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(Question 3) Truth and Fiction as Developmental Catalysts:

A comparative study of Haddon's Christopher and Shelley's Creature

In both Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* and Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the reader is exposed to the transformation of socially deviant characters as they confront the implications of their physical differences. In *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, Christopher Boone develops a new sense of independence and awareness for his capabilities as he solves the mysteries of Wellington's murder and his mother's disappearance and his journey to London. Conversely, the Creature in *Frankenstein* loses his sense of benevolence and turns to bitter vengeance upon learning the social implications of his deformities, as well as experiencing both rejection and betrayal. Nevertheless, in spite of the differences in outcome, the factors that inspire change in both Christopher and the Creature are fundamentally similar; both characters develop from the pursuit of uncovering the truth and perceiving the self through the lens of fiction.

Christopher's desire to solve the mystery of Wellington's murder sets into motion a series of events that ultimately allow him to gain confidence in his capacities and individuality. In essence, the incident enabled Christopher to break through what Freissmann describes as the "uneventful routine" (406)—he is forced to confront his fear of interacting with strangers and acts independently from the protectiveness of his father. Learning of his father's lies, Christopher

likewise engages in a quest for truth as he leaves behind his father's lies in Swindon. Haddon shows the importance of truth to Christopher in his assertion that his father "always tells ... the truth, which means that he loves [Christopher]" (Haddon 87); he associates honesty to love. Hence, as Christopher is betrayed by the closest individual in his life, he is compelled to assert his own independence and escape from his sheltered and ignorant life in Swindon. This transformation in desire for independence is demonstrated when again, he dreams of a world where ordinary humans are gone (Haddon 198), and also as he finally suggests that he will live alone for university (Haddon 221); which contradicts his previous statement that he wants to live with his father as he "[does not] want to live on [his] own" (Haddon 45).

Christopher likewise matures as a result of confronting tremendous psychological stress. Christopher, who finds safety merely in the predictability of his father always putting on his trouser before his socks (Haddon 24), faces significant disorder and fear when he enters a crowded train station. The reader learns that Christopher had never been without an adult supervisor further than the shop at the end of the road (Haddon 129), and in a disordered state he was even close to being run over by a train (Haddon 183). Consequently, his eventual success in reaching London becomes a concrete evidence of his bravery and resourcefulness; he can do anything because "... [he] went to London on [his] own, ... [he] solved the mystery of Who Killed Wellington? and [he] found [his] mother and ... was brave and ... wrote a book" (Haddon 221). Yet his journey is also a humbling experience as he realizes that he "... could never be an astronaut because being an astronaut meant being hundreds of thousands of miles away from home" (131), and he was already fearful when he was only 100 miles away from his mother's home in London. This deeper understanding of his own capabilities eventually leads Christopher to realize that he wanted to become a scientist instead (Haddon 221). Thus, as a result of his

journey, Christopher gains confidence for what he can accomplish and acknowledges that which he cannot. Ultimately, Christopher's journey serves as an extrinsic confirmation that despite his anomalous fears and physical constraints, he is still able to accomplish the extraordinary feat of both uncovering the truth of his mother's disappearance and traveling independently without an adult and this fact allows Christopher to gain confidence in his capacities and individuality.

Conversely, the Creature's analogous desire to understand human society and the reason for his alienation culminates in a bitter and hateful realization that his physical deformities cannot ever be accepted by the human senses. As a noble savage, the Creature is initially presented as an idealized being by nature empathetic and uncorrupted by the apparent evils of civilization. The Creature reveals that he "... admired virtue and good feelings" (Shelley 84) and out of compassion, gathered firewood for the De Lacey family whom he recognizes as a poor yet hardworking cottagers. Yet this inherent virtue is gradually abandoned as the Creature uncovers more truth regarding his role in human society. Ironically, the Creature's desire to understand and communicate with humans by learning language, "which knowledge might ... make [the cottagers] overlook the deformity of [his] figure" (Shelley 78), fails to gain him entry into a community but rather exposes him to his unique and "accursed origin" (Shelley 91). The Creature discovers the grotesque and unique process of his own creation and subsequently Victor's disgust and forsaking of him; hence, the Creature states: "Increase of knowledge only discovered to me more clearly what a wretched outcast I was" (Shelley 91). Language also allows him to learn "of birth and growth of children; [and] how the father doated on the smiles of the infant" (Shelley 84); sensations that he would never experience. Thus, his pursuit for understanding had a profound effect on his psychological state—the Creature develops jealousy

towards the sense of community exhibited by the cottagers and deep hatred towards Victor as the author of his misery.

Additionally, John Bugg points out the significance of the Creature's awareness of his hideous reflection in a "transparent pool" (Shelley 89) briefly after Felix's lessons on Volney's *Ruins of Empire* (662)—having learned imperialism, slavery, and the notion of superior and inferior races based on physical differences, the Creature begins to recognize that his hideousness is the source of his inferiority. It is also interesting that the Creature is characterized by hair "lustrous black" and "yellow skin" (Shelley 35); features commonly ascribed to "the slothful Asiatics" who he is educated to believe are inferior to "the stupendous genius and mental activity of the Grecians" (Shelley 94). Thus, in being educated of human history the Creature weeps at the inevitability of his own "hapless fate" (Shelley 94) as an entity lesser than all of mankind. This knowledge ultimately drives the Creature towards defiant vengeance; the Creature becomes determined to reject this apparent "abject slavery" (Shelley 90) and thus becomes violent. Ultimately, in the Creature's pursuit of understanding society he develops an inferiority complex as he learns of the "insurmountable barriers" (Shelley 102) of human senses as portrayed in history, and is thus transformed, out of despair and defiance, into a vengeful being that seeks malice towards his creator.

Fiction likewise plays a significant role in establishing development in both Haddon and Shelley's work. Unable to relate or develop close relationships with other individuals of society, both Christopher and the Creature find themselves associating at a deeper level with the constructs of fictional work. In the case of the Creature, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, "excited different and far deeper emotions [than the other books]" (Shelley 90) and became central to his sense of self-pity and bitterness. As Adam, he sees himself as a miserable being "united by no

link to any other being in existence” (Shelley 90) and given life without his own consent, and as Satan, he indulges in jealousy and perhaps hatred towards “the bliss of [his] protectors” (Shelley 90). However, in assuming the roles of both Adam and Satan the Creature is made aware of his ability to create desolation; fascinated by “an omnipotent God warring with his creatures” (Shelley 90) and accepting himself as a diabolical being. Thus, having “applied much personally to [his] own feelings and conditions” (Shelley 89), *Paradise Lost* plays a critical role in the shaping of the Creature’s understanding of himself as a being of desolation and thus causes him to lose his goodwill and inherent compassion for others. Additionally, the Creature makes use of Adam and Satan’s actions as reference for his own when faced with uncertainty. For instance, the Creature longs for a female counterpart as Adam had, and similarly harbors a desire to overthrow and rebel against his creator Victor, as Satan. His malice, therefore, is very much influenced by his projection of Adam and Satan onto himself as forerunners to his plight. Hence in using *Paradise Lost* as a method of introspection, the Creature’s character develops in a manner that unsurprisingly resembles Adam and Satan.

Similarly, fiction plays an important role in Christopher’s development. Christopher’s idealization of Sherlock Holmes corroborates Vivienne Muller’s proposal that “[o]ne of the strengths of Christopher’s characterization is his sense of self as ‘normative’, rather than ‘deviant’” (121) for in doing so, Christopher emphasizes his own traits as not only normative, but even as superior to others. In particular, Christopher idealizes his own traits in drawing parallels with Holmes—this includes the ability of finding order within apparent chaos, detaching the mind at will, and a general disregard for the explanatory power of the supernatural and folk superstition (Freissmann 406). Similar to the Creature then, Christopher uses Holmes as a coping mechanism when he is faced with uncertainty. For instance, as he attempts to flee his

father Christopher shows that formulating a plan “[makes him] feel better because there was something in [his] head that had an order and a pattern” (Haddon 132); thus practicing Holmes’ ability to establish order. Moreover, like Holmes, Christopher suggests that he has the ability to notice the obvious things that most people omit when simply glancing (Haddon 73). Despite the fact that this causes a mental overload in new places such as the train station (Haddon 143), Christopher shows that he does not consider this trait a nuisance but rather takes pride in it by considering himself a real-life Holmes unlike others. To Christopher, the success of Holmes as a detective—albeit fictional—is evidence to Christopher that his peculiarities are in fact superior to that of normal individuals in his society. Thus Holmes idealizes Christopher’s perception of the self, allowing him to see past the inconveniences of his physical condition and consider his condition rather as the assets of a top detective and thinker.

Fundamentally, Christopher and the Creature develop as characters as a result of their innate curiosity for solving their mysteries and likewise introspection by means of fictional works. Christopher’s growth is a positive example in which he gains independence and a better understanding of himself in actively seeking truth and through his idealization of himself through Sherlock Holmes. On the other hand, through his education and engrossment with *Paradise Lost*, the Creature realizes the irreparable state of his isolation and thus despairs. Ultimately, while the circumstances of their alienation are perhaps not directly comparable, both the Creature and Christopher are transformed by a similar emotional journey in which they experience physical discomfort, fear, and betrayal as they strive to uncover the truth and understand the self through the ideal.

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