

First Place – High School - Non-Fiction/Essay

The Monster Within

By Maya Gosztyla

Do we all have a monster lurking inside us?

We've probably been pondering this question since the dawn of the human race. Down at our most basic levels, is there something evil inside all of us, quietly biding its time and waiting for the chance to escape and thrash out at the world around us?

Few people have attempted to answer this question, but those who do so successfully go down in history as some of the greatest minds of all time. When searching for an answer to this question, one is likely to consult two brilliant works of classic British literature: Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. These stories have been made into several movies and have inspired similar plots in countless other books, but one must read the originals in order to fully grasp their real meanings.

Many people compare these two stories to each other because they both incorporate the classic conflict of genius scientist versus his demonic creation. Delving into the inner workings of these novels, one will quickly come across the striking parallel between the characters of Dr. Jekyll and Dr. Frankenstein. The two are both earnest scientists, aspiring to revolutionize how the world views the meaning of the word "life" through their experiments; and for both scientists, their work ended in tragedy. They unwittingly created monsters unfit for the human world, murderous creatures that went against all the rules of nature. The beasts rewarded their creators with nothing but sorrow, slaughtering innocent humans and drowning the two scientists in guilt and misery. With their last breaths Jekyll and Frankenstein whispered words of regret, and begged future experimentalists never to take the fateful road down which they had trodden.

On the surface, the characters of Mr. Hyde and Frankenstein's monster appear very similar. They are both unnatural creatures, in that they are somewhere between human and demon, neither alive nor dead. They both are murderers of innocent people. However, when one peers beyond the surface, one finds that they really aren't the same at all. Hyde is an evil, demonic creation, with a definite lust for violence and hatred of humans. In contrast, Frankenstein's monster began

as an innocent, frightened being, cast away from human society due to its hideous physical appearance. Its constant lonely suffering and longing for affection made it furious at its creator for making it so different from humans. When Frankenstein refused to make another monster for it as a companion, the creature resolved to show its creator how it felt to be so miserably alone. It murdered Frankenstein's close friends and family, one by one. However, Frankenstein's monster did not enjoy killing these people; in fact, it hated committing these brutal acts of murder. It had a deep admiration for humans, even while envying their physical beauty and companionship with each other. It was only driven to murder by the humans' cruelty.

Another difference between these two books is that Hyde exists as a part of Jekyll, while Frankenstein's monster is a separate entity from his own person. However, this is only true in the physical sense. Jekyll's experiments showed that every person has an evil "Hyde" inside of them; but perhaps a creature like Frankenstein's monster is in each of us as well. We can relate to its suffering; we know what it's like to be excluded, to feel like less than everyone else, to be driven to hatred by envy. Perhaps Frankenstein's monster is as much a part of his creator as Hyde is a part of Jekyll. It makes one wonder, if these monsters are a part of ourselves, why we cast them away, calling them unnatural demons like we're so superior. These "monsters" are not monsters after all: they are our children, our creations; they are us. Perhaps they are not precisely human, but mentally and emotionally they are no different than the rest of us. It makes one think about about the real "monsters" of our world, those who are different from the rest of us, those who we turn our backs on because we are afraid of the unknown. Little do we know we are only shunning the mirror images of ourselves. We are exposing the monsters that live inside us all.