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Marshal pt 1

In Bridget Marshall's "The Face of Evil: Phrenology, Physiognomy, And the Gothic Villain," Marshall argues that, because phrenology and physiognomy were commonly trusted pseudo-sciences in the 19th century (though they were proven untrustworthy by the medical community of the time), authors created their villains with ugly features because people of the time would understand phrenology and physiognomy. She argues that these two pseudo-sciences had a role in shaping Victorian villains.

Both physiognomy and phrenology assert that one can judge another’s moral nature by measuring their physical features. Marshall explains how popular fictitious stories used the idea that, for example, a vampire and a werewolf looked evil because they were evil inside. She tries to connect the explanation of villain’s features in these books to the findings of phrenology and physiognomy.

Marshall claims that that the reason fictitious villains have alarming physical traits in the Victorian era is due to their author’s belief and/or understanding of phrenology and physiognomy. Although the descriptions of these villains match some of the ideas in phrenology and physiognomy, it is normal practice to have villains look the part. Villains in myth and legend have had alarming physical features for thousands of years.

Marshall uses a “false cause” fallacy, which is when an arguer presumes that “…a real or perceived relationship between things means that one is the cause of the other” (Richardson). To expand on this, the correlation between the physical traits of fictitious characters that match their personalities and the claim by pseudo-sciences that physical traits of real people match their personalities does not mean that phrenology and physiognomy was the causation for these characters being written with alarming physical features.

Though the authors might possibly have been believers, this correlation does not prove that the authors were believers to any degree, nor does it prove that they used these pseudo-sciences as an attempt to relate villains to the readers of their books. This is a claim and has not been backed by any evidence in the article and is just that, a claim. For example, there were no quotes from the authors explaining why they made the villains the way they did. There were only assumptions made by Marshall. She states, “A close reading of the texts shows many instances where the authors both assume the character’s knowledge of, and expect the reader’s familiarity with, phrenology and physiognomy” but does not give any examples (Marshall 162). Like many poetry readers, she seems to read into these novels much more than their authors intended.

Marshall, Bridget. "The Face of Evil: Phrenology, Physiognomy, and the Gothic Villain". *Changing Picture Settings.* Fall 2000. Print.

Richardson, Jesse, et al. *Your Logical Fallacy Is.* “False Cause”. Web. <https://yourlogicalfallacyis.com/false-cause> Accessed on Feb 01, 2015.