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

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Abstract: Trauma and neglect are important features foregrounded in many of Shelley's works. Mary Shelley depicts in her writings, the resulting 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, as well as 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 in relation to her later texts *Lodore ,Mathilda* and the *Last Man*.

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

1.Introduction

Trauma and neglect are important features foregrounded in many of Mary Shelley's works. Mary Shelley depicts in her writings, the resulting 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, as well as the characters in the stories. Shelley's experienceis 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's provides a distinct term, called "philosophical solitude" whichproves beneficial for this paper as it is a term that Shelley adapts more conspicuously in *Frankenstein* and *Fields of Fancy* and in less apparent ways in other texts. A closer examination of Shelley's works discloses what she thought about the concept, particularly how to deal with Solitude. Critics have agreed that Shelley proposes that the remedy for Solitude can be found in nature (an apparent 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. More so, exploring the concept of ecotherapy vis-à-vis the three primary texts may create a distinction between Solitude as a problem and solitude as a solution to grief. Also, since some critics claim that writing, reading andthe use of language are some other ways, she depicts as 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 in relation to 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 understand 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. More so, Mary Wollstonecraft's work may point us to other directions (i.e ways in which Wollstonecraft addressees the concept of Solitude) that neither Mary Shelley nor Percy Shelleydo. Also, investigating Shelley's method of portraying Solitude in

contrast to her mother's technique gives us the opportunity 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, if any, have discussed Shelley's *Lodore* and *Mathilda*within the context of Solitude, it may be necessary to make inferences from criticisms of Shelley's otherworks.

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 Shelleywith the title "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 precisely because of this that many scholars have dwelt excessively on *Frankenstein* thus leaving unique opportunities that both*Mathilda*and*Lodore* offer.

It is an established fact that Mary Shelley lived a life filled with tragedy andthat 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. Coupled with these already depressing circumstances, Shelley's relationships (with her husband, her father and her friends), which should have provided solace for the numerous loses she had, were not as promising as she expected. Infact, the grief and rejection she experiences in her relationships eventually leads 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 "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 simplistic word to decipher, studies and critics have offered multiple facets of the term thus rendering the term to be complex. Edward Engelberg agreesthat Solitude is indeed an ambiguous word noting that a person may actively seek and achieve Solitude but eventually be will faced with "its newly emerging contradictions" (Engelberg 2). In fact Engelberg highlights the complexities of the word after having delivered a paper at the British Comparative Literary Association as he develops what he senses to 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 leaders 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 because 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 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. Bolea argues that no human being needs isolism (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 out by abandoning others (hatred for others), then abandons divinity or God (hatred for God) subsequently abandons themselves (self-hatred) and 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 that there is an unclear binary between Solitude and society because Mary Shelley was an enormously sociable person. Sheridan concludes that it is the devastation of being alone, rejected and unloved that makes the portrayal of Solitude appearheightened in Shelley's writings. Sheridan writes "I am struck by Mary's paradoxical claims for Solitude, of having outlived the sociability of coterie, of 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 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 certain patterns and trends in her writings, which happen to be similar to her own experiences. On the other hand, there are outliers that make us conclude that she perhaps experimented as she wrote sometimes. Nevertheless, what happens to be a consistent feature in all Shelley's works is the manner with which she foregrounds Solitude vis a vis parental neglect (something she was quite familiar with), heartbreak and trauma (death of a loved one). Also, noticeable is the double themes of grief and parental abandonment in both *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, considering the fact that 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 of his marriage to his wife. Ethel on the other hand is also faced with the trauma of an absent mother as well as financial hardship brought upon her by her husband. Similarly, in*Mathilda*, Shelley continues the pattern of the absent mother but in a different way. Diana, Mathilda's mother loses her mother at a very young age. Mathilda's father also loses his mother and his wife (Mathilda's mother who dies fifteen days after her birth). Shelley's projection of trauma in *Mathilda* is heightened with what appears to be a suicidal death of Mathilda's father and Mathilda herself. In Shelley's the *Last Man*, we already notice from the title some sense of trauma as it is an evident indication of an impending doom which is suggestive of death. While we do not notice an obvious 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 andmetaphorwhich also demonstrates the ambiguity of Solitude.Shelley progresses from depicting Solitude in relation to trauma and she moves on to portraying characters who proactively seek Solitude for intellectual activities and/or for freedom. In the *Last Man*, Shelley represents Perdita as a rather complex character when it comes to Solitude. In one instance, Perdita is said to be drowning in sadness and isolation and the next instance she, much like Victor Frankenstein, actively seeks Solitude so as to contemplate on her creative imaginations. 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 goes on to narrate 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 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. In a similar fashion, Shelley puts forth the imagery of Solitude with Mathilda. Mathildasays with her increased liberty, came loneliness asshe was able to "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 dark large orbs were peculiarly expressive of tenderness and melancholy"(*Lodore* 56).These images, which according to Montwieler and Boren are symbolic of the archetypical romantic subject, 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'sstate "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 internal space/room where a person's soul inhabits in order 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, although he warns that an "orgy of Solitude" (extreme Solitude) will detach such a person from the world (Bolea 111). As an example, we see in*Lodore*, an instancewhen 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 actually seeking Solitude because he believes that a person of his status requires some time away for intellectual thinking.This description, undoubtedly, reverberate Barbara Taylor's concept of philosophical Solitude. Though, Katherine Montwieler and Mark Boren contend that Shelley's intention was totally different in *Mathilda* they reaffirm that the romantic subject needs philosophical Solitude for intellectual development.

Since it is an established fact that Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley's mother had a huge impact on many of Mary Shelley's works, it is not out of place to examine Wollstonecraft's use of imagery and/or metaphor to depictSolitude. *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 astream, 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, just 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 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 that comes out of solitary confinements, which is conceivably why Mary goes on to call this scenery a"Temple of Solitude" . Temple of Solitude within the context above could also be read in relation to the romanticization of nature. Essentially, in order to find genuine blissful Solitude, Wollstonecraft suggests that one must immerse themselves in nature and get lost in the natural world in order to blossom just like the flourishing shrub and the clear stream. Wollstonecraft's lyrical metaphor is similarto William Wordsworth ponderings of his experience with Solitude in his poem titled *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 qtd 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 with Mary Shelley and her mother's handling of Solitude, there are also some overt differences. It is important to take note of the fact that Wollstonecraft's protagonist appears to attract grief and misery in a more profound manner than Shelley's characters do. Mary's brother dies of a violent fever and nurses her mother, who is described to have some sort of 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. The point here is that death, as with Shelley's writings, is a prominent subject in *Mary; A Fiction*as 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 seeps into the works of her daughter, Mary Shelley.

Beginning with the most obvious similarity, Mary Shelley, like her mother, address the issues that affect women in such a way that they are more likely subjected to experience isolation and despair. The disparities between the public sphere and the private sphere as explicated by Wollstonecraft in her feminist handbook titled *Vindications of the Rights of a Woman,* is abundantly illustrated in both the mother's and daughter's works. As discussed elsewhere, Mary, Mathilda, Ethel, and Perdita were all bound to either a father or a brother, and in the absence of a male figure, the female characters were subjected to isolation. While both Mathilda and Ethel had overbearing fathers who were present in their lives, Mary and Perdita have no fathers but have husbands to whom they are bound to. However, with Mary, she leaves her husband and decides to be without a man. For 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 indeed 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 clear whether she refers to the Christian God, as she often uses such 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). Apparently 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 a terminal one, Marydecides not to pray for his quick recovery, but rather 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) and when Mary was alone, she either read "The Platonic Marriage or Eliza Warwick", or she "she said long prayers" (*Mary: A Fiction* 2). The narrator specifically 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" but again one may infer from the context given, that the Weekly preparation is like some sort of a devotional or a the 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. Intrinsically, Mary is joyous when she is able to show kindness to another person or when she is shown compassion. Mary, like the archetypical romantic, 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 labour" (*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 with her to the Elysian Fields, which she describes as a "peaceful garden" (*Fields of Fancy* 353*). Fields of Fancy* certainly serves as a remarkable frame narrative for *Mathilda* in that it shapes our perception of both stories. However, it is important 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 as well as 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 also "acquire knowledge and virtue. Or to those who just escaped care and pain" (*Fields of Fancy* 352). These quotes from *Fields of Fancy* are by far one of Shelley's most apparent depictions of Solitude, as 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, but the fact that she portrays multiple ways of dealing with isolation in *Fields of Fancy*, a rather short narrative, one can come to the conclusionthat

Shelley indeed has a complex interpretation of Solitude.

Yet another aspect to 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 or an alter self, much like Rousseau who also has an alter self with "whom 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, in his description of his father that he "buried himself in Solitude among the hills and lakes of Cumberland"(*The Last Man 9*) making it seem like solitude were 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. A more apparent example of anthropomorphism is Lionel's illustration of intense death and annihilation which also "swallows the voiceless Solitude"(*The Last Man*209*)*. Not only does Shelley humanize Solitude, but she also humanizes (feminizes) the plague[12] in contrast toSolitude. 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 its 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 plague's kingdom. Epley et al note in the publication titled "When We Need a Human: Motivational Determinants of Anthropomorphism"reechoeBolea'sargum ent, 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 a process of anthropomorphism"(Epley et al 144-145).

Relatedly, Philips Koch in the article titled "Solitude" who assesses literary definitions of Solitude quotes Henry Thoreau's essay. "I never found the companion that was so companionable as Solitude"[3] (Thoreau qtd in Koch 184),thus inferring that Thoreau anthropomorphizes natural things such as emotions, in such a way that engage 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", "wide Solitude"(*Mathilda*11, 29, 44 *)*. In fact, Mathilda goes on to say 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, exalt and celebrate nature, Shelley suggests in her writing that a withdrawal into nature brings about a soothing therapeutic outcome, , most especially in relation to many of life's challenges. The romantic

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

[2]Christy Tidwell and Bridgitte Barclay, *Gender and Environment in Science Fiction.*, Ecocritical Theory and Practice (Lexington Books, 2019),

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

subject's tendency to recluse to solitary confinements (in nature) is what ecofeminist have now reframed as ecotherapy. While both concepts i.eecotherapy and romanticism may appear to be parallel, ecotherapy is essentially an extension of theromanticization of nature. It is pertinent to immediately state that althoughecotherapy may have been an unfamiliar concept in the nineteenth century, during Shelley's time, the concept (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 a 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)*. Mathilda, on the other hand finds respite from nature as she claims that her "pleasures arose from the contemplation of 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 the company of her father far exceeded her sanguine expectations" (*Mathilda*13, 15*)*.But 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 naturedoes 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/or exile away from the companion of others is not always a solution to grief. Montweieler and Boren argue that "the idealized romantic subjects", whoLodore and Mathilda are, "suffer from a condition similar to Freud's Melancholia"(Montweieler 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". (Montweieler 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, wasan 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 Montweieler and Boren, have been an indication of 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. Greg offers, in his collection of essays, a multifaceted outlook on the subject of ecocriticism. In

his introduction, the author makes the argument that nature therapy (i.e relying on nature as the solution for most human problems) is in an anti-ecological one and he goes on to quote 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 indispensible complexity of nature" (Watson qtd in Garrard 6). Hence, we can come to the conclusions that the Shelley intends for readers to see that the deaths of Lodore and Mathilda are a revelation that nature is not the solution for all human problems.

Shelley, as well as her characters, often resorts 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 in a letter to Woodville, the tragedy that had befallen her. Mathilda tells a story that she had not had the courage to say to anyone. This then suggests that she derives momentary relief from writing about her tragedy as opposed to verbally expressing it, before her eventual death. Brewer argues that though Shelley's characters appear to be uncertain about the "therapeutic value of verbal self-

expression" but 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 as opposed to verbally uttering the story to him in person since the " horror in her tale are 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 hertale with Woodville, if he promises not share the letter with any other person, demonstrating that she is ashamed of her story. In this scenario, the strong interchange of emotions and language are eminent here in the sense that Mathilda seeks to repress her emotions through written words. In contrast to the short lived therapyMathilda 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 in1835. Not only does Lodore's life depend on reading (letters and books), but he is also dependent upon writing letters for engagement, while in isolation. The narrator says of Lodore, that

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"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.

Evidently, 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 us with 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 was 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 or her father, meant that "her affections, her future 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, Lodoreis equally saddened by the death of his father, 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, is unable to function and apparently appears mad, when Villiers is away from her. Just like Mathilda and Elizabeth write to repress their emotions, Ethel exchanges letterswith Villiers to get over her predicament. On one of the occasions of Villiers' departure, Ethel is so consumed by the thoughts of loneliness to the point that she begins to think obsessively about how to persuade him not to leave her, but she decides to avoid any argument with him and simply says one word, "write" to which Villiers responds "everyday"(*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 the purposes of intellectual growth, or it can befall a person through parental neglect and the death of loved ones. Mary Shelley certainly shows these mixed variances as it relates 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, reading and the acquisition of knowledge appear to be the different waysShelley suggests that a person spent their time in order to alleviate grief, most especially when in isolation. Alternatively, Shelley proposes, through herwriting 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 exploringMary Shelley's works in relation to Mary Wollstonecraft's work, it is evident that both writers represent nature as therapy for Solitude. However, while Shelley depicts that a creation of animaginary spirit is therapeutic for the solitary mind, Wollstonecraft portrays that the Author of naturei.e the Almighty God is the only one that can give genuine relief from hardship and grief.

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