

## ENGLISH ADVANCED: *FRANKENSTEIN/BLADE RUNNER*

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Ridley Scott's post-modern pastiche of dystopian and film noir elements 'Bladerunner' and the epistolary novel 'Frankenstein' by Mary Shelley, despite the stark contrast in time and context, both explore similar universal dilemmas of man's problematic and exploitative relationship with nature and the impact of this on the ever-changing dynamic moral framework of mankind. Mankind's loss of humanity and man attempting to play God are in both texts portrayed to be a result of the transgression of moral boundaries. A comparative study between these texts allows us to see thematic and conceptual parallels from the differing perspectives of form, author, time and context.

Blade Runner reshapes various gothic romantic representations of the enlightenment values of reason, knowledge and progress and places them in a 1980's post-modern setting of intellectual and technological progress, devoid of morality and humanity. Born out of the Romantic Movement, a direct reaction towards humanities pursuits of technology and science and the transgression of old moral boundaries, the ideas presented in Frankenstein are re-encapsulated in the film Blade Runner, a product of the fearful post WWII period.

Both texts share the theme of 'warning' of the dangers of unrestrained scientific progress and its consequences. Victor demeaned the human body to be merely 'food for the worm', a product of the severe rationality of enlightenment and scientific revolution thinking, devoid of emotion and spirituality. Victor warns Walton of the dangers of scientific pursuit saying 'Unhappy man! Do you share my madness?...Dash the cup from your lips', and cautions him saying that the quest for knowledge is the 'serpent to sting you'. Shelly uses grim biblical allusion and metaphors as a form of foreshadowing a dark future for humanity if the quest for knowledge and reason continues to occur with transgression of the laws of the natural world. Epistolary mode and confessional style add an air of intimacy and urgency, creating a morality tale attempting to warn against over enthusiasm for radical new ideas.

In Blade Runner the fears of the romantics have been realised, with nature obliterated by science and industrialisation, products of mankind's' greed. The inexistence of the natural world confronts the audience in the opening panoramic scene, an industrialised, polluted skyline of fire stacks, mass infrastructure and artificial lighting backed by a highly technologised synthesised soundtrack. The synthetic landscape is explored through vertical filming vectors, a metaphor for the manner in which humanity attempts to override the natural world as if he was the higher power. The film exaggerates the key issues of environmental degradation, corporate capitalism, technological advancement, globalisation and population growth into a dystopic world presented through a film noir filter symbolising the dark uncertainty of the future when scientific progress leads to a deterioration of the human condition as opposed to its advancement. By looking at these texts side by side, the development and re-evaluating of the scientifically rational ideas of the last centuries can be understood in more depth.

The texts Bladerunner and Frankenstein both demonstrate the underlying importance of nature, man's relation to it, and the impact of this relationship on human nature.

Both Romanticism and Gothicism, which Frankenstein is a hybrid of, portray nature as majestic in which "the very winds whispered in soothing accents'. Personification of the natural elements intensifying the importance of their presence and temperament. Nature for the romantics was a source of both fear and reverence and the possibility for spiritual renewal. Victor, for example, wrapped in depression and remorse after the creation of the monster and the deaths of William and Justine for which he is responsible, heads into the Alps to purify and lift his spirits. The influence of nature on his mood and mental state is evident, 'I contemplated the lake: the waters were placid; all around was calm, and the snowy mountains, the palaces of nature were not changed. The calm and heavenly scene restored me'. When by the end Victor desperately chases the monster obsessively in the Arctic, this desolate landscape symbolising the elemental hatred and destructiveness towards

each other of the monster and Frankenstein. The bleak landscapes used by Shelley are typically gothic: harsh and frozen arctic expanses mirror the cold and ruthless personalities and themes present, serving as a metaphor for the isolation from society and humanity. Storms, a common gothic literary motif, accompany many key events during the novel, including the birth of the monster, when 'a flash of lightning illuminated the object' and the death of William. The storm becomes a metaphor for both physical and emotional tempest.

Scott provides a perspective on how the world would look if disregard for nature feared by the Romantics should continue, portraying a dystopia extinguished of all nature. The lack of knowledge of the natural world is exemplified through Leon's question 'What's a tortoise?'. The absence of natural life is a sustained motif throughout the film, the human desire for nature is satisfied through replicant animals such as the snake and owl.

The desolate arctic landscape in Frankenstein can be paralleled with the constantly rain soaked settings of Bladerunner, typically film noir style with low lighting, claustrophobic framing and deep shadows of an urban landscape. The drab bleakness is powerful and effective in conveying the message of warning of competition with nature and its effects on humanity and the morality of the individual, as first explored in Frankenstein.

The underlying theme of humanity and what it means to be human is explored in both film 'Blade Runner' and novel 'Frankenstein', depicting the corruptive force of progression and transgression on the human condition and identity. Frankenstein comments on mankind's loss of humanity when the creature displays human instincts as it experiences 'the pleasant showers and genial warmth' of nature, a contrast to 'human' Victor showing an 'insensibility to nature's charms', unable to relate to nature while a 'non-human' creature can. Victor's inability to take on the responsibilities of 'parenthood' of nurturing and educating his creation is seen in its namelessness, significantly symbolising his lack of humanity in its creator's eyes. The Monster's hideous appearance, described with horrific visual imagery such as 'yellow skin... watery eyes, shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips', means he is utterly alienated from the rest of humanity. A key notion of humanity is the ability for existential questioning. Frankenstein's monster uses rhetorical questions such as 'Who was I?' and 'What was I' as an attempt to form a personal identity, implicating self-awareness.

The 'replicants' in Bladerunner are similarly brutalised; their murder 'wasn't called execution. It was called retirement', a dehumanising euphemism. In the world of the film 'Blade Runner', attachment bonds between people are broken down due to scientific progression as warned in Frankenstein. Sebastian's dialogue 'I make friends, they're toys, my friends are toys' shows that humans no longer have real families and have lost the ability to develop relationships, which have become artificial, desolate of the empathy of human nature. Deckard's inhumanity is exemplified in Zhora's 'retirement' scene, where she runs in fear of her life in a clear, plastic raincoat emphasising her human, feminine form. Non-diegetic sounds such as her heartbeat further accentuates her humanity, making the death violent and inhumane in the eyes of the audience, emphasising the demoralisation of society.

Curiosity about the past is a human quality displayed by the replicants. Pris quotes Descartes saying 'I think, therefore I am', emphasising the self-awareness of and human qualities of the replicant. The importance of memories in humanity are explored through the motif of photos, representing the replicants perception of 'their past'. This humaneness is dismissed by Deckard who states 'those aren't your memories'.

A comparative study of Bladerunner and Frankenstein accentuates the similarity in the themes of the human experience as perceived throughout time, and can serve as a warning to us today in regards to our desire for scientific and technological progress and the possible implications of progress on the future condition of humanity.