

ENGLISH: *FRANKENSTEIN/BLADE RUNNER*

Analyse the ways in which a comparative study of *Frankenstein* and *Blade Runner* invites consideration of humanity's connection with the natural world;

In any text, conventions displayed often reflect values implicit in its context. Despite an evident lapse in history and context, texts can reflect corresponding connections shared between human beings and particular aspects of the world. Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) are examples of two such texts, comparatively exploring the dynamic and powerful relationship between humanity and the natural world. Under this thesis, both examine in particular the mankind's relationship with the natural environment and the distortion of natural order through the perusal of dangerous knowledge and power.

Both texts explore the fragile but dynamic relationship that exists between humanity and the natural environment of the world. Contextually embraced by Romanticism and Enlightenment, the natural world in Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* possesses the ability to caress and subdue. Shelley's vivid descriptions of the natural landscape convey a romantic appreciation of the beauty of nature, and she uses this landscape to both externalise the inner emotions of both Victor and the creature and to offer a source of alleviation. When mired in remorse after the deaths of his beloved William and Justine, Victor heads to the mountains and seeks refuge in nature's compelling arms; 'the unstained snowy mountain-top, the glittering pinnacle, the pine woods... the sublime and magnificent scenes afforded me the greatest consolation... they elevated me'. The accumulation of majestic visual imagery and positive adjectives foster a sense of tranquillity, and reinforce the powerful influence of nature. Likewise, after a hellish winter of cold and abandonment, the monster feels his heart lighten as spring arrives; 'my senses were gratified and refreshed by a thousand scents of delight, and a thousand sights of beauty', clearly highlighting the consoling nature of the sublime.

However, as the novel progresses Shelly reveals the sinister and threatening aspect of nature aside from the compelling and calm. Towards the conclusion of the novel as Victor chases the monster obsessively, nature, in the form of the Arctic desert, functions as the treacherous symbolic backdrop for his primal struggle against the monster. Shelly uses strong visual and descriptive language to emphasise the remoteness of the region; 'immense and rugged mountains of ice eternal frosts and frozen oceans'. This foreboding and perilous imagery emphasises the reciprocal side of the natural world, and its harsh and unforgiving potential. Shelly, by emphasising the dynamic interaction between the natural environment and her characters, is highlighting the powerful connection humanity held with the sublime natural world in her time, as derived from the emergence of Romanticism and Enlightenment.

Blade Runner invites consideration into humanity's detrimental relationship with the natural world; a reciprocal theme to that offered in *Frankenstein*. Increased industrial development in the 1970's led to an increase in urbanisation, which Scott believed would severely damage the environment, thus forcing him to present a degraded environment to critique humanity's exploitative relationship with nature. Endless scenes depict urban decay and the chaos of Tiger Economy-influenced street life. The opening mis-en-scene panning shot with its doomsday imagery depicts 2019 Los Angeles as Hades. The neon advertising lights illuminate the sky as opposed to stars, inviting the audience to evaluate the impact of overwhelming urbanisation on the natural planet. Scott uses the dark and gloomy 'film noir' portrayal of the streetscape, alongside the slow eerie music and constant acid rain to highlight the grim reality of how technological advances are often made at the expense of individuals and nature. This dystopic image is reinforced by the giant floating blimp that hovers above the city, overtly repeating; "A new life awaits you in the Off-World colonies, the chance to begin again in a golden land of opportunity and adventure". A satirical comment on the consumerism present in the 1980's, Scott uses this blimp to repeatedly inform the audience that the exploitive nature of humanity will lead to an imbalanced relationship between mankind and the natural environment, suggesting that the only contact with nature will ultimately be 'off-world'.

Importantly however, despite its mass-depletion, nature appears to still hold meaningful value throughout the film, as shown through Tyrell's production of the artificial owl and the nature-inspired interior of his living quarters. As the most powerful character portrayed in the film, Tyrell is the only human with access to this degree of luxury, which is powerfully contradicted by the understanding that he is largely at the fault of nature's demise. Evidently Scott, in his futuristic portrayal of 2019, is criticising the detrimental connection that can exist between humanity and nature as a result of increased urbanisation and scientific advancement parallel to his time. Scott is also emphasising in his film the rarity and unique quality the natural environment has obtained as a result of its unrestrained exploitation.

Both *Frankenstein* and *Blade Runner* explore the fine lines that exist between mankind's perusal of higher knowledge and the set order of what is defined as 'natural' in terms of creation and understanding. The texts advocate the notion that there are inherent dangers to the human psyche in an environment in which the distinction between man and 'God' is blurred, as a result of the disruption of this natural order. *Frankenstein* examines the expanding exploration of scientific rationalism and Enlightenment evident in its composed context, infused with the desire to illuminate the unknown. Shelly utilises characters with strong ambitious, unfaltering, and almost egocentric qualities in order to convey the values based around the pursuit of knowledge evident in her time. Victor Frankenstein, a somewhat 'modern Prometheus', attempts to surge beyond human limits and access the secret of life; 'I will pioneer a new way, explore... and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation'. His vowing intentions to reveal and rationalise the 'mysteries' concerning life and death challenge the powerful authority that defines the role of 'God', and possess the potential to provoke adverse consequences. Shelly emphasises how Victor's actions, recognised as reckless and without any thought to the possible consequences, usher him into suffering the extremity of grief and social isolation, as punishment for endeavouring to steal the divine right of power and being.

Furthermore, Shelly critiques the frayed relationship between the creation and creator through her adoption of a passage from poet John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, implying the detrimental consequences associated with mankind's pursuit of higher knowledge; 'Did I ask thee Maker from my clay, To mould Me man? Did I solicit thee, From darkness to promote me?' The rhetorical questions in this intertextual reference epitomize the monster's ill will towards Victor as biblical figure Adam experiences towards his creator, God. The alliteration of the muddled 'm' sound fosters a tone of apprehension, and the use of 'darkness' combined with 'promote' foreshadows the impending consequences associated with the pursuit of knowledge and power. Shelly employs common motifs like this throughout her novel as a way of elucidating mankind's inherent challenge to God's authority, thereby disrupting the natural hierarchy of power. Ultimately, Shelly's purpose is didactic; she is touching on how the ruthless pursuit of knowledge and power compatible to that of God himself defines a distinctive abuse of the natural order of creation and understanding, therefore entailing dangerous consequences.

Similarly, *Blade Runner* offers a corresponding theme wherein the defiance of the natural hierarchy and order of knowledge and understanding, as a result of the pursuit of power, is heavily juxtaposed with adverse consequences. Scott's Eldon Tyrell contains many similarities to Shelly's Victor Frankenstein, in the way that they both maintain a fascination in recreating human life and are unaware of the forces they are dealing with. Scott uses Tyrell, the authoritative, intelligent, and cynical founder of the Tyrell Corporation and creator of the Replicants, to emphasise the developing fear of the large-scale and powerful corporations and industries emerging in the 1980's, and the concerns these company's raised about a disregard for natural order and associated consequences. Scott depicts him as wealthy, powerful, and central to authority in 2019 Los Angeles. The opening scene, panning above the city observing the industrialised urban agglomeration, concludes on a low-angle close up of the massive ziggurat - the Tyrell Corporation - suggesting the former images are a result of this particular industry. Furthermore, the orange-tinted light illuminating the structure situated against the hazy sky further signifies its importance and dominance over the surroundings. Tyrell himself is portrayed as somewhat small and fragile, his thick glasses emphasise the reliance he has on his technology. His 'myopic' vision, imbedded with

the recurring eye motif, metaphorically alludes to his inability to see the ramifications of his actions - his misuse of powerful knowledge and attempt to manipulate himself as 'God'. Scott reinforces this with Tyrell's statement; 'commerce is our goal here at Tyrell', suggesting his blatant disregard for responsibility concerning anything other than profit. By designing his chess pieces as human beings, Scott is furthering the idea of Tyrell 'playing God', and his manipulation of what is natural. Ultimately, the misuse of his knowledge and the disruption of the natural order of the world lead to his subsequent demise. A powerful juxtaposed scene is created, wherein the created oppose and seek revenge on the creator - not unsimilar to that suggested in Frankenstein. Scott allows Tyrell's actions to run a vicious circle around him and eventually character his decline, as a consequence of challenging the natural order of the world and creation. Clearly Scott, in his film, is highlighting how a defiance of what is considered natural in terms of knowledge and understanding, and also an insistent, abusive desire for power, often entails disastrous consequences.

As can be deduced, any text is largely a product of the context of when it was composed and therefore reflects values and themes implicit in this timeframe. Mary Shelly's Frankenstein and Ridley Scott's Blade Runner are too such texts that, despite being composed in different contexts, reflect enduring values and in particular, invite consideration into humanity's connection with the natural world.