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“No More Mr. Nice Gaius”:

*Battlestar Galactica*’s Baltar as the Byronic Post-“Modern Prometheus”

Conventional wisdom posits that the writers of the Romantic period had little interest in mining earlier artistic epochs--like the Classical era--for imitation (“Romanticism” LVIII), and that the movement itself can be viewed as a reaction against Neoclassicism. Yet interest in Classical Greece helped shape many writers of the period (Hebron). This melding of the modern with the ancient informs a trio of works from the era, all concerning the same mythic figure, a kind of rebel hero. This focus on Prometheus, pulling elements from versions of the myth by Hesiod, Aeschylus and Pausanias, can be found in Lord Byron’s poem “Prometheus,” Mary Shelley’s novel *Frankenstein* (subtitled *The Modern Prometheus*), and her husband Percy’s lyrical drama *Prometheus Unbound*. An evolutionary leap from Aeschylus’ mythic figure, Mary Shelley’s ‘Modern Prometheus’ has had a ripe “fecundity” (McQueen 125; Blais 67) of its own, spawning generations of works in a new medium: cinema--from the James Whale/Universal films of the 1930s to twenty-first century science-fiction pieces like *EX\_MACHINA* and *Westworld*. Running through the works, however, from the ancient (proleptically) through today, is that same rebel protagonist archetype, the Byronic Hero. Gaius Baltar, the flawed human scientist from Ronald D. Moore’s 2003-2009 television series *Battlestar Galactica*, is a kind of post-“Modern Prometheus,” a neo-Romantic Byronic Hero who can trace his literary evolution

back through Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, to the ancient myth of the life-giver/fire-bringer, as found in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*.

Before one can trace the Byronic Hero archetype through literature, a definition of the term might be helpful. The archetype has its roots in the poet and poetry of Lord Byron. Called "mad, bad, and dangerous to know" even by his lover Lady Caroline Lamb, Byron became as celebrated for his outsized personality as for his poetry, and after the publication of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, the two--the man and the collective protagonists of his works--became inextricably linked. With his financial debt and interpersonal controversies, Byron himself was viewed as a "rebel against conventional modes of behavior" (Fleming). Only a "powerful and charismatic" (Stein 4) personality could carry enough cultural cachet to overcome the stigma of such rebellion and scandal to rise through both the publishing and societal worlds. His characters were also filled with "ambition, aspiration" (Stein 1) and intelligence. One views these qualities as laudable, maybe enough to earn the title 'hero' alone. And they might have, if it wasn't for the other side of the characteristic coin. Fleming cites a veritable laundry list of less-than-positive attributes, including cunning, arrogant, depressive, traumatized, self-serving, and spiritually doubtful; he describes the Byronic hero as emotionally and intellectually tortured, dedicated to pursuit matters of justice over matters of legality, and given to self-destructive impulses. These aren't just not-quite-heroic--they are an "outright rejection of traditional heroic virtues and values" (Fleming). Lovell adds to this mix the "Byronic sense of sin and capacity for inner suffering" (160), and this concept of guilt and what causes it seems to have played a role in the poet's life as well. Scandals, both sexual and financial, dogged Byron, branding him so negatively that he left his native land at just age 28, never to return. This made Byron "a loner

and outcast” (Stein 2), and yet the archetype that carries his name has become anything but--a staple of nineteenth and twentieth century literature and pop culture. In fact, one could go so far as to say that the Byronic Hero has become the very life-blood of the a post-“Modern Prometheus” / “Modern Frankenstein” archetype. But what is the “pre-modern” myth? Who is this Prometheus?

There are two versions of the story of Prometheus. The most well-known is that of the “fire-bringer.” In this version, Prometheus, a second-generation Titan, tricks the all-powerful Zeus into accepting the inedible parts of animal sacrifice, while allowing man to keep the nourishing parts. Angered, Zeus then takes fire away from mankind. So begins an escalation of retribution: Prometheus steals fire from Olympus and returns it to man; Zeus metes out his punishments--he chains Prometheus to a rock in the Caucasus Mountains, where an eagle eats away his liver every day, and every night the liver grows back for a never-ending revenge; Zeus also punishes man with the first woman, Pandora, she of the jar of evils. In a second version of the myth, the motivation behind Prometheus’ pro-human acts is tacitly revealed: Prometheus had created man from clay, becoming the “life-giver.”

An early major Promethean work is the *Theogony* by Hesiod. In a one hundred and ten-line section (Hesiod, lines 507-617), the eighth century B.C.E. Greek poet writes of “clever Prometheus, full of various wiles” (*Theogony* 507-543), and his tricking of Zeus, and stealing fire. Hesiod also introduces Zeus’ retribution using “a long winged eagle, which used to eat his immortal liver” (507-543), the prophesied rescue by Heracles, as well as the creation of “woman to be an evil to mortal men” (590-612). In another of Hesiod’s poems, *Works and Days*, he adds Pandora’s jar of “countless plagues” (Hesiod, *Works* 90-105); more importantly, Hesiod here

includes Zeus' hiding of fire from man after the trick, prompting Prometheus' theft of fire (42-53). Thus, some two and a half millennia before Mary Shelley, one of the first of her and her Romantic brethren's Promethean influences is created.

Three centuries later, arguably the most famous of the purely Promethean works, the *Promethia*, a trilogy of plays by Aeschylus (*Prometheus Bound*, *Prometheus Unbound*, and *Prometheus the Fire-Bringer*) "reimagines" (Wiki) the work of Hesiod. The only complete work of the trilogy, *Prometheus Bound*, depicts the Titan already being punished in "the distant boundary of the earth" (Aeschylus location 86), and thus focuses the story on the repercussion of the theft of fire. Leaving out both the preceding trickery and the female plague to follow, Aeschylus' Prometheus acts out of pity for man, a marked contrast to Hesiod's "trickster figure" (Hustis 847). Instead, *Prometheus Bound* offers more of Prometheus' kindness toward man: it is the Titan who provides man with all arts (Aeschylus 312). Without the Pandora/woman punishment of man, Aeschylus makes Prometheus a more purely sympathetic character. In keeping with that, he also delivers a prophecy that one day "shall spring a dauntless warrior renowned in archery, who shall set [Prometheus] free from these toils" (477). This foreshadowing of a future rescue by Heracles provides hope, but the play itself ends with the coming storm of Zeus.

That ending of hope and "hurricanes" (Aeschylus 571) is fitting for a play that will be followed by two sequels. Unfortunately, those plays survive in only some pieces and a bit. The first sequel, *Prometheus Unbound*, as its title suggests, recounts the Titan's rescue, and slaying of the eagle by Heracles. While *Prometheus Unbound* survives in a few pieces, the final play *Prometheus the Fire-Bringer* is survived by only a single line (Wiki). Because of Prometheus'

statement in the first play that only he can reveal to Zeus a way to “escape” (Aeschylus 498) a downfall, it is thought that *Prometheus the Fire-Bringer* contains at least a final confrontation between Prometheus and Zeus, if not an outright reconciliation. By the end of the complete *Promethia*, then, the suffering Prometheus will have escaped, confronted and defeated his tormentor. Thus, Aeschylus’ trilogy, over two thousand years before Shelley’s “Modern Prometheus,” provides a second major influence for the Promethean literary tradition.

The third major influential Promethean work--and the first of a series of evolutionary transformations--comes from second century B.C.E. traveler and geographer Pausanias in his *Description of Greece*. In the tenth and final book of his series of historical and cultural overviews, he makes mention of an element of the Promethean mythos that had been absent in both Hesiod and Aeschylus. Here, Prometheus is less fire-bringer than life-giver: “the whole race of mankind was fashioned by Prometheus” (Pausanias 10.4.4). This complicates the mythos by adding an element of “parenting” (Kakoudaki, “Artificial” 44) and responsibility. This life-giver element is crucial for what directions Mary Shelley’s “Modern Prometheus” will go.

First, however, the Byronic Hero archetype must somehow demonstrate itself, albeit proleptically, in these first major works of the Promethean mythos. In Hesiod’s *Theogony*, Prometheus is described as “ready-witted,” as well as “wily ... and cunning.” These descriptors all speak to the Titan’s intelligence, in both positive and negative connotations. His actions, too, reflect Byronic Heroism: “Prometheus matched himself in wit with the almighty son of Cronus;” it would take the Byronic attribute of arrogance to even attempt to trick Zeus. Of course, he doesn’t succeed and suffers the “cruel chains, and ... a shaft through his middle.” Here, the archetypal emotional and intellectual torture is physicalized. And thus, Hesiod’s version of

Prometheus carries within him the traits of a Byronic Hero (Hesiod, *Theogony* 507-43, 545-7, 507-45, 507-43).

Aeschylus' Prometheus is no less Byronic. Chained to the rock, the Titan laments, "What treatment I, a god, am enduring at the hand of the gods" (Aeschylus 139). This speaks to both his arrogance (as a god) and his suffering. As with Hesiod's, Aeschylus' fire-bringer undergoes the "present suffering" (191) as a physical manifestation of the Byronic emotional torture. In this version, Prometheus shows "compassion for mortals ... [only to be] thus coerced to order" (195). In this, his pursuit of kindness is a "strong affection" (Fleming) for mankind; his "rebellion ... overtly inspired by pity" (Hustis 847) becomes, in this context, a pursuit of justice, even against the law of Zeus. Also shown here is what can be seen as an aspiration to become an inspiration for humans to learn from his act--to follow his example of compassion; of course, in even making the statement, the Titan is more than a little-self serving. This mixture of self-service and arrogance can be found in his statement, "All arts among the human race are from Prometheus" (Aeschylus 312). Taking credit for all human arts, he refers to himself in the third person. This larger-than-life arrogance shows that Aeschylus endows his fire-bringer with a bit of the Byronic.

And what of Pausanias' Prometheus? The case for Byronic Herosim is more difficult here as Pausanias provides no adjectives nor descriptors for his version of the Titan, and his *Description of Greece* contains but one act: "the whole race of mankind was fashioned by Prometheus" (Pausanias 10.4.4). The act demonstrates that Prometheus is powerful; for Prometheus to create a new race, one might also intuit intelligence. With "aspiration" as an additional Byronic trait, the act of creation of an entire race is an attempt to become a god, a

primordial god, one that creates not just another of *his* kind, but an entirely *new* kind. In this way, not only do Byronic traits appear in Pausanias' *Description*, but the archetype now contains a trait that will become indelible in the fire-bringer/life-giver characters of to come.

As the nineteenth century began, the writers of the Romantic period consumed the works of Ancient Greece, inspiring them to create works of their own. Three of the period's most famous writers wrote works using as their model and (sub-)title character, Prometheus; and the composition of these three occurred contemporaneously, all within a four-year period. Lord Byron penned his poem "Prometheus" in 1816, while Mary Shelley created her novel *Frankenstein (or The Modern Prometheus)* during that same year and the one that followed; her husband Percy Shelley composed his lyrical play *Prometheus Unbound* between 1818 and 1819. Not only did they take their subject matter from the same Promethean mythos, but it appears they were all influenced by Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*.

According to Ian Dennis in his book, *Lord Byron and the History of Desire*, Byron was "almost obsessively familiar" (96) with the play by Aeschylus; and the influence shows in what Byron chooses to exclude from, and include in, his poem. Byron leaves out Pandora and the punishment of mankind, instead singling out the Titan's "silent suffering" and "torture" (Byron, "Prometheus" lines 6, 56). Byron makes a point of declaring that Prometheus has "strengthen[ed] Man with his own mind" (24). This is not just the gift of fire, but also what Aeschylus calls the "many arts" (Aeschylus 193) provided by Prometheus. Despite Hesiod's "appearance in Percy Shelley's reading lists for 1815" (Kakoudaki, "Artificial" 51), Percy Shelley explicitly references Aeschylus' sequel in the Preface to his own *Prometheus Unbound*, saying he used Aeschylus as his model (P. Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound* position 16560). Shelley's use of the title of

Aeschylus' second play in his *Promethia* trilogy might seem to make his connection to Aeschylus the strongest of the three writers. However, the reference to Aeschylus in the Preface is a double-edged allusion: Yes, Aeschylus is a model, but no, Shelley is not going to attempt the "catastrophe" (16493) of recreating the lost epic drama. Thus, Shelley's direct link to Aeschylus is purely on the surface. What is interesting is that his composition took place *after* those of his friend and wife, two works more greatly indebted to Aeschylus. In this context then, Percy Shelley's work actually acts as more of a Promethean 'course correction' back to Aeschylus after the modernizing of the story in his wife's novel, in which the Promethean character is not "Prometheus" but "Victor Frankenstein," no longer a Titan with foresight, but a mortal, a man, a student scientist.

Though it might appear at first blush to be solely Pausanias' life-giver whom Mary Shelley references, two details belie this, and reveal the deeper Aeschylean influence. At the crucial moment of the Being's animation, Shelley uses the phrase "spark of being" (M. Shelley 59), a phrase that bears striking resemblance to "the Promethean spark, / The lightning of my being" (Byron, *Manfred* 1.1.159-160) from Lord Byron's *Manfred*, which was also written concurrently with Shelley's novel. This link to lightning relates to the second belying detail: the subtitle of Shelley's novel is not solely her invention, but rather a reference to Immanuel Kant's 1755 essay about Benjamin Franklin, whose experiments with lightning and electricity were well-known, and reason enough for Kant to warn against attempts by mankind to manipulate Nature (Stanford). As lightning brings fire from the sky, Shelley's influence by Aeschylus' fire-bringer is made all the clearer.



The key to Aeschylus' Prometheus is suffering: an eagle picks away at Prometheus' torso every day; the sentence is eternal since the immortal Titan's liver regrows every night; and Prometheus is chained to the rock, unable to defend himself against that eagle. Shelley, too, has her "guilt-ridden" (Goldberg 33; Bowerback 419) "Modern Prometheus" suffer psychological pain in metaphorical shackles. During Justine's trial, Frankenstein recounts, "I suffered living torture" (M. Shelley 78). His guilt over creating the Being who had murdered William is undying. And after Justine's execution, Victor remembers, "Guilt ... hurried me away to a hell of intense tortures" (85). Frankenstein may have been hurried to his personal hell, but what is keeping him there? Shelley gives her protagonist the perfect constraint metaphor: as he works to create a companion for the Being, Frankenstein recalls, "I dared to shake off my chains ... but the iron had eaten into my flesh, and I sank again" (140). Here, Shelley's Frankenstein has become the Aeschylean Prometheus, shackled and chained.

As noted earlier, however, Mary Shelley's "Modern Prometheus" is not one taken only from Aeschylus; Pausanias' life-giver version of the myth plays a large role as well. After the traumatizing death of Frankenstein's mother, he attempts to overcome death--which he calls "the most irreparable evil" (M. Shelley 49)--only to be overcome himself by his "too much exalted" (57) imagination. This over-reaching ambition compels him to try to repair what is irreparable, and if that is possible, Frankenstein foresees, "A new species would bless me as its creator and source" (57). It's a godlike and Byronic ambition, and this might have happened had he not abandoned the Being he created. The "direct moral" (P. Shelley, "Review") of the novel posits that one can be made evil by wicked treatment. Because of the abandonment, Frankenstein is not punished by a superior God, but rather by both his own guilt, and his creation, who decides to

wage war “against him who formed [the Being]” (M. Shelley 121). This departure from, and evolution of, the Aeschylean character dominates any discussion of the Promethean aspects of the novel as it brings to the fore questions of a creator’s duty to what has been created, and the punishment of that creator when that duty isn’t fulfilled.

It is on this metaphorical rock of punishment that one first discovers elements of the Byronic Hero in the Romantic Era Promethei of both Byron and Percy Shelley. Byron’s undergoes torture, of course, a sentence for his “Godlike crime” (Byron, “Prometheus” line 35) of kindness, for putting justice above legality; he is punished for breaking Zeus’ law. His silent refusal “not to appease” (30) Zeus becomes a rebellion against conventional behavior; one would naturally be expected to bend to Zeus’ will, but Byron’s Prometheus refuses. It comes at a cost, however: a “suffocating sense of woe” (10). This depressive emotional trait is part of the stereotypical brooding Byronic Hero, a depression shared by Percy Shelley’s *Unbound Prometheus*. In this play, the fire-bringer explains to Earth, “Obscurely through my brain, like shadows dim, / Sweep awful thought, rapid and thick” (P. Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound* 16727). Dark and thick, these depressive thoughts trouble him. Adding to this internal turmoil is a Byronic self-destructive streak: Prometheus laughs at the Furies who have been sent to torment him, saying, “Pour forth the cup of pain” (17047). He makes no attempt to lessen his own suffering; in this case, the blatant calling for further punishment breaks the expected behavior of self-preservation, and represents a rebellion against convention. In the preface to the play, Shelley writes that Prometheus displays a “firm and patient opposition to omnipotent force” (16500); Zeus is the force that sets the law, and Prometheus is willing to oppose it for the sake of mankind, for justice. Thus, these two protagonists from Lord Byron and Percy Shelley display

some of the qualities found in Byronic heroes; however, in the character of Victor Frankenstein, Mary Shelley can be said to out-Byron Byron.

After spending a summer at Lake Geneva with Lord Byron and Percy Shelley, Mary Shelley began work on what would become *Frankenstein*. Such an interaction is sure to have had an impression on an eighteen year-old writer. If the Byronic Hero can be found in her later novels (Lovell), then Victor Frankenstein becomes a rough draft for these characters.

“Self-taught” (M. Shelley 46) but “deeply smitten with the thirst for knowledge” (43), Shelley’s Prometheus, Victor Frankenstein, studies at the university until he “procure[s] ... great esteem and admiration” (55). Arrogant enough to teach himself science, Frankenstein sees the university as a path to his ambitions of admiration. While finding the knowledge he seeks, it is still in a field that puts him at odds with the academic establishment, and he has “contempt for the uses of modern natural philosophy” (51). This Byronic rebellion against conventional thought brings him back into line with the two other Romantic/Promethean protagonists, with whom he also shares a brooding and depressive emotional proclivity. He admits to Walton of being “sullen” (45) even before his mother’s death which “taint[s his] mind, and changed ... into gloomy and narrow reflections upon self” (45). This response to trauma not only reveals his depression but his self-involvement--which Shelley further highlights when Frankenstein says that not even the condemned Justine could feel his own “deep and bitter agony” (85)--or what Blais calls a “narcissistic experience” (77), and Christie a “radical narcissism” (280). This extension of depression into narcissism is yet another example of Shelley’s evolution of the Promethean character, maintaining characteristic links to the past mythos while adding new aspects to the portrayal.

Other Byronic additions to Frankenstein's psychological make-up are the guilt he feels over the repercussions of his creation and the remorse he feels for rejecting the role of responsible creator. As noted before, following the execution of Justine, Frankenstein admits to being "seized by remorse and the sense of guilt, which hurried [him] away to a hell of intense tortures" (M. Shelley 85). He feels regret and guilt, and they bring a kind of Promethean punishment; still, the remorse and guilt is self-centered. It's not until he comes face-to-face with his creation, and not merely the ramifications of it, that he feels "what the duties of a creator towards his creature were, and that [he] ought to render [the Being] happy before [he] complained of [the Being's] wickedness" (94). At last, he feels guilt over what he himself has done, not just what his creation has done, thus linking Frankenstein to Pausanias' life-giver version of the myth. Inextricably tied to this version are Frankenstein's "wrong-headed ambition" (Goss and Riquelme 434), and godlike aspirations of creating a new race (M. Shelley 57), and thus "pioneer[ing] a new way, explor[ing] unknown powers, and unfold[ing] to the world the deepest mysteries of creation" (53). Frankenstein's ambitious goal is the aspirational one of a life-giver, but he also plays the role of Aeschylean fire-bringer, as he speaks of the "spark which [he] so negligently bestowed" (93). This combination of the two Promethean mythos earns the Byronic Frankenstein Shelley's moniker of the "Modern Prometheus."

Mary Shelley heaps upon her protagonist punishment as harsh as that put upon the classical Prometheus of myth, only transcribing the physical Promethean suffering to the more Byronic emotional torment. In what Hustis calls "mental damnation" (63), Frankenstein finds himself miserable and alone. And just as the mythic figure is alone, so too is the Byronic Hero a loner, a self-imposed outcast. Frankenstein reveals that "company was irksome" (M. Shelley

138), so much so that he sets himself apart “in some obscure nook in the northern highlands of Scotland” (139). Alone, Frankenstein becomes Stein’s loner (Stein 2), but it’s not just the Byronic isolation that is key here. Frankenstein not only takes “refuge in Nature” (Blais 95), but also “at the end of the earth” (35), just as Aeschylus’ Prometheus is chained at the edge of the earth. Thus, from the “fragments of [Shelley’s] reading as well as her experience” (McWhir)--her reading of myth and her exposure to Byron--Shelley crafts Frankenstein as a perfect hybrid of Prometheus and the Byronic Hero.

This synthesis of the two archetypes have taken on an evolution of its own, particularly in the medium of film, becoming a Frankenstein “cinemyth” (Picart qtd. in Friedman and Kavey 147). Colin Clive’s cry as Victor Frankenstein, “It’s alive, it’s ALIVE!” (Whale, *Frankenstein* 00:22:25), in James Whale’s 1931 film, can be seen as more than merely a statement about the Creature in that film, but as representing the cinemyth itself. And that cinemyth might have lived and died with the one film had it not been for Whale’s sequel four years later: *Bride of Frankenstein*, widely lauded as “one of those rare sequels that is infinitely superior to its source” (Schickel). In some ways, this second film is more closely related to Shelley’s text than the first film. Containing not only one of the major plot points ignored by many Frankenstein films--the demand for, and the creation then destruction of, a female companion for the Being--this film also uses an introductory device which takes the viewer back to the genesis of the novel, a scene in which Mary Shelley (played by Elsa Lanchester, who also played the Nefertiti-coiffed Bride) discusses the morality of her novel and its hero with Byron and her husband (Whale, *Bride of Frankenstein* 00:02:09). Also, while the original film omits the source of the live-giving energy, the sequel explicitly depicts the use of kites in a storm to draw the lightning--a nod to Benjamin

Franklin, and thus a nested reference to Kant's essay "The Modern Prometheus" and thus Shelley's subtitle of her novel). With the popular and critical success of these first two films, it's no surprise that the cinemyth--the novel's "most enduring legac[y]" (London 257)--has flourished from the early 1930s to the present day.

The new century's contributions to the cinemyth contains such new Prometheus figures (and Byronic Heroes) as Nathan Bateman from 2015's *EX\_MACHINA* and Robert Ford from 2016's *Westworld*. Arguably, however, there is no better example of the newest evolutionary step in the Promethean/Byronic archetype than that from the Ronald D. Moore 2003-2009 science-fiction television series *Battlestar Galactica*, a series that opens with a line of dialogue that feels like a conscious callout to Whale's films of the 1930s: "Are you alive?" ("Pilot" 00:03:33). If Aeschylus "reimagines" (Wiki) Hesiod for his *Promethia*, and Mary Shelley--as a literary analog for her Victor Frankenstein--creates her novel from bits and pieces of her reading and life, then Moore uses aspects from the original Glen A. Larson series of the same name from the 1970s, along with concepts like Capek's "robot" (Chocholous location 141) and Asimov's "Frankenstein Complex" (qtd. in Bartneck 97; McCauley) for his own "reimagined" (Jowett 64; Kakoudaki, "Existential" 179) series. In this "new incarnation" (Seaman 260) of the series, it's explicit that the Cylons were "created by man. They were created to make life easier on the twelve colonies" ("Pilot" 00:00:26), or to do "the work of a drudge" (Forcier 9) in Capek's native Czech. Asimov's theorem posits that these robots would resemble humans, then would attempt to kill their now inferior human creators (Bartneck 97). Thus, instead of Cylons in the form of mechanical "walking chrome toasters" (McRae 208) of the original series, Moore presents "humanoid forms [that] now look and feel so human that they can blend into human

society” (Kakoudaki, “Existential” 197). And most importantly, rather than the laughable straw-man villain of the original series, Count Baltar, Moore develops a more Promethean and Byronic figure in his Gaius Baltar.

From a Promethean perspective, Moore’s Baltar may diverge from Frankenstein in that the former is a Hesiodian fire-bringer, rather than the latter’s primarily life-giver from Pausanias; in other aspects, however, the Promethean parallels are striking. Like Hesiod’s trickster Prometheus, Baltar is intelligent, famous for his knowledge. In giving the Cylons access to the Colonial defense mainframe, Baltar gives these creations knowledge and--symbolically--nuclear fire; later, he actually hands over nuclear fire (in the form of an actual warhead) to the Cylon Gina (“Epiphanies” 00:42:50). Baltar tricks the human leadership into believing he has developed a Cylon detector, and later will be imprisoned and tortured by his captors--both human (“Taking a Break from Your Troubles”) and Cylon (“A Measure of Salvation”)--paralleling Prometheus’ tricking and then torture by Zeus. Interestingly, both societies play the Zeus role in sending a plague to the other: the humans unwittingly release an actual biological scourge on the Cylons (“A Measure of Salvation”), while the Cylons cause a metaphorical epidemic in the human paranoia over who among them might be a Cylon. In this way, Baltar becomes even more Promethean than Shelley’s “Modern Prometheus.”

The most important Baltar/Frankenstein parallels, however, come in terms of their shared Byronic traits. Just as Frankenstein rebels against the scientific limitations of his day, so too does Baltar, who wants to remove, ironically, the ban on Artificial Intelligence research (“Pilot” 00:19:52). Baltar also rejects the traditional heroic value of loyalty; since “he does not belong to either group” (Wimpler 166), Baltar bemoans his state, “I could be a Cylon. I would stop being

a traitor to one set of people, and a hero to another. And have a place to belong” (“The Passage” 00:23:30). He continues to fluctuate back and forth between human and Cylon support. Baltar may not aspire to create a new species and become a god, but he comes to believe that he is “an instrument of God” (“The Hand of God” 00:41:46). Even the consideration of a singular God separates Baltar from the polytheistic human society. And just as Frankenstein’s “monomaniacal pursuit of knowledge ... removes [him] increasingly from a compassionate society” (Goldberg 35), Baltar’s brilliance, questionable loyalty, and egocentric sense of a higher purpose, all make him “an isolated figure, set apart from or even against the human community” (Jowett 75). This “other”-ness creates an emotional remove from the rest of humanity. This disconnect is further revealed in actor James Callis’ performance of the Baltar character, as Jowett notes, “His accent connotes privilege, while its Britishness emphasizes his isolation” (66). This speech pattern is not natural, however; as Baltar reveals in the third-season episode “Dirty Hands,” he had spent much of his childhood trying “to change the way he speaks” (00:25:45), making this isolation a Byronically self-imposed outcast state. Moore layers upon this interpersonal isolation a more physical one: while Aeschylus’ Prometheus may be placed at the end of the earth, and Frankenstein seeks refuge first in the Scottish Highlands then the top of the world at the North Pole, Moore places Baltar in an even further physical remove--not on earth or even a planet, but on “homeless ships in deep space” (Blais 154). Not only does this physical isolation set him apart from the others, but symbolically it puts him in a world of his own, where Byronic self-interest is necessary; like the “fundamentally self-serving dimension of Victor[ Frankenstein]’s character (73), Baltar’s “extraordinary capacity for self-preservation” (“Torn” 00:16:45) and his “well-honed sense of self-preservation” (“A Disquiet Follows My Soul”

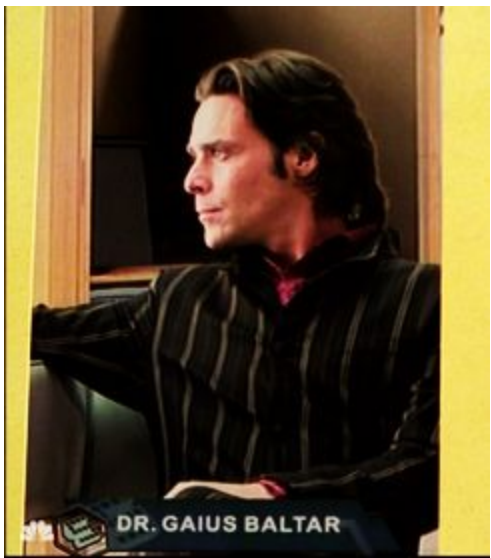
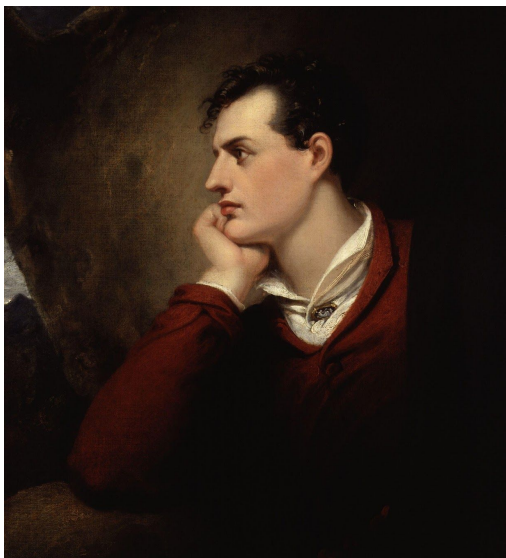


00:30:10) fit well in this ego-centric isolation. Welcome in neither community, isolated by intellect, accent, and location, Baltar uses a Byronic self-serving nature to cope.

Despite his isolation, “intelligent and arrogant” (Chocholous 713) Baltar has a disarming charisma, a Byronic trait missing from Frankenstein. This charming wit allows him to seduce reporters (“Colonial Day”), win a presidential election (“Lay Down Your Burdens”), and even become a religious cult figure (“He That Believeth in Me”). This last role is an example of what Bissonette calls “the battle between religion and science” (113) in Shelley’s novel, in which Frankenstein, “the former skeptic and scientist who had claimed early in the novel that he was immune to supernatural terrors soon became a man terrified of shadows and sounds” (Kakoudaki, “Artificial” 33). It is here, in *Battlestar Galactica*, as Baltar moves from Byronic spiritual doubt to a quasi-religious conversion, that the character’s deeper Promethean links are revealed. In the fourth season episode “Sometimes a Great Notion,” he interrupts a religious service and tells the human polytheistic worshippers, “We want justice, not these stupid gods ... But whom are you serving? ... Would you be serving Zeus? Apparently. The King of Gods, who also happened to be--let me tell you--a serial rapist” (00:16:15). If his dedication to the cause of justice (over the legality of religious worship) is not enough to cement Baltar’s Promethean/Byronic *bona fides*, then his open defiance of Zeus should.

It is not just Baltar’s words that make him Byronic; his very appearance does, as well, demonstrating a kind of Byron-like elaborate dress and style (Fleming). Over the course of the series, Baltar calls attention to his jacket “made of the finest Caprican cloth” (“Water” 00:28:05) and his cigarettes with “some of the finest fumarello leaf on Caprica” (“Bastille Day” 00:31:36); even when he is accused of treason, he argues that the man in the surveillance photo cannot be

him because he'd "never wear a shirt like that" ("Six Degrees of Separation" 00:25:32). Style is just another way for Baltar to set himself above others. His introduction into the series provides a perfect example of this. Knowing that he is about to appear on television, Baltar presents himself first in profile ("Pilot" 00:18:58) before turning to the camera dramatically for the interview. Interestingly, his pose (see fig. 1) is very reminiscent of the painting of Byron by Richard Westall from 1813 (see fig. 2).

	
Fig. 1	Fig. 2
Introduction of Baltar (screen capture from <i>Battlestar Galactica</i> , pilot episode)	Portrait of Lord Byron by Richard Westall (National Portrait Gallery)

In Lovell's exploration of Byronic Heroes in the novels of Mary Shelley, he notes that "those [characters] modelled on Byron are regularly brunettes ... [with] all hav[ing] 'dark' eyes ... all, of course, creatures of vigorous male beauty" (165). Shelley limits the description of Frankenstein to "European" (M. Shelley 34) with "fine and lovely eyes" (178), not exactly Byronic; on the other hand, Baltar is a brunette, brown-eyed, handsome man; clean-shaven at the beginning, but

by the end sporting longer hair and vaguely Christ-like facial hair. As he has for the more behavioral Byronic traits, Baltar certainly fits this Byronic visual blueprint as well.

Additionally, like Frankenstein, Baltar demonstrates a Byronic level of guilt, from the show's pilot episode (saying "What have I done?" [00:43:45]) through a final-season confession to President Roslin. Fearing that he may be mortally injured with a wound in his side, Baltar admits:

Truth is. I was harboring the most awful, desperate guilt. A heavy, dark, unimaginable, soul-breaking guilt...I gave the access codes to the Cylons. They wiped out most of humanity. Of course, I didn't know that's what I was doing at the time exactly, but that's what I did. ... I blamed myself. I blamed myself. ("The Hub" 00:27:45)

This confession is as unsuccessful as when "Victor tries to confess [to his father] his guilt" (Bowerback 420); while Victor's father dismisses the confession, Roslin initially responds by removing Baltar's bandage, letting his side wound bleed, before she reconsiders and saves him. This torn then repaired wound to Baltar's side creates another Promethean link, but it is the emotional torment that connects him to Frankenstein and the Byronic archetype. In the series' first season, Baltar's vision of the "Head-Six" represents "a manifestation of Baltar's subconscious, that essentially he was driven mad by the guilt of what he had done, by participating in the genocide of his entire people" ("Angels" YouTube 00:02:34), something that he fears is his "psychosis" ("Home [Part Two]" 00:08:38) or his being "nuts" (00:19:24). This rational fear of possible insanity by a brilliant but "depressed" (Wimmler 124) man is only made worse by his duties and responsibilities as president. The mental torment of the Cylon occupation

leads to a period of “slip[ping] further and further down into this well of self-hatred and self-loathing” (“Exodus [Part One]” 00:14:31), during which he develops an addiction to pills, introduced in “Lay Down Your Burdens” at the end of season two, and revisited in season three’s “Collaborators.” This addiction becomes a prime example of the Byronic proclivity to substance abuse and self-destructive behavior (Fleming); the addiction also pushes Baltar’s Byronic traits beyond even those of Frankenstein’s.

While Stein is justified in saying that the Byronic Hero should not serve as a role model (3), this kind of character is not inherently wicked or evil. *Battlestar Galactica*’s “Gaius Baltar is a brilliant, gifted human being ... he's made a sport out of mendacity and deception. He was narcissistic, self-centered, feckless, and vain” (“The Son Also Rises” 00:24:30): flawed, absolutely; but also more than willing to admit those flaws (“Pilot” 00:32:27) and to ask for forgiveness (“He That Believeth in Me” 00:37:00). Baltar, an outcast and loner, still desires to be a hero, to have a home, and because of this becomes sympathetic. Despite his culpability in the near-genocide of his entire race, because he doesn’t intend on this consequence, since he doesn’t abandon his creation (or in his case, the group he assists), he can be viewed as more sympathetic than Frankenstein. And it is exactly this idea of the current iteration of the mythos moving beyond the past, that becomes the touchstone metaphor for this Promethean/Byronic Hero. Baltar represents a better hybrid of the two archetypes in that his connections to both are more refined and distilled, compared to Frankenstein’s. In literature as in life, there will continue to be growth and evolution; in other words, there is no perfectly closed feedback loop.

Mary Shelley admits this herself in the 1831 introduction to her novel:

Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos; the materials must, in the first place, be afforded: it can give form to dark, shapeless substances, but cannot bring into being the substance itself. (M. Shelley 23)

Nothing is created of nothing. There are building blocks for all constructions. Shelley cannibalized her own readings and experiences to create *Frankenstein*. In much the same manner, Ronald D. Moore, in the creation of his version of the *Battlestar Galactica* series, decided to “destroy the old show” (“Pilot” commentary 01:35:29). By each artist’s admission, a great debt is owed by the current work to the works of the past. In this way, “no one original story exists; rather, hybrid stories stray from the original author and the idea of unitary origins” (Salotto 198). If the singular identity of the story disappears, then only the throughline, the evolutionary progression, remains. What exists as Baltar really is a new evolutionary version of *Frankenstein*, which even before that had been Prometheus.

Within the universe of *Battlestar Galactica*, one of the major religious readings comes from the Book of Pythia: “All this has happened before, and all this will happen again” (“The Hand of God”). In and of itself, the statement wonderfully encapsulates the ideas of cycles and repetitions: Prometheus repeated as *Frankenstein*, *Frankenstein* as Baltar. But just as Salotto finds metanarrativity as a trope in Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (198), an interesting bit of intertextuality plays out in this quote from *Battlestar Galactica*. This line from the fictional Book of Pythia is a slightly altered restatement of the opening line from Walt Disney’s animated film *Peter Pan*: “All this has happened before and it will all happen again” (*Peter Pan* 00:02:19). Of course, neither version of the line appears in the source text by James M. Barrie. Thus, this

statement ostensibly about cycles and revolutions becomes more a statement about transformations and evolutions.

In evolution, when a dramatic environmental change occurs, this can become an evolutionary “tipping point,” at which a transformational alteration takes place. Within the Promethean/Byronic evolutionary timeline, such cataclysmic events can be seen immediately before the appearance of both *Frankenstein* and *Baltar*. Goss and Riquelme note that *Frankenstein* appears “in the wake of the French Revolution” (435), and Christie admits that political readings of the novel focus on that event (241); in such readings, the Being represents the labor class or the class struggle. Both Blais and Jowett makes explicit connections between *Battlestar Galactica* and September 11 (117 and 74, respectively) and the fear of terrorists living unnoticed among the populace. In the commentary for the DVD of the pilot episode, Moore notes, “To watch the end of the world take place in a post-9/11 world has a very different resonance ... We’ve all gone through a day, an event, a trauma where ... everything changes” (“Pilot” commentary 00:29:30), and more succinctly of his series and 9/11, “It’s about this point in time” (“Pilot” commentary 00:43:35). Interestingly, as if to show the connection between his show and its Romantic-era Promethean predecessors, Moore also reveals in the podcast commentary for the series finale that he and the writing staff included story ideas they “liked” (“Daybreak” podcast commentary 00:22:15) including the French Revolution and Lucifer (a character Percy Shelley compared to Prometheus in the preface to his *Prometheus Unbound* [location 16500]).

If “all this has happened before, and all this will happen again,” when will the next “again” be? No one can be certain, but perhaps hindsight can help inform foresight. When the

next historical upheaval takes place, causing people to change the way they look at a group that has captured the public imagination (the way the underclass did in the aftermath of the French Revolution, and how “terrorists among us” have since 9/11), then there will be a new Promethean tale to tell, with a Byronic Hero referenced as a neo-Frankenstein or a “Modern Baltar.”

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