

English Advanced Notes

Module A – Comparative Study of Texts

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Overview of Concept:

Mary Shelley's 1818 novel Frankenstein and futuristic film Blade Runner directed by Ridley Scott in 1982 are two texts that have been likened and contrasted many times. Although these texts are composed in different mediums, styles, and contexts, they are compared because the issues raised in these texts are still relevant today. This establishes that whilst attitudes and values change with context, fundamental human issues will never change. By examining how text presents their perspectives on these issues, it allows us insight to the values and attitudes of their respective contexts.

- Thematic ideas explored by both texts are always significant to modern society as they deal with age old concern of humanity
- However, how these themes as explored, developed and communicated through the texts' construction is where their relevance can suffer
- Blade Runner was produced more than two decades ago, and Frankenstein closer to two centuries → both passed on an epic poem nearly four centuries old, Milton's Paradise Lost.
- This continuum of consideration highlights the continued significance of literature that examines humanity

Significance of Pairing Texts

- Pairing created meta reality, and heightened awareness of the themes and issues
- On their own, flaws limit their effectiveness in conveying such meaning but together...
- In terms of reception by modern audiences, each text fails in its ability to convey its messages
- Shelley's use of a double frame structure and episodic narrative causes modern critical audience to question the validity of Walton's narration and hence comments on humanity are disregarded
- Blade Runner has been criticised for focusing too much on the visual elements and not dialogue to drive the message home and leaves modern audiences confused.
- By pairing texts, flaws and failures in each are transcended by the links formed between the two, which strengthen the themes.

Contextual Outline

Frankenstein

- Piece of literature attributed to the Romantic period → offers an association of the human psyche with the moods of nature
- Also Gothicism which is used to augment the horror
- Gave rise in response to the industrial revolution → intellectual and artistic hostility towards industrialisation
- Romanticism stressed the importance of mankind's connections with nature

Blade Runner

- Based on the 1969 novel, 'Do Androids Dream of Electrical Sheep'
- Produced during the period of growing mass marketing, urbanisation, corporate greed and massive consumption

Together

- different contexts, same ideas = timeless nature of concept and importance of considering the spectrum of ideas

Theme 1: Scientific Development.

FR:

“Men love to wonder, and that is the seed of science” Ralph Waldo Emerson. Shelley is concerned with the dangers of science, and the irresponsible and arrogant nature of those who successfully 'tempt nature'.

Shelley uses the epistolary novel form in Frankenstein to demonstrate different points of view, and is thus able to use the layers formed by this structure to reinforce the ideas of the text through the use of foils. The Captain Robert Walton is used as an effective foil for Frankenstein. Similarly, it was Walton's desire to '**accomplish some great purpose**' for '**glory**' that blinded himself to spend his fortune on an expedition to the North Pole, showing the value of fame during this age. However, having heard Frankenstein's story, he decides to turn back. Framing Frankenstein and the Monster's story with Walton's letters, Shelley implies that Walton has learnt a moral lesson and begin to see the need to accept responsibility for not just himself, but also his crew.

This is particularly emphasised in the change in tone of the letters before and after Frankenstein's narrative. Walton's self centred assertion that '**success shall crown [his] endeavours**' made way for concerning remarks that “**the men...can never willingly continue their hardships**' and that he '**cannot lead them unwillingly into danger**'. Walton survival contrasting with Frankenstein's demise is symbolic, and serves to reinforce Shelley's point that scientific progress separated from ethics and responsibility will be Humanity's downfall.

BR:

Allusion – **The Immortal Game** played by Sebastian and Roy with Dr. Tyrell. This is based on a chess game between two 19th century grandmasters. The game started off with a King's Gambit – where a pawn is sacrificed for quicker development. This parallels the sacrifice of the human condition for technological advancement in BR. As the game wears on, more and more valuable pieces are sacrificed, culminating with the sacrifice of the queen in order to achieve checkmate. This allusion reflects the 80s scientists and businessmen's goal to maximise profit for self-gain, disregarding ethics and consequences, and by doing so lose piece by piece the very essence of their humanity. This moral decay is particularly highlighted when children, the very symbol of innocence, were depicted committing crimes such as stealing and robbing car parts to sell.

Literary Traditions

- Frankenstein embodies several aspects of Romantic literary, but neither Frankenstein or the creature represent the romantic hero → character that rejects established norms and conventions, has been rejected by society and has the self as the centre of their existence
- However Roy Batty represents a romantic hero → in saving Deckard's life and the sorrowful recognition that 'all those moments will be lost like tears in rain', demonstrated the humanity that is missing by society and can never be achieved due to the retirement of the replicants
- Contrast in texts allows the romantic traditions of Frankenstein to be linked with a modern context in Blade Runner, and appreciated by the audience.

Theme 2

Nature of Humanity. What is it that makes us human? In different contexts, what defines human reveals the values of that context.

FR: Early 1800s England, Romantic Poets such as Mary Shelley's husband Percy Shelley became forerunners to Victorian Aestheticism, which placed great emphasis on aesthetic values such as initial impressions and beauty. This value is reflected in Frankenstein by Shelley. Alluding to the story of Prometheus, Frankenstein's creature complains that he **'had saved a human being from destruction, and as recompense now writhed under the miserable pain of a wound which shattered the flesh and bone'** because he looks **'hedious', 'ugly'**, a monster not even **'Dante could have conceived'**. The similarities between the two stories causes the indignation of Prometheus' punishment is brought to the forefront of the audiences' mind, to compound the injustice we feel for the monster. The Monster is alienated from the human race based on his appearance, which shows that in this context, the resemblance to an archetypal stereotype of human is a defining aspect of humanity.

BR: In the original novel which BR is based on, author Phillip K. Dick believed that it was empathy that defined humanity. Ridley Scott took this idea and subverted it by depicting replicants as more empathetic creatures than humans.

- Scott makes sure that the humans portrayed in the film are individualistic beings with no significant communication with others. In fact, as an extrapolated future from an era of globalisation, they don't even share the same language. The concept of the Great American Melting Pot, where races mix homogeneously and live in harmony, has been replaced with an Great American Mosaic, a fractured society. In contrast, replicants survive as a group, establish bonds and demonstrate loyalty. In fact, replicant Rachel raises a good point when she asks Deckard if he has **"ever taken the VK test [himself]"**. The fact that replicants express more empathy implies that not even a 'real' human can pass a test of humanity anymore. This irony serves as a criticism on the individualistic consumerism that pervaded the early 80s. As humans become more materialistic, we begin to lose our social connections with others, becoming more and more pre-occupied with our things rather than people.

Theme 3

Relationship With Nature. Humans as physical beings, living in a natural world called Earth. It is nature that provides us with the resources we need to prosper and grow. How we treat our environment and use these resources and our attitudes to nature varies over time and place, and thus reveals values.

FR:

- **Setting:** At the most basic level, the vivid settings in Frankenstein reflects the emotions, feelings, and actions of the characters.
 - An engrossed Victor Frankenstein would be **'insensible to the charms of nature'**, working in his lab. His alienation from nature closes off relationships with other people as he **'shunned [his] fellow creatures as if [he] had been guilty of a crime'**

- His withdrawal from nature parallels his retreat from human connections, suggesting that nature is a powerful force on humanity.
- This symbolism is based on the romantic idea of nature as a powerful entity, whose 'immutable' laws are broken by Victor when he created his creature.
- The harsh, unforgiving landscapes during Victor's chase of his creature and his subsequent demise is used to symbolise the punishment of this lack of connection.
- Focus on overextended descriptions of the natural environment → highlighting the importance of humanity's connection and experience of that around them
- Nature is the restoring force → 'contributed greatly to his convalescence'

BR:

- Scott displays that humanity is intrinsically linked to nature. Unlike Shelley, Scott does not regard nature as a powerful entity, but contends that human's mastery over nature must be used with respect and responsibly. In the opening scene, he cleverly uses the lack of youth, plants, new life and seasons to **symbolise** the isolation from nature, replacing them with large skyscrapers built with a pastiche of styles, oversized advertising billboards, overcrowded, dirty sidewalks, and fireballs exploding from factory chimneys in an environmental wasteland. The film medium allows all these aspects to be conveyed simultaneously on the screen, overwhelming the audience with this dystopic image.
- This hyperbolic extrapolation of the early 80s' consumer culture creates an economic and environmental dystopia to remind us what will happen if we do not take care of nature, and how it will affect humanity. It is an ironic reminder that technological advances with no regard for ethics and impact on environment could actually cause a degradation in the human condition.

Together:

- Blade Runner offers a retrospective guide and extreme view on the results that a disengagement with nature causes, whilst Frankenstein highlights how this connection with nature regulates the 'goodness' of humankind.
- Mountain metaphor is purposeful as the gigantic pyramid-like structure we are confronted with draws a clear parallel with Mont Blanc, below which the creature and Victor Frankenstein meet for the first time since their initial post-creation encounters. A cut closer through still distant exterior shot relocates us from daytime to night time, and again we hear foreboding non-diegetic music; the coupling of the darkness and the music magnifies not only the suspense we feel with respect to the pending confrontation between Roy and Eldon, but also our alienation from the unfamiliar world space. In the case of Frankenstein, we are alienated only by the abhorrent visage of the creature, not the surround itself.

Characterisation

Frankenstein

- Strong development of setting at the expense of character depth/development → leaves readers questioning motivations of characters.
- Creature is characterised by the exclusion of society → "I am malicious because I am miserable. Am I not shunned and hated by all mankind."
- Frankenstein's cowardly actions are driven by motivation to remain in society
- Creature is created from human parts and emotionally developed

Blade Runner

- Focus on visual cinema rather than dialogue means audience must undertake in depth analysis to understand motivations → aligns with film's philosophical nature
- Replicants are cloned from humans, physically exact → Tyrell's aim is to create replicants "more human than human"

Together

- Presents the idea that man's creations, and their desire for structure and control, will end up destroying them
- In Frankenstein's case, his creature destroys everything he values in life and causes him to seek the extremities of the earth
- Humans in Blade Runner become slaves to the superiority of their creation → Batty beating Tyrell at chess, Batty saving Deckard through a display of humanity no human has.

Genre

Frankenstein

- Considered to be a forerunner of the science fiction genre
- Sci-fi elements include the exploration of creation of life, consideration of futuristic technology and its rapid development, contradiction of laws of nature

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Band 6 Essay Example:

Spanning centuries, humanity has and will always be a concept which is indefinable. Within the sci-fi texts Frankenstein and Blade Runner, the composers through setting explore the folly of humanity in overstepping boundaries and the dangers of scientific advancement impacting on culture and fear within society. Ultimately the setting in Blade Runner ironically paints LA the so called 'city of angels' as a hellish dystopia void of the natural and humanity, highlighting Frankenstein's consequences of overreaching.

So what is the function of setting? Setting not only sets the environment, it establishes the mood and tone, and ultimately links with the concerns expressed within texts. Within Shelley's text, the setting is influenced by two movements; The Gothic and Romanticism. Romanticism offers an association of the human psyche with the 'moods' of nature, while Gothic settings are used to enhance and augment the horror. In contrast, the dismal world of Blade Runner has been represented through the use of film noir; the lack of natural light and highly stylised setting. These

are key elements of this cinematography, highlighting to the audience key concerns; the rise of technology and the prevalence of a capitalistic dystopian society within the late 20th Century. Firstly, I would like to discuss the composers' use of setting to highlight the corruption of an individual and humanity through scientific pursuit and knowledge. Shelley reflects Victor's supreme folly in choosing to play God through the protagonists' connections with nature and overextended metaphors. As Shelley states, Victor's "*insensibility to its charms*", arising from his immersion in science resulted in a "*deep, dark and deathlike solitude*" with the heavy alliteration exemplifying his degraded sense of humanity. Shelley's use of Gothic setting in, "It was on a dreary night of November" when Victor creates the monster effectively provides an atmosphere to emotionally engage the responder into sharing the horror Victor is feeling at unleashing such an uncontrollable force. Shelly also positions her audience against Victor as creating another being through science was profoundly amoral in Christian society, hence accompanying Victor's act with a Gothic Setting enhances the horror and highlights Victor's folly.

Through Blade Runner, Scott also warns of the dangers of such a desire. This is evident through the expansive establishing shot of a 2019 Los Angeles dominated by an endless maze of giant industrial buildings, revealing a dark bleak world lit up by blazing smokestacks from an oil refinery and the glow of the corporate advertisements. This shot, along with the haunting pounding of the Vangelis soundtrack shows an ersatz society full of poison and decay, positioning the audience to ask themselves; is it possible for a human to inhabit such a place? Scott links this setting with the growing fear of asianisation at the time shown through the various settings including the extreme long shot of the Japanese billboard. Scott is warning the responder of the spread of wealth and Asian culture and also to reassess the consequences of overstepping our boundaries. Secondly, I would like to discuss setting as a powerful device for the narrative structure in both texts. Shelley's use of setting is powerful as it reflects the characters mood and their actions. Nature is reflected as the only force that can restore, with Frankenstein stating, "hath acknowledging how it contributed greatly to my convalescence". The monster also possesses a more intimate connection with "*the pleasant showers and genial warmth of spring*", with such use of setting capturing Shelley's reflection of romanticism's idolisation of nature.

Blade Runner, on the other hand, uses the setting not to accentuate the power of nature but instead the power of corporations. This is shown through low shots looking up at advertisement airships and the Tyrell building and high shots emphasising the unimportance of the people in the streets. The Tyrell Corporation building is reminiscent of the architecture of the Mayan Pyramids; reflecting Scott's religious symbolism through setting within this text. Tyrell with the highest viewpoint over the city is presented as a sort of deity. The only time the sun is seen in the entire film is from Tyrell's office windows. Tyrell tints the windows with the push of a button, suggesting that he, the owner of the Pyramid, controls the sun itself, and so is in that respect a godlike figure. Finally, I would like to point out the how the different contextual concerns Shelley and Riley use within their texts influence the settings used. This is highlighted through the distinctions between the two mountains being Mont Blanc and the Tyrell Corporation. In Frankenstein, Victor discusses the beauty of Mont Blanc, and states that these "*sublime and magnificent scenes afforded me the greatest consolation that I was capable of receiving.*" Evoking Nature through setting is simply not possible in Blade Runner. Unlike Mont Blanc, the Tyrell Corporation does not exhibit the illusive, indescribable beauty of magnificent Nature, but rather embodies a synthetic artificiality. It is a dystopian structure, which is both mathematically and mechanically distinct because it is, like almost everything else highlighted through the setting in Blade Runner, a manmade creation. Setting is a device used by composers to enhance the meaning of their contextual concerns and themes. In the end, is humanity, science and culture definable? While these terms are hard to

grasp, setting is used as a major part of a composer's narratology to reflect on how these three ideals are influenced by social and historical contexts as shown through Frankenstein and Blade Runner.

Better Band 6 Essay – 19/20

'A deeper understanding of disruption and identity emerges from considering the parallels between Frankenstein and Blade Runner.'

Compare how these texts explore disruption and identity

Despite being created in different political, social and cultural paradigms, a comparative study of Mary Shelley's classic novel Frankenstein and Ridley Scott's sci-fi cult film, 'Blade Runner the Directors Cut' reveals similar concerns and issues which are still relevant to a modern audience. Both Blade Runner and Frankenstein were written centuries apart, both being passed on Milton's four century old epic poem, Milton's Paradise Lost. This continuum of consideration highlights the continued significance of literature that examines ideas such as disruption and identity. By considering the commonalities and differences between the two texts, responders are able to gain an insight into the consequences of man overreaching, thus disrupting the chain of being and how technological progress and scientific development leads to a loss of identity and a collapse in the moral nature of humanity.

The idea of 'disruption' is explored within Blade Runner and Frankenstein through the interference of the natural environment due to scientific progress. Such a conflict between nature and science within Frankenstein, stems from the contextual backdrop of the 1800 Romanticism movement, a backlash against the age of Enlightenment and its rationality through scientific experimentation. In an attempt to warn her audience of the horrifying consequences of disrupting nature, Shelley utilises a Gothic-Romanticist style, and motifs such as the sublime and soothing nature versus monstrosity as shown in the lines, "the valley that is more wonderful than the sublime", juxtaposed with the appearance of the monster as "yellow skinned, black eyed". Whilst Victor warns Walton to, "avoid ambition...in science and discovery", his character development, alluded to as the 'ancient mariner', whose hubris of overreaching the boundaries leading to his downfall is contrasted against his perfect childhood, again reiterating Shelley's warnings about the consequences of disrupting nature. Likewise Scott in Blade Runner explores the disruption of nature, however presents the complete other side to that presented in Frankenstein, an environment where nature has become a commodity. Instead of the setting contrasting against the monster of the plot however, the disturbing scenery provides the perfect introduction for Roy, an android who's bleached blonde hair and film-noir costuming is merely a modern version of the yellow skin of Shelley's monster. Roy's deranged personality is comparable to the Frankenstein monster's fits of rage and both commit murders, the ultimate symbolic act of evil, to highlight their role as monsters set loose upon the world when man tried to surpass nature. Furthermore, the panoramic shot of a 2019 Los Angeles environment reveals blazing fire and smokestacks representing hell, accompanied by the haunting diegetic pounding of the Vangelis soundtrack. Scott is evidently taking advantage of his audience's contextual concerns of an asian-ised, dystopic environment void of environmental sustainability. This concept stemmed from the 1980's neo-hippie movement and is further highlighted through the only natural element within the film is the sun in Tyrell's apartment and the bonsai trees, suggesting that Tyrell has 'stolen' God's role, he has replaced the sublime with machines, thus having disrupted the natural to an extent which it cannot be fixed. Hence, both Frankenstein and 'Blade Runner' explore the disruption of the sublime through manmade

initiatives involving scientific and technological progress.

While trying to warn responders about the consequences of scientific advancement disrupting the natural order, both composers also simultaneously promote another Romanticism value, the questioning of human identity. Being titled 'The Modern Prometheus', Victor's 'gift' of creation echoed the two great utopian promises of the 18th century: the Industrial and French Revolution which although contained the potential of great promise, also contained unknown horrors, and this question of identity and humanity is mainly conveyed through the character of the monster. While described as hideous and repulsive, Shelley had nonetheless characterised the monster with eloquent and beautiful speech, a contradiction that forces responders to consider it not as a superficial creature of evil but also as an equal, self-aware being. The reflective tone found in statements such as "But where were my friends and relations?" and "What was I?" creates the persona of a lost child, giving the monster an individuality that the audience can emphasise with and consequently blurring the line between monster and human. This confusion confronts responders forcing them to reconsider what they consider to be the human identity and whether one so monstrous in appearance but human in thought can count as one of them.

Similarly in 'Blade Runner', the genre of Film Noir adds an expectation of deep rooted societal fears which adds to the fear of machines taking over human identity. Scott also relies heavily on his 'monster' to question the idea of human identity in Blade Runner, employing the same persona of a lost child with the android Roy. The composer uses jargon specific to the movie such as "replicant" and "retirement" to dehumanise the androids only to immediately contradict this by showing that replicants are not only "more human than human" physically and mentally, but they might also possess higher morality and develop their own emotions. Roy's use of emotive language is reminiscent of the reflective tone used by the Frankenstein monster especially in the final scene ending with the powerful simile of how his own memories, which make up his identity, will be lost "like tears in rain". These distinctly human characteristics of memory and emotions make up a very human identity that confuses even the modern audience forcing them to consider Roy as a human rather than just another product. This highlights the deep rooted societal fear of science leading to a loss of human identity as machine replaces man, much like Frankenstein's fear of the inevitable decay and collapse of human society.

In conclusion, both Blade Runner and Frankenstein are texts that uphold the Romanticism values of disruption of nature and the questioning of the human identity. Though written and set in vastly different contexts a comparative study of the two texts highlights both composers use of setting and solid characterisation to convey their messages succinctly. However, it is ultimately up to the decision of the responder to consider the impact of scientific progress on the nature of humanity and the 'disruption' of the natural to gain a holistic understanding into the issues presented by both composers.

