

Context: Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818) – Frankenstein's first encounter with his creature

Material

The situation: After creating the humanoid¹, Frankenstein was shocked by its ugliness when it came alive. The scientist ran away from it, leaving it alone and trying to forget it. The monster has survived and, initially good at heart, learned to read and write. In a diary, it has recorded its sobering experience with humans and turned more and more evil. Finally, it sets out to meet its creator, and confronts Frankenstein with the consequences of what he has done. In due course, the monster demands of Frankenstein a female partner, and if Frankenstein will oblige, the monster promises to recede into a distant region of the world, Patagonia (the southernmost area in South America) in order to live their lives far away from a society to which they would never be admitted.

The following passage presents their first encounter, when the monster has finally found Frankenstein. After Frankenstein's unfriendly, indeed hostile² greeting, the scene continues:

"I expected this reception," said the daemon. "All men hate the wretched; how, then, must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things! Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn³ me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us. You purpose to kill me. How dare you sport thus with life? Do your duty towards me, and I will do mine towards you and the rest of mankind. If you will comply⁴ with my conditions, I will leave them and you at peace; but if you refuse, I will glut⁵ the maw⁶ of death, until it be satiated⁷ with the blood of your remaining friends."

"Abhorred monster! Fiend that thou art! The tortures of hell are too mild a vengeance⁸ for your crimes. Wretched devil! You reproach me with your creation; come on, then, that I may extinguish the spark which I so negligently bestowed⁹."

My [i.e., Frankenstein's] rage was without bounds; I sprang on him, impelled¹⁰ by all the feelings which can arm one being against the existence of another.

He easily eluded me and said –

"Be calm. I intreat¹¹ you to hear me, before you give vent to¹² your hatred on my devoted head. Have I not suffered enough, that you seek to increase my misery? Life, although it may only be an accumulation of anguish,¹³ is dear to me, and I will defend it. Remember, thou hast made me more powerful than thyself; my height is superior to thine, my joints more supple. But I will not be tempted to set myself in opposition to thee. I am thy creature, and I will be even mild and docile to my natural lord and king, if thou wilt¹⁴ also perform thy part, the which you owest to me. Oh, Frankenstein, be not equitable¹⁵ to every other and trample¹⁶ upon me alone, to whom thy justice, and even thy clemency¹⁷ and affection, is most due. Remember, I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam, but I

¹ humanoid = (a being) with/of human shape

² hostile = like an enemy

³ spurn = dislike

⁴ comply = obey; play along

⁵ glut = flood

⁶ maw = *Rachen*

⁷ satiate = over-satisfy

⁸ vengeance = revenge

⁹ bestow = [here] give away

¹⁰ impelled = driven, motivated

¹¹ intreat = appeal

¹² give vent to sth. = *etwas freien Lauf lassen*

¹³ anguish = fear, torment

¹⁴ wilt = (archaic) will

¹⁵ equitable = fair

¹⁶ trample = stomp

¹⁷ clemency = mildness, grace

am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. Everywhere I see bliss, from which I alone are irrevocably¹⁸ excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous.”

“Begone! I will not hear you. There can be no community between you and me; we are enemies. Begone, or let us try our strength in a fight in which one must fall.”

From: *Mary Shelley, Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*, ed. Maurice Hindle. Harmondsworth: Penguin 1992, pp. 96-97 (415 words)

Tasks

Comprehension

1. Sum up, in your own words, the first encounter of the monster and Frankenstein.

Analysis

2. Describe the way the two characters interact with one another. What do we learn about the scientist, his creation, and their relation towards one another? In how far do the two characters correspond to our stereotypes of a scientist and a monster? Use quotes from the text to support your views.
3. *Identify the different types of argumentation in the monster’s speeches. Use quotes in a grid to show which are its rational, plausible and moral points against Frankenstein.

Evaluation

4. *Briefly explain the shift of meaning implied by the fact that Nick Dear’s text presents Frankenstein’s artificial life-form as “Creature”, whilst Mary Shelley’s novel refers to it as “monster”, “demon”, “fiend”, and similar terms.
5. Compare the above passage with Nick Dear’s dramatic version in your book (*Context*, p. 36-37). Discuss the differences in both media and their effects: Would it have made sense in a modern drama simply to quote the dialogue from Shelley’s novel? Give reasons for your views, considering language, action/plot and audience.

Must do: 1, 2, 5

Can do: 3, 4

Minimum: 4 assignments

* higher degree of complexity

¹⁸ irrevocably = *unwiderruflich*

Solutions

Textbook: *Context*, pp. 36-37

Fokus Literaturvermittlung: pp. 94-99

Task 1

Summary

The monster accuses its creator Frankenstein because he has abandoned it and reminds him of the monster's own right to live once it has been created. It wants to negotiate a deal with Frankenstein which would settle the conflict between the two of them, provided he accepted the monster's conditions. Upon Frankenstein's flat denial and attempt at a violent attack, the monster describes its own suffering and isolation, caused by its enormous size and ugliness, and explains the reasons for his change from good to evil: It feels alone and neglected. It insists on Frankenstein's obligations towards it and offers him peace, but is again turned turn by him. (109 words)

Task 2

Interaction of the two characters

The scene is one of high emotional intensity on both sides, although it is surprising that Frankenstein seems less elaborate than the monster. While Frankenstein mainly abuses his creation (e.g. "Abhorred monster", l.17, "Wretched devil", l.18), the monster is much more elaborate. It seems even more rational than the scientist, because it avoids physical violence when he tries to hit it (cf. ll. 21/22), and in its replies to Frankenstein's short outbursts of cursing, it reminds him of his duties and responsibilities. It seems the evil part of the monster will only be activated if the scientist does not obey the moral duties towards the consequences of his actions: "If you will comply with my conditions, I will leave them and you at peace; but if you refuse, I will glut the maw of death [...]" (ll. 15-16). By its own nature, it seems to have a sense of aesthetics and morals: It knows what beauty, guilt, and justice are. Thus, it realises its own lack in beauty, and knows that it will always be despised by people: "All men hate the wretched; how, then, must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things!" (ll. 11/12). Therefore it calls for Frankenstein's help and, although addressing him as "lord and king" (l. 28), threatens to destroy him. Thus the hierarchy between the scientist and the monster is not really one in which Frankenstein is the superior power, but the monster.

All in all, the scene demonstrates that, although a scientist is expected to be reasonable, Frankenstein acts very much the opposite: His "rage was without bounds; [he] sprang on him, impelled by all the feelings which can arm one being against the existence of another" (ll. 20/21) However, he is not only physically weaker than the monster, but also inferior in his communicative, argumentative strategies. In contrast, the monster which is usually associated with a blind sense of destruction ("maw of death", l. 16), proves to be a complex being which can not only reflect on its idolation, but also argue about it in order to overcome it: by the help of Frankenstein who must create a female partner for him (l. 15). It does not want to be evil and promises to become good again if Frankenstein offers his help: "I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous" (ll. 32/33). (405 words)

Task *3

The types of argument in the monster's speeches are the following

rational	Plausible	moral
thou hast made me more powerful than thyself; my height is superior to thine, my joints more supple (ll. 15-16)	All men hate the wretched; how, then, must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things! (ll. 1-2)	you owest to me (l. 18)
		me alone, to whom thy justice, and even thy clemency and affection, is most due (ll. 19-20)
		I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend (l. 22)

Task *4

Language awareness

It seems that the shift from the abusive terms "monster", "demon", "fiend", etc. in the novel to the neutral "Creature" in the play implies a shift in judgement. While in Shelley's novel the description the creature is filtered by Frankenstein's, as the first-person narrator's, own perception; instead, in Dear's play

“Creature” seems to be used as a proper name, although rarely in the dialogue, but rather in the stage-directions – where it is capitalized. In Dear’s play, Creature is a character who is not filtered through any obvious point of view (a narrator’s), but whose action must be judged – like Frankenstein’s – by the spectator. (103 words)

Task 5:

Text comparision

The following table shows possible arguments for and against the quotation of the novel passage in the play.

arguments for quoting the scene in the play	arguments against quoting the scene in the play
Shelley’s archaic language may be easily modernized	Shelley’s language is outdated, even when modernized.
the integration of such an elaborate scene may emphasise its importance for the plot	the speed of action is increased by the much faster dialogues and create more suspense.
the monster’s arguments are more elaborate than in the play and can be easily understood by the audience	the monster’s arguments are too passionate and they may sound whingey to a modern audience
it is important to let the monster (as Creature) point out why the scientist is morally and ethically obliged to his creation; thus the scientist’s own guilt is equally emphasised	a modern audience is no longer used to listening to such elaborate and emphatic dialogues: the spiritual imagery (“I am thy Adam”, “fallen angel”, ll. 30-31), for instance, may appear irrelevant to a secularized spectator
the situation in Shelley’s novel as such is very dramatic, it may easily be performed because of the detailed description in the narrative parts and the graphic language both characters use in their dialogue.	Dear’s text leaves more space of freedom for actors to perform his text. His language is less verbose and more to the point than that of Shelley’s characters’.
	the audience does not expect a 1:1 adaptation of the narrative text. In order to highlight the most important points of the plot (the guilt in both the scientist’s and Creature’s actions), the dramatist must reduce the source.
...	...