

Like Father Like Son:  
Parental Absence and Identity Construction  
in Shelley's *Frankenstein*

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“Everything must have a beginning . . . And that beginning must be linked to something that went before.”

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*.

## Abstract

Romantic author Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1787-1851) suffered numerous traumatic incidents in her personal life. Her experiences with parenthood, from the death of her mother to the deaths of her own children, have warranted several critical interpretations of her most famous novel, *Frankenstein*. This essay will discuss *Frankenstein* as a representation of Shelley's own thoughts and experiences. Her romantic perspective, as expressed by the novel, challenged Enlightenment ideals by placing emphasis on the importance of emotional connection, while awakening a concern for those who believed logic and science to be the only sources of "truth" and personal fulfillment. Additionally, through a thorough analysis of individual characters as well as the relationships between characters in the novel, I will demonstrate how Shelley's novel is a medium through which she specifically discusses the role of a parent in a child's life.

My paper employs a comparative examination of the parent-child relationships in Shelley's life and those found in the novel. In relation to Shelley's life, I came to understand that the relationships in the novel are, in many ways, a reflection on the responsibilities of the conceptual "parent-figure". By incorporating the theories of Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein and Wilfred Bion, my thesis analyzes *Frankenstein* from a psychoanalytic perspective. These theories conclude that successful self-identification relies on a healthy relationship between parent and child, and that an unhealthy relationship conversely produces harmful effects for a child as that child attempts to construct his/her identity. According to those conclusions, both Shelley and her protagonist, Dr. Victor Frankenstein, were led down destructive paths because of the inability to identify: a problem which is rooted in their abandonment.

I chose to write about this topic because I believe that Shelley's novel sheds light on the flaws of Enlightenment ideology, many of which can still be considered problems today. More

specifically, Shelley and I would agree that the pursuit of knowledge can create a distance between one and one's humanity, ultimately affecting the way in which one engages with others as well as the self. This problem, then, extends beyond a literary context and can be discussed historically, ethically, and philosophically, as it has produced a never-ending debate between progressive intellectualism and humanity itself.

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According to Freudian psychoanalytic theory, an infant is understood to be driven by basic human instinct. This idea is emphasized by Freud's notion of the "tabula rasa." The term, literally meaning "blank slate," refers to the natural/innately aware state of a new-born mind which is emotionally and imaginatively unregulated by the faculties which govern social behavior. However, from the time that we are born, we begin to construct our identities within both an individual and cultural context. How a person constructs his/her identity is directly linked, then, to the child's first communal experience, the relationship between parent and child. In agreement with this idea, it can be said that successful identification depends on the parent's ability to direct a gradual compromise of the child's instinctually uninhibited mental state and the cultural "rules" he/she is expected to follow as a member of society. Socialization, the process through which one comes to define one's place in the larger society, plays a major role as one begins to address personal identity. With this said, it is similarly implied that a parent's failure to successfully socialize a child inevitably produces various harmful consequences for both the child and the environment in which he/she lives.

When thinking about identity, the age-long debate concerning nature versus nurture almost always arises. While some consistently hold fast to the idea that humans have an innate nature that drives thought and behavior throughout our entire lives, it is hard to denounce the very apparent significance of social factors considering the varying imprints of different cultures on each individual. Without completely dismissing the idea of human nature, it can be argued that if human consciousness is comprised only of this same "nature," different cultures would rarely oppose one another. The way that cultural beliefs and ideas imprint themselves on the mind of the individual demonstrates how one's environment is a major factor in identity construction. Psychoanalytic theory compromises the nature versus nurture debate by claiming

that both nature and nurture must be equally considered when discussing identity. Within this argument, another arises which conversely addresses parental absence and the effect it can have on a child's mental and emotional development.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* explores parental absence in its various forms. As she was a product of parental absence herself, Shelley's novel provides a commentary on the role of the parent in identity construction and, more importantly, the consequences associated with parental absence. Using extensively developed character relationships, Shelley provides readers with a clear picture of those imprints made on her own mind, allowing ample opportunity for psychoanalysis. As told by *Frankenstein*, the consequences of such unfortunate circumstances can be divided into different categories. These consequences are psychological, drastically disturbing the course of a child's socialization and identity formation. They are emotional, as they prevent communication resulting in feelings of loneliness, anomie, and lack of self-worth. Lastly, consequences are physical, as the emotional and psychological responses often manifest in a harmful and violent manner.

## I. Mary Shelley: A Closer Look

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley was born on August 30<sup>th</sup> of 1797. She was the product of two of the most influential thinkers of the time period. Her father, William Godwin, was an esteemed novelist, philosopher, and journalist. Her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, was a well-known women's rights activist and writer. Wollstonecraft produced several famous works such as *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, which would be a major influence to Mary Shelley later in her life. Wollstonecraft and Godwin were known by most as political and intellectual rebels. They even opposed the institution of marriage, believing that it robbed women of legal existence (Ty). In avoidance of bastardizing their child, they married four months into the pregnancy. However, just eleven days after giving birth, Wollstonecraft contracted puerperal fever (a postpartum disease that was common at the time) and passed away (Doherty 389). After her death, William Godwin presided as the primary caretaker for Shelley and her half-sister, Fanny (daughter of Wollstonecraft and ex-lover Gilbert Imlay) (Ty).

Shortly after Wollstonecraft's death, Godwin began to collect and assemble some of her unfinished work. In January of 1798, he published *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, which included writings that accounted for many of the personal experiences of his deceased wife (Ty). Within this account, Godwin shed light on Wollstonecraft's character by detailing events such as her affair with Gilbert Imlay (a former officer in the American Revolutionary Army), her obsession with painter Henry Fuseli, and her multiple attempts at suicide. In doing this, Godwin "hoped to immortalize his wife whom he considered to be 'a person of eminent merit'" (Ty). Unfortunately, the predominantly conservative values of the time did not necessarily agree with the type of lifestyle that Wollstonecraft led up to her death. As a



result, many saw the unfortunate circumstances of her untimely death as deserved punishment for female deviance and sexual irresponsibility. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, then, would grow up “with the realization that the parent she had never known was both celebrated as a pioneer reformer of woman's rights and education, and castigated as an ‘unsex'd female’” (Ty).

In the first three years of her life, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin would become very attached to her father. The feeling, at first, was indeed reciprocated. Godwin idolized the child, calling her “pretty little Mary” (Ty), and exhibiting extreme favoritism for her over half-sister Fanny. Neither of the girls received formal education in their early childhood. Instead, Godwin supervised most of their education himself, pushing Shelley to eventually develop a love for literature and writing.

In May of 1801 (just four years after the death of his wife), William Godwin met Mary Jane Clairmont. It was not long after their meeting before he decided that she would make a fine wife and new mother for his children. Clairmont had children of her own (six year old Charles and four year old Jane), and was evidently not particularly fond of Mary (Ty). She appeared to be jealous of Godwin’s marriage to Wollstonecraft as well as his close relationship with Mary. As Eleanor Ty (biographer who studied Shelley’s life) claims, “not only did she demand that Mary do household chores, [but] she constantly encroached on Mary’s privacy, opening her letters and limiting her access to Godwin” (Ty). Ty makes it clear that Clairmont engaged in an active effort to keep Mary and her father apart. Clairmont also shamelessly demonstrated an extreme favoring of her own children over Mary. Her daughter, Jane, went off to study French in school, while Mary was never given any opportunity for formal education despite her growing interest in writing. However, having already learned to read, Mary furthered her own education

by reading the books in her father's well-stocked library and by observing his conversations with other intellectual pupils who often visited their home (Ty).

Clairmont eventually founded the Juvenile Library of M.J. Godwin and Company, her very own publishing company. The company generated a large profit for the Godwin's. Mary was able to have her work published by the company as she grew up (Ty). In spite of this, however, the relationship between Mary and her step-mother continued to worsen. It is understood that Mary

. . . construed Mrs. Godwin as the opposite of everything that she has learned to worship in her own dead mother – as conservative, philistine, devious, and manipulative, where Wollstonecraft was freethinking, intellectual, open, and generous. (Ty)

In 1812, Mary was sent to live in Scotland with a friend of her father's, William Baxter, and his family. During her time in Scotland, Mary befriended Baxter's two daughters and was exposed to a very different family dynamic than she had ever seen. She observed a closeness that she herself did not experience growing up in a home with a hostile replacement-mother figure. It is also said that her time with the Baxter's was a time in which her creativity was fueled by the beauty of the nature which she discovered when she visited Ireland with the family (Ty).

When she returned to England, Mary met Percy Bysshe Shelley, a new follower and student of her father. Shelley financially supported Mary's father, offering generous donations as he came from a wealthy family and believed that his money proved its worth in the assistance of others (Ty). Shelley, at the time, was married to a woman named Harriet Westbrook Shelley (Lauritsen). However, he eventually became a constant dinner guest at the Godwin house. He and Mary would escape on walks together, engaging in deeply intimate and intellectual conversation. It is said that Percy most loved that Mary was the daughter of two of the greatest

minds of the time period, and that he was taken by her beauty and craving for knowledge (Lauritsen). Soon enough, Mary and Percy announced that they were in love (Ty).

Upon hearing this news, Godwin forbade the two from continuing to see one another, ashamed of Mary's insistence on a married man. Shelley then attempted suicide, convincing Mary of his unimaginable and uncompromising love. Following the gesture, Mary and Percy ran away to France with plans to elope. Mary was then disowned by her father, as he believed her actions to be unforgivable. Despite the Shelley family's financial stability, Percy was still waiting on an inheritance and could not afford to sustain himself, causing the two to struggle and move frequently (Ty). Financial instability, however, was only one of a number of stresses on the couple's relationship. Percy believed in the concept of "free love," and often encouraged Mary to have unwanted sexual relations with other men (Ty). He also openly entertained romantic and sexual gestures from other women, including Mary's own step-sister, Jane (Ty).

After the marriage, Mary encountered a spell of bad luck. In 1815, she gave birth to their first child, despite Percy's still legal marriage to Harriet Shelley. In fact, Harriet was pregnant with Percy's child in the same year. Mary and Percy's daughter, Clara, was born prematurely and died only eleven days after her birth (a curiously ironic number, as Mary's mother died eleven days after giving birth to her). In the next few years, death would become a regular part of Mary Shelley's life. Fanny Godwin and Harriet Westbrook Shelley (still pregnant with Percy's child at the time) both committed suicide in 1816. Later that year, Mary gave birth to her second child, William. Three years later in 1819, William died of malaria. Her third child, Clara Everina, was born in 1817 and died in 1818 after contracting dysentery (Doherty 390). In her fifth pregnancy, Shelley miscarried. Her fourth child, Percy Florence, was her only child that survived long enough to outlive her (Lauritsen).

After several of these deaths, Mary began a slow descent into depression. Just two weeks after the death of her first child, she had a nightmare in which she warmed the body of the dead child by fire, bringing it back to life (Mellor 10). The image of her dead daughter clearly haunted Mary, causing the nightmare to recur for a significant time thereafter. About eighteen months later, Mary, Percy and a newly acquired friend of theirs, Lord Byron, often met and had intellectual discussions during the couple's travels. On one rainy night in June of 1816, they (along with William Polidori, Byron's doctor) convened in Geneva and entertained themselves with a collection of German ghost stories. The four then decided that they would have a contest for which they would each write a horror story to share with one another (Ty). Of the experience, Mary recounts,

I felt that blank incapability of invention which is the greatest misery of authorship, when dull nothing replies to our anxious invocations. *Have you thought of a story?* I was asked each morning, and each morning I was forced to reply with a mortifying negative.

(Shelley 7)

Here, it is clear that Shelley struggled to come up with a story. She experienced an extreme anxiety as she tried to compete with her husband and the other men, until she became inspired by another dream which came to her some nights after.

Shelley's dream was fueled by a conversation which had taken place after the other three men shared their composed horror stories. Scientific innovation and discovery (specifically the work of Charles Darwin) was a frequently visited topic of discussion amongst the group.

Inspired by this debate, Shelley had a dream in which she

. . . saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together.  
I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then . . . show signs of life, and  
stir with an uneasy, half vital motion. (Shelley 8)

The day after, Mary began writing what would later become the fourth chapter in her most famous work, *Frankenstein*. Her dream painted a picture of the scientific pursuit of creation. Considering the popular debates on creation at the time, Mary (as both parent and child) was forced to consider herself within the debate as both creation and creator. With death so prevalent in her life, especially in the cases of her children, Mary then composed the story of Victor Frankenstein, a story which gothicized the relationship between parent and child.

Several characters within the novel can be read as representations of Mary Shelley's emotional and psychological experiences. From the death of her own mother to the deaths of her children, Shelley was the subject of several traumatic events that undoubtedly influenced her perception of parenthood. It can be said, then, that her trauma unconsciously manifested within her fiction.

## **II. Romanticism as a Rejection of the Enlightenment**

In a rebellious attempt against the forces of organized religion, intellectuals of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century collectively began writing the philosophies that would later become known as the texts of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment, also known as the “age of reason,” was a movement which emphasized the importance of logic and reason over more traditional (mainly faith-based) values. While in theory such progression might serve as a necessary reformation of an exploited society, philosophies of the movement gave way to complications which would eventually lay the ground work for the next cultural challenge, the challenge proposed by the romantics.

The supreme goal of the Enlightenment was to dismantle a social structure that was based strictly on religion. As the church continued to lose the trust and respect of the people through a continuously suspicious engagement in politics, it was no surprise that the “free-thinkers” of the time period would seize the opportunity to debate the institution as a whole. In addition to the growing mistrust of the church, the movement was fueled by the industrial revolution which exposed new ways of understanding human capability. Developments in science and technology urged people to consider that the human mind was not merely limited in its perception of truth and reality, as was previously suggested by religion which conversely attributed this ability to a higher power. To Enlightenment thinkers, traditional ideologies unjustly suggested the individual to be insignificant and incapable, a notion that was proven false specifically by the discovery of electricity. The revolution became an indicator that truth and reality could indeed be accessed by a human being, should one simply apply reason and logic in the pursuit.

The irony in the age of reason lies in its “reasonable” denial of emotion, an ever-present and undeniable human experience. The movement stressed the irrationality in emotional experience, disregarding it as an accurate method through which one can access reality. While emotion is certainly not logical, it cannot be denied as a way through which people perceive. Emotional filters, should one admit it or not, are most certainly activated when observing both the internal and the external, whether this takes place consciously or unconsciously.

This was precisely the perspective taken by the romantics. The romantic era was, in many ways, a complete rejection of enlightenment ideology. As opposed to logic and reason, romanticism validated the metaphysical, and acknowledged sensory experience and emotional recognition as the means through which one perceives reality. The sometimes unexplainable nature of emotion suggests an element of mystery that is contrastingly celebrated by romanticism. Specifically, sensational feelings like awe and terror in the presence of nature were used as examples of the authenticity in emotional experience. While enlightenment thinkers rigorously sought after a universal truth, romantics placed a high value on the unknown with an understanding that it is sometimes beautifully ungraspable.

*Frankenstein*, as a Romantic text, embodies these concepts by exposing the many dangers of Enlightenment philosophy. Shelley’s protagonist, Dr. Victor Frankenstein, is both product and projection of individualistic intellectualism. Specifically focusing on the parent-child relationship, Shelley emphasizes the importance of emotional recognition by telling a story of what happens when it is not present. According to the text, overemphasis of intellectual superiority coupled with a complete disregard for the very human experience of emotion leads a person into an existence in which he/she becomes separated from his/her humanity. In this separation, one becomes separated from the self, as well as those around one. The haunting tale

is one detailing the inescapable chain of selfishness and monstrosity that is created when a person lacking a sense of identity attempts to create life.



### **III. Frankenstein: A Brief Synopsis**

The tale begins from the perspective of explorer, Robert Walton. Walton begins the narration in a series of letters addressed to his sister, detailing his experience on a journey to the North Pole. Walton relays an intense passion for his work, aspiring to achieve “some great purpose” (Shelley 13), but also expresses his feelings of loneliness and isolation as he struggles to relate to the other men on his ship. That is, until one night when he encounters a stranger stranded on a sheet of ice and takes him aboard. The man is very weak, and Walton and his shipmates try to be accommodating. After a few days in recovery, the man is revealed to be Dr. Victor Frankenstein, who then agrees to tell Walton his story.

Victor then assumes the role of narrator. He begins his story by describing his family. His father, Alphonse Frankenstein, married his mother, Caroline Beaufort, after Caroline’s father (a good friend of Alphonse’s) dies. Victor is born two years later. When he is five years old, Caroline, on a trip to Italy, meets a poor Italian family and a young orphan girl, Elizabeth Lavenza, whom the family takes care of. Caroline decides to adopt the child, and she and Victor grow up together becoming the closest of childhood friends. Caroline from the beginning, however, is adamant on Victor and Elizabeth marrying someday.

Victor’s household is completed with the addition of William, his younger brother, and Justine Moritz, another young girl taken in by the Frankenstein family. He also befriends a classmate named Henry Clerval with whom he develops an extremely close relationship. He explains that he grows up within a very tight-knit circle of family and friends. As he enters his teen years, Victor becomes fascinated by natural philosophy, specifically the work of Cornelius Agrippa, an alchemist specializing in the occult sciences. However, his interest is dismissed by

his father who claims that the outdated works of Agrippa and the like are “sad trash” (Shelley ). Victor also questions his interest when an associate of his father who studies modern natural philosophy explains to him the scientific workings of electricity.

Soon after, Victor prepares to go off to college. But just before he leaves, Caroline contracts scarlet fever from Elizabeth, and dies. Victor is severely affected by the loss. Despite his desire to stay with his family in Geneva, however, he is urged by his father to leave for school as soon as possible. Victor attends the university at Ingolstadt where he meets several professors who also scold him for his interest in natural philosophy, encouraging him toward a more modern approach to science. The curious and impressionable Victor then attends a chemistry lecture which completely restructures his intellectual mentality, eventually causing him to become obsessed with human anatomy and decay.

Victor’s neurotic and obsessive behavior now begins to manifest. He dives head first into his new interest and secludes himself within his quarters at Ingolstadt, leaving all social relationships and overall human interaction behind. After a few years, he finds that he has accomplished all that he can under the guidance of his professors, and endeavors to take his studies further on his own. He vows that he “will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation” (Shelley 43). Here, Victor asserts that he will use his scientific discoveries to create life out of the inanimate.

Victor becomes more and more engulfed in his work, and aspires to be the creator of a “new race” (Shelley 42). As he works, he continues to isolate himself and becomes physically ill. He ignores everything that was once important to him including his friends, family, his own health, and his studies at school. His family writes to him, expressing their concern for his wellbeing as he has not communicated with them in a long while. These letters, however, all go

unanswered. Victor spends endless days and nights in the darkness of his basement assembling the bodily parts of different corpses together. After months of hard labor, he is finally able to bring his creation to life.

Despite the highly anticipated result of his efforts, Victor is shocked and horrified as he watches the creature come to life. He confesses that he chose the bodily parts which would make up his creation with an image of beauty in mind, but that compiled together, the pieces only added to the horrific appearance. He admits, “now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart” (Shelley 53). Victor then rushes into his bedroom to escape the creature, and tries to go to sleep to rid himself of the anxiety that overcomes him. However, he is unable to do so, haunted by a nightmare in which his beloved Elizabeth turns into his mother’s corpse before his eyes.

When he wakes, the creature is standing above him smiling. Still shocked and disgusted, Victor flees from his apartment, abandoning the creature. He paces around the courtyard of Ingolstadt and runs into his old friend, Henry Clerval. Seeing Henry refreshes Victor, and reminds him of what he left behind back in Geneva. The two catch up with one another, and Victor brings Clerval back to his apartment. When they arrive, the creature, to Victor’s delight, is nowhere to be found. Henry, observing Victor’s deteriorating health, offers to stay with Victor and take care of him. Soon after, Victor receives a letter from Elizabeth.

Elizabeth is extremely worried about Victor’s health and the distance that he has created between him and his family. She also informs Victor that Justine, a young girl who also lived with the family as they were growing up, has come back to stay with them after her mother’s passing. Victor remains at Ingolstadt for a short time after. He soon recognizes that his condition becomes worse in the presence of chemicals, and that he cannot physically bear to be at the

school any longer. At this point, he decides to go back to Geneva. While he waits for his father to inform him of when he will be leaving, Victor and Henry walk around the country, often finding peace in the beauty of nature.

When Victor finally receives word from his father, he is surprised by disheartening news: his younger brother, William, has been murdered. Upon hearing the news, Victor leaves for Geneva immediately. When he arrives, the gates to Geneva are closed, so he walks into the woods again attempting to clear his mind. He goes to the site where he knows William's body was found, and for the first time, he sees the creature wandering about. Upon seeing the creature, Victor immediately blames him for William's death. However, he soon learns that Justine is being brought to trial for the murder, as she was found in possession of a picture of Caroline that William always kept in his pocket. Knowing the truth about William's murder, Victor tries to defend Justine but is too afraid to speak up about what he has done. Despite his efforts, no one believes him, and Justine is forced into a confession by a priest who promises her salvation. Though she confides in Elizabeth and Victor that she has not really committed the crime, she is still convicted and sentenced to death.

After the deaths of two figures in the family, Alphonse Frankenstein decides to take the rest of the family on a trip in order to raise their spirits. Victor, however, is unresponsive. Instead, he retreats again, and considers suicide on many occasions because of the grief and guilt that he feels. When they return to Geneva, Victor continues to sink into his depression. In nature, as it is often reiterated in the novel, he seeks solace and peace of mind. In light of this, he goes off one night to the summit of Montanvert, and again encounters the creature. The creature runs after Victor and frightens him. Though Victor threatens and yells at him, the creature approaches

Victor in a way that he does not expect. Instead of reacting violently or aggressively, the creature calmly asks Victor to join him in his dwelling by the fire so that he can tell his story.

The creature's story is eloquently expressed, and is charged by emotion. He emphasizes his feelings of extreme confusion and discomfort after being born (and subsequently abandoned) and discusses his first experiences with human impulses like thirst and hunger. The creature then explains how he learned to survive in the wilderness on his own. When he first encounters human beings, they are frightened (like Victor) by him and react with disgust. Upon discerning these reactions, he comes to understand that he must isolate himself. He finds a separated space for shelter near a small cottage, and notices that there is a family living inside it. From his dwelling he is able to observe the cottagers while remaining unseen.

The observations that the creature makes about the cottagers prove extremely significant as he formulates perceptions of human interaction. The creature steals food from them to satisfy his own hunger, but then realizes that the family is very poor and unhappy. A sense of guilt then comes over him, and he starts to leave firewood in front of their doorway in an effort to help them. The creature also starts to slowly understand basic language from the cottagers. He learns that they are called by the names Felix, Agatha, and De Lacey. However, as he comes to admire them, he also starts to question his own solitude. That is, until he observes his reflection in a puddle and is, for the first time, made aware of his disfigured appearance. Afterwards, he realizes that he cannot reveal himself to the cottagers, and continues to watch them from afar.

Soon, the cottagers welcome a woman named Safie into their home. The creature, at this time, can only notice the change in mood of the household upon Safie's arrival. However, Safie does not speak the same language as the cottagers. Felix begins to teach her the language by using texts like Constantin-François de Volney's *Ruins of Empires*, while the creature silently

observes and learns for himself. After learning the language of the cottagers, it becomes clear to the creature that Safie is Felix's lover. As the creature conceives, Safie's Turkish father was prosecuted by the Turkish government for a crime he did not commit. Felix attempted to help Safie's father during which time he met Safie and fell in love with her. When he assisted her father in escaping his imprisonment, however, Felix is caught and his family is banished from France, sending them into poverty. Through language, the creature is able to understand much about how people (specifically, families) interact with one another. However, by recognizing and admiring the benefits of communal relationships as represented by the cottagers, he becomes more and more aware of his own isolation, causing him to feel increasingly rejected and alone.

As the creature seeks the same communion that he observes among the cottagers, he wanders around looking for his creator, hoping that Victor will accept him. During his journey, though, he finds pages of Victor's journal that convey his disgust with the creature upon its birth. Disappointed, the creature then decides that he will look to the compassionate cottagers for approval, and that he will do so by first attempting to communicate with the blind De Lacey. Using language, he assumes, will finally allow him to communicate and connect with another human being by establishing common ground between them. When he puts his well-developed plan into action, the elderly De Lacey responds positively, and continues to engage in conversation with the creature for some time. However, as soon as Agatha, Felix, and Safie return to find the disfigured creature, they react immediately out of fear, threatening and banishing him again into a solitary existence.

The incident infuriates the creature. He is now aware that despite his ability to establish connection and communicate with others, he is still an outcast because of his appearance. He is angered at the human race as a whole and seeks revenge, more specifically, on the human who

created him. On his way to Geneva in search of Victor, the creature sees a young girl drowning, and still manages to feel empathy for her. He saves her life, at which point a man who had been looking for her shoots him, assuming that he attacked her. The constant abuse and rejection exhibited by others (despite the creature's efforts to be kind) continues to produce hatred and anger within him. Along his search for Victor, he comes across young William, and is made aware that he is indeed Victor's brother. When he realizes the relation, he strangles the child to death, and plants the photo of Caroline Beaufort in the sleeping Justine's pocket. His explanation incriminates Victor as the source of all the destruction that the creature has caused in Victor's life. He is honest with Victor about the killings, hoping that Victor will take responsibility and be able to identify with his circumstances enough to fulfill a simple request. He asks that Victor create a female mate for him so that he no longer has to live in solitude and therefore, no longer has the desire to kill.

Victor reluctantly agrees to the request, though he is fearful of the potential consequences of creating yet another creature like the first. Even though he does agree, he puts off the creation for as long as possible in avoidance of the result. Victor has extreme anxiety as he debates creating the second creature. Alphonse wonders if his disoriented state stems from his unhappiness, as he is soon to be married to Elizabeth. In response, Victor expresses that his only source of happiness is in knowing that he and Elizabeth will soon wed. However, he asks to go to London before the wedding takes place. His father agrees, sending Clerval along with him, and he soon sets off to begin his work.

After some time passes, Victor grows increasingly paranoid about his lurking creation. As he assembles the new female creature, he has the realization that he is also creating a possibility for procreation between the two creatures which could produce of a "race of devils"

(Shelley 144). In the midst of this realization, the creature appears to him. Victor is then overcome by his fear and anxiety, and impulsively destroys the unfinished mate. The creature becomes enraged and vows that he will dedicate the rest of his days toward seeking vengeance on Victor. He leaves Victor to his paranoia, and promises that he will be with Victor again on his wedding night.

In the next scene, Victor takes a row boat into the middle of the ocean and dumps the remains of his incomplete creation. He then falls asleep, and wakes up to a group of townspeople who suspect him of a murder that took place the night before. When the body is revealed to him, he sees that it is Henry Clerval, who he knows has been taken as the creature's latest victim. Victor is held in prison for some time. While in prison, he again becomes dangerously ill. After several months, Victor is finally found innocent. However, he continues to suffer knowing that he must now re-enter the world in which his angry creation awaits him.

While he is imprisoned, Elizabeth grows increasingly concerned about Victor. She assumes that his frequent illness is arising as a result of his being forced to marry her, and worries that he is possibly in love with someone else. Victor responds reassuringly, telling her that he cannot wait to be back in Geneva and for them to finally wed. All the while, Victor remembers the words of his creation. He anticipates that he will confront the creature on the night of the wedding, and that they will engage in a fight after which a winner can be named, and the looming conflict finally resolved. When he arrives back in Geneva, arrangements for a speedy wedding are made, and the ceremony takes place. Afterward, Victor and Elizabeth head to a cottage nearby for their honeymoon.

Victor continues to anticipate the attack. He advises Elizabeth to go to sleep soon after they arrive, as he does not want her to lay eyes on the creature. She agrees, and Victor begins to



search for the creature, prepared to face him. However, while he is looking around the cottage for the creature, he suddenly hears Elizabeth scream, and immediately realizes what has happened. He realizes that the creature did not plan to come after him, and that Elizabeth, as the woman he loves, was the intended victim all along. The creature sought vengeance on Victor by subjecting him to the same isolated existence that Victor has subjected him to by refusing to create a mate for him. Just as he guesses, Elizabeth has been murdered, and the creature flees. After relaying the news of Elizabeth's death to Alphonse, Alphonse becomes consumed by grief and dies just days later. Consumed by his own grief and guilt, Victor then decides to turn himself in and finally confesses that he created a monster that is responsible for the recent deaths. However, no one believes him, and he dedicates the rest of his days to looking for the creature until he can destroy it. Victor's narrative now arrives in the present. He explains how he ended up where Walton finds him. He explains that as he hunts the creature, he finds clues that have been left for him as if the creature experiences pleasure in being chased. On this note, his story ends.

Walton now reflects on his encounter with Victor. He writes to his sister that he believes Victor's story to be true, and that he wishes that he had known Victor when he was young as he described in his story, as opposed to now when he is very sickly and approaching death. Soon after, Victor dies. On the night of his death, Walton hears a strange noise coming from the room where Victor's body lays. When he looks inside, he sees the creature crying over Victor's corpse. The creature talks to Walton, telling him about his life and how he regrets becoming evil. Furthermore, he says that he too is ready to die now that Victor is dead. His death, however, is not detailed. At the end of the novel, he simply vanishes in the darkness.

#### IV. The Helpless Creation

The term “childhood” has many associations. Generally, it can be understood as the early stages in one’s life during which survival is almost completely dependent on the care of another. Dr. Sigmund Freud, who dedicated his life’s work to the study of human psychic development, argues in one of his most famous works *The Ego and the Id*, that the infant stage of development is particularly delicate because it represents the “id.” The id, as Freud conceives it, is the part of the human psyche comprised only of instinct. The id gives way to instinctive behavioral impulses that many claim reflect human nature (De Berg 52). For example, an infant will cry when it is hungry, as it needs food to survive (without being able to feed itself). This dependence renders a child helpless, and therefore imposes a level of responsibility upon the parental figure. While parental responsibility exists firstly on a physical level, it later extends to a psychological and emotional level as well. As psychoanalytic theory explains, the parent’s duty to a child also becomes defined by his/her ability to ensure that a child can effectively engage and communicate with his/her “self” as well as the outside world.

From the time of his mother’s death, Victor Frankenstein begins to demonstrate the complications which can arise in child development when a parental figure is not present. The same can be said of Mary Shelley’s experience with losing her own mother. Though the loss occurs at different stages of development for the two (Shelley at birth, and Victor as he is approaching college) the representation of maternal absence is a constant. For Victor and Mary, the absence of the maternal figure has psychological consequences. In both cases, these consequences are a manifestation of the child’s unconscious reaction to his/her abandonment. In his *Studies on Hysteria*, Freud proclaims that there are three main causes of mental pain. One of

these causes is the feeling of helplessness (Fleming 28). He argues that it is helplessness which causes the infant to form an attachment to the mother. On Freud's notion, Manuela Fleming elaborates,

Helplessness . . . is defined by Freud (1895) as the first condition of the human race. In his view, primordial pain can be found in the human baby's helpless condition . . . in this context he enhances the importance of the surrounding environment and the early infant-mother relationship. (28)

Here, Fleming describes how Freud's theory of helplessness suggests dependence on the mother as an external object, thus emphasizing the importance and influence of the surrounding environment in child development.

Psychoanalyst Melanie Klein adds to Freud's argument by claiming that infants form attachment to the maternal figure specifically as a defense mechanism to the state of helplessness (Liekermen 156). When understood as a defense mechanism, dependence provides the reason for what she termed "projective identification." Projective identification describes the process through which a child develops psychologically by forming his/her first "object-relation" to the mother (156). Here, the "object" represents the "other," or anything that exists in the external world (155). In this context, the mother is the first object that the child develops a relationship with. The concept of object-relation explains projection and introjection, essential processes that, according to Klein, occur continuously throughout one's life. Projection occurs as the infant attempts to rid his/her self of infantile anxiety (or, "mental pain") by projecting the frustration (as an element of his/her ego) into the mother figure. "Into" the mother figure as opposed to "onto" is a purposeful distinction that is made: "into" suggests that the mother internalizes that which is projected (157). On the other hand, introjection occurs when the infant processes his/her

experience with the nurturing, external “good” object, and internalizes it as a part of his/her “self” or ego. The mothers’ bosom, in particular, serves in projective identification as the first external object with which the infant innately associates with sanctuary, a protected escape from the anxiety of helplessness (157). This notion illustrates how the first experience of self-identification is embedded within the infant-mother relationship.

Within the same school of thought, psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion expanded on Freudian and Kleinian ideas of identity and external experience (Fleming 29). Bion formulated his own theory which breaks up the ego in terms of the interactions between what he called alpha-elements, beta-elements, and alpha-functions. Alpha-elements represent one’s conscious thoughts. Beta-elements are the “unprocessed” or “raw” experiences one has with the external world as perceived through the senses (Glover 114). These experiences, as Bion explains, “become absorbable” into alpha-elements, meaning that they are processed by the ego and thereby internalized (114). This process occurs through alpha-functions (114). Alpha-functions are defined as the preverbal ways through which humans communicate with themselves and the outside world.

Defining the maternal-figure in terms of alpha-function, as Bion does, places sole responsibility on the mother as the medium through which the child learns to mentally process/cope with emotional experiences beginning immediately at birth (Glover 114). Bion solidifies his claim by identifying the mother as the “container”, a term describing the mother as the object which consumes (or contains) the child’s projected feelings of both frustration and attachment, and the object which contains the elements of the “other” ego that the child reciprocally internalizes. Nicky Glover clarifies the nature of mother-infant attachment by explaining Bion’s conception of “maternal reverie.”

The mother's 'reverie' is her alpha-function, and represents [her] ability to modify a child's tensions and anxieties. The mother and the child form a 'thinking couple' which is the prototype of the thinking process that continues developing throughout life. (114)

Bion interprets reverie as a transcendent experience between mother and child that can be almost equated to fantasy, in that it cannot be conceptually grasped within the confines of conscious human understanding. It is a connection established when a mother nurtures her child, and consists of the feelings of love and compassion shared mutually (though not verbally communicated) between the two (115). This is the first time that a child is able to communicate with the external, and therefore affects the way he/she perceives and internalizes the external thereafter. Maternal reverie, then, proves to be a significant factor in self-identification.

In conjunction with Klein's initial statement on dependence, concepts of maternal alpha-function and reverie most certainly imply that any disruption in the infant mother relationship would be inevitably consequential for the child in question. In relation to Shelley's story, these concepts tell us that Victor's creation, lacking the emphasized maternal figure, similarly lacks a way through which he can relieve his frustration through projective identification, and cannot therefore construct a healthy sense of self. Bion's analysis concludes that since the creature does not experience the unconscious, emotional exchange that occurs between mother and infant, he is denied the first (and most beneficial) intersubjective experience, the experience of being protected and nurtured in the helpless state. Without that initial recognition of his helplessness accompanied by a reciprocation of emotional attachment, the creature becomes subject to his infantile anxiety for the rest of his life. Not only is the new-born creature left alone to make sense of and act upon his instinctual impulses for survival, but he is also left without another to identify with, causing him to be psychologically affected.

Bion's later work with continual regard to Freudian and Kleinian psychoanalytic theory began to discuss mental pain specifically in terms of identity struggle and the parent-child relationship (Fleming 28). He hypothesized it as the struggle to grasp a sense of identity resulting from an unconscious mental conflict between the instinctually driven "self" and the socially-immersed "self." The conflict often causes one to go through the process of repression. Fleming explains repression as "'psychical activity' [which] draws back from any event which might arouse unpleasure" (29). As expressed here, repression is another defense mechanism of the psyche. It happens as a denial of unpleasurable or "painful" experiences, and allows one to function in society without having to consciously acknowledge that pain. While it may temporarily relieve mental pain, repression most often manifests, yielding consequences that reflect one's detachment from his/her sense of identity.

Mary Shelley incorporates mental pain and repression in her fiction, as she embodied it in her own life. The mechanism to cope (or constructively deal with emotional trauma) and the mechanism to repress can be said to function like muscles in the psyche. If the mechanism to cope is exercised (as it is under the assumption of the mother as alpha-function), it becomes stronger, enabling a person to engage with emotional experiences in a healthy way throughout his/her life. In contrast, the failed infant-mother relationship encourages repression by offering no other compromising agent, no object, which serves as an apparatus for thought (Glover 110). Mary Shelley, as proposed by psychoanalytic analysis of *Frankenstein*, certainly repressed her painful experience of growing up without a mother. Without the connection in maternal reverie, Shelley, like her monster, is left alone to helplessly seek the transcendent relationship which can presumably only exist between mother and infant. In other words, Shelley and her motherless creature both become unfairly subject to their frustrated abandoned state, forcing them to repress

painful emotions, and therefore struggle as they each try to establish a sense of self. It must then be asked, if an infant does not have the described experience, is he/she doomed in self-identification? And if not the mother, what becomes the object with which one projects and introjects? Where, or to whom, does a helpless child turn?

## V. Language as the Primary Apparatus

As the creature grows out of the infant stage, he learns how to be physically self-sufficient and assimilates to his environment by following his instincts. The creature, so far in the novel, has witnessed the horrified reactions of others in response to his presence. He is initially confused by these reactions because he has no desire to harm anyone and can only understand his own perspective. However, this is before he acquires any means of communication. When the creature sees his reflection, he is able to understand his physical deformity comparatively by considering it in relation to the appearances he has observed. The way he perceives his identity at this point then, is characterized by his objectivity, or his complete distinction from the other. From the outside he can observe others, but as he strives to achieve intersubjectivity, he is constantly made aware of his objective position and is therefore still prevented from engaging in projective identification.

The creature retreats into solitude, a recurring thematic touchstone in the narrative. When he does, he comes into contact with the cottagers from whom he gains a new perspective on human interaction and emotional experience, specifically in relation to the concept of love. As he has only known rejection from the time of his birth, love is a concept that intrigues the creature as he watches the different dynamics unfold: two children taking care of father, brother and sister taking care of one another, and husband/lover taking care of wife/beloved. Metabolizing an idea like love without any previous exposure to it excites the creature. He observes their happiness in communion (and perhaps, happiness itself) for the first time. He then becomes so consumed by his desire to experience it that he endeavors to communicate with them, convinced that if he can express his harmlessness, they will perhaps accept him (the way they accept each other) with



open arms. Though he was not able to benefit from maternal reverie as an infant, the creature again ventures to identify with the object by attempting to assimilate to his social surroundings: he does so by learning language. For the creature, language takes the place of the mother in fulfilling the role of primary apparatus. While in maternal-reverie the mother serves as the first medium through which the child becomes able to communicate internally and externally (though non-verbally), language, for the creature, is the first way in which he learns to engage with himself and the other, and therefore communicate.

The relationship that unfolds between the creature and the cottagers allows the reader access to a different image of the creature's identity, more accurately characterized by innocence. De Lacey, because he is elderly and blind, is also a representation of innocence. He is prevented from seeing physical deformity, allowing him to judge the creature based only on how he can verbally communicate his character. Though De Lacey becomes fond of the creature, his children (whom he depends on) take a simple look at the creature and reject him without further consideration, causing De Lacey to react in the same way. This is one of the first instances in which the creature begins to internalize his place in society as a complete outcast because of his physical deformity. Even though he is able to communicate a "good" character to De Lacey, his character is completely undermined by his appearance. The creature is then forced confront his degree of separation from others, and must recognize his rejection as rooted only in physical discrimination. By learning language from the cottagers, the creature comes to grasp the universality of the emotional experience of love. However, language also makes the creature aware of his own inability to attain it. Understandably so, he grows frustrated with his circumstances. His character has thus far been constructed by innocence and generosity, but his appearance (as constructed by Victor) has condemned him to a life of isolation. Despite his

hopes that language would relieve him of his loneliness and anomy, it again causes the creature to identify his place in the world as the unidentifiable object.

It must be noted that the narrative structure of his story as he relays it to Victor does not establish him as unidentifiable in the eyes of the reader. Instead, his touching and eloquent speech as well as his intellectual incorporation of philosophical texts (like Milton's *Paradise Lost*) (Shelley 120), establish similarity between the creature and the reader, allowing the reader to empathize and identify with him throughout the rest of the novel. However, to elaborate on this point, it can be said that that the reader's understanding of the creature through his narrative/speech rather than a physical encounter with him (such as those experienced by the characters in the novel) suggests that while language is certainly a tool of communication, there are other factors which must be considered when understanding the human ability to empathize.

In her essay, Manuela Fleming uses Bion's work to link language to the object, or "other." She concludes of Bion's theory that,

'Words,' for instance, symbolize 'no-things' or a representation of absent things different from nothing. The no-thing represents a space linked to mental suffering due to absence of the object, and it could be, depending on the condition of the mind, either contained and suffered or, if there is intolerance to pain, changed into a 'thing-in-itself' or beta-element and evacuated by means of projective identifications. (29)

Here, Fleming emphasizes words as symbols. Rather than holding a universally true and individual meaning, a word is merely a way of representing an idea. In this representation, a word is then a generalization for one's experience with (or perception of) an object. For example, if I want to communicate to another that I would like to climb a tree: the word "tree" is a generalized signifier of an array of different kinds of trees. However, in my mind, there is a

specific picture of an object which I associate as a tree, while the object being visualized by the other I am speaking to is likely to be completely different, as he/she has come to associate the word differently. Language and the use of words, as Bion's theory suggests, arises because the psyche needs to create an association for an object it perceives in a way that is communicable (to both the self and the other) when the object is not present. However, as demonstrated by the "tree" example, each person associates a word in an individual way, depending on his/her experience with the object. While the different associations of a simple word like "tree" might not be detrimental to successful human interaction, the same cannot be said for more intangible concepts such like love, pain, beauty, etc. Because these concepts have such differentiating associations, language can impose a gap in empathetic understanding.

According to Flemings explanation of Bion's theory, the mental pain associated with the absence of an object is either compromised by the psyche through projective identification, or uncompromised, producing continuous mental suffering. Because the creature has not successfully achieved projective identification, he experiences continuous pain as his psyche attempts to compromise the absence of the "mother," the "father," the "sister," the "brother," and the "mate/lover," as he has now come to understand these ideas as constructed and projected by the cottagers. Overall, he seeks compassionate interaction, which he now associates with "love" as embodied by these familial relationships. The constructed concepts of the family reinforce the creature's objectivity as he is unable to personally identify with the emotional experience associated with them. Ultimately, his position as the object is the source of his mental pain, forbidding him from relating to and therefore empathizing with others. His anger and resulting lack of empathy, then, is what makes him kill or, what makes him a "monster."

## VI. Dominant Ideology and the Binary: Conflicts in Identity Construction

“Monstrosity” is another concept that can be analyzed as a generalized construction. It is commonly defined as an inherent “evil” that exists within a person (or creature) that drives him/her to act in such a way that is harmful to others. However, when examined in relation to Victor’s creation, the word “monster” exhibits the flaws of language in portraying the gray area which exists between binary cultural concepts. In order for language to collectively make sense to a group of people, it is easier to define conceptual ideas in terms of opposition. Western culture, in particular, has a tendency to structure language based on these binary concepts which assign meaning to words by establishing radical opposition (for example, ideas of love and hate or good and evil). As demonstrated by *Frankenstein*, the social construction of monstrosity unjustly results in a misguided characterization of Victor’s innocent creation.

Language, as the means through which we socially interact, is a social construction itself. It can therefore not be denied that language is representative of dominant cultural ideology. “Monstrosity” as associated with “evil” exists as an opposition to the social construction of “good.” Because the creature commits murder (which is socially unacceptable), he cannot be categorized as “good,” automatically placing him into the category of “evil,” even though his actions do not necessarily reflect an evil nature. As reiterated by Bion’s conception of “words”, the binary relationships which arise within language enable people to categorize in precisely this way. It is assumed by psychoanalytic theory that language is a secondary mode of understanding and provides a way of categorizing the external, but when language assumes the role of primary apparatus (as it does in the case of Victor’s creation), a person is then forced to seek identification and therefore construct his/her identity in terms of the dominant cultural concepts

embedded in it. Furthermore, it can be concluded that the imposition of ideological ideals on the psyche as one seeks to define the “self” results in an inevitable struggle for those who do not completely identify with either side of a binary relationship, or those who exist in the gray area.

*Frankenstein* supports the many claims posed by psychoanalytic theorists regarding the consequences of the absent mother. When the maternal figure is not present, a child, in his/her desperate need for the emotional attention and nurturing commonly experienced in maternal reverie, will seek that attention from outside forces. Victor’s creation demonstrates that the mind of an infant is malleable and absence of the proposed dominant force in mental development leaves that mind open to be easily impressed upon, specifically by the implications of cultural ideology. Despite psychoanalytic suggestions of the mother as the dominant force in child development, however, the role of the father must also be considered when addressing identity construction. Presumably, a motherless child is not a parentless child, which means that the child might not be completely at risk when constructing his/her identity should the mother figure be absent. Perhaps, the child could instead internalize elements of his/her father, and internalize/project those elements of the ego instead. Victor as the only existing creator or parent figure, then, has a responsibility to share parts of his ego or “self” with his child in such a way that instills both a sense of community and a sense of self within the creature. However, the conflict between the creature and his creator lies exactly in this issue.

Victor himself is also a product of paternal neglect. Through a psychoanalysis of Victor, then, one can deduce that Victor’s creation is in many ways a manifestation of his repressed desire for his father’s approval. As previously noted, Victor’s interest in modern science takes form as a result of his father’s harsh criticism of his interest in natural philosophy. As he initially sees it, studying modern science is the only way in which he can relate to his father, and

therefore the only way that he can obtain his father's approval. However, his growing obsession only further separates him from his father. He completely loses sight of his original goal in an effort to repress the pain he feels as a result of his mother's death. Upon successful completion of his creation, Victor is horrified at the very sight of him. If the role of the parent is characterized by intersubjectivity, his compassion for his child should not be dependent on physical appearance. But Victor's problem in loving the monster unconditionally does not merely signify his vanity. His obsessive and hyperactive strife to create life is instead a behavioral reaction to his repressed pain. It is a manifestation of the insecurity he feels as a result of being robbed of the protective object of his affection and subsequently placed in the care of a paternal figure who approaches parenthood from a position which eliminates emotional expression as a means through which parent and child identify.

Without consideration of emotion, empathy is not possible. Lack of emotional support from the father-figure is a concept frequently explored in the novel. The relationship between Victor and Alphonse, it can be said, is in many ways related to Shelley's relationship with her own father. Specifically speaking, Alphonse schedules Victor to leave for Ingolstadt just days after the death of his mother. The reaction that one might expect (or prefer) a father to have is significantly more empathetic. On the contrary, however, Alphonse insists that Victor leave for school immediately to "distract" him from the emotional suffering that the death may cause. Ironically, Victor's illness and voluntary isolation from his father and other family members happens as a result of this very "distraction."

Victor's disobedience (in being unresponsive to his family's letters) is also the behavioral consequence of emotional neglect. Laura Claridge agrees that "the romantic educators typically placed the blame for . . . misconduct at the door of a negligent (though often well-meaning)

parent. Shelley herself often indicts Victor's parents in exactly this way" (1). By insisting that Victor avoid his emotional pain, Alphonse seemingly has his son's best interest in mind, as he clearly does not want Victor to experience the pain in the first place. Though he may have good intentions, Alphonse's healing strategy is immensely flawed. Should he have provided direct emotional support by acknowledging and addressing Victor's emotional pain constructively rather than dismissing it, he may not have been driven to retreat into scientific pursuit.

Caroline's death is not the only instance in which Alphonse Frankenstein emotionally abandons his son. From the beginning of the story, it is clear that Alphonse places significant value on intellectualism and social standing. Modern scientific intellectualism, according to the previously mentioned theories, can be read here as the cultural construction with which Victor comes to associate his identity as a result of his father's criticism. In doing so, however, Victor falls victim to the same dehumanizing falsities which Shelley believed to have plagued the Enlightenment era. The flaw in Enlightenment ideology, as Shelley understands, lies in its overemphasis of the logical and its undermining of the very human experience of emotion. In other words, by retreating into science, Victor relinquishes his humanity.

The ever-present dismissal in Victor and Alphonse's relationship causes Victor to seek approval (like the monster) in his environment, specifically through gaining social standing. As Claridge explains,

The need to win approval from judgmental parents can at times compel the child toward excellence; but it can also be perverted into disastrous extremes, in which the child transforms his Promethean aspirations for success into those of overreaching and surpassing his parents at the cost of everything else. (5)

Victor's need for approval provokes his egotistic plight toward intellectual superiority, and thus his interest in creation. As a symbol, the monster's physical deformity represents the unhealthiness of Victor's aspirations and the emotional turmoil that they eventually cause.

Victor's obsession with constructing a personal sense of intellectualism suggests that his intentions in creation are completely selfish, marking his descent down a destructive path. Lars Lunsford agrees, "Victor Frankenstein doesn't value life in the absolute. Instead, he places a higher worth on his reputation. He wants to join the new class of learned men that has replaced the landed gentry as the upper society in Europe" (1). As Lunsford remarks, acceptance or fulfillment, for Victor, can be recognized in the new-found intellectual upper-class of European society that emerged during the Enlightenment. However, with such an extreme emphasis on gaining personal validation through social standing, Victor's concept of the value of human life becomes dangerously altered, eventually resulting in the downfall of both him and his creation.

Mary Shelley again projects the relationship between Victor Frankenstein and Alphonse Frankenstein as an image of her relationship with her own father. Just like Victor, it can similarly be stated that William Godwin had a skewed perception of the value of life. Not only did he recover from his first wife's death within a short amount of time, but he came to value the life of his own daughter by only ever addressing her level of education and her relationship with Percy Shelley. In her earlier life, she sought out information and educational experience in a way which her father could personally identify with, causing him to idolize her. However, upon making the decision to run away with Percy, her father disowned her as she acted "dishonorably" by eloping with a married man. Whether or not her actions should have been condoned, her father's love proves to be conditional, and is reliant on how she is viewed socially. In conjunction, her timely attempt at rebellion against her father leaves her ostracized and rejected instead of



nurtured. In this sense, Shelley and Victor relate in that the two are both forced to find self-worth on their own, causing them to seek it using other means. Mary feels a sense of self-worth when she marries Percy Shelley, leading her into an emotionally destructive relationship. Victor feels a sense of self-worth upon discovering the secret to the creation of life, eventually leading him into madness.

Victor's creation causes him to literally regard himself as fathering a new species (Shelley 36). By creating a new species, Victor aspires to achieve immortality. He assumes a god-like role, possessing the power to create life beyond the limits of human procreation. The idea of immortality was one that was closely examined on a moral and ethical level by romantic critics of the Enlightenment. A major criticism of the Enlightenment was that in its attempt to dismantle the institutional ideologies imposed by organized religion, it merely succeeded in constructing a new ideology which was solely based on the binary opposition between faith and logic. In conversation with the previous discussion of the binary nature of language, it can be said that the Enlightenment presented an ideology which merely aimed at radical opposition, thus causing Enlightenment thinkers to undermine the many human elements (such as emotional experience) which exist in the gray area.

Mary Shelley was well versed in affairs surrounding mortality. Not only did she (like Victor) lose her mother, but she also witnessed the deaths of several of her own children, her half-sister, and her husband's wife (for which she felt personally guilty). The idea of mortality can be applied when analyzing different aspects of Shelley's life, including her role as a woman writer of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. While Mary's intellectual pursuit differed from Victor's in that it was not necessarily scientific, her education certainly made her aware of her own social circumstance as a woman. Following in her father's footsteps, she was surrounded specifically by men who

were regarded as intellectually superiors of the time period. Similarly, when she married Percy Shelley and became acquainted with Lord Byron, the pressure to be considered equal continuously grew, especially when she was challenged in the contest to write a ghost story. As Mary was primarily exposed to a male-dominated intellectual world, it must be considered that her mother's presence (as a fellow intellectual) could have aided her in developing a proud sense of intellectual womanhood.

However, this was not the case. Shelley was never fully confident in her ability to produce a good piece of writing. In addition, the pressure put on her to continue her mother's legacy by both her father and Percy could have very well been the source of the anxiety she often felt as a writer. She was haunted by nightmares over the writing contest, and reasonably so. She never went off to school, and relied only on herself for education once her father selfishly became consumed by his new marriage. He did not nurture her ability to write at the critical stages of her intellectual development, nor did he adequately encourage or support her in a way that would instill within her a sense of security regarding her writing. She grew up in the shadows of the new intellectual class of men, insecure and intimidated by the minds around her and doubting herself throughout the entire process of trying to establish her identity. Producing the *Frankenstein* text, then, was Shelley's own attempt to beat the odds and achieve the masculine ideal of immortality, the immortality she could not femininely gain by successfully raising a child. As suggested by the opening quotation of this paper, *Frankenstein* was born an extension of a chapter, just as a child is born an extension of a parent.

Womanhood as it relates to procreation can also be understood as a culturally constructed ideology. The struggle to construct one's identity in terms of an ideological concept like womanhood is embodied by Shelley's character, Elizabeth Lavenza. In Freud's *Studies on*

*Hysteria*, we find a case study that assists in the analysis of Elizabeth from the psychoanalytic perspective. The Freudian patient referred to as Lucy R. suffered psychological trauma as a result of “her unrequited love for her German employer” (Fluhr 2). Lucy was a governess living in her employer’s home, and as she was required to assume a maternal role for his children, found it difficult to understand that she was not really the wife and mother of the household. Of the study, Nicole Fluhr notes, “The . . . case features [a] . . . figure familiar in the pages of New Woman fiction, the surrogate or foster mother, whom new women writers resorted to in their efforts to disentangle motherhood and biology” (2). From this perspective, the “mother” is understood not as a biological relation between woman and child, but as a cultural relationship in which a female assumes a maternal role by becoming the caretaker of the child. For Lucy R, the ideological implications of motherhood cause her to psychologically deteriorate, as she is unable to recognize her true relation to the family.

In analyzing *Frankenstein* on a similar basis, Elizabeth can be interpreted as the replacement mother-figure to the Frankenstein family. Shelley does not write of the circumstances of Caroline’s death unintentionally. In blaming Caroline’s death on scarlet fever which she contracts from Elizabeth, Shelley acquaints the reader with the concept of maternal replacement. Like Lucy R., Elizabeth assumes a maternal role due to the fact that she is the only female of age in the Frankenstein household. Though she is not biologically related to the family, her assumption of this role causes her to believe that she is now emotionally responsible for Victor. Her sense of responsibility evolves, like Lucy R.’s, into unrequited obsession, causing her to wait for Victor with no real promise that he will eventually become a lover (or, son) that she can nurture. The relationship between Victor and Elizabeth represents the tension between child and non-biological parent. As Elizabeth tries to gain a place of significance in Victor’s life,

she unintentionally pushes him further away and becomes one of the many forces that cause him to “retreat into himself” (Lunsford 1). Her death at the end of the novel symbolizes her failure to establish her own identity that is separate from Victor. She, as the replacement mother, is killed by the creature because she has become merely an extension of her illogical and psychotic infatuation. From Shelley’s perspective as demonstrated by Elizabeth, there is no adequate replacement for the biological mother, reminiscent of her feelings towards her own step-mother.

Like Elizabeth, Mary Jane Clairmont’s assumption of the maternal role leads her to psychological deterioration. Considering Freud’s theory of the Electra complex, it can be said that Clairmont was unconsciously threatened by Mary’s relationship with her father, resulting in her harsh treatment of Mary and continuous efforts to keep the two apart. Mary most certainly saw her step-mother as psychotic, suffering mentally when she entered a family in which her love interest had placed two other females before her, one whom she would not have to physically deal with, and one who was still alive, living in her house as a silent reminder of her own insignificance. Mary Shelley clearly believed that in disregarding the biological significance of the maternal figure, the replacement inevitably causes psychological harm to both herself as well as the child in question.

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* provides insight into the emotional and psychological effects of parental absence that plagued Shelley’s inner conscience for most of her life. Through analysis of the major characters in her novel, one can easily deduce that Shelley was severely affected by the parental absence and neglect she experienced as a child. From this perspective, one can understand that parental absence is not merely physical, and that the numerous types of parental abandonment yield harmful psychological consequences. These consequences, as demonstrated by Shelley’s characters and her own personal life, negatively affect the child’s

ability to construct a sense of personal identity. In denying a child his/her first communal experience, the child must consequently venture to construct his/her identity in relation to the dominant ideological concepts, subjecting the child to the harsh implications of the cultural ideals of his/her environment. As a result, it is impossible for those most innocent to truly understand not only themselves, but the others with which they seek communion, condemning them to an existence of miserable isolation.

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