

**New York Performance Standards Consortium**

**Center for Inquiry in Teaching and Learning**

**Moderation Study**

2007-08

**Student Exemplars in English**

# New York Performance Standards Consortium

## Exemplars of Consortium Student Work

The teachers of the New York Performance Standards Consortium schools participated in a moderation study conducted by the Center for Inquiry in Teaching and Learning, the Consortium's professional development center. The student work included in this booklet was assessed by hundreds of Consortium teachers involved in the moderation process. Using the Consortium rubrics and evaluating papers from schools other than their own, the teachers reached consensus on the level of accomplishment of each paper.

### The Moderation Process—Phase I

In the spring of 2007, Consortium staffs submitted student performance assessment papers (known as PBATs, performance-based assessment tasks) and the rubrics used to evaluate the work. Each school submitted three papers in each of the following academic disciplines: English, social studies, math, and science. The papers represented the span of the rubric rankings: Outstanding, Good, Competent, and Needs Revision.

From the hundreds of papers submitted, 33 were assembled for Phase I of the process. Papers at either extreme of the assessment rankings—exhibiting either very highly- or lowly-skilled work—were removed since they were more reflective of individual students than of the general Consortium student population.

### Phase II

On a Saturday in late September, 150 teachers from the Consortium schools gathered to assess student work. Each teacher individually assessed three to four papers, then met with a group of about ten teachers, each representing a different Consortium school. They discussed and debated the quality of the papers and assignments, their individual assessments, and then worked together to complete a “consensus rubric.”

Using the papers that had achieved the greatest consensus, packets of 3 papers each, in each discipline (a total of 12 papers), were distributed to the Consortium schools for school-based assessment using the Consortium rubrics.

### Results

The moderation study results are considered “reliable” for papers that received a passing score (i.e., Competent or better) on 80% or more of the consensus rubrics. Those papers are included in this collection, along with their modal score.

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**Love in Literature**  
*Their Eyes Were Watching God* and  
*The Good Earth*

**Assessment: Competent**

## Love in Lit

### Literature Mastery

The task: Write a literary analytic essay that compares *Their Eyes Were Watching God* with *The Good Earth*. You may choose to focus on two characters, a theme, or a particular literary element or style to form the basis of your argument. Form a clear thesis and support your viewpoint with specific evidence from both texts.

*The Good Earth* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* are two books with many of the same themes. In the book called *The Good Earth* shows the main character Wang Lung and his metamorphosis from a poor farmer to a rich man as well as the his relationship with his three love interests. The book show how one's life back then was connected to the richness of the Earth. The book *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is about a woman named Janie and her growth through her love interests and knowledge of one's self. In the book it shows Janie's story and how she experienced different men who treated her differently. In both books the main characters show the different types of love for the different relationships they have.

The first relationship that both main characters had was forced and it was either one-sided and there was not really any love at all. Janie's grandmother said that she was becoming of age and said she will get her a husband. When her grandmother suggested Logan Killicks, Janie protested by saying "Naw Nanny, no ma'am! Is dat whut he been hangin' round here for? He look like some ole skull head in a grave yard." (Hurston, 13). Janie did not hide her disdain for Killicks, she thought of him as too old and unattractive. Her grandmother wished for her to have a stable environment when she passed but Janie would not have it. She was young and in her heart she wished for a marriage where she would be in love with the other. In the end she went with her grandmother's wishes and married Logan. Janie was distraught in her relationship with Logan; she was depressed

and therefore she did not love him. She talked to her grandmother but she said "If you don't want him you sho oughta...Dat's how come de ole folks say being a fool don't hurt nobody...you wants some dressed up dude dat got to look at da sole of his shoe every time he crossed da street....You can buy and sell such as dem wid what you got. In fact you can buy 'em and give 'em away." (Hurtson, 23). Janie's grandmother told her that even if she didn't love him she should learn to appreciate him because of what he had. She also thought that she was probably fantasizing about some handsome man to take her away instead of taking what she has. Janie's relationship with Killicks was not one born of love but of reluctance and duty for her grandmother.

In *The Good Earth* the main character Wang Lung's relationship with O-lan was the same as Janie's was with Killicks. When Wang Lung became of age his father went out to get him a wife. Since they were poor he asked the house of Hwang to buy a slave for a wife. Wang Lung met her he was a little disappointed because her feet were not bound. In China bound feet were thought to be a sign of beauty. Wang Lung was happy with her in the beginning because she was the first woman she had known but the found her to be too plain. Wang Lung did not connect with her because he felt she was too distant; "When she opened her eyes at last, she looked at him with a strange speechless gaze, and he felt as though he faced a child." (Buck, 25). There were many reasons why he felt so distant, one of which is that she was a woman and women in China were supposed to be beneath men. Wang Lung did not want to be ridiculed because he felt intrigued by his wife. Later on Wang Lung begins to grow tired of O-lan and he gets a concubine. Then he felt guilty because he already had O-lan but his guilt soon turned to anger when he saw that O-lan wasn't angry with him. He was angry because what he

expected from O-lan did not happen; "...and sadly out of her strange dumb eyes that were like beast's eyes that cannot speak." (Buck, 218). Wang Lung heard of women that scream and holler and sometimes even kill themselves but O-lan never showed any of these signs; all she did was drop her head and cry in defeat. Wang Lung's relationship with O-lan was distant because they were not connected in ways that people who love each other are supposed to be.

The second relationship that both main characters encountered was one of infatuation. In the beginning they felt that high of gaining something new but as the relationship died down they began to see that person as their idol no longer. In the book *Their Eyes Were Watching God* Janie was so depressed with Killicks but then when Joe Starks came along he filled her heart with a simple type of love that was infatuation. One day as Janie waited for Logan to come with a mule Joe came around and asked her about her life. When Janie told Starks about her life behind the plow he was stunned:

"You behind a plow! You ain't got no mo' business wid uh plow than uh hog is got wid uh holiday! You ain't got no business cuttin' up no seed p'taters neither. A pretty doll-baby lak you is made to sit on de porch and rock and fan yo'self and eat p'taters dat other folks plant just special for you." (Hurstons, 29).

Janie laughed and was flattered at Joe's compliment. She had never had anyone (especially a man) giving her compliments and treating her nice. She was dazed by his smooth talking and when he asked her to run away with him she thought about it. Janie thought that if she went away with Joe she would be free from the mundane life she had

with Killicks and move on to one that promised an adventure everyday. Janie soon realized that she feel in 'love' with the dream and not the man. Joe was everything she pictured for a man to be. He spoke well and he treated her right, but their point of views about how women should be treated was little different. Janie thought woman should be treated equally with equal respect and work. Joe thought that women had to be put on a 'porch' for others to admire their beauty and should not work. Since in those times man ruled over woman Janie felt constricted in her marriage with Joe. These restrictions on Janie's poetic mind made her feel as if she were in a glass cage staring out at the admiring townspeople and when ever she tried to speak out Joe would snuff out her ideas with harsh words and hands. Even nearing his death bed, Joe would not listen to Janie's views or opinions. When she told Joe how she felt he would not hear it and Janie calmly accepted. Janie tried to express all she felt:

“Listen, Jody, you ain't de Jody ah run off down de road wid. You'se whuts left after he died. Ah run off tuh keep house wid you in uh wonderful way. But you wasn't satisfied wid me de way Ah was. Naw! Mah own mind had tuh be squeezed and crowded out tuh make room for yours in me.” (Hurston, 86)

Janie thought that he became different when he grew into power and became mayor. She thought that he would be one to take care of her and treat her with equal respect but the she realized that was only infatuation as her and as their relationship progressed she saw his true colors as controlling and manipulative.



In The Good Earth Wang Lung experienced the same type of infatuation with Lotus. As Wang Lung grew rich from his crops he hired other people to do his work and then grew angry with his boredom. Wang Lung took his anger out on O-Lan by ridiculing her looks but she accepted it too peacefully. Wang Lung then began to go to a great teahouse because he felt that a man of his status only deserves to have the best. He saw Lotus' picture and immediately became infatuated with her. He got to see Lotus and then he became obsessed with her. Night and day all he thought about Lotus: "The days were endless. He would not sleep anymore in his bed....his breast filled with a sickness of a pain he could not understand."(Buck, 195). Wang Lung immediately became obsessed with Lotus' looks as soon as he saw her. In his mind he pictured her to be everything he wanted of a woman. He was so into her beauty that he failed to see the wickedness that lay within her heart. Lotus only cares about fine things and she disliked the children. Cuckoo and O-lan often clashed because of their history and Wang Lung failed to see the trouble that plagued his crops. Then he finally saw the truth of Lotus' true self as she mocked his children; "' Now I will not her my children cursed, no and not by anyone...if she does not love you she does not love your father either.'"(Buck, 225). Wang Lung fell out of his obsession with her beauty and saw her for the person that she really is.

The last relationship both characters had was one where the character finally found the person they resolved to be with. In Their Eyes Were Watching God, after Joe died Janie felt that she was free, she still continued working in the store with new found peace. One day a man named Teacake came in and he was everything Janie ever wished for a man to be. He treated her with kindness and respectfully. He treated her so well that she feared him to be a fraud; "She adored him and hated him at the same time." (Hurstons,

108). Janie fears that he too good to be true and everything he doing was just to get her for her money. As the days went on they went through many trials and they still came out together in the end. During a storm Teacake protected Janie from a rabid dog and then contracted Rabies. She was distraught as she had to kill him to save her life; "She hug him tight for soon he would be gone, and she had to tell him for the last time. Then the grief of outer darkness descended."(Hurston, 184). Janie still held sorrow for Teacake but still appreciated Teacake for the kindness he gave her. Teacakes showed Janie a different type of love that wasn't forced or clouded by admiration; it was a gentle love that was like she imagined it to be.

In The Good Earth Wang Lung's final love was with Peach Blossom. As Wang Lung grew old he strayed away from Lotus who only thought of food and gossip. Wang Lung was content with watching his grand children grow but his youngest son put a seed of thought in his head. Peach Blossom was only a slave to take care of Lotus but Wang Lung only admired her for her gentleness but soon found beauty in her was well. When Wang Lung finally had her and grew too old Peach blossom was kind and took care of him. She was everything he wanted; "The brief heat of it passed and passion died out of him; he was fond of her, but passionless." (Buck, 375). As Wang Lung grew old and tired he still loved Peach and that fact that she took care of him. He found a love that was like his dream.

In both books the main characters went through the different types of love. Wang Lung was with O-lan as Janie was with Logan because it was forced and they did what they were told to do and they did not like the person they were forced to be with. Janie's relationship with Joe was as Wang Lung's relationship with Lotus because it began as

infatuation where they only saw the idea of the person they wanted but then later on died as they saw the person's true color fade in. Their final relationship was the one that they finally had a taste of what they thought love was truly to be. Their ideas of love were finally manifested through the last person they were with.

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**Author Study**  
**James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* and**  
**"Sonny's Blues"**

**Good**

### Author Study: James Baldwin

What makes an American? There are many different types of people in the world, so the possibilities for an average American are numerous. People everywhere exist in all shapes, colors, and sizes. Yet, ideals or expectations are still set up for the average person to follow throughout life. When people fall out of the norm, they are seen and made to feel like outcasts. In Giovanni's Room and "Sonny's Blues," by James Baldwin, the author reveals the pressures of societal expectations. The main characters, David and Sonny experience the feelings of an outsider. Baldwin describes the experience of being an outsider as being misunderstood, and ultimately secluded, because of what someone is or wants. As a result of being an outsider, they also push away those they love, who are confused by their behavior as an outsider.

In a society, people are excluded because they are different. In Giovanni's Room and "Sonny's Blues," Baldwin shows what society expects from its individuals. Eventually these expectations blend in with the idea of being part of an American society. The author uses specific characters to represent the pressures of society, such as David's mother-like landlord in Giovanni's Room and Sonny's brother in "Sonny's Blues." As the landlord woman assures that the room David has rented is in good condition, she finds out that David's fiancée is in another country and he is alone – "You must go and find yourself another woman, a good woman, and get married, and have babies. Yes, that is what you ought to do" (68). This shows that men are expected to have a woman who

can take care of him and have babies. David has a mindset that makes him believe that what he wants is to be married and have a woman to take care of him. In fact, he wants to conform to society's norms. Unlike David, Sonny was also pressured to adjust to social norms. Baldwin uses the character of Sonny's brother to describe what is "normal" in his society. When Sonny's brother asked him if he was serious about playing jazz, it implied that becoming a jazz musician was not the type of career he wanted for his brother, especially since he himself was a school teacher. Sonny's brother let him know that he "[has] got to finish school" (94). This shows that Sonny becoming a musician was indeed unacceptable as Sonny's brother wanted other things for him. Baldwin's main characters David and Sonny are examples of how outsiders fall out of societal norms.

In Giovanni's Room, David's role as a man in part of a society was to have a woman take care of him and have children. The fact that the United States has such a negative history towards homosexuality may explain why Baldwin portrays David being in such denial of his own. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the "coming out" of just a few people convinced the people in medical science field that these people, who had increasing feelings of the same sex, had a form of mental illness (Painter). By 1933, the idea of people engaging in what was called "sodomy," became so "abnormal" that a "Pennsylvania appellate court [asked] that a man [who was] accused of sodomy to strip naked in the courtroom to prove that he was 'normal'" (Painter). The fact that a court wanted a man to prove whether he was normal or not shows the intolerance of people and how that intolerance may still exist today. Homosexuality was basically condemned in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the United States. It is no surprise then, that Baldwin

depicts the character of David as scared and in denial of who he is and what he wants. This might also explain why David wanted to leave the United States to France.

Baldwin uses *Sonny's Blues* to show how jazz excludes someone from society but also helps to deal with their seclusion. In general, jazz is known as a "black communal expression" (Carter). When jazz was categorized as black music it became very controversial. The idea of black supremacy in jazz has also become so popular and politically correct that jazz audiences sometimes discriminate against white musicians. Gene Lee, author of Cats of Any Color: Jazz Black And White, argues though that it is an interracial art that celebrates "the human spirit and personal vision" (Carter). There are many arguments, but one idea that is agreed upon is that what has been articulated is the centrality of jazz to African American culture as a "creative reflection of black experience" (Carter). Many people say that jazz represents pain and suffering but others, such as Wynton Marsalis, musician, describe jazz as "optimistic music – a music that takes its primary inspiration from struggles and achievements of the black community" (Carter). Baldwin uses the argument of jazz as "optimistic music" in "Sonny's Blues" because jazz helps Sonny cope with the fact that he is an outsider. Sonny's determination to play jazz may also be explained by the fact that jazz represented a form of "black supremacy" which might have been why Sonny was determined to play it. Therefore, even though he was being excluded from society, Sonny felt like he still belonged in the jazz part of society because it was something he could identify with since jazz was a "reflection of black experience."

Although David desperately tries to live up to the American ideals by restoring his relationship with his fiancée Hella, he knew that, no matter what, he was an outsider.



He tries to fool everyone around him, by saying that he wants to marry Hella and have kids of his own, when actually he was only fooling himself. Even when the landlady asks him if he is going to join Hella, he thought to himself, "I know I ought to lie, but somehow I cannot. I am afraid of her eyes..." (69). This scene shows that he knows who he is but is fighting himself so that no one knows who he really is – an outsider. He said that he was afraid of "her eyes" which means that he did not want to be judged for being an outcast in that society. "The eyes" symbolize society and its norms. He lied to her because her eyes held the threat of criticism from society that he has been afraid to confront. He only wanted the American ideal to not appear to others as an outsider. Regardless, David eventually expressed his feelings for Giovanni. As David witnessed the changes in Giovanni, he began to be filled many different thoughts – "I was in a terrible confusion. Sometimes I thought, but this *is* your life. Stop fighting it. Stop fighting. Or I thought I am happy. And he loves me... sometimes, when he was not near me, I thought, I will never let him touch me again..." (88). David thinks that he should "stop fighting it" and that he should not develop a deep romantic relationship with him. He only needed Hella seem like he wanted to conform to social norms and have a woman; when, in fact, David knew he really wanted Giovanni because "when [he] first looked at Hella, found her body uninteresting... [He] sometimes watched her naked body move and wished that it were harder and firmer" (158). The room becomes a symbol of how David is secluded from society as an outsider – "To insure privacy, Giovanni had obscured the window panes with a heavy, white cleaning polish... No one ever came to see us, except Jacques, and he did not come often. We were far from the center of the city, and we had no phone" (86). This sounds like they lived in the middle of nowhere. They

covered the windows so that people could not see from the outside, which must mean a person could not see out from the inside either. This shows how cut off they were from society. He also describes the room as cut off from communication. They completely separated themselves from society. Even though society did not segregate them the room represents that idea of alienation. As a result of his sexuality and want for Giovanni, David shows how an outsider is secluded from their society because of who they are and their personal desires.

Similar to David, Sonny also recognized that he himself was an outsider. Sonny's brother disliked the idea of Sonny becoming something that is not traditional or as safe as a school teacher. Nonetheless, he tells his brother, "I'll have to do a lot of studying to do, and I'll have to study everything but, I mean I want to play with - jazz musicians" (93). Unlike David, Sonny takes the risk of becoming more of an outsider by actually starting his career as a musician and leaving - "[Isabel] suddenly realized that his records were gone and she knew for certain he was gone" (97). Taking a risk and leaving makes Sonny more of an outsider because people who fall into the norm "play it safe" and might not leave their comfort zone - like Sonny's brother who made the safe decision by becoming a school teacher. Sonny was confirmed as an outsider because of the fact that his brother "didn't like the way he carried himself, loose and dreamlike all the time, and [he] didn't like his friends and his music seemed to be merely an excuse for the life he led. It sounded just that weird and disordered" (97). Sonny's brother becomes part of society by conforming to it. As previously mentioned, Baldwin also uses the character of Sonny's brother to represent the societal expectations. Therefore, when Sonny's brother did not

accept Sonny's decision to be a musician, it was really as if society was secluding Sonny. Therefore, this showed the seclusion from society due to what Sonny wanted for himself.

The people who cared for Sonny and David were puzzled at the way they were acting although their behavior was caused by the fact that they were both separated from society. Since the beginning, David was confused about his sexuality, particularly because of the ideals he was trying to live up to. Of course, his confusion also puzzled his fiancée. Hella. Frustrated and concerned about David, she would say things like, "I wish you'd tell me what it is" (154) and he would respond with "You don't know anything about it... You don't know how I feel" (160). Because David always seemed to be torn between conforming to social norms and doing what he wanted, he not only confused himself, but everyone around him, as well. As another outsider, Sonny's brother also misunderstood him. No matter how much Sonny explained his desire to play jazz to his brother, he never quite comprehended Sonny's reasons – "I simply couldn't see why on Earth he'd want to spend his time hanging around nightclubs, clowning around on bandstands, while people pushed each other around the dance floor... I just don't altogether get it, that's all" (93). Since Sonny's brother did not understand, Sonny (like David) develops feelings of being alienated. This shows that Baldwin describes an outsider as being confused and misunderstood by other people as both David and Sonny are. They are outsiders who are misunderstood by the people surrounding them who have already conformed to society's expectations.

Both main characters must find a way to deal with the consequences of being an outsider. Since David internalized what society said he should be, he began to conform and push Giovanni away – "But I'm a man! What do you think can happen between us?"

(142). If he was not giving into the society's norms, then he would have stayed with Giovanni. While David was with Giovanni, he had to deal with the continuous reminder of being separated from society – Giovanni's room. The room symbolizes David's segregation from society when he chose to be with Giovanni. When he described the room and how he felt about it, David was really describing how he felt as an outsider. As he spent more time in Giovanni's room, David felt closed in. The time in the room reminded him more of whom he is. David describes "the room's disorder which was frightening; it was the fact that when began searching for the key to this disorder, one realized that it was not to be found in any of the usual places... it was a matter of punishment and grief. I do not know how I knew this, but I knew it at once, perhaps because I wanted to live..." (87). In this quote, the disorder that David describes actually represents is the confusion in his life around his homosexuality. The "key to this disorder" is the fact that David is living with Giovanni as an outsider. He finds this key in an unusual place which is still somewhere in Giovanni's room. It is unusual because of David's sexuality. Since David is an outsider, he sees that even when he tries to get out of the disorder or confusion, there is no way to escape "the punishment" of being secluded in that room – just like he cannot escape the fact that he is gay. David still had the mindset that he wanted to feel as part of society. David dealt with this struggle by leaving Giovanni and leaving Paris – (David speaking) "Giovanni, I'll won't be coming back. You know I won't be back" (143). Since David was struggling with his homosexuality, he pushes Giovanni away. Because David's behavior confused Giovanni, David rather not deal with Giovanni and therefore leaves him. He later tells Hella, "I've been living in Giovanni's room for months, and I just can't stand it anymore. I have to get out of

there... Maybe it's just that if I stay in Paris I'll keep running into Giovanni..." (135).

This shows that the way David dealt with Giovanni was by escaping, or in other words, not dealing with him at all. Later on though, when David finally realizes that no matter where he was, he was never going to escape being an outcast, he faces his hardest challenge of all – recognizing that he lost Giovanni forever. As an outsider, the hardest challenge of all was having to sacrifice Giovanni who David really wanted, because of his desire to be in the "inside."

Unlike David, who conformed to society in the beginning, Sonny always followed his own desires. In spite of that, Sonny had to cope with the challenges of being an outcast. Sonny left his home in Harlem to do what he wanted to do - play jazz. As Sonny's and his brother ride in a cab, his brother describes how some people "escaped the trap, most didn't. Those who got out always left something of themselves behind, as some animals amputate a leg and leave it in the trap. It might be said that [he] had escaped, after all, I was a school teacher; or that Sonny had, he hadn't lived in Harlem for years" (88). This shows that Sonny chose to do what he wanted instead of conforming to social norms: he gave up his home in Harlem. His brother was in fact right about Sonny "leaving something behind" because not only did he leave his home behind, he left his brother behind. Sonny had always wanted his brother to understand or "listen to" the reasons that he wanted to be a musician – "I hear you. But you never hear anything I say" (95). He never understood, and therefore never accepted, Sonny's decision, making Sonny an outsider in society. Since Sonny was an outsider and his brother did not understand, in a way, he pushed his brother away when he left to play jazz. Although Sonny is his brother, Sonny pushes him away and therefore leaves the only person who

cares about him behind. His brother not understanding Sonny was Sonny's most difficult struggle. Sonny turned to drugs to deal with his struggle of being an outsider – "...when I was most *out* of the world, I felt that I was in it, that I was *with* it..." (102). When he was on heroin, he felt like he had a good fit in the society that his brother was part of, even though this was not reality. In addition to dealing with being an outsider by using drugs, he also used playing jazz to cope with being an outsider. Of course, since playing jazz was what he wanted for himself, this would be the best way to help him handle his struggle with his brother. Sonny's friend Creole made this possible – "he wanted Sonny to leave the shoreline and strike out for the deep water. He was Sonny's witness that deep water and drowning were not the same thing" (104). This quote describes that Creole knew what it was like to be an outsider, but that Sonny needed to take risks because that would be the only way to gain what he wanted – to be able to play jazz and be accepted by society. Creole helped him realize that although he is stepping into deep water, that is the risk he needed to take since he was already an outcast. When Sonny "has to fill this instrument with the breath of life" (104) it shows how he is coping with being an outsider. Instead of taking drugs, music becomes the primary way for Sonny to deal with being an outsider. Although music is part of what makes Sonny an outsider, for Sonny playing jazz helps him face himself as one. Ultimately, since Sonny has the attitude that he became an outsider because of his music, then why not let it help him deal with his struggle as an outsider, as well.

In conclusion, Baldwin wants us to understand that the experience of being an outsider is difficult because they are often misunderstood and face many troubling struggles and consequences along the way. Baldwin wants us to know that whether or not

outsiders like Sonny and David conform to norms, people will not understand them. Even if people eventually do understand them, people in society may still choose to not accept them. In the end, because Baldwin's main characters did not conform to society's norms; they were both free to be themselves. Although David seems to be alone in the end of the story, he did not conform because he is also not with Hella. It was David's choice to not come home to Hella for days and spend the night with some random man. Even when Hella discovered David, he did not do anything about it. That showed that he finally accepted himself and chose not to conform anymore. If he really did conform, he would have tried to deny his homosexuality again. In addition, he is not with Giovanni because Giovanni is the struggle or sacrifice he had to endure to get to this point. Giovanni is also the risk that David took as an outsider. Sonny has different results because he had always pursued what he wanted to do and never really did conform. The sacrifices that he faced as an outsider though helped him become more comfortable with being himself. Ultimately, the difficult process of both David and Sonny not conforming to society led them to be comfortable with themselves and not have to be suppressed by social norms.

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*Frankenstein* and “The Birthmark”

**Assessment: Competent**

## English PBAT Paper

Both the conflict in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "The Birthmark" have to do with the irresponsible actions of scientists in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Victor Frankenstein creates a "monster" in Shelley's famous novel and Alymer creates a potion to rid his beautiful wife of a small, red birthmark in the macabre short story "The Birthmark." These scientists use their knowledge and abilities in science to benefit themselves rather than society, and this causes their downfall as well as the downfall to their loved ones.

The main characters in both texts, Victor Frankenstein and Alymer, have very similar traits and probably represent the characteristics of scientists during their time period. They both were experimenting in science during a time when electricity had first been discovered. Mary Shelley based the scientific parts of her book on the works of Humphry Davy, the first President of the Royal Society of Science. Davy had said, "to modify and change the beings surrounding him, and by his experiments to interrogate nature with power, not simply as a scholar, passive and seeking only to understand her operations, but rather as a master, active with his own instruments" (Mellor: 18). Davy encouraged the scientists of his day to experiment with nature and master it through experiments. Both Alymer and Frankenstein did exactly this and suffered consequences for experimenting with nature.

Both men are characterized in their respective works as reputable scientists with social status who have studied hard and believe in human advancement through science. In "The Birthmark," Alymer made amazing potions that could do almost anything but

every potion had a negative consequence to it. When he tried to show off to his new bride, Georgiana, none of his potions seemed to work right which foreshadowed more horrible things to come. Alymer brags to her that one of his experiments could bring immortality or death from just a point of a finger. When Georgiana asked in horror "Why do you keep such a terrific drug?" Alymer replied "Do not mistrust me, dearest its virtuous potency is yet greater than its harmful one" (Hawthorne: 7).

Alymer then exposed her to one of his experiments. He gave Georgiana a pot of soil in which a new plant shot through the dirt and the leaves unfolded themselves into a stunning, beautiful plant. Georgiana loved it but Alymer (who is also showing a dark side) soon said, "Pluck it, and inhale its brief perfume while you may. The flower will wither in a few moments and leave nothing save its brown seed vessels; but thence may be perpetuated a race as ephemeral as itself" (Hawthorne: 5). After Georgiana inhaled the flower, it withered into death which horrified poor Georgiana. She could sense that what he was doing was questionable but her love for him surpassed her doubts.

Alymer is irresponsible with his experiments similar to Victor Frankenstein. Frankenstein had attended the University of Ingolstadt in Switzerland where he studied natural philosophy and chemistry and devoted long hours to his studies. When he entered the university, he paid a visit to one of the principle professors. Krempe. When he revealed that he was inspired by the works of sorcerers and mystics like Cornelius Agrippa, Albertus Magnus and Paracelsus, he chastised him and said, "Good God! In what desert land have you lived, where no one was kind enough to inform you that these fancies, which you have so greedily imbibed, are a thousand years old, and as musty as they are ancient?" (Shelley: 57)

But another more kindly professor, Waldman tells Frankenstein, "The ancient teachers of this science promised impossibilities and performed nothing... but these philosophers whose hands seem only made to dabble in dirt, and eyes to pour over the microscope, or crucible, have performed miracles" (Shelley: 61). Waldman also shared a desire to make the impossible come true and tells Frankenstein that science can make it into reality. This could have driven him to create the "monster" because he wanted to "ascend the heavens" and make miracles like in the fictional works he read.

Eventually Frankenstein's knowledge and expertise surpassed his teachers after a few years and rather than become a medical doctor like his father wanted, he decided to put his newfound knowledge into use. Frankenstein becomes obsessed with making an immortal being, a new living species of man. He wanted to find out, "whence did the principle of life proceed?" (Shelley: 67). Still grieving over his mother's death (she died right before he went to the university), Frankenstein explains, "If I could bestow animation upon lifeless matter, I might in process of time renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption (Shelley: 73)."

Frankenstein commits an irresponsible act when he created the monster. He created a frightening being made of dead human body parts. He does not accept the responsibility of caring for the creature and abandons him because he is so hideous and he is scared of his creation. He is disappointed with his results and says "for this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart" (Shelley: 42). Frankenstein's dream has now turned into a nightmare.

The "monster" starts off being very kind and gentle but Victor doesn't know this because he abandons and rejects him. In time, the monster learned to read and write and express his emotions. He realized he was a "monster" after gazing upon his reflection in a pond and was treated like a "monster" by humans every time he encountered them. Villagers chased him, a family he grew to love rejected him and after saving a drowning girl, he was rewarded by being shot.

Victor has a tendency to reject the people he loves. When he abandons the monster, he goes back home to his loved ones. Frankenstein's fiancée, Elizabeth Lavenza is waiting for him after years of being away. She is Victor's cousin who came to live in the Frankenstein household as a young girl. It is clear that Victor loves her and wishes nothing more than to be with her but he is also obsessed with his studies and experiments, and eventually with hunting down and killing his creation. While they were engaged, Frankenstein postponed the wedding for years since he was pursuing the "monster" he created. Victor was too engrossed in catching the monster who had gone on a murderous rampage, killing his little brother William and framing his servant, Justine, for his murder.

Elizabeth grew worried and believed Frankenstein did not want to marry her but he reassured her that he loved her and would marry her one day. He knows by then end of the novel that she is the true source of his happiness, not the experiments or science. But because Victor destroyed any chance of the monster being happy (Victor first abandoned him and destroyed the female companion he was supposed to make for him as part of an agreement), the monster became enraged and killed Elizabeth on their wedding night.

Alymer and Georgiana have a close relationship as a newly married couple. He greatly dislikes the tiny, handlike birthmark on her cheek and wanted her to remove it even though she thought of it as a bit of a "charm" and others had no problem with it. Alymer, in his quest to find perfection rather than happiness, insists that it takes away from her beauty and that the birthmark is some kind of evil blemish. Georgiana reluctantly agreed to remove the birthmark because she loved her husband so dearly:

*"If there be the remotest possibility of it, let the attempt be made at whatever risk. Danger is nothing to me; for life, while this hateful mark makes me the object of your horror and disgust,--life is a burden which I would fling down with joy. Either remove this dreadful hand, or take my wretched life! You have deep science. All the world bears witness of it. You have achieved great wonders. Cannot you remove this little, little mark, which I cover with the tips of two small fingers? Is this beyond your power, for the sake of your own peace, and to save your poor wife from madness?"*

Alymer made his wife believe the birthmark his wife had was ugly and a "burden" although she and her former lovers thought it was a thing of beauty. Since Alymer was stressing Georgian about the birthmark so much, it began to drive her mad. She allowed Alymer to use his powers in science to remove the birthmark so they could be truly happy together. He provoked his wife in believing the birthmark was a terrible thing even though it was merely just a birthmark, and perhaps a symbol of life rather than evil as he arrogantly thought.

Each scientist in the two texts creates their own "monster." Alymer's monster is a potion that kills her and Frankenstein's is a humanlike creature he makes from dead human bodies. They both have good intentions but it ultimately creates death upon the ones closest to them. Although Alymer loses his beloved wife from his creation, Frankenstein suffers from the deaths of his childhood friend, Henry Clerval; his youngest

brother William; his bride, Elizabeth; and Justine Moritz, the servant girl because of the monster's need to revenge Victor.

The "monster" in "The Birthmark" is Georgiana's birthmark. Alymer hates the birthmark and believes without it Georgiana's true beauty would show. Although "Georgiana's lovers were wont to say that some fairy at her birth hour had laid her hand upon the infant's cheek, and left this impress there to token of the magic endowments that were to give her such sway over all hearts." Alymer is so irresponsible he put his wife's life at risk to remove something as small as a birthmark.

Alymer and Frankenstein were both experimenting with science during the same time period, when electricity was first discovered and was in its early stages. The President of the Royal Society of Science, Humphry Davy, was the leading scientist of their time. He encouraged scientists to experiment with nature and that's exactly what Alymer and Frankenstein did. They irresponsibly experimented with nature and created their own "monster." At the end nature fights back, killing the ones closest to them and Victor Frankenstein.