

Acceptable/Good

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Mary Shelley's creature from *Frankenstein* presents an interesting contradiction: the idea that a monster is not really a monster. By this, it should be understood that what is conceived by most as a monster, such as the creature, may be entirely different than physical perception may lead one to believe. Popular culture tends to spin Frankenstein's creature as if it were a belligerent brute that has no intention but that of mayhem and destruction. It may be seen; however, through the course of Shelley's text that much like beauty, monstrosity is in the eye of the beholder. The creature presents himself to both to the Doctor and the audience as what seems very human, both in manner and speech. However pleasant his personality, the characters within *Frankenstein* find it impossible to avoid judgment of the creature based on his looks because to these people, the creature looks like a monster. The people then shun and despise the creature all because he looks like a monster. This does have unfortunate repercussions for the humans as the creature reciprocates vengeance for his rejection. The unfortunate result of this exchange is what I believe is a common cycle to monstrosity: monsters beget monsters. The concept of monstrosity stems from the cyclic process in which one party imprints their preconceived notions of monstrosity onto another, and by this, the subject in itself becomes a monster by circumstance.

The human characters in the story have a predefined notion of what they believe a monster should look like from their experiences that they use to protect themselves against other potential monsters. Humans carry with them instinctive responses to things that are deemed monstrous. This is so that we may protect ourselves from things that typically are monstrous both in appearance and action. The easiest and most instinctive response is that of appearance, and humans tend to use this nearly exclusively to judge monstrosity. The Doctor has this response

Comment [m1]: As a reminder, your five things are:

1. Logical development of ideas
2. Analysis
3. Organization
4. Keep attention
5. Convincing argument

when he first beholds his creature, having “breathless horror and disgust [fill his] heart” simply from the sight of his own creation. (Shelley 61) The Doctor should be expected to be the most sympathetic towards the creature, he is, after all, its creator. Frankenstein must have seen the corpse of the creature for months previous to the reanimation, he should see the creation as an expected outcome of a scientific experiment. What is expected is not the result, however, as the Doctor has a frankly emotional and vivid response to the sight of the living creature. Why should Frankenstein have such a dramatic turn when only moments ago he was describing the creature as “selected” and “beautiful?” (60) It is, perhaps, a basic instinct that humans carry with them to defend themselves against potentially dangerous creatures. The urge of disgust that Frankenstein generates does not cause him to act, but rather to flee. This reaction is not Frankenstein acting upset at the creature’s appearance and deciding to leave, it is a deep-rooted emotional response that acts to keep humans safe. The villagers of Ingolstadt, on the other hand, have a more physical response than just flight. With “the whole village roused, some fled, some attacked me,” while the creature escaped from the village as fast as he could. (98) This feasibly alters the previous statement that humans are programmed with a natural response of flight from danger: at the sight of danger, humans tend to have a fight or flight response, based on the individual’s qualities. With the variety of people in the village, some chose to run away from what they viewed as a threat, and others choose to fight the creature. This response tends to only be provoked by the physical appearance of the creature, no one in the village seems to mind him until they comprehend his looks.

Is this emotional response so inherent in humans that it cannot be avoided? It is possible that naturally, humans are much more open to new and potentially frightening experiences than they may let on. Old man De Lacey, as a blind man, has none of these preconceived notions that

Comment [m2]: This first paragraph seems to be going in two directions for me: 1) you want to show the catalyst by which the monster becomes such (he is called a monster by everyone around him), and 2) you want to understand why people call him a monster solely based on appearance. Those two while connected, don’t always seem to be in this paragraph you jump from one idea to other back and forth, but I think that too much time is spent on flight v. fight which doesn’t seem related at all. Instead I think you want to focus on the fact that this reaction is natural for human protection and why it’s based purely on physicality—it has to be because we will almost invariably see the creature before we meet him so we have to make a snap judgment if indeed it is a natural response meant to keep humans safe.

seem so natural in humans. The old man, when trying to comfort the creature in their visit, tells the creature that since “[he] is blind, he cannot judge [the creature’s] countenance,” and can therefore be a more accurate judge of what the creature is really like. (120) The villagers and Frankenstein simply assume because the creature fits their definition of what looks like a monster, that he must therefore be one. They all have such a strong emotional response to his appearance that they give no time to attempt to communicate with the creature or try to understand it. Old man De Lacey can, however, take the time to try and understand the creature. Since he is blind he does not have the strong emotional response that is natural to the rest of the characters. The old man even starts to find that the creature is an agreeable, decent being before the rest of the De Laceys enter and allow their eyes to judge. The Doctor, at one time, even admits that “[he] felt a wish to console him,” but as soon as the Doctor looks at the creature, “[his] heart sickened” and felt “horror and hatred” towards the creature, solely on appearance. (130) Even Frankenstein, who was so quick to flee from his own creation can feel for the creature; although he still has a negative reaction to the creature’s exterior.

Infuriated by his rejection from society, the monster sees no alternative but to seek revenge against the people who abandoned him; this in turn reinforces the humans’ ideas of monstrosity. The emotional response that the humans have at the sight of the creature cause them to act against it, or to flee from it, as stated earlier. This is problematic for the creature as he attempts to find his place in the world. In the wild, he can tell that he does not fit in with the birds and animals. He therefore tries to fit in with the human society, because he shows a desire for the company of others, as demonstrated by his time spent near the De Laceys. The creature “solely directed towards...introducing [himself]” to the De Laceys after months of preparation, to avoid and encounter like the one he had at Ingolstadt. (118) Despite his efforts at

Comment [m3]: This is a very good counterargument I think you’ve handled it well, but I’m not sure if you’ve answered the question from the first sentence-can humans overcome the emotional response-it doesn’t seem so from Frankenstein’s example-that suggests that the first bias still remains.

communicating with the De Lacys and later with Doctor Frankenstein, the creature still cannot find a viable avenue into the human society. His physical appearance creates too strong of a response for the humans to adequately bring him in their company. His constant rejection by the humans leads the creature to become frustrated; he wants to become part of the human society, or at least be accepted and able to commune with other beings. Since his rejection by the humans is so universal, i.e., despite their efforts to try to understand the monster, all the humans the creature encounters reject him, he feels totally shut out of any hope for companionship. By being denied his desire for companionship, the creature feels anger and resentment towards the humans. In his discussion about his desire for a bride, the creature becomes animated with a “fiendish rage” and became so infuriated to the point where he was “too horrible for human eyes to behold” when his last plea for company is denied by the Doctor. (129) By this time, the creature is tired and frustrated with rejection, he sees his last hope is to gain a like counterpart and leave the presence of humankind. When this last request is eventually denied by the Doctor going back in his word, the monster loses control of his reason. The anger and hate that he had previously bottled up in the faint hopes of company are now unleashed as he has nothing left but to exact revenge on the people who abandoned him. This presents a problem for the cause of the creature, however, as this causes him to act in what the humans consider to be monstrous ways. The creature kills a child, then seeks after and murders every member of the Frankenstein family in revenge not only to the Doctor for abandoning his creation, but also directed towards the rest of human society. In these horrid acts of stalking, murder and destruction, the monster essentially acts out exactly as the humans predicted. The humans preconceptions of what a monster looks like comes from the correlation that often, but not always, things that look bad are bad. By

Comment [m4]: A lot of this seems like repetition of what you’ve said before. I think it might be better to just move forward and show the cause/effect sequence, for instance “Because the humans cannot overcome their initial reaction to his appearance, the creature becomes frustrated and has little choice but to act out against their rejection.” That “because” connects this idea to what has come before and eliminates the need for you to rehash everything about the rejection itself.

Comment [m5]: But who is writing this description? As you have already stated, Frankenstein seems to have a bias that he can’t overcome. Is this another instance of him seeing the worst in the creature—what the creature might consider passion for his argument, Frankenstein sees as “fiendish rage”

Comment [m6]: This is a really long paragraph and I think you are expressing two linked ideas here: first that the creature only takes acts the way he does because of the way others treat him and 2) that because the humans have already labeled him as monster, they can’t see his actions as anything other than purely monstrous, they can’t see them as justified. I think it might help you to break these two ideas up so that you can further show the cause/effect of all of this (the cause/effect for the creature and the cause/effect for the humans).

making these assumptions about the creature, the creature ends up reaffirming his status as a monster in the eyes of the humans. The monster beget the monster.

Thus the cycle of monstrosity plays out. The creature did not start out inherently with the personality or actions of a monster, but because of his appearance, he was assumed to be one. By this assumption, the humans refused to come into contact with the creature for fear of their safety. The unfortunate result of this is that the total shunning of the creature caused him to react violently at the people who rejected him and thus confirmed this status as a monster in the human's eyes. This does have interesting implications for the creature in the novel, however. If the people had been able to overcome their aversion to the creature's looks, could he have adapted into their society and become accepted? It is possible that if his introduction was slow, and through the blind eyes of old man De Lacey, that people could have come to understand his situation. While few real world consequences, the monster does confirm the belief of this author that the creature is a misunderstood monster, and a monster by an unfortunate cycle. The greatest obstacle to Frankenstein's creature is not so much on his part, but on that of the humans. Their focus on what looks like a monster is so focused that they miss the fact that appearances can be deceiving, and do not attempt to accept or learn about the creature. They act self-interestingly, paying no mind to the outcast. What might happen, then, if a human child were born hideous? Might the human parents shun it, or, like the parallels to paradise lost, could the creation be cast out of light? Did not Quasimodo find some form of contentedness in his seclusion? It seems as if the creature could have found some place in the world, even if it was a small hovel. The notions and reactions that humans have are so hard-wired into our minds that it seems impossible to act against our gut instinct. To a certain extent, the monster gains these traits from the humans: do not reason, fight, or fly.

Works Cited

Shelley, Mary. Frankenstein. Ed. Johanna Smith. 2nd ed. New York: Bedford/ St. Martin's, 2000.

Print.

Interest/Convincing: I want to talk about these two items together because I think one is affected by the other. Yes, your argument is interesting and you take it in a lot of different directions that I think would appeal to a lot of people interested in the psychology of monstrosity. However, it is the multitude of directions that I also find problematic. On the whole, the argument isn't as convincing because it doesn't seem to follow a single thread. I think that sometimes you get distracted by related ideas (like fight or flight) that don't seem particularly useful to your central claim about the cycle of monstrosity. I know that you had some difficulty in expressing this complex idea and that may be where a lot of the confusion comes in. So in revision, I think you want to consider what is absolutely essential for the argument and what is not. If we are just talking about cycles, do we then want to show parallelism between the cycle the monster and the humans are experiencing, do we want to focus on only one? I think you could make this a very good paper, but it will take a good deal of restructuring and paring down to get there.

	Inadequate	Acceptable	Good	Strong	Outstanding
Complex major claim that is focused and clearly lays out the argument of the paper.					
Minor claims are used strategically to advance the argument.					
The text is used in strategic ways and the rhetorical analysis is thorough.					
Use of concessions and counter-arguments to strengthen the writer's authority					
Stakes of the argument or why it matters					
Clear and coherent organization that presents the writer's argument in a logical and accessible manner.					