

Break on through to
the other side



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

After ten weeks of intently studying a wide range of some of literature's greatest authors and their representative works, one is hard pressed to single out only four of these transcendental pieces from such a distinguished list. However, four of these works, and their authors, truly stand out, subsequently requiring further analysis; William Wordsworth's "Prospectus" to *The Recluse*, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and *Biographia Literaria*, written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. While these four authors differ greatly in many aspects, including style and technique, one theme that seems to be prevalent in their works is that of Imagination, a grand power that has withstood the ages and lives on even today. Clearly, all of these exemplarily writers find the imagination to be a dominant influence in their work, an attitude substantiated succinctly by Coleridge, as he writes, "The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the primary agent of all human perception," a powerful quote that demonstrates the influence imagination holds for these authors. The word "primary" is especially important in the previous passage, as Coleridge clearly believes that imagination is the most important aspect in one's mind when the issue of clarity is at hand. He understands that a person's imagination allows the mind to be freed, to see past the tangible and enter through the "doors of perception." Likewise, Wordsworth understands Coleridge's point of view, lyrically writing "Into our Minds, into the Mind of Man- My haunt and the main region of my song." To Wordsworth, imagination resides in the subconscious of the mind, capable of emerging in order to provide clarity. Meanwhile, both Mary Shelley and Oscar Wilde also incorporate the idea of imagination into their novels, allowing the reader to find their own conclusion in terms of the role the mind's eye plays in their respective tales. In

Frankenstein, Shelley creates one of the most infamously creative and imaginative—albeit crazy—characters in modern literature with her protagonist, Victor, the genius behind Frankenstein the mythical monster. It is Victor's warped imagination that leads him to attempt the unheard of: To create and animate a being in the mold of Man, contradicting everything considered natural and holy. Upon conceiving his master plan, the eccentric scientist becomes convinced his is blessed, commenting, "I became myself capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter." He continues, imagining the adulation that will come about because of his epic discovery, growing ever more self-confident, as he says, "My imagination was too much exalted by my first success to permit me to doubt of my ability to give life to an animal as complex and wonderful as man." While the basic tenants of the idea of imagination are similar in the three works examined up to this point, the word itself has distinct meanings. Whereas imagination to Wordsworth and Coleridge is the ability to think outside of one's own mind in the hope of seeking clarity, Shelley, through Victor, portrays the idea of imagination as innovation, with revolutionary discovery as the cornerstone of the scientist's personal grandeur. Ironically, Shelley writes imagination with far less creativity than does either of the two poets, as the reader is easily able to follow the developing plot. It is quite clear that Victor's own imagination has formed a picture in which he is canonized for his creation, and this delusional vision leads to the ensuing difficulties he encounters. Wordsworth and Coleridge, unlike Shelley, more closely associate with Blake's quote, and it is easy to see that they are under his influence. For example, Coleridge finds imagination to be, in his words, "A repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM," a statement

that leads the reader to believe that the author concurs with Blake, in which they both believe with a well developed imagination, the possibility for lucid thought is endless. Likewise, Wordsworth seems to echo the thoughts of his esteemed colleagues, writing, " The human Soul of universal earth, Dreaming on things to come," alluding to the intuitive nature of imagination, and the minds' ability to see clearly when all is dark. Despite the fact that all four examined authors do use the theme of imagination, Oscar Wilde approaches the subject from a different angle than that of the other three. Wilde goes about explaining the imagination as a concrete physical sense; the ability to consciously determine what is going to take place. He explains this viewpoint as he writes, " Actual life was chaos, but there was something terribly logical in the imagination." The author continues, further clarifying his thoughts, " It was the imagination that set remorse to dog the feet of sin. It was the imagination that made each crime bear its misshapen brood." It seems as though Wilde views imagination as a negative, a view that contradicts the more upbeat perspective of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley. He looks at imagination as though there is no way to alter the state of thought, a far cry from the multitude of possibilities both poets believe imagination opens up. Instead of step through the door and examining all that is possible, Wilde stays in the physical world, unable to explore what is not present at first glance. Additionally, Shelley presents the multitude of possibilities that stem from an active imagination as immeasurable, a number only restricted by a lack of creativity. It is this belief that leads Victor to go above and beyond normal convention when crafting his deviant creation. The idea of imagination plays a large and vital role in the works of William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Mary Shelley, and Oscar

Wilde, although these well-known and well-respected authors choose to use the theme in diverse ways, allowing the topic to be shaped by their view on an unproven metaphysical subject. For Wordsworth and Coleridge, the notion of imagination is similar to the doors of perception that William Blake speaks of. To them, a vivid imagination allows one to experience more than just the tangible fruits of earth, as we are able to step through the “ doors” and into a world of untold possibilities. This powerful minds’ eye allows one to see more than would otherwise be possible in a corporal state, and enlightenment is one of the infinite possibilities. Shelley also sees imagination as a powerful force, but her interpretation is more of a material perspective, with the imagination able to will action. Victor, the main character of her novel, uses his unlimited imagination to create a being that would otherwise have been left to the Creator. However, because of his ability to think outside of the norm, he is able to apply his vision, how ever strange, and create what he has imagined. Despite the fact that the other three authors see imagination as a positive force able to bring clearer thoughts and visions, Wilde almost seems to view it as a negative, with too much being gleaned from the endless potential of the mind. To him, the imagination becomes sensory overload, a conduit of potential sin. Despite the difference in opinion of these highly esteemed authors, the theme of imagination is strong throughout all of their works. Whether they believe in the doors of perception or are frightened of the possibilities that lie beyond the physical realm, all four of these authors understand the strength and power that is held in the imagination of the mind.