In the fall of 1797, as Samuel Taylor Coleridge was writing “The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere,” he found himself reflecting on the influence of his childhood reading, recalling how, from the age of three, he “read incessantly,” and, by the age of six, had become obsessed with stories of the unknown, from Robinson Crusoe to the Arabian Nights’ Entertainments. This childhood reading was not, however, without its ill effects. By reading the Arabian Nights’ Entertainments, he became “haunted by spectres, whenever I was in the dark,” causing such “anxious & fearful” behavior that his father, when he “found out the effect, which these books had produced,” seized “and burnt them.” “The Ancyent Marinere” records the powerful force that tales of the unknown exerted on Coleridge’s imagination; he even bestowed his own compulsive habits on his fictional creation, claiming that the Mariner “had told this story ten thousand times since the voyage which was in early youth and fifty years before.” In August 1806, Coleridge himself recited the Mariner’s tale as another child, eight-year-old Mary Godwin, hid behind a sofa and listened enraptured. The profound influence of Coleridge’s poem on Mary Shelley could be seen ten years later, in August 1816, when she, while reading Coleridge’s companion piece to “The Ancyent Marinere,” “Christabel,” began to write her own story of the unknown, Frankenstein. In writing Frankenstein, a novel that replicates “The Ancyent Marinere”’s intricate narrative structure of stories told within stories and incorporates the poem as a formative influence on her characters, Shelley participates in a con-
versation with Coleridge about the pleasures and the dangers of tales of the unknown.

Coleridge's and Shelley's fascination with the unknown reflects a larger cultural obsession of the Romantic period. Across generations and genders, writers of Coleridge's and Shelley's time produced unprecedented quantities of gothic fiction and exotic tales, with stories set in the Middle Ages, the Orient, or, as in "Kubla Khan, or, a Vision in a Dream," both. But while Coleridge and Shelley, like many, were captivated by printed narratives of the unknown, they were vociferously opposed to unregulated and irresponsible venturing into the unknown in the real world. As more than ever before was being learned and written about previously unknown worlds, whether they were found with a telescope or a microscope, on the seven seas or in a laboratory, Coleridge and Shelley, among others, could not help but observe that many of these discoveries inevitably led to conquest and exploitation. By creating a composite voyage alluding to the originary moments in European maritime exploration in "The Ancyent Marinere"—from Ferdinand Magellan's first circumnavigation of the globe in the sixteenth century to Captain James Cook's explorations of the South Pacific and Antarctic regions in the later part of the eighteenth century—Coleridge laid bare the economic motivations for and ethical implications of the Mariner's having been "the first that ever burst / Into that silent Sea" of the Pacific (lines 105–6). Indeed, readers of the poem have long argued that the Mariner's sufferings and guilt cannot be divorced from the expansionist project that culminated, by the end of the eighteenth century, in the slave trade, the plantation system, and imperial culture. Readers of Frankenstein have also observed that Mary Shelley, by reflecting darkly on contemporary maritime exploration and scientific experimentation, lodged a powerful complaint against the twin dangers of imperialism and science. Less attention, however, has been devoted to the ways in which Coleridge and Shelley sought to eradicate, or at least to mitigate, the damage caused by reckless discovery.

In this essay, I will argue that both Coleridge and Shelley saw the domestic affections as the primary tool for restraining these excesses. The commonality between "The Ancyent Marinere" and Frankenstein extends beyond their recommendation of the domestic affections to their recognition that the desire for discovery and conquest was profoundly inflamed by printed accounts of discovery and conquest. By liberating the imagination from the constraints of prudence and suffering, narratives of discovery
tended to promise excitement and glory without consequences. Both “The Ancyent Marinere” and Frankenstein self-consciously reflect on the power of tales of the unknown, paying particular attention to the way such stories inspire imitation, both in the physical world and on the page. Thus they manifest their awareness that print culture enabled and encouraged British imperialism. Coleridge’s poem and Shelley’s novel exhibit a tension between their attraction to stories of the unknown and their repulsion by the effects of unbridled exploration. By investing considerable faith in the restraining powers of the domestic affections, Coleridge and Shelley sought, perhaps without complete success, to exploit the enthralling nature of the unknown without encouraging actual projects of discovery.

I

In a series of lectures given and published in 1795, Coleridge launched a severe attack on the slave trade and British imperialism, arguing that these practices were responsible for not only atrocities abroad but also corruption at home. Likewise, Shelley, between 1810 and 1830, joined a growing chorus of women writers who bitterly lamented both the global and domestic consequences of the expanding British Empire; she would, of course, extend this critique to the realm of experimental science. In Frankenstein, the creature and even Victor lament the destruction of civilizations through discovery and conquest. Shelley argues that destruction will be avoided “if no man allowed any pursuit whatsoever to interfere with the tranquillity of his domestic affections” (p. 38). In one of his lectures of 1795, Conclones ad Populum. Or Addresses to the People, Coleridge insists that the cultivation of “every home-born feeling” is necessary to “discipline the Heart and prepare it for the love of all Mankind.” Shelley would have agreed with Coleridge that without love of family and friends one could not learn regard for the welfare of strangers, especially those—of different features and habits—who were likely to be encountered through the pursuit of discovery.

In espousing this view, Shelley would have been contradicting her father’s, William Godwin’s, writing of the early 1790s. For Coleridge, arguing that domestic feelings are the origin of all social feelings, that “[t]he most expansive Benevolence is that effected and rendered permanent by social and domestic affections,” offers a direct rebuke of Godwin. According to Coleridge, Godwin’s Enquiry Concerning Political Justice (1792) is “a book
which builds without a foundation” insofar as it famously (or infamously) argued that general benevolence has no basis in, and is superior to, private attachments.12 “I ought to prefer no human being to another,” wrote Godwin, “because that being is my father, my wife or my son, but because, for reasons which equally appeal to all understandings, that being is entitled to preference.”13 Coleridge believed that love of family was not only natural and inevitable but also necessary for general benevolence: we could not come to care for others without first loving our parents, spouse, and children. The pivotal act of “The Ancyent Marinere,” the slaying of the albatross, reflects the Mariner’s failure to achieve universal benevolence. Here Coleridge may be suggesting that the Mariner, by having cut himself off from all domestic ties, seems to be incapable of acting kindly toward a “sweet Bird,” “a Christian Soul,” that “every day for food or play / Came to the Marinere’s hollo!” (lines 88, 65, 73–4).

In addition to asserting the foundational importance of the domestic affections as a means of mitigating the devastation wrought by exploration, Coleridge was also aware of the great threat to family and home posed by imperial expansion and slavery. In his 1795 lectures, Coleridge bitterly laments that both Englishman and slave alike have been cruelly “torn from the bleeding breast of domestic affection.”14 The corrosive effects of imperial policies on the home preoccupied Coleridge through the 1790s, pervading his lectures of 1795 and poems such as “Fears in Solitude,” which was written in April 1798, the month after he completed “The Ancyent Marinere.” In “The Ancyent Marinere,” Coleridge presents the essential incompatibility of discovery and the domestic affections. The Mariner’s only blood relative in the poem is a nephew who dies with the other two hundred men; when the “ghastly crew” is reanimated (line 340), his alienation from his only kinsman is complete:

The body of my brother’s son  
Stood by me knee to knee:  
The body and I pull’d at one rope,  
But he said nought to me—

(lines 341–4)

The Mariner, it seems, has no other domestic attachments, nor does he have any connection to a home, choosing instead to “pass, like night, from land to land” (line 586). And he continues to prefer the less social and more solitary activity of prayer in church.
as “sweeter than the Marriage-feast, / ’Tis sweeter far to me” (lines 601–2).

The Mariner’s participation in discovery not only forecloses his own ability to form domestic bonds but also threatens the wedding guest’s ability to do so as well. Though not comparable to the violence done to an African man kidnapped and sold into slavery, or even to an Englishman forcibly impressed, the Mariner does use force—“He holds him with his skinny hand”—and enchantment—“He holds him with his glittering eye” (lines 9, 13). In telling his tale, he also draws the wedding guest, who is the “next of kin” to the bridegroom (line 6), away from “[t]he merry Minstralsys” (line 36). The Mariner may be hoping to do the wedding guest a good turn—

The moment that his face I see
I know the man that must hear me;
To him my tale I teach.

(lines 588–90)

Yet the intrusion disrupts the wedding guest’s sociability, perhaps permanently. By relating the “ghastly aventure” that has caused him perpetual “woeful agony” (lines 582.1.3, 579), the Mariner renders the wedding guest incapable of re-joining the party, despite the enticements of the “loud uproar” and “the Bride / And Bride-maids singing” (lines 591, 593–4).

Coleridge was concerned not only with the weakening of domestic affections at home but also with their perversion abroad. Life-in-Death, the central female figure in the poem and the only woman other than the bride and bridesmaids “and Maidens gay” (line 609), need not be understood solely as proof that Coleridge saw women as inherently corrupt. Rather, Life-in-Death may in part reflect his awareness that women could be diseased through the agency of wandering men. The geographical precision in the poem suggests that Life-in-Death may at one level allude to a native islander, a woman the Mariner would have likely encountered in the middle of the Pacific. Life-in-Death appears to the Mariner as a diseased and debauched version of the bride; instead of the bride’s virginal rosininess, Life-in-Death’s skin is “white as leprosy” and her lips are somewhat too red (line 192). Alan Bewell, who observes that leprosy was thought at the time to be a tropical form of syphilis, has clarified Coleridge’s odd usage of the word to refer to a venereal disease. As was no doubt known to Coleridge, many of the women whom Captain Cook’s men en-
countered on the South Pacific Islands were, like Life-in-Death, often hideously diseased, having been infected with venereal disease by prior encounters with European sailors. Cook's published journals are replete with anxiety about the contraction and transmission of venereal disease by and to his crew. His habitual calm is punctuated by disgust, having "the Mortification to find that all the care I took when I first Visited these islands to prevent this dreadfull desease from being communicated to them, prove eneectual." He is particularly appalled by the "ulcers upon different parts of their bodies, some of which had a very virulent appeareance." Life-in-Death emerges, therefore, as an example of what Bewell has called "the staggering epidemiological cost of empire," and Coleridge's poem serves as a reminder of the extreme devastation caused by the suspension of domestic affections through the pursuit of discovery.

Shelley's *Frankenstein* is even more explicit in viewing discovery as a threat to the domestic affections. In her novel, she dramatizes the voyage of another antipodal explorer, Robert Walton, whose Arctic expedition takes over where Coleridge's poem (and Cook's explorations) left off—searching for the elusive Northwest Passage. Like the Mariner, both Walton and Victor Frankenstein are aspiring discoverers: Walton hopes to be the first to find an Arctic continent and a Northwest Passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and Frankenstein hopes to be the first to bring dead matter to life. Joseph W. Lew has identified Walton's imperialist ambitions and argues that Shelley, through her characterizations of Walton, Henry Clerval, and the creature, criticizes the growth of the British Empire in the Orient. However, Walton seeks not only a quicker trade route from Europe to the Orient, imagining "the inestimable benefit which I shall confer on all mankind to the last generation, by discovering a passage near the pole to those countries, to reach which at present so many months are requisite," but also an Arctic continent of "beauty and delight," where "snow and frost are banished" and whose "productions and features may be without example" (p. 10). Shelley may be posing questions about Walton's search for a fertile Arctic continent, after similar beliefs about an Antarctic continent were firmly laid to rest by Cook several decades before. In *A Voyage towards the South Pole, and Round the World* (1777), Cook had this to say about the long sought-for Antarctic continent:

Lands doomed by Nature to perpetual frigidness; never to feel the warmth of the sun's rays; whose horrible and savage aspect I have not words to describe. Such are the
lands we have discovered; what then may we expect those to be, which lie still farther to the South? For we may reasonably suppose that we have seen the best, as lying most to the North. If any one should have resolution and perseverance to clear up this point by proceeding farther than I have done, I shall not envy him the honour of the discovery; but I will be bold to say, that the world will not be benefited by it.\textsuperscript{22}

Shelley will use Cook's equanimity in the face of his nondiscovery as a foil for her own explorers.

Shelley's fictional explorers, Walton and Frankenstein, seek "the honour of the discovery" at almost any cost. Walton's crew threatens mutiny because they fear their captain will sacrifice more lives—we are told that many have already died—in the vain hope of discovery (p. 163). Frankenstein also participates in this project of discovery, exhorting the men to persevere by telling them that if they proceed, they will "be hailed as the benefactors of [their] species; [their] name[s] adored, as belonging to brave men who encountered death for honour and the benefit of mankind" (p. 163). He goes so far as to tell them that death is preferable to the shame of returning home without having risked every danger in the pursuit of their "glorious expedition": "Do not return to your families with the stigma of disgrace marked on your brows" (p. 164). Yet Walton, though bitterly disappointed, will turn back, after his sailors make "a demand, which, in justice, [he] could not refuse" (p. 163). Walton's retrenchment may be attributed, at least in part, to the strength of his affection for his sister Margaret. At the outset of his journey, she serves as his moral compass, as he asks her to have faith in him: "you know me sufficiently to confide in my prudence and considerateness whenever the safety of others is committed to my care" (p. 14). When debating whether to return home should the ship be freed from the surrounding ice, he imagines her feelings: "Yet what, Margaret, will be the state of your mind? You will not hear of my destruction, and you will anxiously await my return. Years will pass, and you will have visitings of despair, and yet be tortured by hope. Oh! my beloved sister, the sickening failings of your heart-felt expectations are, in prospect, more terrible to me than my own death" (p. 162). Walton's willingness to imagine his sister's sufferings and to let it influence his actions is what ultimately separates him from Frankenstein, who refuses to recognize the claims of others and consequently entertains no concept of retreat.
Shelley's denunciation of the project of discovery, therefore, concentrates on and culminates in Frankenstein, the first of a new generation of scientific discoverers who refuses to acknowledge any ethical constraints. Indeed, Frankenstein is attracted to science because it seems to be without limits: “in a scientific pursuit there is continual food for discovery and wonder” (p. 34). With the old projects of discovery having been exhausted—there being no new trade routes or land masses to discover and no more peoples to colonize and enslave—Frankenstein seeks to create what can no longer be merely discovered: a new race of men. “[I]n discovering the cause of generation and life,” Frankenstein hopes to create “[a] new species [that] would bless me as its creator and source” (pp. 36–7). “No father,” he believes, “could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs” (p. 37). Readers have observed Frankenstein's desire to usurp women's reproductive capacity, but he wishes to eradicate both mother and father by becoming the creator of all. Mary Shelley demonstrates not only the folly and impossibility of Frankenstein's desire—he quickly realizes that females will be necessary to propagate the new race and so quickly loses interest in the project—but also its utter destructiveness. According to Shelley, the paradoxical solution to this attack on the family is to strengthen its affective claims.

Percy Shelley, in his preface to the 1818 Frankenstein, explains that one of Mary Shelley's chief concerns in the novel is “the exhibition of the amiableness of domestic affection” (p. 8). She achieves this by negative example, as the novel documents the dire consequences that follow when domestic affections are disavowed. Frankenstein, in his “do as I say not as I do” advice to Walton, is well aware that pursuits undermining domestic values pose global dangers:

If the study to which you apply yourself has a tendency to weaken your affections, and to destroy your taste for those simple pleasures in which no alloy can possibly mix, then that study is certainly unlawful, that is to say, not befitting the human mind. If this rule were always observed; if no man allowed any pursuit whatsoever to interfere with the tranquillity of his domestic affections, Greece had not been enslaved; Caesar would have spared his country; America would have been discovered more gradually; and the empires of Mexico and Peru had not been destroyed. (p. 38)
Here Shelley, through the unlikely voice of Frankenstein, attributes some of the worst atrocities of empire building to pursuits that weaken domestic affections. She believes that stronger domestic affections, while they would not necessarily have prevented discoveries of new worlds, would have mitigated suffering by making such exploration more gradual and less exploitive. Margaret Saville, who shares Mary Shelley’s initials, performs just this restraining function in the novel, as her absent presence reminds her brother to avoid being the agent of suffering. Another sister figure in Frankenstein, Elizabeth Lavenza, will likewise recommend only those occupations that strengthen domestic ties. In a letter to Victor, she advances just such an ideal, that of a farmer, for Ernest Frankenstein, who, by staying with his family and in his native land “to cultivate the earth for the sustenance of man,” engages in “the least hurtful, or rather the most beneficial profession of any” (p. 45). Rather than pursuing a vocation that could bring honor and fame, as Frankenstein does, one should think about what can be done to help and avoid harm to others. For Shelley, the potential for harm is minimized and the capacity for good enhanced if one remains at home, or, at the very least, respects the claims of domestic ties when abroad.

In this way, Shelley situates herself among other women writers who, between 1810 and 1830, blame imperialism, war, and slavery for eroding the domestic affections. Anna Letitia Barbauld, in Eighteen Hundred and Eleven (1812), laments that imperialism and the wars fought in support of the British Empire have left old women widowed and childless (“No son returns to press her widow’d hand”) and young women husbandless (“the rose withers on its virgin thorns”). Women’s “discovery” consists of anxiously exploring a map to find “the spot that wrecked her bliss”—the place where her loved one died—and she “learns its name but to detest the sound.” Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park (1814) attributes the moral degeneration of the Bertram family at least in part to Sir Thomas’s participation in slavery, which necessitates his departure from England for the West Indies and encourages Lady Bertram’s excessive indolence. And Felicia Hemans, in a number of her works, including The Siege of Valencia: A Dramatic Poem (1823), “Graves of a Household” (1826), and “The Traveller at the Source of the Nile” (1826), dramatically represents how empire disperses and so destroys the family. These writers insist that the values of discovery are necessarily antithetical to the domestic affections, an argument that Coleridge had anticipated much earlier in “The Aneyent Marinere” and that Shelley develops more fully in Frankenstein.
In *Frankenstein*, Shelley traces the source of imperial ambitions to childhood reading. As young boys, Walton and Frankenstein, like Coleridge, are spellbound by tales of exploration. "[A] history of all the voyages made for purposes of discovery composed the whole of our good uncle Thomas's library," says Walton, and were "my study day and night" "for the first fourteen years of my life" (pp. 11, 13). Walton, "passionately fond of reading," "read with ardour the accounts of the various voyages which have been made in the prospect of arriving at the North Pacific Ocean through the seas which surround the pole," and eventually organizes an expedition, "the favourite dream of my early years" (p. 11). Frankenstein, likewise, attempts to reenact his own reading of natural philosophers: "[t]he raising of ghosts or devils was a promise liberally accorded by my favourite authors, the fulfilment of which I most eagerly sought" (p. 26). Shelley seems to be in agreement with Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth who, in *Practical Education* (1798), had warned parents to avoid giving travel writing to "boys of an enterprising temper, unless they are intended for a seafaring life, or for the army" because such boys "are prone to admire, and to imitate, every thing like enterprise and heroism." The Edgeworths predict what Shelley dramatizes in her novel, that boys are led by imitation into the service of imperialism: "A boy, who at seven years old longs to be Robinson Crusoe, or Sindbad the sailor, may at seventeen retain the same taste for adventure and enterprize, though mixed so as to be less discernible, with the incipient passions of avarice and ambition; he has the same dispositions modified by a slight knowledge of real life . . . he will now admire the soldier of fortune, the commercial adventurer, or the nabob, who has discovered in the east the secret of Aladdin's wonderful lamp; and who has realised the treasures of Aboulcasem."30

Yet neither Coleridge nor Shelley was willing to accede to the remedy resorted to by Coleridge's father and advocated by the Edgeworths, who argued that literature for children should be drawn from real life to avoid inflaming the imagination and that any offensive stories should be censored with a pair of sharp scissors. Coleridge, though aware of "all that has been said against it," considered that children should "be permitted to read Romances, & Relations of Giants & Magicians, & Genii," for he knew of "no other way of giving the mind a love of 'the Great', & 'the Whole.'" He believed that his own "mind had been habituated to the Vast" by such childhood reading. Shelley likewise, in her
verse dramas for children, *Proserpine* and *Midas*, written in 1820, eschews realistic narratives for classical mythology. And in their writing for older audiences, both Coleridge and Shelley return again and again to the unknown. In *Biographia Literaria, or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions* (1817), Coleridge explains that in the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) it was determined that "my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic." Shelley, likewise, was unwilling to abandon nonrealistic narratives, employing, to spectacular effect, the supernatural and the fantastical in her novels. Rather than advocating censorship, her solution is to dramatize precisely the dangers described by the Edgeworths, transforming Walton, Frankenstein, and even Clerval from wide-eyed boys into enterprising men.

Like the Edgeworths, Shelley was aware that fictional stories of discovery inspired imitation in much the same way as true accounts. Frankenstein at one point compares himself to Sinbad (p. 36), and both he and Walton claim to have been inspired by none other than Coleridge's "The Ancyent Marinere." And just as they refuse to heed the warnings issued in the books they read as boys, so too they choose to repeat rather than avoid the dangers represented in Coleridge's poem. Frankenstein, immediately after he has abandoned the creature, invokes the poem, feeling

Like one who, on a lonely road,

Doth walk in fear and dread,

And, having once turn'd round, walks on,

And turns no more his head;

Because he knows a frightful fiend

Doth close behind him tread.

(p. 41)

Yet Frankenstein cannot see how, like the Mariner, he has brought "fear and dread" upon himself by his cruel neglect. Walton similarly misreads the poem, writing to his sister: "I am going to unexplored regions, to 'the land of mist and / snow;' but I shall kill no albatross, therefore do not be alarmed for my safety" (p. 14). Walton follows the letter but contradicts the spirit of the poem, for though he kills no albatross, he endangers himself and his crew by his reckless pursuit of discovery. He nearly relives the Mariner's experience, becoming trapped in floes of ice from which he only miraculously escapes. In the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, Shelley sharpens the identification between Walton and the Mariner, with Walton warning his sister that he may return
to her “as worn and woful as the ‘Ancient Mariner’” (p. 184n6).34 He further “disclose[s] a secret” to his sister: “I have often attributed my attachment to, my passionate enthusiasm for, the dangerous mysteries of ocean, to that production of the most imaginative of modern poets. There is something at work in my soul, which I do not understand . . . there is a love for the marvelous, a belief in the marvellous, intertwined in all my projects, which hurries me out of the common pathways of men, even to the wild sea and unvisited regions I am about to explore” (p. 184). That of all possible literary role models Walton should invoke the Mariner seems a perverse choice, unless we recall the overwhelming force of tales of discovery. For the Mariner’s rhyme attests to the magnetism of stories of the marvelous, with the Mariner not only captivating the wedding guest such that he becomes “like a three year’s child” who “cannot chuse but hear” but also the countless others to whom, we are to believe, the Mariner has told his tale (lines 15, 18).

And it is by telling their tales that the Mariner, Frankenstein, and Walton further participate in projects of discovery. By taking pains to ensure that their narratives will be widely dispersed, Coleridge and Shelley articulate the close ties between actual and textual discovery. The Mariner, by telling his tale “ten thousand times,” ensures not only that he will have a broad audience but also that his oral tale will be fashioned into poetic form, here a ballad, which will be more easily remembered and eventually transcribed. Frankenstein, we learn from the creature, keeps a meticulous account of the four months prior to the creature’s birth, “a journal” in which he “minutely described . . . every step [he] took in the progress of [his] work” (p. 97). The creature, when he finds this journal, “began to study [it] with diligence,” thus being the first in a long line of readers of Frankenstein’s story. Walton transforms Frankenstein’s oral tale into written notes, “to record, as nearly as possible in his own words, what he has related during the day” (p. 20). He prepares his transcription to give pleasure to his sister, but he also imagines “with what interest and sympathy” he, and perhaps others, will “read it in some future day!” (p. 20). Frankenstein then “corrected and augmented [the notes] in many places” to give “life and spirit” to the narration and therefore ensure its dissemination (p. 160). He is confident that the story will circulate, telling Walton: “Since you have preserved my narration . . . I would not that a mutilated one should go down to posterity” (p. 160). Here Frankenstein takes the trouble to produce an unmutiliated text, something that he neglects to do when creating an actual living creature. His true object, it seems,
has always been the claims of posterity, which he now hopes to satisfy through literary rather than human creation.

Similarly, Walton is a failed poet seeking the linguistic mastery over the globe that he could not achieve in the physical realm. Like Frankenstein, he takes enormous risks with the welfare of others so that he has a good story to tell. That Walton is an aspiring travel writer becomes clear once we recognize that the vast majority of the letters he writes to his sister are never sent. Walton is able to post only his first three letters (which comprise the first five pages of the novel); in his fourth letter he writes that “it is very probable that you will see me before these papers can come into your possession” (p. 16); and, at the end of the novel, he concludes that it is “highly probable that these papers may never reach you” (p. 162). The letters are variously described as a “journal”—the form, of course, of many published travel narratives—as “papers,” and even as a “manuscript” (pp. 18, 16, 20). He is highly conscious of the proper conventions of travel writing, refusing to document trivial incidents that “experienced navigators scarcely remember to record” (p. 15). Walton eagerly adopts the duties of an author, authenticating Frankenstein’s narrative by perusing the letters of Felix and Safie and satisfying himself as to its veracity by his encounter with the creature. He finally agrees to return to England, in part because his crew has left him with little choice, in part because of his continued affection for his sister, and also because, by then, he has acquired an even better story to tell—Victor Frankenstein’s.35

If in Frankenstein Shelley demonstrates the dangers of children reading stories of the unknown, she also details the salutary effects of other kinds of stories on young minds. The creature’s early reading, rather than encouraging him to seek conquest, makes him long, above all, for a family. Instead of reading about discovery, invention, and the expansion of empires, as do Walton and Frankenstein, the first book the creature hears read, Volney’s Ruins of Empire, documents the high cost and inevitable decline of empire building. He learns not only that man can be virtuous and honorable but also that he can “be base and vicious . . . a condition more abject than that of the blind mole or harmless worm.” Hearing of the discovery of America, the creature is not impressed by the glory of the “discoverer” Christopher Columbus but, rather, “wept with Safie over the hapless fate of its original inhabitants” (p. 89). The first books the creature reads to himself—Paradise Lost, Plutarch’s Lives, and The Sorrows of Young Werther—likewise insist upon the limits of human goodness and achievement. In Plutarch, for example, the creature “read of men
concerned in public affairs governing or massacring their species,” and, repulsed by their violence, comes to prefer, with Plutarch, “peaceable law-givers” (p. 96). When the creature observes that “if my first introduction to humanity had been made by a young soldier, burning for glory and slaughter, I should have been imbued with different sensations,” Shelley articulates her belief in the enormous power of imaginative literature to shape developing minds and proposes texts that teach the dangers of ambition and the need for restraint (p. 97).

The creature’s early reading also cultivates respect for the domestic affections. The creature explains how, in Werter, the “gentle and domestic manners it described, combined with lofty sentiments and feelings . . . had for their object something out of self” (p. 95). This capacity for fellow feeling, whether for the Native Americans or the De Lacey family, is cultivated through narrative. The creature will, in turn, attempt to inspire sympathy by telling his own story to others, albeit with limited success. In the shadow of Mont Blanc, Frankenstein, “partly urged by curiosity” and by “compassion confirmed,” consents to hear the creature’s story (p. 76). Covering Frankenstein’s eyes, the creature says that even if he is too hideous to be looked at “[s]till thou canst listen to me, and grant me thy compassion” (p. 75). Victor, then, “[f]or the first time . . . felt what the duties of a creator towards his creature were” (p. 76). So long as he only hears the creature’s tale of suffering, Frankenstein “compassionated him, and sometimes felt a wish to console him” (pp. 109–10). Though Frankenstein’s sympathy is short lived—as soon as he opens his eyes, his “feelings were altered to those of horror and hatred” (p. 110)—Walton’s greater schooling in the domestic affections makes him a more compassionate listener. The novel ends with Walton’s “first impulses” to fulfill Frankenstein’s dying request that he kill the creature “suspended by a mixture of curiosity and compassion.” The creature explains how his “heart was fashioned to be susceptible of love and sympathy” and that he turned to evil only because, despite his essential goodness, he was reviled rather than loved (p. 167). By having the creature tell his story yet again, and through Walton’s decision to hear the creature’s tale rather than kill him, Shelley further intimates the tremendous power that inheres in tales of suffering, which bind people together through sympathetic imagination and offer the potential to overcome “horror and hatred” (p. 110).

The imagination, then, enables what the creature describes as “something out of self,” later elaborated by Percy Shelley in “A Defence of Poetry” as “a going out of our own nature, and an
identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination.\textsuperscript{36} Two decades earlier, in his preface to \textit{Poems on Various Subjects} (1797), Coleridge had similarly argued that the essential function of the imagination is sympathetic identification, for it is "a law of our Nature, [that] he, who labours under a strong feeling, is impelled to seek for sympathy."\textsuperscript{37} The poet, by expressing his feelings, and the reader, by seeking out the feelings of others, enlarge their sympathies and hence their moral sense. By enabling us to imagine the suffering of others, poetry has the potential, says Coleridge, to "domesticate with the heart."\textsuperscript{38} For Coleridge and Mary Shelley, then, the imagination was a force for both good and evil. To curtail the dangers posed by their own fictional explorations of the unknown, Coleridge and Shelley propose the cultivation of sympathetic identification both within and beyond the domestic sphere, urging the love of family, home, and even a gentle bird and deformed monster. Thus, they make the claim that the harm caused by the pursuit of discovery can be mitigated by the exercise of sympathy and kindness.\textsuperscript{39}

Yet I want to conclude by suggesting that neither Shelley nor Coleridge was entirely satisfied by this resolution. In her 1831 preface, Shelley draws a telling analogy between herself and Columbus in a novel that has alluded, on a number of occasions, to the suffering caused by his discovery: "In all matters of discovery and invention," she writes, "even of those that appertain to the imagination, we are continually reminded of the story of Columbus and his egg. Invention consists in the capacity of seizing on the capabilities of a subject, and in the power of moulding and fashioning ideas suggested to it" (pp. 178–9). The source for this anecdote was likely the following passage from Washington Irving's \textit{The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus; To Which Are Added Those of His Companions} (1828), describing a discussion that occurred after Columbus's successful voyage of 1492:

A shallow courtier present, impatient of the honors paid to Columbus, and meanly jealous of him as a foreigner, abruptly asked him whether he thought that, in case he had not discovered the Indies, there were not other men in Spain, who would have been capable of the enterprise? To this Columbus made no immediate reply, but, taking an egg, invited the company to make it stand on one end.
Every one attempted it, but in vain; whereupon he struck it upon the table so as to break the end, and left it standing on the broken part; illustrating in this simple manner, that when he had once shown the way to the New World, nothing was easier than to follow it.\textsuperscript{40}

Here Shelley recognizes not only the identity between her own fictional creation of a new world and Columbus's actual discovery and conquest of the New World but also the way in which, once she has "shown the way" to these new worlds, "nothing was easier than to follow it." In bidding her "hideous progeny [to] go forth and prosper," Shelley acknowledges not only that her novel will spawn textual imitations but also that it will inevitably fail as a cautionary tale (p. 180).

By incorporating into her novel fictional discoverers who are more encouraged than horrified by "The Ancyent Marinere," Shelley makes it plain that tales of the unknown will give birth to more ill-advised ventures into the unknown, both in print and in life.\textsuperscript{41} Shelley and Coleridge even admit their limited ability to control their own imaginations; Shelley, for example, in her preface, describes the "acute mental vision" that gave rise to \textit{Frankenstein} (p. 179), whereas Coleridge, in the note preceding "Kubla Khan"—which Shelley had read as she wrote \textit{Frankenstein}—explains that "images rose up before him as things . . . without any sensation or consciousness of effort."\textsuperscript{42} But just as they seem, by attributing their literary creations to visions, to be abdicating conscious command over their work, they implicate themselves in the very practices of discovery and imperial conquest that they condemn. Shelley compares herself to Columbus, much in the same way that Coleridge, in "Kubla Khan," acknowledges that the poet's construction of "a sunny pleasure-dome" is complicit in the dictator's imperial decree for the erection of "a stately-pleasure dome."\textsuperscript{43} Many years later, in December 1834, Shelley would compare her imagination to Kubla Khan's empire: "My imagination . . . is my treasure—my Kubla Khan—my Stately pleasure ground through which a mighty river ran down to a sunless sea."\textsuperscript{44} For both Coleridge and Shelley, life without the imagination was unthinkable, it being their balm and often their only companion. Not wishing to censor their own imaginations, they offer models of compassionate readers in the wedding guest, the creature, and Robert Walton, who emerge sadder and wiser for the tales they heard.
NOTES


2 Coleridge to Thomas Poole, 9 October 1797, in Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956–71), 1:347. In this letter, Coleridge explains how he had the run of his aunt’s “every-thing Shop at Crediton,” where he “read thro’ all the gilt-cover little books that could be had at the time” (1:347). In addition to reading, at six years old, Robinson Crusoe and The Arabian Nights’ Entertainments, he also read “Belisarius” and “Philip Quarle” (1:347). Coleridge likely read a version of Jean François Marmontel’s Belisarius, a history of the Byzantine general under Justinian I (ca. AD 505–65), who was largely responsible for the great expansion of the Eastern Empire. “Philip Quarle” was probably an edition of The Hermit: Or, the Unparalleled Sufferings and Surprising Adventures of Mr. Philip Quarle, an Englishman, first published in 1727. Similar to Robinson Crusoe, it describes Quarle’s fifty years of solitude and suffering on a South Sea island. It went through many editions and was adapted in many children’s stories.

3 Coleridge to Poole, Collected Letters, 1:347.


Bernard Martin was the first to detect similarities between Coleridge’s poem and the Authentic Narrative by John Newton, a slave trader turned Evangelical clergyman (The Ancient Mariner and the Authentic Narrative [Melbourne and London: William Heinemann, 1949]). Thereafter, William Empson (“The Ancient Mariner,” CritQ 6, 4 [Winter 1964]: 298–319); J. R. Ebbatson (“Coleridge’s Mariner and the Rights of Man,” SIR 11, 3 [Summer 1972]: 171–206); Patrick J. Keane (Coleridge’s Submerged Politics: “The Ancient Mariner” and “Robinson Crusoe” [Columbia and London: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1994]); and Debbie Lee (“Yellow Fever and the Slave Trade: Coleridge’s The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” ELH 65, 3 [Fall 1998]: 675–700) have traced the poem’s rich allusions to the slave trade. Also of importance are recent collections of essays that have reconsidered colonialism as a shaping force in Romantic writing. See, for instance, Romanticism, Race, and Imperial Culture, 1780–1834, ed. Alan Richardson and Sonia Hofkosh (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 1996) and Romanticism and Colonialism: Writing and Empire, 1780–1830, ed. Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998).


8 Coleridge, Conciones ad Populum. Or Addresses to the People, in Lectures 1795 on Politics and Religion, ed. Lewis Patton and Peter Mann, vol. 1 of CW, pp. 21–74, 46.

9 Coleridge, Lectures on Revealed Religion, Its Corruptions and Political Views, in Lectures 1795, pp. 75–229, 162.

10 Coleridge, Lectures on Revealed Religion, p. 164.


12 Coleridge, Conciones ad Populum, in Lectures 1795, p. 62; Coleridge, Lectures on the Slave-Trade, in Lectures 1795, pp. 231–51, 247.

Gothic (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 182–99. Unlike these authors, I argue for a more historicized reading of Life-in-Death. For a thorough review and persuasive reading of Coleridge’s poetic depictions of women, see Mellor, “Coleridge and the Question of Female Talents,” Romanticism 8, 2 (2002): 115–30. She finds that Coleridge was neither a misogynist nor a feminist and that though he could imagine and hope for intellectual equality with women, he never achieved this ideal in life or in his poetry.

16 Scholars have tended more recently to see Life-in-Death and the spectre-bark as allusions to the slave trade. (See my note 8 above.) While William Bligh’s The Bounty did travel to Tahiti to secure the bread fruit plant intended as a food source for slaves in the West Indies (Kitson, “Romanticism and Colonialism: Races, Places, Peoples, 1785–1800,” in Romanticism and Colonialism, pp. 13–34, 30), slave ships carrying slave cargo, for the most part, would have little reason to be in the Pacific, where the Mariner’s ship is located when it encounters Life-in-Death.


19 Ibid.

20 Bewell, p. 98.

21 See Lew.


23 For a concise and influential account of this reading, see Mellor’s “Possessing Nature: The Female in Frankenstein,” in “Frankenstein”: The 1818 Text, pp. 274–86.


25 Barbauld, p. 162, line 37.

26 Barbauld, p. 162, line 38.


29 Maria Edgeworth and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Practical Education, 2 vols. (London: J. Johnson, 1798), 1:336. Coleridge had enthusiastically responded to Practical Education, writing to his wife, Sara, on 18 September 1798: “I pray you, my Love! read Edgeworth’s Essay on Education—read it heart & soul—and if you approve of the mode, teach Hartley his Letters.” However, he did acknowledge that “there are very good things in the work—and some nonsense!” (Collected Letters, 1:418). Perhaps the “nonsense” Coleridge
referred to was, in part, the Edgeworths' argument against giving imaginative literature to children. Although there is no record of Shelley's having read *Practical Education*, her dramatization of the effects of tales of discovery on boys is so similar to those described by the Edgeworths that it seems probable she was familiar with the book. Strengthening this claim is the Edgeworths' strong endorsement of *Plutarch's Lives* as suitable reading material for children.


34 Shelley also identified with the Mariner. Her journal entry of 16 April 1841 contains a slightly incorrect recollection of a verse from "The Ancyent Marinere":

"Alone—alone—all—all alone
Upon the wide, wide sea—
And God will not take pity on
My soul in agony!"

(Shelley, *Journals*, 2:573)

35 Walton's notes are not, of course, the only text to have been "corrected and augmented" (p. 160). Both "The Ancyent Marinere" and *Frankenstein* were considerably revised, with the second editions adding substantially to the original versions. That Coleridge and Shelley felt compelled to retell their own stories testifies, once again, to the powerfully reproductive nature of such tales.


39 In arguing that Shelley supports the extension of domestic affections, I disagree with Adam Komisaruk's recent argument that in *Frankenstein* Shelley regards domesticity and the domestic affections with suspicion. While noticing that a number of characters show hostility to their own family and that these characters are those who most strongly embrace capitalism, the conclusion Komisaruk draws from this—that Shelley believes the same im-
pulses toward selfishness and oppression underlie both institutions—is not a necessary one. In fact, what Shelley shows is not, as Komisaruk argues, "that the construct of the domestic affections owes itself to political oppression" ("So Guided by a Silken Cord: Frankenstein's Family Values," SIR 38, 3 [Fall 1999]: 409–41, 423), but, rather, that dire consequences follow when domestic affections are overwhelmed by selfish private and public pursuits. I am in agreement with Kate Ellis, who argues that "[i]t is not domestic affection but the context in which it manifests itself"—the context being the insistence on separate spheres for men and women—"that brings death into the world" ("Monsters in the Garden: Mary Shelley and the Bourgeois Family," in The Endurance of "Frankenstein": Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel, ed. George Levine and U. C. Knoepfflacher [Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1979], pp. 123–42, 124).

40 Washington Irving, The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus; To Which Are Added Those of His Companions, vols. 3–5 of The Works of Washington Irving, 15 vols. (New York: George P. Putnam, 1851), 3:275. Irving and Shelley became acquainted in the summer of 1824 and continued to see each other socially into the 1830s. Indeed, an effort was made by John Howard Payne to encourage a match between them after Shelley expressed some interest in Irving. See The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, ed. Betty T. Bennett, 3 vols. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1980), 1:423n1. While there is no record of Shelley's having read Irving's Life and Voyages, she read many of his other works and made inquiries about the publication of this work. Moreover, in a strange example of life (or biography) imitating art, the similarities between Columbus's and Walton's situations are such that it seems highly likely that Irving drew upon Shelley's fictional explorer Walton for his biography of Columbus.

41 In her (fictional) preface to The Last Man (1826; ed. Anne McWhir [Peterborough ON: Broadview, 1996], pp. 1–5), Shelley and her companion (Percy Shelley) proceed, over the protests of their guides, to explore a hidden passage in an attempt to find the true cave of Sibyl. They do, in fact, encounter danger, but they also discover the cave and with it the Sibyline leaves. It is from these Sibylline leaves, an allusion to Coleridge's 1817 collection of poetry, that the author—according to the conceit of the preface—creates her novel. Thus, again Shelley suggests the inefficacy of cautionary tales, as the author and her companion ignore the warnings of their guides: "they told us that there were spectres, that the roof would fall in, that it was too narrow to admit us, that there was a deep hole within, filled with water, and we might be drowned" (p. 2). The preface, as an allegory of the imaginative process, also suggests just how fruitful such flights into the unknown can be, and the novel itself celebrates the domestic affections, even though they are incapable of preventing almost complete human annihilation.


43 Coleridge, "Kubla Khan, or, a Vision in a Dream," in Poetical Works, bk. 1, part 1, pp. 509–14, lines 36, 2.

44 Shelley, Journals, 2:543.