Frankenstein and the Ancient Mariner

Samuel Coleridge published *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* in 1798 and it became a prominent piece in literary romanticism. It was published in *Lyrical Ballads* along with numerous other poems that aided in shaping the movement of romantic style writing, including those by William Wordsworth. Many authors following its publication referenced Coleridge's work or employed his style in their pieces. Mary Shelley, an author who published her most acclaimed work in 1818, did both. The determining elements of Coleridge's poem, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, are mirrored in Shelley's novel, *Frankenstein,* in respect of literary technique, narrative structure, and intertextual themes.

Allusions in writing prompt a better understanding of the author's text by referencing another commonly known work. Allusion became a popular literary technique during the romantic period and was efficaciously used by both Coleridge and Shelley. An example of this technique in Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* can be seen in lines 59-60 of part one which states, "instead of the cross, the albatross about my neck was hung." The albatross hanging from the mariner's neck symbolizes the weight of his sin and Coleridge frames a comparison between the cross of Jesus and the albatross, ultimately alluding to the Bible. Shelley actually alludes to *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* in *Frankenstein* when Frankenstein is describing his feelings of loneliness and fear of his creation and actually quotes Coleridge's work. This is seen when Frankenstein says that [he] "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 him tread" (Shelley 5). This use of allusion allows Shelley to convey to the

audience how this experience has greatly altered Frankenstein's life forever, as did what occurred with the mariner.

In both, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Frankenstein,* similar literary technique is applied with the use of hyperbole. An example of hyperbole in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is shown when Coleridge discusses how still the ship was in lines 117 to 118, "as idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean." According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word idle is referring to "inaction or the absence of significant activity." Coleridge uses this device again in lines 121 to 122 of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* when he states that there was, "water, water, everywhere, nor any drop to drink." Here he is placing emphasis on the Mariners thirst when he is stranded on the ship in the middle of the ocean. Mary Shelley's use of hyperbole can be seen in paragraph 1 on page 126 of *Frankenstein*:

"A fiendish rage animated him as he said this; his face was wrinkled into contortions too

horrible for human eyes to behold; but presently he calmed himself and proceeded…"

Here, Shelley is discussing a blatant difference in emotion and emotional expression and almost exaggerating this change. In both cases, hyperbole is used effectively by specifically selecting phrases that overemphasize a statement by adding a grander effect to the piece.

Similar narrative techniques are also used in *Frankenstein* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* by both romantic period authors. Shelley and Coleridge used foreshadowing as a major narrative technique in these two works. This use allows the authors to present the reader with the notion that they can expect what is going to happen later in the story but leaves them questioning possible outcomes. According to Craciun in "Writing the Disaster: Franklin and

Frankenstein" on page 438, a key point for romanticism in Shelley's novel is nested in the framed narrative. An example of this in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is the wedding guest has a strong reaction when he is told that the mariner shot the albatross and the narrator asks "Why look'st thou so?" in line 80, part 1. This foreshadows to the reader the extremity of the consequences for the mariner's actions. In *Frankenstein,* Shelley uses foreshadowing on page 165 in paragraph 1:

"The wind which had fallen in the south, now rose with great violence in the west. The moon had reached her summit in the heavens and was beginning to descend; the clouds swept across it swifter than the flight of the vulture… suddenly a heavy storm of rain descended"

This quotation is of great importance because, notably, every time before Frankenstein's monster appears in the work, Shelley discusses the moon. Foreshadowing is used by both authors effectively and serves to draw in the reader by developing an air of mystery.

In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,* Coleridge's narrative structure includes a frame story prior to the main narrative being presented and Shelley's *Frankenstein* is written with a mirrored use. The use of a frame story allows the writer to distance himself further from the narrator in order to expose unreliability and this can be seen in both narratives. It also provides a strong hook to capture the attention of the audience. In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,* the frame story begins with a third person narrator and then transitions to two other speakers, being the Mariner and a wedding guest. The primary narrator is the Mariner because he is telling the tale to the wedding guest, while the third person narrator informs the audience of what the Mariner and the wedding guest leave out, making the narrative even more

questionable. In *Frankenstein,* a third person narrator begins the story and then transitions to Victor Frankenstein being the narrator and then the monster begins narrating. The use of a frame story in both pieces ultimately allows the author to create suspense from the beginning and maintain an air of mystery throughout the tale.

Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* also share a plethora of common themes including the underlying idea of retribution. The Mariner's singular impulsive decision to shoot down the albatross results in unimaginable things happening to him. Following the shooting of the albatross, the Mariner and his crew bake black in the sun and become delirious from thirst while surrounded by water. Likewise, in *Frankenstein*, Frankenstein makes a blinded decision to create this creature and spends most of the story paying for his actions. Following the monsters' creation, Frankenstein becomes ill with a fever and the people closest to him are killed.

Another common theme found in both *Frankenstein* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is the respect for nature and living things. Both tales emphasize the power of natural forces through the albatross and Frankenstein's creation which can be shown through, as previously discussed, retribution. In Frankenstein, if Frankenstein had left nature alone instead of attempting to go against it, his life might not have been altered. In Sherwin's "Frankenstein: Creation as Catastrophe," he reinforces this idea by referring to "the aura of a primal sin against nature that somehow justifies the ensuing retributive bother." Another clue into this theme would be the lack of respect for Frankenstein's creation is what ultimately leads to the unwarranted affects. Likewise, in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,* if the Mariner had not shot

the albatross, then none of the horrible things would have occurred to him or his crew. This makes the moral of having respect for nature and the inhabitants of it very clear.

Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and Shelley's *Frankenstein* are very similar as a result of the mimicry during the romantic period of similar literary technique, intertextual themes, and narrative structure. Both authors incorporated these romantic ideas into their works creating some of the most memorable romanticism pieces and iconic shaping tools for the ideals of writing during the 18th century and beyond.

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