
THE DIALECTICS OF SOLITUDE: UNDERSTANDING MARY SHELLEY'S DEPICTIONS OF SOLITUDE IN SELECT NOVELS

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Abstract: Trauma and neglect are essential features foregrounded in many of Shelley's works. Mary Shelley depicts in her writings the effects of trauma which most times are loneliness, depression, or Solitude. Like many authors, Shelley's life experiences have influenced the nature of her stories and the characters in the stories. Shelley's experience is perhaps what makes her representation of trauma seem overwhelmingly realistic, particularly in the *Last Man*, *Lodore*, and *Mathilda*. Nonetheless, it seems like Shelley depicts the concept of Solitude in multiple ways, thus causing the reader to question her intentions regarding her portrayal of characters that experience solitary moments. In order to take a step further into investigating Shelley's depictions of Solitude and its variants (i.e., despair, sorrow, loneliness), this paper aims to understand the methods she employs in portraying Solitude. While many critics of Mary Shelley have explored the subject of Solitude in her earlier work, such as *Frankenstein*, this paper will explore the subject of her later texts, *Lodore*, *Mathilda*, and the *Last Man*.

Keywords: Solitude, Ecotherapy, *Lodore*, *Last Man*, *Mathilda*

1. Introduction

Trauma and neglect are essential features foregrounded in many Mary

Shelley's works. Mary Shelley depicts in her writings the effects of trauma, which most times are loneliness, depression, or Solitude. Like many authors, Mary Shelley's life experiences have influenced the nature of her stories and the characters in the stories. Shelley's experience is perhaps what makes her representation of trauma seem overwhelmingly realistic, particularly in the *Last Man*, *Lodore*, and *Mathilda*. Nonetheless, it appears like Shelley depicts the concept of Solitude in multiple ways, thus causing the reader to question her intentions regarding her portrayal of characters that experience solitary moments. Barbara Taylor provides a specific term called "philosophical solitude," which proves beneficial for this paper. It is a term that Shelley adapts more conspicuously in *Frankenstein* and *Fields of Fancy* and in less obvious ways in other texts. A closer examination of Shelley's works discloses what she thought about the concept, mainly how to deal with Solitude. Critics have agreed that Shelley proposes that the remedy for Solitude can be found in nature (an obvious inference since she is a Romantic writer). Ecotherapy, a term that loosely defines a person's desire to seek healing (following a tragic event) from ecology or nature, is a fundamental concept in this essay, which may guide our understanding of Shelley's workings with solitary characters in her works. Exploring the concept of

ecotherapy vis-à-vis the three primary texts may distinguish between Solitude as a problem and Solitude as a solution to grief. Also, since some critics claim that writing, reading, and language are other ways she depicts coping mechanisms for despair and trauma in her novels, this paper will explore how Shelley's characters use language as therapy.

In order to take a step further into investigating Shelley's depictions of Solitude and its variants (i.e., despair, sorrow, loneliness), this paper aims to understand the methods she employs in portraying Solitude. While many critics of Mary Shelley have explored the subject of Solitude in her earlier work, *Frankenstein*, this paper will explore the subject of her later texts, *Lodore*, *Mathilda*, and the *Last Man*. In addition, this paper will explore Mary Wollstonecraft's novella titled *Mary: A Fiction*, with the end goal of not just comparing how both mother and daughter depict Solitude but to understanding the mother's influence on the daughter's method. Putting these fictional pieces into dialogue with one another will aid our understanding of the concept of Solitude. Mary Wollstonecraft's work may point us in other directions (i.e., how Wollstonecraft addresses the concept of Solitude) that neither Mary Shelley nor Percy Shelley. Also, investigating Shelley's method of portraying Solitude in contrast to her mother's technique allows us to understand and possibly appreciate both the novelistic feature (which runs over a longer arch) of Mary Shelley's works and Mary Wollstonecraft's seemingly poetic novellas (marked by brevity). Additionally, since very few

critics have discussed Shelley's *Lodore* and *Mathilda* within the context of Solitude, it may be necessary to make inferences from criticisms of Shelley's other works.

2. Contextualizing Solitude in Mary Shelley's life

As previously stated, only a few critics have discussed Shelley's *Lodore* and *Mathilda*. Nevertheless, it is unsurprising that this is the case considering the attention her first novel, *Frankenstein*, is given. Many scholars have dubbed Mary Shelley the "Mother of science fiction" primarily because of her pioneer novel. Carl Freedman, in the publication titled "Hail Mary: On the Author of *Frankenstein* and the Origins of Science Fiction," contends that "Frankenstein remains the most widely accepted as the founding text of science fiction" (Freedman 253). Essentially, the name Mary Shelley has become known chiefly for science fiction. Given the significance of the science fiction genre, the subject of Solitude is conceivably made to seem even more profound in *Frankenstein* than in *Mathilda* or *Lodore*. Unlike *Mathilda* or *Lodore*, *Frankenstein* offers a relatively more productive use of Solitary moments, as Victor makes a living creature of his own. It is pertinent to emphasize that it may be precise because many scholars have dwelt excessively on *Frankenstein*, thus leaving unique opportunities that both *Mathilda* and *Lodore* offer.

It is a fact that Mary Shelley lived a life filled with tragedy and that these circumstances in her life manifested in many of her writings. Mary Shelley's

experiences with trauma began with the death of her mother. Not only does she lose her mother, whom she never meets, she also loses three children, and eventually, she loses her husband. With these already painful circumstances, Shelley's relationships (with her husband, her father, and her friends), which should have provided solace for the numerous losses, were not as promising as she expected. The grief and rejection she experiences in her relationships eventually lead her to seek solace from her dead mother's grave. Ann Mellor, in her book titled *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fictions, Her Monster*, notes that "during her lonely childhood, Mary frequently visited her mother's grave in St. Pancras Churchyard, where she read her mother's works and sought solace from nature and her mother's spirits" (Mellor 20). Biographers of Shelley have also noted that beyond seeking solace at her mother's graveyard, she found joy through experiencing nature.

3. Interpretations of Solitude

Before we begin to explore Shelley's portrayal of Solitude, perhaps a brief assessment of the term Solitude may be in order. While Solitude may seem like a simple word to decipher, studies and critics have offered multiple facets, thus rendering the term complex. Edward Engelberg agrees that Solitude is an ambiguous word, noting that a person may actively seek and achieve Solitude but eventually face "its newly emerging contradictions" (Engelberg 2). Engelberg highlights the complexities of the word after having delivered a paper at the British Comparative Literary Association

as he develops what he senses as a feeling of incompleteness because "Solitude was an imposing subject and needed a study of its own" (Engelberg 2). This led him to publish the book titled *Solitude and its Ambiguities in Modernist Fiction*. Also, Barbara Taylor, in the publication titled "Separations of Soul: Solitude, Biography, History," provides a history of western Solitude and offers definitions of Solitude from different perspectives. Taylor traces Solitude from a religious standpoint, maintaining that religious leader are known to withdraw from their congregations for spiritual rejuvenation and communication with God. Philosophical Solitude is another term that Taylor coins to describe yet another aspect of Solitude, and she paints a picture of "Socrates standing on a lonely hillside in frozen meditation" (Taylor 643). Taylor also argues that Solitude is not necessarily the absence of people. Even if a person is alone literally, there is the imagined presence of a loved one (dead or alive), God (in the case of a religious person), heroes or heroes, or even nature. According to Taylor, nature assumes a human personality.

Stefan Bolea, in his rather provocative essay titled "Of Hatred and Solitude in the Works of Mary Shelley and E.M. Cioran," offers a different dimension of Solitude as he argues against what he calls "deep loneliness," which in our understanding is Solitude. Bella argues that no human being needs isolationism (a variant of "isolationism") because, as human beings, we are social animals and can only function effectively when we are in relationships with other people. Bolea cautions that a person who isolates

themselves will lose their sense of selfhood because the human nature "cannot survive without inner alterity" (Bolea 110). Notably, he concludes that the progression of Solitude is that the person starts by abandoning others (hatred for others), then abandons divinity or God (hatred for God), and subsequently abandons themselves (self-hatred). If unchecked, this may result in psychosis and even death(Bolea 111-116).

Consequently, one can conclude that there is no fine line between Solitude and society (i.e., being in the presence of others). Claire Sheridan reiterates Bolea in the article titled "Anti-Social Sociability: Mary Shelley and the Posthumous Pisa Gang" as she notes that Shelley had a complex relationship with Solitude. Sheridan infers an unclear binary between Solitude and society because Mary Shelley was an enormously sociable person. Sheridan concludes that the devastation of being alone, rejected, and unloved makes the portrayal of Solitude appear heightened in Shelley's writings. Sheridan writes, "I am struck by Mary's paradoxical claims for Solitude, having outlived the sociability of coterie, and being last" (Sheridan 415). This statement by Sheridan shows the ambivalence of Solitude.

4. Analysis of Solitude in Mary Shelley's Texts

Given our understanding of the concept of Solitude, it is clear that Shelley, just as earlier confirmed by Sheridan, indeed has a complex relationship with Solitude (as depicted in her novels). On the one hand, a close look at her

representations of despair reveals specific patterns and trends in her writings, which happen to be similar to her own experiences. On the other hand, some outliers conclude that she perhaps experimented as she wrote sometimes. Nevertheless, what happens to be a consistent feature in all of Shelley's works is how she foregrounds Solitude vis-a-vis parental neglect (something she was pretty familiar with), heartbreak, and trauma (death of a loved one). Also noticeable are the double themes of grief and parental abandonment in *Mathilda*, a novel written in 1819 and *Lodore* written in 1835. The sixteen-year gap between both novels shows how great a writer Shelley is because she successfully recycles *Mathilda*.

Specifically, for all three primary texts analyzed in this essay, we see a pattern where Shelley foregrounds some form of trauma. In *Lodore*, the protagonist is confronted with rejection from his wife, who decides not to go with him to Illinois. Consequently, as he remains in Illinois, Lodore goes into various contemplations about his marriage to his wife. On the other hand, Ethel is also faced with the trauma of an absent mother and the financial hardship brought upon her by her husband. Similarly, *Mathilda* Shelley continues the pattern of the absent mother but in a different way. Diana, Mathilda's mother, loses her mother very young. Mathilda's father also loses his mother and his wife (Mathilda's mother dies fifteen days after her birth). Shelley's projection of trauma in *Mathilda* is heightened with what appears to be the suicidal death of Mathilda's father and Mathilda herself. In Shelley's the *Last Man*, we already notice

some sense of trauma from the title as it is an evident indication of impending doom that is suggestive of death. While we do not notice an unmistakable pattern of the absent mother, since just about everyone dies as a result of the plague, Shelley continues the projection of trauma through suicide (Perdita dies by jumping into the sea) and heartbreak (Raymond's emotional ties with Evadne).

In her depictions of solitary moments of loneliness, Shelley uses imagery and metaphor, demonstrating the ambiguity of Solitude. Shelley progresses from depicting Solitude about trauma, and she moves on to portraying characters who proactively seek Solitude for intellectual activities and freedom. In the *Last Man*, Shelley represents Perdita as a rather complex character regarding Solitude. In one instance, Perdita is drowning in sadness and isolation. In the next instance, much like Victor Frankenstein, she actively seeks Solitude to contemplate her creative imagination. As an example, Lionel describes Perdita as "cold and repulsive" (*Last Man* 12), noting that she had a "perpetual cloud dwelling on her brow" (*Last Man* 12). Lionel, the narrator, then narrates that Perdita "would ramble to the most unfrequented place, scale dangerous heights in unvisited spots so she might wrap herself in loneliness in these self-created wanderings" (*Last Man* 12). Lionel goes so far as tagging his sister as a dreamer and calls her "the visionary Perdita" (*Last Man*, 12, 17) to give readers a sense of Perdita's love for her imaginary solitary world.

Similarly, Shelley puts forth the imagery of Solitude with Mathilda. Mathilda says that with her increased liberty came loneliness as she could "ramble amidst the wild scenery of the count...wandering forever about these lovely solitudes" (*Mathilda* 12). Again, Shelley continues with the vivid imagery of Solitude in *Lodore*. The narrator recounts, "Fitzhenry was perpetually seen mounted and forcing his way amid the forest land, or galloping over the unincumbered country. Sadness sat on his brow and dwelt in eyes, whose large dark orbs were peculiarly expressive of tenderness and melancholy" (*Lodore* 56). According to Montwieler and Boren, these images symbolize the archetypical romantic subject. They are replete in the three primary texts referenced in this article, which indicate the mixed variance of the concept of Solitude inherent in Shelley's writing.

Shelley represents the intricacies of Solitude in *Lodore* as her depiction of Solitude appears to be paradoxical on the surface. In the second chapter, the narrator describes Lodore's state "he lived in peace and Solitude and seemed to enjoy the unchanging tenor of his life" (*Lodore* 56). In this instance, Shelley depicts Solitude in such a way that seemingly appears paradoxical. However, the claims made by Barbara Taylor give us a clear context to understand what Shelley does here. Taylor notes that "physical isolation, social disengagement, withdrawals, and inwardness; none of these are Solitude, although some may be preconditions for it" (Taylor 644). A more relevant point that she makes that is useful for the

argument made in this paper is based on a term she coins called "philosophical Solitude ."According to Taylor, philosophical solitude "symbolizes the mental autarky of the great sage" (Taylor 643). Thus, implying that scholars, intelligent people, and perhaps writers need the time and space to ruminate and think deeply (Taylor 643). Taylor quotes Michel de Montaigne's definition of Solitude as an interior space/room where a person's soul inhabits to "commune with muses, lost friends and company of a unique sort" (Taylor 644). In the same vein, Bolea reechoes Taylor stating that measured Solitude is essential for an individual's growth. However, he warns that an "orgy of Solitude" (extreme Solitude) will detach such a person from the world (Bolea 111). As an example, we see *Indore*, an instance when Lodore thinks deeply about his past struggles and "wretchedness" that "on occasions would seize an immediate opportunity to break away and remain alone" (*Lodore* 56-57). In this same instance, the narrator also describes Lodore as one "who had filled a high station in society and had been educated who looked upon himself as being "of a distinct and superior race to human beings that crossed his path" (*Lodore* 57) as such Lodore progresses from remembering his struggles to seeking Solitude because he believes that a person of his status requires some time away for intellectual thinking. This description, undoubtedly, reverberates Barbara Taylor's concept of philosophical Solitude. Though Katherine Montwieler and Mark Boren contend that Shelley's intention was different in *Mathilda*, they reaffirm that

the romantic subject needs philosophical Solitude for intellectual development.

Since it is a fact that Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley's mother, had a significant impact on many of Mary Shelley's works, it is not out of place to examine Wollstonecraft's use of imagery and metaphor to depict Solitude. *Mary: A Fiction* is perhaps one of Wollstonecraft's best works that provide us with her definition of Solitude. As with Shelley's protagonist in *Lodore* and *Mathilda*, the source of Mary's Solitude in *Mary: A Fiction* begins with parental neglect. Like *Mathilda*, Mary's increased liberty offers her the opportunity to wander alone to "castles inhabited by her ancestors" and retire "to places where human foot seldom trod" (*Mathilda* 9). Mary uses a metaphor of a stream, rocks, and a plant to define Solitude as she narrates:

One way home was through the cavity of a rock covered with a thin layer of earth, sufficient to afford nourishment to a few stunted shrubs and wild plants, which grew on its sides and nodded over the summit. A clear stream broke out of it and ran amongst the pieces of rocks that had fallen into it. Here twilight always reigned—it seemed the Temple of Solitude; yet, paradoxical as the assertion may appear, when the foot sounded on the rock, it terrified the intruder and inspired a strange feeling, as if the rightful sovereign was dislodged (*Mary: A Fiction* 9-10).

This metaphorical imagery of "flourishing shrubs on a rock" and the

stream that breaks out of rocks portray the bliss and beauty of solitary confinements, which is conceivably why Mary calls this scenery a "Temple of Solitude." Temple of Solitude, within the context above, could also be read about the romanticization of nature. Essentially, to find genuine blissful Solitude, Wollstonecraft suggests that one must immerse themselves in nature and get lost in the natural world to blossom just like the flourishing shrub and the clear stream. Wollstonecraft's lyrical metaphor is similar to William Wordsworth's ponderings of his experience with Solitude in his poem *I wandered lonely as a Cloud*. Wordsworth replicates, in his poem, an image of daffodils fluttering in the breeze stretched over the coastline, almost seeming like stars in the sky. In the last stanza of the poem, during a moment of what appears to be loneliness, Wordsworth reflects on the beauty of the image as his poem reads, "For oft when on my couch I lie in vacant or in pensive mood, they (images of daffodils) flash upon that inward eye, which is the bliss of Solitude" (Wordsworth qt in *Poetry Foundation*). Wollstonecraft's "Temple of Solitude" is much like what Wordsworth describes as the "bliss of Solitude" in that both signify the therapeutic relief Solitude can offer.

On the other hand, while there are many similarities between Mary Shelley and her mother's handling of Solitude, there are also some overt differences. It is essential to note that Wollstonecraft's protagonist appears to attract grief and misery more profoundly than Shelley's characters do. Mary's brother dies of a violent fever and nurses her mother, who is described to have some terminal disease.

Again, Mary's best friend, Ann, loses her profligate father and her benefactor (a male clergyman). Henry, who emotionally caters to Mary the same way Woodville does for Mathilda, recounts a similar story of the loss of his father before his birth. As with Shelley's writings, the point here is that death is a prominent subject in *Mary; A Fictional*; it appears that almost every character recites a story about the loss of a loved one.

One must point out that both Mary Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft's novels undeniably share striking similarities, thus reiterating the argument that Wollstonecraft's ideas seep into the works of her daughter, Mary Shelley. Beginning with the most obvious similarity, Mary Shelley, like her mother, addresses the issues that affect women so that they are more likely subjected to experience isolation and despair. As explicated by Wollstonecraft in her feminist handbook titled *Vindications of the Rights of a Woman*, the disparities between the public sphere and the private sphere are abundantly illustrated in both the mother's and daughter's works. As discussed elsewhere, Mary, Mathilda, Ethel, and Perdita were bound to either a father or a brother. In the absence of a male figure, the female characters were subjected to isolation. While both Mathilda and Ethel had overbearing fathers present in their lives, Mary and Perdita have no fathers but have husbands to whom they are bound. However, Mary leaves her husband and decides to be without a man. A novel published in 1788, *Mary; A Fiction*, clearly shows how audacious Wollstonecraft's feminist ideologies were

for her time, in contrast to her daughter, who maintains some conservative ideologies regarding a woman's dependence on a man.

Solitude, for Wollstonecraft, is a concept that has some supernatural forces attached to it. A reading of *Mary: A Fiction* reveals that solitary moments are a time to commune with God (the supernatural being). Mary, Wollstonecraft's central character, is said to "have heard of a separate state and that angels sometimes the earth" (*Mary: A Fiction* 4). The narrator says that Mary would "sit in a thick wood in the park," talking to the angels and render what one may call worship in honor of God (*Mary: A Fiction* 4-5). While it is not overtly apparent whether she refers to the Christian God, as she often uses phrases such as "the father of spirits," the being, Almighty Friend (*Mary: A Fiction* 21, 47, 61), one can infer from her biography found on the website of the *Dictionary of Unitarian & Universalist* that because she "was a congregant at the Unitarian chapel at Newington Green," and was influenced by Richard Price, the Minister of the chapel, that she refers to Christian God (*Dictionary of Unitarian & Universalist*). As such, *Mary: A Fiction* reiterates the assertions of Barbara Taylor that a righteous person could withdraw away from society into Solitude for "heavenly meditation as it was the essence of Solitude" (Taylor 643). Taylor argues that "Mary spent Solitary hours conversing with God until he becomes almost apparent to her senses" (Taylor 646). This is the case for Mary, as she often retreated to pray when she felt sad. For instance,

when she hears that Henry, her lover is ill, she "prayed wildly—and fervently" (*Mary: A Fiction* 57,65-66).

As she realizes that his sickness appears to be terminal, Mary decides not to pray for his quick recovery but instead asks for God's will to be done. The moment she realizes that Henry is dead, rather than mourn or grieve, like Mary Shelley's characters typically do when they lose a loved one, Mary "dedicates herself to the service of that Being into whose hands, she had committed the spirit she almost adored" (*Mary: A Fiction* 66). More blatantly, in the opening paragraphs of the novella, the narrator recounts that "she obliged to be alone or with her French maid" (*Mary: A Fiction* 2). When Mary was alone, she either read "The Platonic Marriage or Eliza Warwick," or she, "said long prayers" (*Mary: A Fiction* 2). The narrator affirms that because Mary "dreaded the horrid place vulgarly called hell," she read her Weekly Preparations (*Mary: A Fiction* 2). Wollstonecraft fails to give sufficient context for the reader to pinpoint what she refers to as "the Weekly Preparations." However, again, one may infer from the context that the Weekly preparation is like some devotional or a Holy Bible that may cleanse her thoughts and make her a holy person qualified to go to heaven.

Going off of the assertion that religion represents a form of therapy for Wollstonecraft's central character, Mary appears to be in awe when she is shown compassion. Intrinsicly, Mary is joyous when she can show kindness to another person or when she is shown compassion.

Like the archetypical romantic, Mary is said to have sought relief from nature when she has some misunderstanding with her mother. However, in her pursuit of Solitude in nature, Mary learns "the luxury of doing good" (*Mary: A Fiction* 10). As with Shelley's characters who explore nature or delve into nature to find happiness, Mary's protagonist does the same but apparently, due to her empathetic and selfless nature (resulting from her religious readings), she is distracted by the predicament of the poor fisherman she sees on her way. Mary sees this as an opportunity to be charitable; unlike the hypocritical Christians "who imagine they can be religious without exercising benevolence" (*Mary: A Fiction* 29); Mary has a strong desire to show kindness to people in need, such that she is described to have shed "sweet tears of benevolence" which "frequently moistened her eyes, and gave them a sparkle" (*Mary: A Fiction* 10). This seemingly oxymoronic phrase reveals the joy Mary receives from benevolence. The tear she sheds in this instance appears to be both tears of joy (given that she has the opportunity to practice charity) and tears of sadness, resulting from the condition in which she "finds the poor fishermen, who supported their numerous children by their precarious labor" (*Mary: A Fiction* 10). Also, the words "sweet" and "sparkle" support the idea that she was happy to be in a position to help the poor. Precisely, the narrator says that Mary's "benevolence knew no bounds" and that "she would dance with joy when she had relieved their wants" (*Mary: A Fiction* 10). Consequently, one can conclude that not only is God at the center of Wollstonecraft's perception of Solitude,

philanthropy, and altruism present some form of therapeutic relief for Mary, Wollstonecraft's main character.

Much like Mary in *Mary: A Fiction* who spends time conversing with God, the narrator in Mary Shelley's *Fields of Fancy* is also described to have had multiple conversations with an imagined entity; a spirit. The narrator in *Fields of Fancy*, similar to Mary, actively seeks Solitude as she "loved to walk by the shores of the Tiber which were solitary" as a way to get over the grief she experiences (*Fields of Fancy* 351). The narrator, whose gender is not disclosed, is confronted by a spirit named Fantasia, who is described as having the attributes of consoling poets and intellectuals. Fantasia, the spirit, attempts to persuade the protagonist to quit mourning the loss of loved ones and pleads with her to go to the Elysian Fields, which she describes as a "peaceful garden" (*Fields of Fancy* 353). *Fields of Fancy* indeed serves as a remarkable frame narrative for *Mathilda* in that it shapes our perception of both stories. However, it is essential to highlight the similarities inherent in Wollstonecraft's narrative and *Fields of Fancy*. Shelley depicts, just like her mother does, that a combination of nature and an imagined presence of a spirit, and in Wollstonecraft's narrative, God, can alleviate grief and improve intellectual thinking. Fantasia says to the narrator, "I have many lovely spots under my command, which poets of old have visited ...you will at least see new combinations that will sooth if they do not delight you" (*Fields of Fancy* 352). Fantasia also calls the Elysian Field a place to "acquire knowledge and virtue. Or

to those who just escaped care and pain" (*Fields of Fancy* 352). These quotes from *Fields of Fancy* are one of Shelley's most apparent depictions of Solitude. It represents unambiguously how she thought solitary moments should be spent, thus confirming her mother's influence on her methods. This is not to say that Shelley does not depict the same in the three primary texts analyzed earlier in this paper. However, because she portrays multiple ways of dealing with isolation in *Fields of Fancy*, a relatively short narrative, one can conclude that Shelley indeed has a complex interpretation of Solitude.

However, another aspect of Shelley's representations of Solitude is that she portrays solitary moments in a manner that mirrors sheer madness. This is particularly true when Lodore gets nervous about receiving some message from London. The narrator describes Lodore's anxiety, "was change approaching? How long will you be at peace? Such warning voice startled him in the Solitude: he looked around, but no human was near, yet the voice had spoken so audibly to his sense" (*Lodore* 69). Although Taylor describes what happens to Lodore in this instance as an inner presence of an alter self, much like Rousseau, who also has an alter self "who maintained a solitary dialogue" (Taylor 645), other scholars have described Lodore's anxiety as "ontic disconnectedness" or neurosis/psychosis (Bolea 110).

Shelley seemingly anthropomorphizes Solitude, making it (Solitude) appear to be a human being or a

thing. If Shelley does not anthropomorphize Solitude, she very much concretizes the word. In the *Last Man*, Lionel recounts his father's description that he "buried himself in solitude among the hills and lakes of Cumberland" (*The Last Man* 9), making it seem like Solitude was a thing or a place to be buried in. In the same vein, Raymond is said to have hastened from public spaces "to the Solitude which was at once his bane and relief" (*The Last Man* 98). In this instance, we get some sense that Lionel attributes human characteristics to Solitude in such a way that it provides relief to Raymond. An example of anthropomorphism is Lionel's illustration of intense death and annihilation, which "swallows the voiceless Solitude" (*The Last Man* 209). Not only does Shelley humanize Solitude, but she also humanizes (feminizes) the plague.¹² Lionel narrates, "From this moment I saw plague no more. She abdicated her throne and despoiled herself of her imperial scepter among the ice rocks that surrounded us. She left Solitude and silence co-heirs of her kingdom" (*The Last Man* 330).

From this excerpt, it is apparent that the plague, which had already ravished England, and in this instance, Switzerland, had done it is worst, leaving empty towns with dead bodies. It is this intense emptiness (silence) and hollowness that Lionel now refers to as the heir of the

¹Markus Poetzsch, 'A Complicated Welcome,' *Canadian Literature*, no. 196 (2008), 171-172,203.

²In contrast, to Solitude, Christy Tidwell and Bridgitte Barclay, *Gender and Environment in Science Fiction*, Ecocritical Theory and Practice (Lexington Books, 2019)

plague's kingdom. Epley et al. note in the publication titled "When We Need a Human: Motivational Determinants of Anthropomorphism" reechoe Bolea's argument, referenced earlier in this essay, stating that as human beings, we need to be in the company of other humans to function effectively. However, Epley et al. emphasize that when a person happens to be subjected to abject loneliness such a person tends to "create humans out of non-humans through an anthropomorphism" (Epley et al. 144-145). In the article titled "Solitude," Philips Koch assesses literary definitions of Solitude quotes Henry Thoreau's essay. "I never found the companion that was so companionable as Solitude."³ (Thoreau qt in Koch 184), thus inferring that Thoreau anthropomorphizes natural things such as emotions in such a way that engages his mind, despite the loneliness (Koch 184). As such, the tremendously social Lionel, who in the unfortunate circumstances of excessive death, sees the need to anthropomorphize natural forces and emotions such as the feelings of loneliness to keep him company. A similar pattern is apparent in *Mathilda* as Mathilda infers that Solitude becomes, her only friend when her nurse leaves her with her cold and unaffectionate aunty. Mathilda qualifies Solitude with various adjectives such as "lovely Solitude," "perfect Solitude," and "wide Solitude" (*Mathilda* 11, 29, 44). Mathilda says that "Solitude also lost some of its charms" (*Mathilda* 46). These instances

reiterate the assertions of critics who argue that Shelley, like her characters, shows a complex relationship with Solitude thus making it even more challenging to make conclusive assertions about her representation of the concept.

It is essential to note that Shelley, just like many romantic writers, exalts and celebrates nature; Shelley suggests in her writing that a withdrawal into nature brings about a soothing therapeutic outcome, most especially about many of life's challenges. The romantic subject's tendency to recluse to solitary confinements (in nature) is what ecofeminists have now reframed as ecotherapy. While both concepts i.e. ecotherapy and Romanticism, may appear parallel, ecotherapy is essentially an extension of the romanticization of nature. It is pertinent to state that although ecotherapy may have been an unfamiliar concept in the nineteenth century. During Shelley's time, the concept (of ecotherapy) provides us with a more precise tool to analyze how Shelley's characters utilize nature as a therapeutic relief from trauma. Woodville, Mathilda's companion who loses a lover, exemplifies how one may rely on nature for soothing relief from trauma. Mathilda describes that Woodville retires to the woods so that he could "peacefully indulge in his grief," and although the passing of time "softens his grief," he basks himself in nature's beauty "for a consolation in his unhappiness" (*Mathilda* 50-51).

On the other hand, Mathilda finds respite from nature as she claims that her "pleasures arose from the contemplation of

³Henry David Thoreau, J. Lyndon Shanley, and John Updike, *Walden*. (Princeton University Press, 2001),

nature alone"(Mathilda 13) as she was lonely and had no companion. However, upon her father's temporary return, her happiness knows no bounds as she proclaims that "the happiness she enjoyed in her father's company far exceeded her sanguine expectations" (Mathilda13, 15). However, when her father walks away from her, leaving her with the news of his incestuous desires for her, Mathilda becomes even more inconsolable, to the extent that a withdrawal into nature does not pacify her in the same way nature does not provide relief to Lodore.

It is essential to point out here that the perceived deaths of Lodore and Mathilda appear to be Shelley's endeavor at suggesting that a recluse into nature and exile away from the companion of others is not always a solution to grief. Rottweiler and Boren argue that "the idealized romantic subjects" who Lodore and Mathilda are "suffer from a condition similar to Freud's Melancholia"(Montweierer and Boren). The authors affirm that Shelley suggests that reclusion from society does not signify greatness. Rather it indicates "a kind of despair... that is destructive". (Montweierer and Boren). While this assertion may seem like an overreaching conclusion to make, one must stress that Shelley may have been in the position to have made such suggestions, given that she lived a life filled with trauma (deaths of loved ones). Sheridan notes that Shelley, who was part of the "Pisa gang," a group of friends of the Shelleys including Bryon, Trelawney, and others, was an extremely sociable person (Sheridan 416). Accordingly, Shelley's experience as both

a lonely person, resulting from deaths and neglect, and as a sociable person could, as suggested by Montweierer and Boren, have indicated Shelley's critique of the "idealized romantic subject's" desire for exile away from society.

Garrard Greg's text titled *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism* presents a different perspective of looking at Shelley's representations of nature and the romantic subject. In his collection of essays, Greg offers a multifaceted outlook on the subject of ecocriticism. In his introduction, the Author argues that nature therapy (i.e., relying on nature as the solution for most human problems) is anti-ecological. He quotes Robert Watson, who states in his essay that the act of "making nature an antidote for the complexity of our cognitive ecosystems involves the denial of the indispensable complexity of nature" (Watson qt in Garrard 6). Hence, we can conclude that Shelley intends for readers to see that the deaths of Lodore and Mathilda are a revelation that nature is not the solution to all human problems.

Shelley and her characters often resort to the use of words and language, most especially letter writing, as a form of relief from traumatic experiences. William Brewer, who takes note of Shelley's skeptical attitude towards the power of words and language, reiterates this assertion in the article titled "Mary Shelley on the Therapeutic Value of Language" that Shelley addresses the "therapeutic value of written self-expression" in many of her works (Brewer 387). Particularly in *Mathilda* this is most apparent as the entire narration is a letter Mathilda writes to

recount her experiences with rejection. Mathilda, who awaits her death, writes to Woodville the tragedy that had befallen her. Mathilda tells a story that she had not dared to say to anyone. This suggests that she derives momentary relief from writing about her tragedy instead of verbally expressing it before her eventual death. Brewer argues that though Shelley's characters appear uncertain about the "therapeutic value of verbal self-expression," they tend to see the short-lived relief they get from written words (Brewer 387).

In Mathilda's Letter, the first few lines describe her emotions as being in "a strange state of mind" and that she is "alone in the world and about to die" in a "lone cottage on a solitary wide heath where no voice reaches her" (*Mathilda* 5). Mathilda then proceeds to reveal the salubrious benefits she gets from writing about her tragic history instead of verbally uttering the story to him in person since the "horror in her tale is unfit for utterance" (*Mathilda* 5). Mathilda states in her narration that she believes that she will never see another winter again, and as a result, she is swayed to write her story. Persuaded by a strong urge to put her story into writing, Mathilda is only willing to share her tale with Woodville if he promises not to share the Letter with any other person, demonstrating that she is ashamed of her story. In this scenario, the vital interchange of emotions and language is imminent here because Mathilda seeks to repress her emotions through written words. In contrast to the short-lived therapy Mathilda receives from written

words, Frankenstein gets momentary benefits from verbal expression.

Going further in the discussion on the therapeutic value of written words, Shelley also projects this subject in *Lodore*, a later novel published in 1835. *Lodore's* life depends on reading (letters and books), but he also depends on writing letters for engagement while in isolation. The narrator says of *Lodore* that "he had loved books, poetry, and the elegant philosophy of the ancients. His mind was now in a fit state to find solace in reading, and excitement in the pursuit of knowledge" (*Lodore* 59). *Lodore's* love for reading is much like Frankenstein's, whose desire to speak like the Delacey's translated into attempts at reading.

Both reading and writing present some form of companionship to the solitary mind, as seen in *Lodore*. Particularly for the women in *Lodore*, Shelley presents imagery of women who are tremendously dependent on a male figure (i.e., a lover, brother, friend) to be mentally and emotionally balanced. Consequently, in the absence of a male figure, the women in *Lodore* tend to fall into severe depression. When young Elizabeth, *Lodore's* sister, loses her father, she is so devastated by his death that upon hearing that her brother is to leave England for what she calls "the stage of the world" (*Lodore* 86), she suddenly wishes for him to remain with her in England, because the quick realization of loneliness, brought upon her by the death of her father, meant that "her affections, her prospects, her

ambition" (*Mathilda*87) were now centered on Lodore's company.

The narrator goes on to state that out of pity for his sister, Lodore "made the sacrifice of one month to gratify her...in reading and writing letters" to her in "the most solitary districts" (*Mathilda* 87). In contrast to a deeply distraught Elizabeth, Lodore is equally saddened by his father's death, but he appears to fantasize as he is described as seeming "to live rather in a dream than in the actual world" (*Mathilda*86). Nevertheless, just like Elizabeth, Lodore is comforted by reading and writing letters. As with Elizabeth, Ethel, who is utterly dependent on a man's companionship, cannot function and appears mad when Villiers is away from her. Like Mathilda and Elizabeth write to repress their emotions, Ethel exchanges letters with Villiers to get over her predicament. On one of the occasions of Villiers' departure, Ethel is so consumed by the thoughts of loneliness that she begins to obsessively about how to persuade him not to leave her. However, she decides to avoid any argument with him and says one word, "write," to which Villiers responds "every day" (*Lodore*284).

5. Conclusion

Mary Shelley depicts in her works that traumatic experiences such as the loss of a loved one, heartbreak, and neglect are often preconditions for a person's desire for solitude. Solitude can be actively sought out for intellectual growth, or it can befall a person through parental neglect and the death of loved ones. Mary Shelley certainly shows these mixed variances

related to Solitude. Also evident from a close reading of all the primary texts in this essay is that Shelley portrays multiple ways a person reacts to voluntary or involuntary Solitude. Letter writing and reading. The acquisition of knowledge appears to be the different ways Shelley suggests that a person spent their time alleviating grief, especially when in isolation. Alternatively, through her writing, Shelley proposes that exploring nature can be another way to gain relief and freedom from a tragic event. Nevertheless, the eventual deaths of Lodore and Mathilda cause us to wonder what Shelley's thoughts were precisely, particularly as it relates to the issue of Solitude.

Furthermore, in exploring Mary Shelley's works about Mary Wollstonecraft's work, it is evident that both writers represent nature as therapy for Solitude. However, at the same time, Shelley depicts that creating an imaginary spirit is therapeutic for the solitary mind; Wollstonecraft portrays the Author of nature. The Almighty God is the only one that can give genuine relief from hardship and grief.

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