

Credits

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Biographical Sketches

Michael Lloyd graduated cum laude and in the honors program in Chemical Engineering with a B.S. in 1984. He accepted a position at Henderson State University in 1993 shortly after earning his Ph.D. in Mathematics (Probability Theory) from Kansas State University. He has presented papers at meetings of the Academy of Economics and Finance, the American Mathematical Society, the Arkansas Conference on Teaching, and the Southwest Arkansas Council of Teachers of Mathematics. He has been an active member of the Mathematical Association of America since 1993, earned 18 hours in computer science, and has been an Advanced Placement statistics consultant since 2002.

Jonathan Eagle received his B.S. in Biology, minoring in chemistry and statistics, in 2015 from Henderson State University. Graduating cum laude as member of Honors College and the McNair Scholar Program, he was recognized as the Outstanding Graduating Senior in the Biology Department. He plans to continue his education at the graduate level in the area of biomolecular sciences.

The Man-Forged Miscreants

Peter Wilson

Mentor: Peggy Dunn Bailey, Ph.D.

In this essay I deconstruct the facilitation we as people provide in the formulation of our most dangerous enemies. These miscreants are generally reflections of their creators, and often in literature they triumph over their creators in ironic or thought-provoking ways. To support this notion, I compare and contrast the antagonists from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* using textual evidence and several critical responses.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* utilizes a significant portion of its text deliberating what it means to be human. In the literal sense, Victor Frankenstein is the human and the creature a humanoid facsimile. Yet most readers identify Victor as the monster and his creation as a more emotionally human and relatable character. As the story progresses, it becomes clear to Victor what horror he has unleashed upon himself and his family. In denying the beast the fair treatment it craves, Victor creates his own arch nemesis.

In Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, this idea is similarly explored. The mariner's greatest obstacle throughout the text is divine retribution. His refusal

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to accept a status quo brings into existence the issues that, if the story is to be considered factual, still plague him to this day. The character is haunted by the choices he carelessly made. Like in *Frankenstein*, this is one of the most troubling attributes of the piece. The idea that our humanity is delicate enough that a single thoughtless misstep could derail it completely is an agonizing one. This concern accompanies the mariner throughout *The Rime*. This is because readers as humans love the idea of being blameless victims unaccountable for our own failures. *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* address the fact that *we are often completely responsible*. The two pieces are often relegated to the horror genre because they bring to light an uncomfortable truth: that man creates his own monsters.

As an antihero, Victor is primarily characterized by his relentless ambition. In chapter 3, Victor recounts to Walton the joy he took in fostering his own intelligence. He claims his “proficiency, that of the masters . . . I improved so rapidly, that, at the end of two years, I made some discoveries . . . which procured me great esteem and admiration at the university” (Shelley 931). After his discovery of the way to reanimate a corpse, he takes the opportunity to liken himself to a combination of the mythical Prometheus and God, saying “. . . 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” (933).

He initially attempts to create the beast merely to prove that he can. He is essentially blinded by his irresponsible motivation. Up to the moment his creature breathes for the first time, Victor’s thoughts are only of the task at hand. He thinks of neither the terror the creature would engender nor the danger he puts himself in. This inability to multitask ends up causing him significant misfortune; as soon as his creature is brought to life, Victor considers his task concluded. As soon as this happens, he realizes he has no further plans for the disfigured being currently struggling to make sense of the world. In this moment, Victor’s fight-or-flight response activates and he flees. It is only later that he realizes his ambitions have come to a screeching halt.

Shelley’s creature is a perfectly crafted foil for Victor. Whereas Victor is characterized by his ambition, it becomes the nature of the monster to subdue his creator’s aspirations at every turn. When Victor believes the monster has died of its own ignorance in the harsh German environment, he sees the demon with his own eyes. When Victor attempts to rendezvous with Henry Clerval, he finds his friend’s mutilated corpse surrounded by accusatory locals. And on his wedding night, when Victor has decided either he or the monster shall die, the monster trumps him once again and throttles Victor’s bride. Victor builds the creature to prove it possible; the creature haunts Victor to prove that he can contradict this assertion.

The mariner’s goal is a different one altogether, yet the results are the same: the formation of a dangerous adversary. The mariner’s original intention is identical to every other sailor aboard the ship. He hopes to avoid misfortune on the journey. But when he “inhospitably killeth the pious bird of good omen” (line 79), this fate becomes impossible. The difference between Victor and the mariner is the shapes their monsters take. Victor’s nemesis is a hulking brute of a creature, far smarter and faster and more powerful than any mortal man. The mariner’s enemy is the price he must pay for his actions. It is the knowledge that there is an immense force waiting to deliver karma upon him. This scares the mariner; he knows he has made a grave error in killing the albatross, and he is just as afraid of cosmic retribution as Victor is of the creature.

One of the main causes of strife for the mariner is something that has also caused confusion among scholars. The fact that there is no premeditation to the mariner's killing of the albatross indicates no reason exists for the action. In *Frankenstein*, the reader is walked through every step leading up to the eventual formation of the creature. Political, emotional, and curricular motivations are considered by the narrator, and the result is astounding: a plot development that makes sense from every perspective. The slaughtering of the albatross has none of this, and this conspicuous lack of purpose remains unanswered throughout the rest of the piece. The mariner killed the albatross for no reason, and it is this fact that haunts the mariner. He is being punished for an act that he committed likely out of boredom. He knows he is culpable, and not even his own reasoning can absolve him of his penalty.

Even though both the mariner and Victor Frankenstein “create their own monsters,” they go about it with entirely differing methods. A large section of *Frankenstein* is dedicated to the sheer amount of effort it required to bring such a goal to fruition. Just as the story considers his emotional and scholarly motivations for doing so, it also details the minutia of the process. His childhood infatuation with the magical arts inspires him to study the occult and eventually delve into biology and other natural sciences. One of his college professors berates him for his ignorance while another supports him on his path to knowledge. The novel outlines how the character went about collecting the fragments of tissue and piecing them together. It takes hard work and months of planning for him to accomplish what he decides to do.

The mariner's summoning of the monster is achieved much differently. It is accidental and instantaneous. Immediately after the killing of the albatross, the other sailors detest his actions. They viewed the bird as a symbol of good luck, and chide the one that ended its life. But when the tempest is calmed, they find justification in his actions. For this reason, Coleridge states, “they make themselves accomplices in the crime” (99). As time passes and the weather is transformed into calmness unfit for sea travel, the sailors again turn on him and his fate is left to be determined by Death and Life-in-Death. Just as his life was changed forever by the untenable decision to kill the albatross, the state of his soul is established with the result of a game of dice. His decision to kill the bird was made not out of reason; it was an absent-minded and reckless choice. In an equivalent manner, his punishment is chosen by a gamble.

But the results of the gamble are far more severe than at first imaginable. Life-in-Death's initial objective with the mariner is to teach him the error of his ways, to teach him the importance of animal life. By the end of the text, the mariner completely understands which unspoken rule he had broken. His perspective has transformed. The “slimy things [that] did crawl with legs / Upon the slimy sea” (125-126) are now described as “happy living things!” (282). Character-wise, he has abandoned the disgusted trigger-happy persona he had at first inhabited. The life of the albatross has gone to good use, convincing the protagonist that “the dear God . . . made and loveth . . . All things both great and small” (615-617). Yet even after accepting the malevolence of his actions, his punishment continues. And still continues. Life-in-Death has penalized the mariner by afflicting him with an everlasting life. It is clear that Life-in-Death wants more than to clean the moral slate. Life-in-Death wants to make an example of him. This is further proven by the second half of her curse. The mariner is to spend his eternal life wandering the earth and reciting the tale of his misconduct. In addition to an everlasting life, he will also possess an inextinguishable despair. Not only will the mariner never have a restful day again, he will never forget the one stupid mistake he made so hastily.

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The mariner created a monster that's more powerful than himself, and it doesn't want any sort of equilibrium. It wants complete unadulterated revenge.

Frankenstein's monster begins slower and less competent. While the mariner's rime only covers the course of several days, Victor's story is long and arduous. This time Victor spends in recuperation is well spent by the beast; he learns to see and smell and eat. Life-in-Death already exists when the mariner summons her. Frankenstein's monster requires time to grow and develop.

When the monster first awakes, he is scared, blind, and alone. The monster himself describes his initial feelings as "confused and indistinct" (961). But these inhibitions begin to fade, and the only handicap that remains is the detestation exhibited by spectators. According to Thomas H. Schmid, this loneliness is one of his defining characteristics. His inability to cohere to society results in his moral disconnect from humanity, and it is this disconnect that emotionally advocates the murders he commits. Schmid claims that "the real horror in the sufferings of a Frankenstein's creature, Victor Frankenstein, or an Ancient Mariner is that such experiences can never be adequately communicated to 'normal' members of society" (19-20). Just as this highlights another curse of the fate of the ancient mariner, the impossibility of ever coexisting with a normal society, it sets more groundwork for the horror that constitutes the creature's genesis. The monster, despite vying to be treated as human, began life as a laboratory experiment, and is therefore unable on a fundamental level to associate with mankind.

Schmid goes on to speculate that "each character's story [spins] a tale of personal isolation" (23). Victor's dilemma in the novel is intrinsically linked to that of the creature. Despite Victor's engagement and familial ties, he is in essence an isolated individual. When relaying his tale to Walton, Victor asserts that he "was engaged, heart and soul, in pursuit of some discoveries" (931). One of Victor's many discoveries happens to be that of resurrection. Just as the monster is singularly focused on the people emotionally tied to Victor Frankenstein, so is Victor focused on the well-being of his latest project. And just as the monster generates fear and anxiety for his creator, the creator indirectly sabotages his own prosperity.

This is important as it highlights the duality between man and beast. Victor Frankenstein is a wunderkind, a prodigy, and this is clear to the reader as he recounts the narrative of his youth. Before his university era, he already felt an inclination towards educational endeavors. He tells the reader, "My occupations at this age were principally the mathematics. . . . I was busily employed in learning languages" (926). When he arrives at the university of Ingolstadt, he rises far above the level of his peers. This extraordinary intelligence is mirrored by the thing he creates. The monster, after just a few months of observation, can speak and read flawlessly. He has studied history and philosophy, and bemoans the unfairness of his circumstances. He laments, "This was then the reward of my benevolence! I had saved a human being from destruction, and, as a recompense, I now writhed under the miserable pain of a wound" (985). He understands justice and the lack of it. Both Frankenstein and the monstrosity he created have been elevated to the same plane of thought. Both are morally ambiguous and both self-righteously think themselves a divine mediator. In the same action that Frankenstein created his own perfect foil, he recreated himself.

In addition to being a highly intelligent creature with above average speed and dexterity, the monster also brings to life young Victor's flirtation with the supernatural. In "The Elison Fields," Adam Lifshy claims the birth of the monster is "Frankenstein's realization of

his childhood dreams of becoming a conjuror of phantoms” (141). The creature haunts Victor as a phantom would; its absence is felt just as its presence is felt. And, like a phantom, the monster and its desires of a wife are never far from Victor’s mind. The monster is Victor’s equivalent in brilliance and his superior in physical ability, but its supernatural inclinations are a direct copy of Victor’s childhood hobbies.

The duality that is shared between Frankenstein and his creation is not duplicated in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. In fact, the opposite is true. The mariner could not be more different from the beast he creates. The mariner, before any of his atrocities are committed, is nothing more than an average sailor. Until the moment in which he slays the albatross, he is indiscernible from the other boat workers. He is played as the normal man, an utterly boring character meant to be occupied by the reader. This interpretation of the character couldn’t be less comparable with the cosmic and debatably omnipotent Life-in-Death. The comparison of the two is almost comical, as the two are so dissimilar. The summoner’s fate is held in the fickle hand of the summoned. Frankenstein recreated himself in his monster, and the mariner created his own polar opposite.

The story dictates one major transformation on behalf of the mariner, when he comes to terms with the inherent beauty of nature. At this point he is somewhat freed from the curse, though the majority of its effect still remains. According to Hillier, “The Mariner’s unthinking, unfeeling destructiveness [is] a senseless act of unwarranted and unprovoked aggression against a pacific creature that shows humans nothing but affection” (5). Alice Chandler, too, describes the albatross by saying, “In the very center of the crystalline waste, life appears and sends its emissary” (403). Perhaps this is the reason the mariner’s punishment was originally so severe. Rather than create something evil, as Victor Frankenstein did, the mariner took something beautiful and sullied it. And it is because the mariner has understood the error of his actions that the albatross falls from his neck. At this point his transformation is complete and a fraction of his burden is lifted. Chandler claims that “spiritual wisdom is born out of hatred and sin” (413), and this proves true as the mariner is partially absolved. However, though the mariner has learned his lesson, he still finds no escape from the monster he created. He is plagued with immortality and so must live with it every day.

Frankenstein shows several enormous transformations in the character of Victor Frankenstein: most notably, his metamorphosis from an ambitious and indestructible man to a cowering guilt-ridden wretch. His emotional and mental battle with his creation has left him scarred and fearful. He no longer finds joy in anything. The love he once felt for his family and friends has likewise been strangled from existence. Yet if there is any good fortune to be had, Victor has it, for in the end of the novel he finally escapes the monster he created. After the strenuous weight the beast had placed upon his psyche, Victor in the end of the book succumbs to the embrace of death. Unlike the mariner, Victor is rewarded with a final sense of peace after somewhat acknowledging his mistake. His ambition has been permanently sated and his careless aspirations halted forever. His slate is mildly cleansed, and a sense of karmic justice is felt by the reader.

Both Frankenstein and the mariner inadvertently create their own monsters. Frankenstein creates the monster to satisfy his ambition, to prove to himself that he is skilled. The mariner leaves himself in the clutches of karma due to his reckless treatment of the lives of animals. Whether one is more deserving of punishment is debatable, but nevertheless both characters are the architects of their own misfortune. In the end, they are both subjected to the

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horrors they created, and both pay the price with their lives. Frankenstein's earthly life is forfeited, and the mariner's spiritual well-being will forever be unobtainable. The fact is that both characters must face the problems they created and pay the required sum. They are both allegories to the fact that we create our own monsters. We are our own enemies, and we reap what we sow.

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Biographical Sketch

Peter Wilson is a Henderson State University undergraduate student. He began writing early in high school, focusing his meager abilities on the construction of terrible poetry. After nearly a decade of intermittent practice, he has vastly improved in skill, and now continues to produce terrible poetry in vastly larger volumes. In addition to this, he has also authored a variety of critical response papers and even several adequate short stories. Born and raised in the small town of Van Alstyne, Texas, Peter still continues to fight through financial panic and four hours of I-30 traffic to return to HSU, where he plans to complete his education.