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The Persuasion of Frankenstein

Relationships between parents and offspring are often complicated, especially if the offspring feel abandoned by and isolated from those who gave them life. In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the relationship between Victor Frankenstein and his monster embodies that strain, as exhibited by Victor's abandonment of his "child" as soon as he witnesses life enter its grotesque frame. This abandonment sets in motion a devastating sequence of events that culminates in the death of his little brother William and the execution of his servant Justine. In Vol. 2 Chapter 2, while climbing Mountanvert in the hopes of forgetting the suffering he was responsible for, Victor is approached by the creature, who pleads with him to fulfill his responsibility to his creation and listen to the story of his plight. The creature appeals to Victor in many ways, and while he is at first rebuffed, he ultimately persuades Victor to hear his tale. Although Frankenstein's monster is effective in his use of pathos, or appeal to emotion, it is his combined use of ethos and logos, or appeal to credibility and appeal to logic, that dominates his argument. Furthermore, his appeal resonates with the theme of isolation that is witnessed throughout the work and could also be seen as a reflection of the isolation Mary Shelley felt from her mother due to the former's death following childbirth, as well as the psychological trauma she personally experienced as the result of the premature deaths of most of her children.

Frankenstein's monster often details the despair he has come to experience when he appeals to Victor. In doing so he uses pathos to effectively generate an emotional response. After being rebuked by Victor for his appearance, the creature expresses how he expected Victor's response, because "all men hate the wretched; how then must I be hated, who am miserable

beyond all living things!” (Shelley 113). Through this self-deprecating language he is able to convey to Victor his complete despondency as a result of his interactions with humans. He unfortunately understands all too well how a miserable looking creature such as himself will be hated, since he noticed men despise the outliers of society. The monster draws particular attention to his predicament, as he makes it clear his situation is worse than any other living creature, and truly unrivaled. The monster further discusses his situation when he states: “Everywhere I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded” (Shelley 114). This poignant statement reflects how the monster is an outsider in the truest sense: he is completely isolated from any relationships or actions that would allow him to look positively upon the world. This isolation is a recurring theme throughout the novel. It allows him to observe the joys and triumphs that humans around him experience, such as the shared love of siblings or the satisfaction of marriage, but to him it only makes matters worse, as they are unattainable. He feels he has no real hope of experiencing unadulterated joy or complete acceptance from humans. The monster further elaborates on his misery when he notes to Victor that “You, my creator abhor me; what hope can I gather from your fellow-creatures, who owe me nothing?” (Shelley 114). With this rhetorical question the monster communicates the sense of desperation he is experiencing. If he cannot turn to the person who created him, his “parent,” who understands and is responsible to him more than anyone else, then he cannot have any hope towards other humans, who have no responsibility to him and will likely judge him based solely of his disfigured frame. Throughout his emotional appeal to Victor, the monster is able to effectively convey his isolated and dejected state and begin to soften Victor’s heart by generating a sense of sympathy and remorse from him.

The use of pathos lays the groundwork for the monster's appeal to Frankenstein, but it is by appealing to Frankenstein's senses of authority and logic that the monster eventually convinces him to listen to his story. The monster first appeals to ethos and logos by stating that "you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us" (Shelley 113). The monster immediately reminds Victor that even though he abhors what he created, with the act of imbuing life into a once inanimate body, Victor created the strongest bond one can create between two beings, that of the parent and offspring. He is also quick to remind Victor that it is one that only death can break. The monster wants Victor to understand that what he has created cannot be so casually abandoned, and that in fact, he still has a number of responsibilities to his creation such as establishing a meaningful relationship with him or creating a female companion for him. The monster's statement connects with the theme of isolation by drawing attention to the abandonment the creature felt from Victor ignoring his responsibility to him. The monster's most compelling appeal comes when he notes that "I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed" (Shelley 14). By placing Frankenstein on the same level as God, the monster affirms Frankenstein's complete authority over him while drawing a parallel between himself and the first human. Like God, Frankenstein created something from nothing, and like Adam, the monster is the first of his kind, isolated and without any being like him. The monster's observation that Frankenstein is his God and he his Adam is the ultimate appeal to Frankenstein's authority, as abandoning the first being of his kind is a far graver offense than avoiding the product of an experiment gone wrong. In the statement, the monster also reflects how rather than using his authority to embrace and nurture his offspring, Frankenstein endeavors to prevent his creation from ever having a relationship with him, driving

him away from fulfillment and into isolation with no hope of achieving happiness. In his appeal to Victor's authority, the monster effectively reminds Victor of the role he took on the moment he created him and the responsibilities Victor has as a result of that decision.

Whereas at first the creature invokes the relationship between God and creation in his appeal to ethos and logos, he goes on to use a legal approach in which Victor is the judge and he the plaintiff. The creature at first questions Frankenstein's sense of equity and justice when he says, "Oh, Frankenstein, be not equitable to every other, and trample upon me alone, to whom thy justice, and even thy clemency and affection, is most due" (Shelley 114). The monster's observation that Frankenstein is quick to act fairly and justly towards other humans, yet seems incapable to do so towards his creation, is a powerful critique of Frankenstein's character. The implication the creature makes is that if Frankenstein were truly a moral, virtuous man, he would act justly towards everyone he knew, and even more so towards his offspring, who desperately desires to be treated so. Through his statement, the monster implicitly questions why Frankenstein would forget to treat those closest to him in a moral manner. In this sense, the monster also discusses the separation that he feels between the just treatment he deserves and the treatment he receives. The monster further questions Frankenstein's character when, after he has stated that his enemies will "share his wretchedness" he tells Frankenstein, "Yet it is in your power to recompense me, and deliver them from an evil which it only remains for you to make so great" (Shelley 115). The monster makes it clear that he will make Frankenstein's loved ones and all humans suffer if Frankenstein doesn't oblige his request, placing their fate on his action and also determining whether his sense of justice outweighs the aversion he has towards taking responsibility for his creation and giving the monster the respect he feels he is entitled to. The answer to this question of character has potentially dire consequences for Frankenstein and all

those connected to him, and it is thus the strongest appeal to his character the creature makes. The implicit questions that the monster poses to Frankenstein in his appeals to ethos and logos effectively reveal to Frankenstein how his decision will impact the creature's potentially devastating actions.

The sense of isolation that the creature communicates through its appeals to pathos and ethos can be closely linked to the experience Mary Shelley had with the complex relationship between parent and offspring. Mary Shelley was completely isolated from her mother, who died several days after child birth, and thus never got to experience an enriching relationship with the person who gave her life. The isolation Shelley felt from her mother could have been the inspiration for the complete isolation and misery Frankenstein's monster experiences as a result of his abandonment. In addition, Mary Shelley struggled with her relationships with her offspring, as three of her four children died after only a few years of life. The psychological distress she likely felt as the creator of children who didn't survive more than a few years could have served as the inspiration for the anguish Frankenstein felt at creating such a disfigured monster. The similarity between Mary Shelley and Frankenstein and his monster suggest that the story she wrote could be a fictional representation of her experience with motherhood.

In *Frankenstein*, the monster uses an effective combination of pathos, ethos and logos to appeal to Frankenstein's emotion, credibility and logic, ultimately persuading Frankenstein to listen to his story. The feeling of isolation that the creature effectively reflected in his appeals to Frankenstein resonated with the theme of isolation witnessed throughout the novel. The experience of both Frankenstein and his monster also drew parallels to the life of Mary Shelley, who likely crafted the work based on her complicated experience with motherhood. Overall, the complex relationship between Frankenstein and his monster revolves around one question. To

what extent are parents responsible to their offspring? The question can be answered in a myriad of ways, and it will likely define the interactions of generations to come.

Works Cited

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*. Ed. Brantley Johnson. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2004. Print.