pp 43)<sup>1</sup> Here, Shelley proposes the Gothic genre criticises her own society instead of purely being for the readers pleasure. Hence, her titling the tale 'The Modern Prometheus' she gives birth to an avant-garde doctor who steals resources from God and attempts to breed a new set of species through science and colonization. Furthermore, Victor resides in the landscapes of phantasms he begins to recollect his 'childhood before misfortune ... tainted (his) my mind' (Shelley Ch 2 Pp 31)<sup>1</sup> Shelley chooses to entwine nature and human emotion by using metaphors of the natural landscapes to relate to Victor's feelings through pathetic fallacy. She takes the 'romantic' approach with her poetic imagery of his emotions. The use of macabre landscapes and Frankenstein's 'solitary chamber, or rather a cell...separated from all other apartments' (Shelley Ch4 Pp 43)<sup>1</sup> makes Victor's workplace sound segregated and confined and he becomes the fallen angel in his 'hellish' dwelling as he is locked in a 'cell.' This is the beginning of Victor's punishment and he falls into isolation and begins to neglect his family as he finds sustenance from nature. Ironically, it is nature that ultimately murders Victor. Moreover, Victor is intoxicated by his belief of gaining 'additional strength from salubrious air' (Shelley Ch6 Pp55)<sup>1</sup> to keep him company instead of friends. The notions of nature as a form of therapy was not new to Shelley, she took inspiration from her friend Samuel Coleridge. In the poem the Rime of the Ancient Mariner the protagonist destroys the life of a pure being. However, the Mariner is different from Victor as he repents his sins and lives on to tell the tale that he 'had done a hellish thing' (Coleridge, Part II.9) . In fact, the Mariner is plagued by the guilt of his actions and 'instead of the cross, the albatross /About my neck was hung' (Coleridge, II.34)<sup>2</sup> He is affected by loneliness and is divorced from the idyllic world and begins to worship the bird as his shrine and it becomes his saviour returning him subconsciously to normality. The Mariner sees the 'beauty' (Coleridge, IV. 59 )<sup>2</sup> in the hideous sea monsters. Coleridge proposes he uses natural hunter-like attributes 'for a mere display of skill'<sup>3</sup>. Contrastingly, Victor's heart is filled with 'breathless horror' (Shelley Ch 5 Pp 45)<sup>1</sup> as he scorns his Creature. Despite their doppelganger relationship. Victor is the real creature with a man's bodily exterior and the interior of a devil falsely impersonating God. Shelley, reinvents Coleridge's ideas and turns Frankenstein into a modern cautionary tale for forthcoming readers warning them about the dangers of transgression and excessive knowledge leading humans to the edge of their own consciousness. The critic William Guthrie agrees and claims the Mariner's 'half-conscious impulse'<sup>3</sup> led him to kill the albatross. This is pivoting back to the idea of humans being 'half made up'<sup>1</sup> and unaware of the nature around them. The lack of communication between the Mariner and the crew was evidently influenced by the weather as 'the sails dropped down' which metaphorically meant they were destined to drown in the personified water as well as in their misery. Ultimately, both Victor and the Mariner are entrapped in the 'silence of the sea' as they bathe and drown their lives away in the unchaste waters of their sins.

Frankenstein is at the heart of colonial literature. Science is seen as 'robbing us of wonder.' Shelley and Coleridge are spellbound by the unknown's link to the real world. These unknown discoveries lead to exploitation of the inferior race. In fact, readers and scholars of Frankenstein have observed that this tale reflects the twin dangers of science and imperialism. In Paul Cantor's essay 'The Scientist and the Poet'<sup>6</sup> he reflects on the war between science and art. However, Shelley synthesizes imagination and imperialism as her key focus and uses science implicitly as a distraction from the underlying issues of colonization and prejudices. Cantor argues that 'Science can tell us how to do something, but it cannot tell us whether we should do it' The people who birth contemporary monsters 'tend to be marginalized themselves: women, people of colour' Shelley lived in a time where debates were being made about slavery. Therefore, Shelley includes discussions regarding 'scientific man's mastery of nature

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with the imperialist thrust to maintain subject races' 7 Earlier on in the novel, Victor states he will be a colonial master and create 'A new species' (Shelley Ch 4 Pp 43)<sup>1</sup> who will bless him as 'its creator and source' (Shelley, Ch 4 Pp43)<sup>1</sup> Here, the scientist usurps nature as a distraction for his true plan of being a colonist. However, it is unsuccessful as his creation rebels against him and he is murdered by nature's orders. Shelley alters the spectrum of slave and owner relationships by making the creature resist domination because his father and society fail to see his humanity. Although, it is rare to find sources on Shelley's opinions on slavery, John Clement argues 'She would certainly have been aware of the issue .../ through Shelley's personal relations to Coleridge ... who probably had the greatest influence on Mary as a child' . Furthermore, the creature is without a name and he is questioning his existence asking, 'What was I?' (Shelley, Ch 15 Pp.99)<sup>1</sup> his lack of identity coincides with Shelley, an intelligent educated woman subjected because of her sex and appearance. This resembles Mary Wollstonecraft's argument that women's miseducation can turn them into foolish vain creatures. Hence, with the creature's intelligence his 'sorrow only increased with knowledge' (Shelley, Ch13 Pp 93)<sup>1</sup> Similarly, African Slaves felt shun from society in the 19th century, without real names and discriminated because of their appearances. Clement critiques Frankenstein being written at a time engulfed with 'European expansion and rule over 'darker' places and races'<sup>8</sup>. Appearance contributed to prejudices both in the novel and during the slave trade. The Creature's 'yellow skin scarcely covered' (Shelley, Ch 5 Pp45)<sup>1</sup> in veins and his 'dull yellow eye'<sup>1</sup> open. Here the reader gets a Gothicised image of the outsider who is made from pieces of 'bodies deprived of life' (Shelley Ch 4 Pp 41) <sup>1</sup> Shelley births a creature who represents every man. He is stitched together metaphorically and personified as humanity itself. Shelley may have been influenced by the Yellow fever of West Indies, which was a plague during the reign of British colonies. The fever caused the patients 'eyes (to) turn ...yellow. / the skin turned... yellow'<sup>8</sup> this triggered madness and delirium. The Creature and the slaves were forced into living a certain way. Therefore, causing them to be secluded and plagued with pain and illness from the vile treatment from society.

Coleridge actively worked on the abolitionist movement in 1795 while writing *The Ancient Mariner*. The poem is an 'indictment of British Maritime expansion' , where the killing of the albatross, allegorically represents the crux of colonial expansion. The reader may be bewildered at the thought of slavery in relation to a tale about redemption and guilt. However, Coleridge and Shelley broadened their ideas out of the typical conventions and to look at slavery through a contemporary lens. Additionally, Coleridge's *Mariner*, transgresses borders and like a foreigner he also becomes an outsider in the land of wonder. The reader is never given a real name for the Mariner or his crew he is coinciding with the creature's status as a nobody. Coleridge's notion of 'losing self in another'<sup>10</sup> is prevalent when discussing the Mariner because similarly to the slaves he also is under the dictatorship of God. Additionally, Shelley acknowledged the dangers posed in the poem as she heard Coleridge recite it in 1806 Hence why Robert Walton warns the reader he 'shall kill no albatross' (Shelley, Letter II. Pp18)<sup>1</sup> This apt tribute to Coleridge addresses that future voyagers should not travel the unknown. The Mariner and Victor create dual characters as the Mariner 'kills the slave-like Albatross' <sup>10</sup> and Victor aborts his creature and enslaves him in torment. Contrastingly, the Mariner becomes the colonizer and the colonized and he develops into an 'unwilling victim of the slave trade' <sup>10</sup> and passive without 'no voice... the silence sank' (Coleridge, VI .111) <sup>2</sup> and he remains in solitude.

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In conclusion, to some extent, both texts are Gothic, but they weren’t intended to be gothic fantasy’s. Gothic conventions remain a distraction from the deep-rooted message in both texts. Finally, both western authors use the cautionary tale structure to warn the readers of the consequences of exploitation and tampering with the unknown and the effects posed on the human psyche. Both authors relied heavily on romantic imagery through the weather conditions and animate the setting by personifying the desolate landscapes as the characters emotions. Accordingly, Victor and the Mariner use nature as their escape and cures to their miseries. The reader can see both characters are led on by their imbalanced subconscious minds under subjugation to nature. Eventually leading Victor to be murdered by his child and nature. Shelley and Coleridge took inspiration from current affairs around them and subliminally hid the constraints of colonialism within their cautionary tales to warn the future reader about crossing unknown boundaries and stepping in foreign lands of ‘mist and snow’<sup>1</sup> because ultimately God will seize the trespassers right to continue living. Therefore, the scientific elements were used to confuse the reader from the allegorical and social significance of the ‘slave-like’ 10 victims in both tales.