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Self-study: A Risk to Evil

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* tells a gripping story that a mad scientist Victor Frankenstein creates a monster from the dead's bodies, and the monster keeps killing Frankenstein's families and friend to torment him until both Frankenstein and his creature go to death. At the first glance, Frankenstein creates a devil who commits several unforgivable crimes. However, the creature "looked upon crime as a distant evil" before he reads the *Sorrows of Werter*, *Paradise Lost*, and Frankenstein's journal (Shelley 98), which reveals that the creature is not born as a devil. As a result, I wonder what kind of effect these three books have on the creature. In this response paper, I will dig into the creature's own thoughts related to the *Sorrows of Werter*, *Paradise Lost*, and Frankenstein's journal respectively. Based on my analysis, I will argue that these three books make the creature start to think like a devil. In other words, the creature's own understanding of these three books due to self-study without proper instruction may lead him to evil.

In terms of the *Sorrows of Werter*, I claim that this book triggers the creature's self-recognition and sets his own wants free. After reading the *Sorrows of Werter*, the creature says that "My person was hideous, and my stature gigantic: what did this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination?" (Shelley 98), which shows that the creature starts to think of his own identification. Though the creature cannot find the answers to these questions immediately (Shelley 98), he tries to have

a better understanding on himself while reading the other two books. Besides, the creature also indicates that the *Sorrows of Werter* “had accorded well with the wants which were for ever alive in my own bosom” (Shelley 98), which reveals that this book matches the creature’s own wants. What’s more, the phrase “for ever alive” shows that the *Sorrows of Werter* has lit up the creature’s wants that will last forever. From my perspective, the *Sorrows of Werter* makes the creature start to learn about himself and aware of his own wants, even though the creature’s own wants might be evil.

Along the creature’s way to continuing his reading, *Paradise Lost* makes him aware that he can meet his own wants triggered by the *Sorrows of Werter* by taking revenge. By comparing himself with God’s “perfect creature” (Shelley 99), Adam, the creature realizes that he “was wretched, helpless, and alone” (Shelley 99), which makes him feel disappointed and depressed. Without proper instruction to relieve his negative emotion, the creature considers Satan as the “fitter emblem” (Shelley 99) of his condition for many times and allows “the bitter gall of envy rose” (Shelley 99) within himself. Linking himself to a devil and allowing envy to rise within himself indicate that the creature thinks himself more like a devil instead of a good man. Besides, *Paradise Lost* “moved every feeling of wonder and awe, that the picture of an omnipotent God warring with his creatures was capable of exciting” (Shelley 99). The word “warring” shows that the creature realizes the probability of violently fighting against his creator for his own wants by reading *Paradise Lost*. However, regarding a myth, *Paradise Lost*, as “a true history” mistakenly (Shelley 99), the creature’s mind may not be able to realize the potential harm of revenging his creator in human society, which turns out to be a path to evil for him.

Driven by notions of revenge in his mind, the creature finally knows what he is by

reading Frankenstein's journal that eventually makes the creature think like a devil. Referring to Frankenstein's journal, the creature says that "Every thing is related in them which bears reference to my accursed origin" (Shelley 99). By providing "every step" Frankenstein takes in the progress of his work (Shelley 99), this journal answers the creature's questions that "Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come?" (Shelley 98). Besides, Frankenstein's journal also strengthens and confirms the creature's hostility to his creator. After he realizes his "accursed origin" (Shelley 99), the creature yells "Cursed creator!" (Shelley 99). The word "cursed" indicates the creature's anger and dissatisfaction from the bottom of his heart. Driven by loathing of Frankenstein, the creature is finally determined to violently fight against his creator. The decision to take revenge for his own wants shows that the creature has thought like a devil.

After reading the *Sorrows of Werter*, *Paradise Lost*, and Frankenstein's journal, the creature has a clear idea of what he is and chooses revenge as his destination. However, the creature develops his intelligence only by himself, even misunderstanding some parts of the books he reads. Due to lack of proper instruction, the creature does not examine what he learns by himself and may consider everything he obtains from his reading as correct and adoptable. In other words, the creature does not know whether his ideas derived from his reading are acceptable or moral from the perspective of human beings. The creature's decision to take revenge turns out to be a disaster for him in the end of the novel. To conclude, the creature's miserable ending tells us that proper instruction is necessary while we are learning new knowledge, because appropriate instruction can lead us to examine our own ideas and may help us correct our understanding of new stuff.

Works Cited

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*. edited by J. Paul Hunter, W. W. Norton & Company, 2012.