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Framing the Monster

*Frankenstein* is perhaps better known for its film adaptations than its original novel. The movies captivated audience with their dark, dramatic genre defining cinematography. The creature was reimagined to be a horror icon, defined only by its ability to scare. This notion comes for the most part from the imagery and tone of chapter 5 of *Frankenstein,* in which the Doctor brings his creature to life. This is set up to be a horrific scene, and the audience to supposed to see it as such through Shelley’s use of language. During the creation of the monster, Shelley uses superfluous diction along with dark imagery and tone to create a dark sense of foreboding about the creature and the events to come.

The way in which Frankenstein describes his creation indicates how not only the characters are supposed to interpret the creature, but also provides a mindset in which the audience is to place the creature. The way in which Frankenstein first reveals his description of the monster is interesting in of itself. The first true description of the monster comes when the Doctor narrates what was so good about the creature. To the doctor, the monster’s “limbs were in proportion, and [he] had selected [them to be] beautiful!” (Shelley 60) It is interesting that that Shelley had the Doctor speak about what was to be before the audience has any idea what is. Through this inner speech we see that the doctor is disappointed in his creation, but yet cannot truly see why. It is unsure whether the creature is inherently bad is if the doctor is just having a melodramatic fit. It is only later as the doctor describes the monster’s “watery eyes” set back in his “shriveled complexion and straight black lips” that it can be seen that the creature is hideous, and is described this way so that the audience shares in the doctor’s fear of his creation’s appearance. (60) Shelley’s choice of adjectives and tone set by the dreary night of November create an impression of the creature; that it is evil and will cause no good.

Secondly the creation is framed heavily by ambiance in this chapter, and the tone and style in which its creation is set add to the doctor’s horrific descriptions to label the creature as a monster. The setting very much describes the kinds of attitude that the human characters develop towards the creature: negative ones. The creature’s formation takes place at one in the morning on a “dreary night in November” with “raid pattering on the window” and the doctor’s “candle… nearly burnt out.” (60) These descriptions are fine examples of imagery, conjuring up dark images of an evil place where and evil act is about to happen. This not only frames the creature as a horrid creation, but lends part of its dismalness to the doctor, who is the reason the creature is being created in the first place. This creates a very dark tone around the creation of the monster that does not even star to let up until the next day. This dark tone is meant to linger in the reader so that the fear of the creature as a monster is established. A fear that is more instinctive than based in reason, the creature has done nothing this far that could be considered bad or evil, but nearly the setup of his creation is enough through rhetorical devices to label the creature as a monster.

Chapter 5 is meant to establish the creature as a monster to be feared, both in the mind of the doctor and the reader. This is achieved rather effectively because the doctor gains a lifelong fear of his creation. Thus Shelley’s use of diction, tone and imagery are power tools for manipulating emotion to create a certain point of view and opinion about the monster. The creation is now the monster as far as the story is concerned, and everyone is afraid of it.

Works Cited

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

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