

**Mary Shelley's Frankenstein: A closer look into the process of identity, self worth, and the devastation of a life without it**

Distinguishing identity can be a challenging task, however when coupled with abandonment and neglect the process of determining self worth can be nearly impossible. Victor flees at the sight of his creature, relinquishing all responsibility for what he has just given life to and leaving his creation to fend for itself. Alone in his tender first days of life, the monster is left to wonder the world alone in hopes of discovering himself and learn about the world. Without the facilitation, care, and example of his creator, the monster develops moral conscience and identity through unusual means, creating an unnatural understanding of the world and his specific role in it. Due to the absence and negligence of his "parent," the creature gains knowledge through painful personal experience, lead with nearly no example or facilitation of any kind. This text examines the cruel upbringing of the creature's life as well as the neglect of his creator and its direct effects on the creature. It's Victor's irresponsible choice of abandonment from the start that motivated the creature's habits, beliefs, choices, and actions, all of which result in a agonizing destructive end for Victor and his loved ones.

For most, obtaining identity is a continual process, sculpted over time through life experiences, social interaction, mentor moments, and the model behavior of others. In the case of Victor Frankenstein and his creation, these

rules and the positive outcomes associated do not apply. Sadly, both struggle to discern their value and placement in the world, scrambling to gather any understanding of personal identity. Victor's personal dilemma directly influences the monster's development, creating a mirror image of Victor's own identity crisis leading directly to moral and mortal devastation. A number of critics have evaluated the creature's inability to sustain stable self-worth, however what has been largely ignored is the effect of his creator. Victor's unstable identity and emotional trouble since youth influenced the monster's life. Lee Zimmerman discusses the similarities and affects of both creator and creation's young life traumas and the negative outcomes experienced by both. Mary Shelley examines the struggle of discovering identity through family relations and the damaging affects of a lonely life in her book Frankenstein.

The dilemma of identity begins far before the monster is developed. Initially, it's founded in Victor's inability to love and know himself. Clearly gifted and talented with intellect and ability, he sadly allows his mind to become corrupt, drifting away from the comforts of life he knew and the safe harbor of home. Family, friends, and his education were all pushed aside for his intrigue and curiosity of science, causing him to lose his identity gained through social and familial interaction. Victor allows the security of his intelligence to consume him, blatantly disregarding all other responsibilities and shying away from the identity he once knew. He slowly eases into a hold of isolation, falling deeper and deeper into a realm of personal distortions and great scientific advancements.

Victor's actions of self-seclusion prove his detachment and disdain towards the human race, a habit which results in devastating consequences for his creation.

At first, Victor's surprise with his own capabilities, "I found so astonishing the power placed within my hands. I hesitated for a long time concerning the manner in which I should employ it" (32), yet later resents his brilliance and regrets his choice in recreating life. Unfortunately, his focus on *how* he should use his powerful abilities is misplaced while he disregards the consequences of his actions and the horrible possible outcomes. The loss of his personal identity and responsibility results in his downfall through the monster's immoral and unmonitored actions.

During his time in isolation, Victor planned every detail of his creation, taking into account the necessary elements of producing his living final project; however, he does not consider the requirements attached to then raising and preparing the creature for the life ahead of him. He never ponders the creature's appearance until he brings it to life (Seagal, 861) proving that his lack of preparation consistently remained throughout the entire creation process. While Victor pieces together his project in the lab, the reader watches as pieces of his own life fall apart. Perhaps if the creator had a stronger self-reliance, the inner strength would have reached out to his monster and prepared both creator and creation for the future.

With his concern for himself dwindling and his mind slowly escaping him through scientific, mental, and emotion breakdowns, it's evident that his parental

responsibilities developed prematurely, corresponding with his inefficient self worth which drove him to create a *new* life rather than focusing on his own. Zimmerman argues that it as Victor's poor parental example within his own family that contributed to his inability to perform as a father figure for his creation, shying away from the responsibilities he created for himself and following in the ineffective parenting footsteps of his mother and father. He remained ignorant to what the effects and responsibilities would be to the life he made after the feat was accomplished.

In order to shun his personal struggle, Victor puts forth all his efforts, emotions, and intelligence towards building this new life. This tactic of self-avoidance is commonly associated with broken families and death, both which Victor sadly endured in his youth, leading him to build links of his own in the patriarchal chain—flawed, incomplete, and obscure as they may have been—in order to find the comforts of a family (Duyfhuizen 477). Victor's lack of preparation and inability to cope with the responsibility once it's thrust upon him leads to his failure as a parental figure and the identity crisis suffered by the monster. Lost in the confusion of himself, Victor found a new identity in his creation, sadly however he despised what he saw.

During the monster's first moments of life, he watches as his creator—his father, his example—scream in horror when looking upon him and then flee, abandoning the helpless newborn in his time of need. Victor recounts he was “unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the

room" (Shelley 42). Had Victor possessed a greater degree of self-love, he would have instead embraced the creation, acknowledging the power of his work and the wonderful accomplishment that this new life was. Rather than being proud, excited, or even happy with his final product, Victor abandons it—just as he has abandoned other key figures and factors of his life. It's apparent that the typical reaction of this genius scientist is to reject the portions of good in his life, leaving him lonely and hollow. Without joy in his life, the lonely habits he has formed over the previous years has overcome any form of self worth or identity for Victor, motivating him to leave situations where he is most needed and would benefit most from, more specifically a father-son relationship.

Victor's self pity and diminished confidence leaked into his creation, once again tainting a valuable and vital family oriented relationship. The lack of a deep, meaningful father-son connection, scars the monster: "no father watched my infant days" (Shelley, 106). Without skillful care, monitoring, and mentoring the monster's development was inefficient, leading him to repeat many of the same mistakes and tragically follow in the footsteps of his poorly trained creator. The emotions that are primarily present in the infant's first glances of life are bound to remain with them: whether those emotions surface as hate, love, adoration, fear, hope, or detain—*all* can leave a lasting impression on the mind and soul of a young developing child (Zimmerman, 135).

This action of fleeing leaves the monster with a void and lack of understanding, allowing him to maintain the hazy and unclear perspective of

Victor's of what man is and how he, specifically, fits in with society. The monster's perspective of himself was initiated by Victor and a directly reflects his creator's uncertainty and apprehension of his own abilities. Victor failed to see that treating someone poorly leads to ill feelings and wicked actions (Thompson, 81). Victor in essence created a creature in his own image, instilling the same fear, doubts, and insecurities, all which were enforced upon his sudden departure.

Due to the absence of his maker, the monster is left to fend for himself, becoming a hollow shell, perplexed with questions of what he is, who he is, and his placement in this new and confusing world: the monster sadly questions, "What was I? The question again recurred, to be answered only with groans" (Shelley,120-21). As the creature develops on his own, with no family to lean on or example to follow, he becomes cold, stone hearted, and bitter towards the civilization that won't accept him. Identity is founded on many guiding principles, one fundamental impact being community and society. Clearly lacking the family unit necessary for appropriate development, the creature then seeks society. How an individual forms identity is in collaboration with or response to community (Bernatchez, 205), a community where sadly the creature is rejected once again.

One of Victor's largest mistakes as a parental figure was not establishing clear and distinct guidelines for his offspring. With no example to follow or knowledge to fall back on, the monster wonders through life, grasping only

pieces of what and who he is. His source of information ranges from assumption to personal observation, none of which were facilitated or monitored by a higher or more knowledgeable source. The monster becomes acutely aware of his unique traits, understanding the necessary requirements for entering human society and his inability to obtain them (Bugg).

The effects that an infant has when initially meeting and exploring the world for the first time creates a direct connection to their habits, thoughts, and future in life. With only examples of cruelty, abandonment, and rejection to follow, it's no surprise that violent tendencies and destructive patterns. With no proper facilitation, he struggles to determine appropriate thoughts and actions, causing blunder after blunder as he attempts to find a niche of his own. The instabilities at this time of both monster and society collide, resulting in his downfall and further plunge into the life of an outcast (Rovee 147). Victor also struggled to find a place, shrinking away from society and the pain of being different. Though he was motivated by choice, the similarities link the two once again to one another, both painfully and keenly aware of their differences.

Though he isn't entirely human, he isn't entirely of another race or species either. His skewed ability to observe and lightly understand society has taught him that he can never fully become part of the crowd, his existence will always remain that of an outside, an observer peering in, watching happy lives go by rather than experiencing it for himself. Though the monster may not fully understand his role, he has learned enough about the human race to understand

that the rules do not apply to him, and though he lacks rules he does not lack the emotion tied to them. He has developed the desire, as all mortals do, for companionship. Soon, he then requests something of Victor: "But one as deformed and horrible as myself would not deny herself to me. My companion must be of the same species and have the same defects. This being you must create." The monster does not have a perfect knowledge of all things, yet he has instinctively and privately come to understand the world on his own. The monster has picked up the pieces of a man's role, the same pieces that Victor so freely and absentmindedly left behind.

Of course stumbling alone through life as he has eventually leads the creature to grasping some intellect and understanding. In time the monster comes to understand his own deformities and inabilities, he states: "I am alone and miserable; man will not associate with me." Comprehending his own unique absurdities, the creature falls into a life of despair, hating himself, his creator, and society for his misplaced existence and misshapen understanding.

What appears to remain one of the most ironic elements of the story are the ire similarities between Victor and his creation. Victor recalls his own childhood to Walton, claiming that "the companions of our childhood always possess a certain power over our minds, which hardly any later friend can obtain. They know our infantine dispositions, which, however they may be afterwards modified, are never eradicated" (Shelley 176). Knowing through personal experience the value of strong family relations, it's tragic that he would chose



the pathway of abandonment for his own creation, his own "child." Victor's sense of reality was distorted through his parents pressures, accommodations, and restrictions, all of which could be factors into why he chose to leave his own creation and cause greater and longer lasting negative effects, all which are very similar to his, on the monster. The monster's story, his bizarre and harmful "childhood," begins exactly where Victor's left off. His story is sculpted through Victor's particular psychoanalytic way of thinking (Zimmerman), causing the monster to lead the life Victor rejected.

Among many other similarities, one of their greatest lies in their parallel hatred of themselves and one another. This assumption of mutual rejection was encouraged and enforced by the actions of the other (Coleman 21). The creator declares: "unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room. . .dreams that had been my food and pleasant rest for so long a space were now become a hell to me" (Shelley 42, 43), revealing Victor's blatant detestation of his creature. Presumably, the monster later recounts of his master: "cursed, cursed creator!...Have a hell within me" (Shelley, 121). Sadly both display hatred not only towards the other, but also towards the man in the mirror. With numerous striking similarities in character and perspective, both creature and creator sharing loathing of one another seems hardly shocking and strangely unites the two in the end.

Bound by revenge and hate, they endure a global pursuit—one which can only end in death. The devastating trauma caused by the monster is ultimately

what leads to Victor's downfall, however it was his initial actions that motivated the monster since youth. Though the monster murdered his family, friends, and other loved ones, he left his creator to suffer as he had in a lonely life of agony and isolation—the same life he was destined to. The young scientist is nevertheless slain by the monster; Victor dies of exhaustion and heartbreak in a bunk aboard Captain Robert Walton's ice-trapped ship (Thompson 81).

Ultimately, the choices made by both creator and creature caused drastic and painful affects on both lives. The monster's identity crisis was initiated by irresponsibility, sculpted parental negligence, fueled through Victor's lack of identity (Hustis 845). The monster reminds us that we are each responsible for the activities we engage in and the things we create, particularly within the family unit. It's Victor's early lessons of invisibility, centering both his life and his creation's around the impossibility to being sympathetically seen (Zimmerman 135). Through Shelley's Frankenstein, identity, family unity, society, and the affect of others are defined through Victor, the monster, and their choices. Similarities of hatred, childhood, and identity lead to violent actions and immoral motivations. Both are destroyed and directly affected through abandonment, leading both the monster and Victor may maintain very similar misunderstandings of their identity and haze over their individual roles in the world.

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