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CODE SUJET : EHP 8  
SUJET (JURY)  
SUJET CANDIDAT N°

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*. London, 1818.

Letter 1

St. Petersburg, Dec. 11th, 17—

To Mrs. Saville, England,

5 You will rejoice to hear that no disaster has accompanied the commencement of an enterprise which you have regarded with such evil forebodings. I arrived here yesterday, and my first task is to assure my dear sister of my welfare and increasing confidence in the success of my undertaking.

10 I am already far north of London, and as I walk in the streets of Petersburg, I feel a cold northern breeze play upon my cheeks, which braces my nerves and fills me with delight. Do you understand this feeling? This breeze, which has travelled from the regions towards which I am advancing, gives me a foretaste of those icy climes. Inspired by this wind of promise, my daydreams become more fervent and vivid. I try in vain to be persuaded that the pole is  
15 the seat of frost and desolation; it ever presents itself to my imagination as the region of beauty and delight. There, Margaret, the sun is forever visible, its broad disk just skirting the horizon and diffusing a perpetual splendour. There—for with your leave, my sister, I will put some trust in preceding navigators—there, snow and frost are banished; and, sailing over a calm sea, we may be wafted to a land surpassing in wonders and in beauty every region  
20 hitherto discovered on the habitable globe. Its productions and features may be without example, as the phenomena of the heavenly bodies undoubtedly are in those undiscovered solitudes. What may not be expected in a country of eternal light? I may there discover the wondrous power which attracts the needle and may regulate a thousand celestial observations that require only this voyage to render their seeming eccentricities consistent forever. I shall  
25 satiate my ardent curiosity with the sight of a part of the world never before visited, and may tread a land never before imprinted by the foot of man. These are my enticements, and they are sufficient to conquer all fear of danger or death and to induce me to commence this laborious voyage with the joy a child feels when he embarks in a little boat, with his holiday mates, on an expedition of discovery up his native river. But supposing all these conjectures to be false, you cannot contest 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  
30 at present so many months are requisite; or by ascertaining the secret of the magnet, which, if at all possible, can only be effected by an undertaking such as mine.

35 These reflections have dispelled the agitation with which I began my letter, and I feel my heart glow with an enthusiasm which elevates me to heaven, for nothing contributes so much to tranquillize the mind as a steady purpose—a point on which the soul may fix its intellectual eye. This expedition has been the favourite dream of my early years. I have 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. You may remember that a  
40 history of all the voyages made for purposes of discovery composed the whole of our good Uncle Thomas' library. My education was neglected, yet I was passionately fond of reading. These volumes were my study day and night, and my familiarity with them increased that

regret which I had felt, as a child, on learning that my father's dying injunction had forbidden my uncle to allow me to embark in a seafaring life.

45 These visions faded when I perused, for the first time, those poets whose effusions entranced my soul and lifted it to heaven. I also became a poet and for one year lived in a paradise of my own creation; I imagined that I also might obtain a niche in the temple where the names of Homer and Shakespeare are consecrated. You are well acquainted with my failure and how heavily I bore the disappointment. But just at that time I inherited the fortune of my cousin,  
50 and my thoughts were turned into the channel of their earlier bent.

Six years have passed since I resolved on my present undertaking. I can, even now, remember the hour from which I dedicated myself to this great enterprise. I commenced by inuring my body to hardship. I accompanied the whale-fishers on several expeditions to the North Sea; I voluntarily endured cold, famine, thirst, and want of sleep; I often worked harder than the  
55 common sailors during the day and devoted my nights to the study of mathematics, the theory of medicine, and those branches of physical science from which a naval adventurer might derive the greatest practical advantage. Twice I actually hired myself as an under-mate in a Greenland whaler, and acquitted myself to admiration. I must own I felt a little proud when my captain offered me the second dignity in the vessel and entreated me to remain with the  
60 greatest earnestness, so valuable did he consider my services. And now, dear Margaret, do I not deserve to accomplish some great purpose? My life might have been passed in ease and luxury, but I preferred glory to every enticement that wealth placed in my path. Oh, that some encouraging voice would answer in the affirmative! My courage and my resolution is firm; but my hopes fluctuate, and my spirits are often depressed. I am about to proceed on a long  
65 and difficult voyage, the emergencies of which will demand all my fortitude: I am required not only to raise the spirits of others, but sometimes to sustain my own, when theirs are failing.

This is the most favourable period for travelling in Russia. They fly quickly over the snow in their sledges; the motion is pleasant, and, in my opinion, far more agreeable than that of an  
70 English stagecoach. The cold is not excessive, if you are wrapped in furs—a dress which I have already adopted, for there is a great difference between walking the deck and remaining seated motionless for hours, when no exercise prevents the blood from actually freezing in your veins. I have no ambition to lose my life on the post-road between St. Petersburg and Archangel. I shall depart for the latter town in a fortnight or three weeks; and my intention is  
75 to hire a ship there, which can easily be done by paying the insurance for the owner, and to engage as many sailors as I think necessary among those who are accustomed to the whale-fishing. I do not intend to sail until the month of June; and when shall I return? Ah, dear sister, how can I answer this question? If I succeed, many, many months, perhaps years, will pass before you and I may meet. If I fail, you will see me again soon, or never. Farewell, my  
80 dear, excellent Margaret. Heaven shower down blessings on you, and save me, that I may again and again testify my gratitude for all your love and kindness.

Your affectionate brother,  
R. Walton

85

Arabella B. Buckley, *The Fairy-Land of Science*. London, 1879.

Week 1, Lecture I: How to enter it; how to use it; and how to enjoy it.

[...] Lastly, anyone who has read the 'Wonderful Travellers' must recollect the man whose sight was so keen that he could hit the eye of a fly sitting on a tree two miles away. But tell me, can you see gas before it is lighted, even when it is coming out of the gas-jet close to your eyes? Yet, if you learn to use that wonderful instrument the spectroscope, it will enable you  
5 to tell one kind of gas from another, even when they are both ninety-one millions of miles away on the face of the sun; nay more, it will read for you the nature of the different gases in the far distant stars, billions of miles away, and actually tell you whether you could find there any of the same metals which we have on the earth.

10 We might find hundreds of such fairy tales in the domain of science, but these three will serve as examples, and we must pass on to make the acquaintance of the science-fairies themselves, and see if they are as real as our old friends.

15 Tell me, why do you love fairy-land? what is its charm? Is it not that things happen so suddenly, so mysteriously, and without man having anything to do with it? In fairy-land, flowers blow, houses spring up like Aladdin's palace in a single night, and people are carried hundreds of miles in an instant by the touch of a fairy wand.

20 And then this land is not some distant country to which we can never hope to travel. It is here in the midst of us, only our eyes must be opened or we cannot see it. Ariel and Puck did not live in some unknown region. On the contrary, Ariel's song is:

"Where the bee sucks, there suck I;  
In a cowslip's bell I lie;  
There I couch when owls do cry.  
25 On the bat's back I do fly,  
After summer, merrily."

30 The peasant falls asleep some evening in a wood and his eyes are opened by a fairy wand, so that he sees the little goblins and imps dancing around him on the green sward, sitting on mushrooms, or in the heads of the flowers, drinking out of acorn-cups, fighting with blades of grass, and riding on grasshoppers.

35 So, too, the gallant knight, riding to save some poor oppressed maiden, dashes across the foaming torrent; and just in the middle, as he is being swept away, his eyes are opened, and he sees fairy water-nymphs soothing his terrified horse and guiding him gently to the opposite shore. They are close at hand, these sprites, to the simple peasant or the gallant knight, or to anyone who has the gift of the fairies and can see them. But the man who scoffs at them, and does not believe in them or care for them, he never sees them. Only now and then they play  
40 him an ugly trick, leading him into some treacherous bog and leaving him to get out as he may.

Now, exactly all this which is true of the fairies of our childhood is true too of the fairies of science. There are forces around us, and among us, which I shall ask you to allow me to call fairies, and these are ten thousand times more wonderful, more magical, and more beautiful in

45 their work, than those of the old fairy tales. They, too, are invisible, and many people live and die without ever seeing them or caring to see them. These people go about with their eyes shut, either because they will not open them, or because no one has taught them how to see.

50 They fret and worry over their own little work and their own petty troubles, and do not know how to rest and refresh themselves, by letting the fairies open their eyes and show them the calm sweet picture of nature. They are like Peter Bell of whom Wordsworth wrote:

"A primrose by a river's brim  
A yellow primrose was to him,  
55 And it was nothing more."

But we will not be like these, we will open our eyes and ask, "What are these forces or fairies, and how can we see them?"

60 Just go out into the country, and sit down quietly and watch nature at work. Listen to the wind as it blows, look at the clouds rolling overhead, and waves rippling on the pond at your feet. Harken to the brook as it flows by, watch the flower-buds opening one by one, and then ask yourself, "How all this is done?" Go out in the evening and see the dew gather drop by drop upon the grass, or trace the delicate hoar-frost crystals which bespangle every blade  
65 on a winter's morning. Look at the vivid flashes of lightening in a storm, and listen to the pealing thunder: and then tell me, by what machinery is all this wonderful work done? Man does none of it, neither could he stop it if he were to try; for it is all the work of those invisible forces or fairies whose acquaintance I wish you to make. Day and night, summer and winter, storm or calm, these fairies are at work, and we may hear them and know them,  
70 and make friends of them if we will.

There is only one gift we must have before we can learn to know them - we must have imagination. I do not mean mere fancy, which creates unreal images and impossible  
75 monsters, but imagination, the power of making pictures or images in our mind, of that which is, though it is invisible to us. Most children have this glorious gift, and love to picture to themselves all that is told them, and to hear the same tale over and over again till they see every bit of it as if it were real. This is why they are sure to love science if its tales are told them aright; and I, for one, hope the day may never come when we may lose that childish clearness of vision, which enables us, through the temporal things which are seen, to realize  
80 those eternal truths which are unseen. If you have this gift of imagination come with me, and in these lectures we will look for the invisible fairies of nature.



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John Martin, *The Great Day of His Wrath*, 1851-3.

Tate Britain

Oil on canvas: 1965 x 3032 mm

