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**The Cost of Creation: Ambition and Trauma in
Mary Shelly's Frankenstein**

*A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for a Master's Degree in
Literature and Civilisation*

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Declaration

I, Zerouali Kheir eddine, do hereby vow before the esteemed authority of this scholarly pursuit, that this extended essay, titled *The Cost of Creation: Ambition and Trauma in Mary Shelly's Frankenstein*, has been composed solely by my own hand. Under the watchful guidance of my learned instructor, Dr. Selma Belhamidi, this work stands as a testament to my intellectual devotion and is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the esteemed Master's degree in British Literature and Civilization. Let this declaration stand as a mark of my commitment to the noble art of knowledge, and the pursuit of truth within the realm of literary and cultural studies.

Dedication

To all my loved ones.

Acknowledgments

To begin, I am profoundly grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Selma Belhamidi, whose insightful guidance, unwavering support, and refined expertise shaped this extended essay with care, precision, and intellectual depth. Her role in the development of this work is invaluable and cannot be overstated. I also extend sincere thanks to Dr. Sarah Bensahla Tani and Dr. Samira Laoufi, whose thoughtful feedback and final corrections helped polish this work and bring it to its final form. Their contributions are deeply appreciated.

My gratitude further goes to the dedicated faculty of the English department for fostering an environment of academic curiosity and encouragement, as well as to my fellow classmates, whose companionship and support made this journey one I will always treasure.

Thank you all, for it requires great courage to look at oneself and forge one's own path.

Abstract

Ambition and trauma have existed intertwined with the human condition, driving both discovery and destruction across literature. These drives converge in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in a Gothic framework that delves into the psychological cost of creation, rejection, and loss. Victor Frankenstein's one-track pursuit of knowledge and scientific renown acts as proof of the human search for transcendence, but also for its inability to withstand the emotional cost of overextension. Shelley's tale spins not only a tale of scientific horror but a deeply psychological exploration of loss, identity, and collapse. The Creature, created through ambition and cast out into tragedy, is a figure for the darker consequences of abandonment and unmet emotional needs. Through close reading method and applying psychoanalytic theory, object relations theory, and trauma theory, this research analyzes the reflected collapse of Victor and his Creature to assess how unhealed emotional trauma manifests as vengeance, repression, and psychological disintegration, making the purpose of this work is to study Frankenstein not just as a warning of scientific hubris, but as a profound investigation of ambition, trauma, and the psyche's vulnerable response to loss. In exploring their shared lapses of emotional resilience and cure, the research offers a literary case study of psychological pain within gothic literature.

Keywords : ambition, trauma, grief, rejection, identity, psychoanalysis, disintegration

Résumé

L'ambition et le traumatisme sont intimement liés à la condition humaine, nourrissant à la fois la découverte et la destruction à travers la littérature. Ces forces convergent dans *Frankenstein* de Mary Shelley, inscrit dans un cadre gothique qui explore le coût psychologique de la création, du rejet et de la perte. La quête obsessionnelle de Victor Frankenstein pour le savoir et la renommée scientifique illustre la recherche humaine de transcendance, tout en révélant l'incapacité à supporter les conséquences émotionnelles d'un dépassement de soi. Le récit de Shelley ne se limite pas à une histoire d'horreur scientifique, mais propose une exploration psychologique profonde du deuil, de l'identité et de l'effondrement intérieur. La Créature, née de l'ambition et précipitée dans la tragédie par le rejet, incarne les conséquences sombres de l'abandon et des besoins affectifs insatisfaits. Par la méthode de lecture étroite et en mobilisant la psychanalyse, la théorie des relations d'objet et la théorie du traumatisme, cette recherche analyse l'effondrement parallèle de Victor et de sa Créature afin d'évaluer comment un traumatisme émotionnel non résolu se manifeste par la vengeance, la répression et la désintégration psychique. L'objectif de ce travail est d'étudier Frankenstein non seulement comme une mise en garde contre l'hubris scientifique, mais comme une enquête profonde sur l'ambition, le traumatisme et la réponse vulnérable de la psyché face à la perte. En examinant leurs failles émotionnelles partagées et leurs tentatives de guérison avortées, cette étude propose une analyse littéraire de la souffrance psychologique dans la littérature gothique.

Mots-clés : ambition, traumatisme, deuil, rejet, identité, psychanalyse, désintégration

ملخص

لقد كان الطموح والصدمة موجودين متشابكين مع الحالة الإنسانية، مما أدى إلى الاكتشاف والدمار عبر الأدب. تتلاقى هذه الدوافع في رواية فرانكشتاين لماري شيلي في إطار قوطي يتعمق في التكلفة النفسية للخلق والرفض والخسارة. إن سعي فيكتور فرانكشتاين ذو المسار الواحد للمعرفة والشهرة العلمية هو بمثابة دليل على بحث الإنسان عن التعالي، ولكن أيضاً على عدم قدرته على تحمل التكلفة العاطفية للتوسع المفرط. لا تدور حكاية شيلي حول قصة رعب علمي فحسب، بل تدور حول استكشاف نفسي عميق للخسارة والهوية والانهيال. المخلوق، الذي تم إنشاؤه من خلال الطموح وتم طرده إلى المأساة، هو شخصية للعواقب المظلمة للهجر والاحتياجات العاطفية غير الملباة. من خلال اتباع أسلوب القراءة الدقيقة و من خلال تطبيق نظرية التحليل النفسي، ونظرية العلاقات الموضوعية، ونظرية الصدمة، يحلل هذا البحث الانهيار المنعكس لفكتور ومخلوقه لتقييم كيفية ظهور الصدمة العاطفية غير الملتزمة على شكل انتقام وقمع وتفكك نفسي. الغرض من هذا العمل هو دراسة فرانكشتاين ليس فقط كتحذير من الغرسة العلمية، ولكن كتحقيق عميق في الطموح والصددمات النفسية واستجابة النفس الضعيفة للخسارة. وفي استكشاف الثغرات المشتركة في المرونة العاطفية والعلاج، يقدم البحث دراسة حالة أدبية للألم النفسي في الأدب القوطي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الطموح، الصدمة، الحزن، الرفض، الهوية، التحليل النفسي، التفكك

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Epigraph

“When does a man die? When he is shot in the heart with a pistol? No. When he is stricken with a deadly disease? No. When he eats soup made from a deadly mushroom? No. It’s when he is forgotten. I may disappear but my dream will live on, and the ailing hearts of the people will be healed.”

-Eiichiro Oda, One Piece

General Introduction

The impetus for this research is very personal, born from the lived experience loosely resembling those depicted in Shelley's novel, whom have had to cope with the devastating aftermath of unchecked ambition entwined with unfinished mourning. These experiences, much like those of Victor and the Creature, like those of Victor Frankenstein and his Creature, are distinguished by the pursuit of ambitions which, however general in scope, have been soiled and then undermined by abiding emotional agony and psychological upheaval. It is this individual identification that brings a heightened urgency and introspection to the study as it struggles to shed light on how hidden loss and ongoing striving can render deep psychological destruction. Through close reading of *Frankenstein*, this research attempts to examine the fragile intersection of ambition and trauma, revealing the price to be paid in human terms when emotional resolution is sacrificed in the interests of greatness. As in *Frankenstein* (1818), Mary Shelley constructs one of the longest-lived images of duality, demonstrating ambition as a desire to become great only to the degree that it represents psychological energy disavowed by the moral obligation to be anchored as well as connected to empathy and compassion. Composed at a moment of explosive scientific discovery and philosophical turmoil, *Frankenstein* positions itself at the crossroads of Enlightenment rationalism and Romantic self-reflection, providing a chilling account of the price of creation, the burden of trauma, and the instability of human identity. What is produced is not simply a Gothic horror story but a psychological case study of bereavement, loneliness, and the dangerous price of unchecked ambition.

This paper places *Frankenstein* within the dual contexts of trauma and ambition, analyzing how Shelley uses the intertwined fates of Victor Frankenstein and his Creature to investigate the psychological and moral limits of human ambition using psychoanalysis and

trauma theory. As throughout proper study of novel version provided by the website, an online edition that does not contain page numbers, and as such, in-text citations will refer only to the author's name without pagination. Victor's one grand pursuit of knowledge denied to God is presented as narcissistic and traumatic obsession that strives to master death but ends in pure moral tunnel vision and psychological breakdown. Conversely, the Creature, born into rejection and raised on abandonment, is the wounded self whose need for recognition turns to revenge in the face of social rejection. Their respective paths offer two sides of the same narrative coin, illustrating how a failure to metabolize trauma and integrate mourning into a sense of coherent self leads to continued violence and emotional devastation.

The research is guided by three core questions:

1. How does Victor Frankenstein's uncontrolled ambition contribute to his psychological destruction, and what does this say about the destructive power of single-minded scientific ambition in Gothic literature?
2. How is the Creature's rejection and abandonment experience typical of Object Relations Theory tenets, and how does it condition his spiraling into violence and grief?
3. How does the dynamics between ambition and trauma in *Frankenstein* act as a narrative mechanism for investigating unfinalized grieving and the effects of haunting due to loss, according to Cathy Caruth's Trauma Theory?

After careful reading of the novel multiple times and doing further research on the characters and the psychological treatment of them, this study proposes the following hypotheses.

1. Victor Frankenstein's insatiable ambition is a narcissistic fantasy- and unworked-through trauma-based psychological defense mechanism that leads to self-annihilation; this illustrates the

Gothic cliché that uncurbed intellectual aspiration, divorced from emotional accountability, is a means of psychological disintegration.

2. The Creature's psychological trajectory follows the patterns outlined in Object Relations Theory, where the lack of supportive relations and serial rejection forestall the formation of a stable sense of self, hence transforming his trauma into reactive violence and deep grief, typical of the Gothic outsider whose sense of self is formulated in terms of exclusion.

3. The intertwining of themes of trauma and ambition in the novel reveals how both Victor and the Creature are haunted by unproductive grief, consistent with Caruth's definition of trauma as an unclaimed experience that recurs in a disruptive fashion; *Frankenstein* therefore stages grief not as resolution but as eternal return of the past, conditioning the Gothic as a field of endless psychological resonance.

This research is spread over three chapters, each expanding the psychological and literary dimensions of *Frankenstein* through a cumulative layering of theory, textual critique (close reading), and thematic investigation. The first chapter provides background by tracing the literary and cultural history of ambition—from the heroic individualism of classical myth to the moral failings and existential dilemmas of the Gothic genre using Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as the primary text, accessed through the online literary archive at the website. This chapter places Victor Frankenstein within much earlier figures of the overreacher, compared to a Prometheus and Faust character who is attracted to forbidden knowledge only to have it be responsible, not for illuminating discovery, but for ruin and exclusion. Through its engagement with Gothic tropes and Romantic anxieties about scientific advancement, the chapter demonstrates that Victor's ambition is as psychological as it is intellectual—a constant drive to master death to command nature over, and assert a fractured sense of self. The analysis then proceeds to explain the way in

which this compulsive drive transfers itself into the creature's narrative since he too shares a kind of ambition: acceptance, belongingness, and human recognition. Here too, in both cases, ambition is such a double-edge psychological driver, shaping identity, yet destabilizing it.

The second chapter changes its focus to the psychological and emotional effects of this ambition, with the discussion of the internal wounds inflicted by trauma and grief. Drawing from the use of Freudian psychoanalysis, Melanie Klein's Object Relations Theory, and Cathy Caruth's Trauma Theory, the second chapter offers a comparative analysis of how both Victor and the Creature feel, exist, and cannot cure their emotional wounds. Victor's guilt is repressed, displaced, and redirected into a manic drive for revenge, and the Creature's trauma, the outcome of systematized rejection and existential neglect, is retaliatory violence and melancholic mourning. The chapter argues that all the characters are not emotionally literate and psychologically strong enough to process their trauma positively, and their pain becomes circular because it describes Caruth's theory of trauma as an unclaimed experience which returns in repetitive, haunting forms. Here, Shelley's tale is not merely read as a tragedy of bad decisions, but as an analysis of what fails when grieving doesn't function, and psychic pain is allowed to gangrene in the self or erupt crazily outward.

The third chapter examines the psychological disintegration that ensues from these unresolved experiences, with the ultimate collapse of selfhood, moral clarity, and the possibility of healing. This chapter discusses how both Victor and the Creature turn to mechanisms of projection, denial, and narrative self-fracturing to cope with their respective burdens. Victor's vindictive paranoia, his illusions, and his total expulsion from reality mark the later stages of psychological dissolution, and the Creature, having taken in rejection and discovered no purpose of atonement for his suffering, worships vengeance and finds himself compromising to nihilistic

exile. Traversing psychoanalytic and theory of trauma, this chapter argues that both the characters cannot reach psychological integration—something Freud might term working through, and Jung individuation—are thus stuck within unresolved cycles of bereavement and alienation. Through the process, Shelley's novel not only critiques scientific arrogance, but human inability to emotionally resolve with the meaning of loss, culpability, and lust. The chapter concludes by placing *Frankenstein* as a haunting Gothic investigation of trauma's aftershock that remains and the cost paid for attempting to create or control life in forfeiting the requirement of empathy and affective accountability.

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Introduction

To man ambition has been the defining characteristic of his nature unfolding and shaping choice and action along with personality which in turn shaped the path of history, inspiring great deeds and causing profound ethical and psychological crises. As far as literature is concerned, ambition has been studied over centuries, often depicted as a force of creation and destruction from the tragic heroes of ancient Greece to the ethically conflicted heroes of Gothic novels, so as literature still asks questions regarding the implications of boundless ambition as in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* where ambition is marked as the all-pervasive motivating factor behind the central character Victor Frankenstein and his relentless pursuit of domination in science as well as how it relates to the Creature's abortive quest for identity and acceptance making their fate interconnected and metaphorical of the complicated nature of ambition as a force that compels to greatness but also to bring about disaster and psychological torture. Because characterization of ambition in literature has unfolded with changing philosophical and cultural ideologies, it is relevant to place it in a historical background and context, making it the first task of this chapter as well as to put into perspective Victor Frankenstein as an ambitious over-reacher, a typical character of Gothic fiction. Shelley presents an intimation of the consequences of ambition without moral constraint resulting in the second task based on bringing psychoanalytic theory, trauma theory and object of relations theory into play to show how ambition, although a potent stimulant, can become a force for destruction when unconnected with foresight and accountability.

1.1. Definition and Historical Context of Ambition in Literature:

1.1.1. Ambition in Classical Literature:

Ambition in classical literature is often linked to heroism and hubris, as in Greek tragedies the concept of hybris (excessive pride or ambition) leads to the downfall of great figures for example in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus relentless quest for truth despite multiple warnings exemplifies an ambition that results in his tragic self-destruction

O god-all come true, all burst to light!

O light-now let me look at my last on you!

I stand revealed at last-cursed in my birth

Cursed in marriage, cursed in the lives I cut down with these hands!

(Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*)

As this moment marks Oedipus realization that his relentless pursuit of truth that has been driven by his ambition to be a just and wise ruler, has ultimately led to his tragic downfall, as perhaps in his quest to seek knowledge he got exposed to his own guilt, proving that unbound ambition even in pursuit of righteousness can lead to devastating consequences. Similarly, in *The Iliad* Achilles' ambition for eternal glory compels him to engage in a conflict that ultimately costs him his life

My mother, Thetis the goddess of the silver feet tells me

that two fates bear me on to the day of death,

If I hold out here and I lay siege to Troy,

My journey home is gone, but my glory never dies.

If I voyage back to the fatherland I love,

my pride, my glory dies...

true, but the life that's left me will be long,

the stroke of death will not come on me quickly.

(Homer, *The Iliad*)

because this excerpt demonstrates how Achilles sees the two destinies that await him: a long but unspecified life or a short life with eternal glory and possibly his choice of staying and fighting is motivated by his ambitious desire for eternal glory because it decides his tragic fate. To that end, Roman literature also displays the same trends in *The Aeneid*, Virgil's Aeneas embodies an even more restrained ambition in that his aspiration is tempered by duty to fate and the gods, but in other characters like Julius Caesar in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* desire for unfettered power leads to betrayal and death "Et tu, Brute? -Then fall, Caesar! (*Julius Caesar*, 3.1) since this line, spoken by Caesar as he is stabbed by his close friend Brutus, is the ultimate betrayal caused by his ambitious desires as the Latin phrase "Et tu, Brute?" (that is, "you too, Brutus?") expresses his shock and dismay upon realizing that even Brutus, his loyal friend, has betrayed him as those dying words prove his tragic downfall as well as corroborating the theme of betrayal and penalty of political ambition.

1.1.2. Ambition in Medieval and Renaissance Literature

During the medieval period, ambition was largely framed through moral and religious lenses as the literature of this time warned against unchecked ambition, emphasizing humility and divine will as on *The Divine Comedy* Dante places the excessively ambitious in Hell

Through me the way into the suffering city,

Through me the way to the eternal pain,

Through me the way that runs among the lost.

My maker was divine authority,

The highest wisdom, and the primal love.

Before me nothing but eternal things

Were made, and I endure eternally.

Abandon every hope, all you who enter. (Dante Alighieri. *Inferno*)

As this inscription in the Gates of Hell serves as a warning to all souls entering, including those whose excessive ambition led them to betray morality and deceive others or seek power at the expense of righteousness so figures like Ulysses fits the deceitful ambition and Count Ugolino for treacherous ambition which puts them in eternal punishment illustrating how Dantes condemns unrestrained ambition that defies divine order.

But then the Renaissance saw a shift in how ambition was perceived as humanism flourished so did ambition becoming more closely associated with intellectual pursuit and individualism as showcased in *Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe, the titular character's insatiable desire for knowledge and power leads him to sell his soul to the devil granting him many great discoveries but also many moral corruption

Till, swollen with cunning, of a self-conceit,

His waxen wings did mount above his reach,

And, melting heavens conspired his overthrow.

(Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*)

as this passage spoken by the Chorus compares Faustus to Icarus, who flew too close to the sun and fell to his doom. It foreshadows how Faustus' relentless ambition for knowledge and power that is gained by his pact with the devil that leads to his tragic downfall as the cost of that great ambition and moral corruption was his soul.

1.1.3. Ambition in Gothic Literature: The birth of the Mad scientist

Gothic literature emerging in the late 18th century brought new dimensions to the portrayal of ambition resulting in the archetype "mad scientist" or "overreaching creator" becoming central to the exploration of the dangers of human ambition in defying natural or divine laws making Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* a quintessential example

It was the secrets of heaven and earth that I desired to learn; and whether it was the outward substance of things or the inner spirit of nature and the mysterious soul of man that occupied me, still my inquiries were directed to the metaphysical, or, in its highest sense, the physical secrets of the world

(Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch. 2)

Showing how this is a key reflection of Victor Frankenstein's obsessive pursuit of knowledge and his ambition to surpass the natural limits of human understanding since he expresses an insatiable thirst for knowledge further emphasizing that he does not seek ordinary scientific understanding but the "secrets of the heaven and earth" suggesting an all-encompassing desire to uncover both the material and the metaphysical truths of existence, demonstrating his intellectual obsession and rather than being satisfied with the conventional learning, Victor is drawn to the most profound

and mysterious aspects of life as the contrast between “the outward substance of things”(physical science) and “the inner spirit of nature and the mysterious soul of man”(metaphysics) suggests that Victor’s ambition to bridge the gap between what is tangible and what is beyond human comprehension leading to spiral into hubris.

In later Gothic works such as *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* in which ambition manifests in the desire to separate and control the human duality

It was on the moral side, and in my own person, that I learned to recognize the thorough and primitive duality of man; I saw that, of the two natures that contended in the field of my consciousness, even if I could rightly be said to be either, it was only because I saw radically both.”

(Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Ch. 10)

As this confession of Dr. Jekyll acknowledges his ambitious desire to separate the good and evil aspects of human nature, believing he could control them, unfortunately his experiment with the transformative potion ultimately backfires as his darker self- Mr. Hyde- gains dominance proving ambition to manipulate and master human duality can lead to disastrous consequences.

1.1.4. Ambition in Modern Era: Psychological and Societal Perspectives

From a psychoanalytic perspective ambition can be analyzed by means of Freudian and Jungian concepts because Freud's "death drive" theory would have it that people even in the pursuit of their ambition may be unconsciously drawn towards self-destruction like Victor Frankenstein because "the aim of all life is death" (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*) because in this book Freud speculates that beyond the impulse of pleasure and living on (Eros) there is and a counter force-the death drive- that causes individuals to seek self-destruction and compulsion

because to end up returning to an inorganic state so this train of thought is consonant with the speculation that even ambitious activities, which seem life-giving may ironically lead to individuals' destruction because they push themselves beyond the boundaries in such a manner that is self-undoing or self-destructive like Victor Frankenstein. In trauma theory on the contrary uncontrolled ambition is generally a bid to counteract inherent psychic traumas such as in the ambition of Viktor Frankenstein which can be used to interpret as a defense mechanism against his unfinished grieving over life and death

One of the phenomena which had particularly attracted my attention was the structure of the human frame, and indeed, any animal endued with life. Whence, I often ask myself, did the principle of life proceed? It was a bold question, and one which has ever been considered as a mystery; yet with how many things are we upon the brink of becoming acquainted, if cowardice or carelessness did not restrain our inquiries (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 4)

As this reflects Victor's obsessive focus on the origins of life, which can be interpreted as a psychological response to his early experiences with death particularly the loss of his mother suggesting that his pursuit of creating life stems from deep seated grief over his loss.

Lastly, as the long-lasting heritage of ambition in literature is observable over centuries ambition has remained a common denominator in literature evolving in its representation from ancient heroism to gothic hubris and modern-day existential crisis and whether depicted as a tragic flaw or a drive for necessary progress, it still determines the complicated literary stories as is the story of *Frankenstein* as Mary Shelley narrates an advisory story on ambition shedding light on its psychological effects and moral challenges and as literature continues to reflect

societal fears, ambition will definitely remain a topic of examination revealing the always present conflict between human desire and its capacity for devastation.

1.2. Victor Frankenstein's Scientific Ambition and Ethical Implications

Victor Frankenstein's ambition while rooted in deep intellectual curiosity and passion for discovery as was mentioned in "So much has been done, exclaimed the soul of Frankenstein—more, far more, will I achieve; treading in the steps already marked, I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation."(Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch. 3) Ultimately spirals into an obsession that blinds him to ethical considerations as his relentless pursuit of knowledge and mastery over life becomes a cautionary example of unchecked scientific ambition illustrating how an individual's desire for greatness can lead to catastrophic consequences making *Frankenstein* a critique by Shelley of the human nature and overall boundless ambition aligning Victor as the Faustian overreacher as "The ego is not master in its own house", making his unconscious drive his obsessive pursuit of godlike knowledge often dictated his behavior beyond rational control in the same vain as Faust whose insatiable thirst for knowledge and power results in their ruin. Such ambition led Victor to ignore human ethics and defile even the dead

Who shall conceive the horrors of my secret toil as I dabbled among the unhallowed damps of the grave or tortured the living animal to animate the lifeless clay? My limbs now tremble, and my eyes swim with the remembrance; but then resistless and almost frantic, impulse urged me forward; I seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit" (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 4)

Illustrating how the grotesque and morally transgressive Victor's work in nature was and his willingness to desecrate graves and experiment with the dead bodies highlights his complete

disregard for ethical boundaries in his ambitious pursuit of creation as the imagery “dabbled among the unhallowed damps of the grave” reinforces that his ambition has led him into the forbidden almost unholy territory foreshadowing the horrific events that would later befall him as Freud exclaims “The organism wishes to die only in its own fashion”(Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*) which aligns with Victor’s ”resistless, and almost frantic, impulse” suggesting that he is not merely seeking intellect but is acting on impulse-driven by Thanatos (the death drive) as Freud theorized that individuals are unconsciously drawn toward self-destruction even when pursuing life affirming goals in this case Victor’s delusion of his ambitious goal to uncover the secrets of creation in order to conquer the natural world, to manipulate death and life. As his relentless pursuit of knowledge comes at the expense of his personal relationships

But I could not tear my thoughts from my employment, loathsome in itself, but which had taken on irresistible hold of my imagination, I wished, as it were, to procrastinate all that related to my feelings of affection until the great object, which swallowed up every habit of my nature, should be completed. (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch4)

Leading to profound alienation all in the name of his research which further pushed his scientific ambition resulting in his total immersion with his work abandoning all moral and ethical behavior especially since no one even his loved one were to approach him resulting in his loss of any sense of boundaries , a complete disregard for ethical implications of his work and deeds, and as he set his eyes on the scientific achievements he failed to consider the moral consequences of creating life since the moment he witnesses the Creature’s first moments revealing the depths of his failure: “Now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror disgust filled my heart”(Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch. 5), so Victor’s immediate rejection of the Creature

signifies his moral irresponsibility that has been pushed by his ambition as he does not acknowledge the life he has created, nor does he accept responsibility for its well-being and according to Melanie Klein's Object of Relations Theory Victor's abandonment of the Creature mirrors a failed parental relationship wherein neglect fosters deep psychological trauma as she states "The good object is felt to be the source of life, the bad object as a source of annihilation." (Klein, *Envy and Gratitude*) as his ambition resulted in his ethical blindness, therefore not only affecting himself but those around him, so rather than bringing him fulfilment it shattered all his ethics leading to a late realization of how deep down he spiraled out of control

Lastly, as Victor Frankenstein's scientific ambition initial noble, ultimately becomes his greatest downfall due to causing him an ethical blindness and developing obsessive tendencies

A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs. Pursuing these reflections, I thought, that if I could bestow animation upon lifeless matter, I might in process of time (although I now found it impossible) renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption. (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch4)

Revealing his megalomaniacal vision of himself as god-like figure, a man completely deaf to the moral and ethical implications of his experiments which led to this very ambition to blind him to the pains as well as his Creature might suffer because he assumes that his "new species" would bless him and not resent him for locking him in a self-conceited fantasy pointing out that Victor's moral blindness is further underscored by his identification as a father implying that he identifies himself as a benevolent giver of life but ironically he fails completely in his responsibility abandoning his creation the moment it is brought into life because his assumption that "no father

could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs”, anticipated his disastrous misjudgment of creation and responsibility instead of being admired he is faced with horror and rejection-both from himself and his creation.

1.3. The Role of Unchecked Ambition in Shaping Personal Identity

Ambition stands as a fundamental aspect of human identity as it shapes an individual’s aspirations and sense of self as well as their decision which affect others , however, when it is left to its devices unchecked and without restraints it can distort personal identity leading to moral corruption and psychological disintegration as was the case in *Frankenstein* in which Victor Frankenstein’s limitless ambition does not merely define his scientific pursuits but also erodes his moral compass and self-perception

I seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit. It was indeed but a passing trance, I had returned to my old habits. I collected bones from charnel-houses and disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame. In solitary chamber, or rather a cell, at the top pf the house, and separated from all other apartments by a gallery and staircase, I kept my workshop of filthy creation; my eyeballs were starting from their sockets in attending the details of my employment. (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 4)

Perhaps this very obsession with his scientific ambitions is what consumes his entire identity leading to moral decay as his admission that he “lost all soul or sensation but for this pursuit” reveals the extent to which his relentless drive for discovery overrides his ethical consideration and personal well-being. Likewise, Creature’s own transformation is fueled by a desperate and ultimately destructive ambition to be accepted as throughout the novel Marry Shelley illustrates how his desire his driving ambition to be accepted by others no matter what is what led to the

traumatic events that led to his grief as well as Victor's', as this quote "I am malicious because I am miserable, am I not shunned and hated by all mankind" encapsulates how the Creatures' deep desire for acceptance transforms into destructive ambition and hatred .

1.3.1. Victor Frankenstein: The Fragmentation of Identity

Victor Frankenstein begins his journey as a passionate scientist, driven by the noble desire to advance human knowledge as he states that "Wealth was an inferior; but what glory would attend the discovery, if I could banish disease from the human frame and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!" (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 2), as this desire and ambition to erase disease and help humanity to become "invulnerable" stems from the death of his mother an event that both impacted and shattered the young Victor

It is so long before the mind can persuade itself that she, whom we saw every day, and whose very existence appeared a part of our own, can have departed forever—that the brightness of a beloved eye can have been extinguished, and the sound of a voice so familiar, and dear to the ear, can be hushed, never more to be heard. These are the reflections of the first days; but when the lapse of time proves the reality of the evil, then the actual bitterness of grief commences. (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 3)

as this grief mixed with his already ambitious personality led him developing a habit to pursue the forbidden nature to beat nature in a sense, overthrow death and disease alike, and since that emotional turmoil ties directly into his scientific ambition he later expresses the desire to "banish disease from the human frame" and make humans "invulnerable" as a this can be seen as a response to this deeply personal loss and his mother's death can be perhaps seen as a

psychological wound that shapes his pursuit of scientific power—not just to prevent illness but to overcome death itself and as Cathy Caruth puts it

the shocking and unexpected occurrence of an accident. The example of the train accident—the accident from which a person walks away apparently unharmed, only to suffer symptoms of the shock weeks later—most obviously illustrates, for Freud, the traumatizing shock of commonly occurring violence. Yet the recurring image of the accident in Freud, as the illustration of the unexpected or the accidental, seems to be especially compelling, and indeed becomes the exemplary scene of trauma par excellence, not only because it depicts what we can know about traumatizing events, but also, and more profoundly, because it tells of what it is, in traumatic events, that is not precisely grasped. The accident, that is, as it emerges in Freud and is passed on through other trauma narratives, does not simply represent the violence of a collision but also conveys the impact of its very incomprehensibility. What returns to haunt the victim, these stories tell us, is not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known. (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, p 19)

as it aligns with Victor's experience of his traumatic death of his mother an event he never fully processed, and this psychological fragmentation between his haunting trauma and his ambitious desires to conquer death and create life is further proved by Freud's theory of the divided self, where Victor's uncontrolled id-driven desires clash with his neglected moral conscience (superego) resulting in severe psychological distress as his story unfolds, and Shelley portrays Victor's loss of identity as a direct consequence of his ambition as it is stated

I avoided explanation and maintained a continual silence concerning the wretch I had created. I had begun life with benevolent intentions and thirsted for the moment when I should put them in practice and make myself useful to my fellow beings, now all was blasted; instead of that serenity of conscience, which allowed me to look back upon the past with self-satisfaction, and forward to the future with hope, I was seized by remorse and sense of guilt, which hurried me away to hell of intense tortures such as no language can describe. (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 22)

Which highlights Victor's internal psychological conflict and fragmentation a clash between his id-driven ambition (his obsessive pursuit of scientific power) and his suppressed superego (his moral responsibility) and Freud's theory of the divided self that suggests that when the id (desires, impulses) dominates without the regulation of the superego (morality, conscience) the result is intense psychological distress and further R. D. Laing argued that psychosis is not a medical condition, but an outcome of the "divided self", or the tension between the two personas within us; one our authentic, private and the other the false, "sane" self that we present to the world.

As the novel progresses, Victor's identity becomes so fragmented that he no longer resembles the ambitious scholar he once was his detachment from his family and friends leaves him emotionally num, reinforcing his transformation into a tormented shell of his former self as ultimately his fragmented self is a result of both his traumatic past and his ambitious desire to overturn "death" itself as he spirals down an endless torment where his ambition consumes his personal identity turning him into a paranoid outcast

I threw myself on the bed in my clothes, endeavoring to seek a few moments of forgetfulness, but it was in vain: I slept, indeed, but I was disturbed by the wildest dreams. I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of

Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held a corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel. (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch. 5)

Finally because the dream itself represents his deeply rooted trauma: Elizabeth, once a synonym of life and love turns into a corpse reminding him of the death of his mother and foreshadowing future tragedy as well as with his subconscious contrasting the death of his mother with his creation implying that he himself has unconsciously disrupted the order-namely introducing life where there should not be with but haunted only by death and decay, because Jung's law of individuation assumes a balanced individual integrating disparate elements of the self-ambition and human connect as well and Victor's inability to integrate it is very much the reason why his own identity turned fractured and married only in paranoia, guilt and self-imposed exile and the further his obsession went in his experiments the more alien he turned towards his previous self-making and what caused its destruction is converting erstwhile enthusiasm for science to revulsion and affecting the Creature's future endeavors as well.

1.3.2. The Creature: The Identity of Rejection and Vengeance

While Victor's uncontrolled ambition erodes his personal identity, the Creature experiences a similar transformation driven by his own kind of ambition, the simple desire for acceptance and recognition stemming from the moment of his creation as he struggled with and identity crisis and the uncertainty of his place in the world

I was dependent on none and related to none and related to none. The path of my departure was free, and there was none to lament my annihilation. My person was

hideous and my stature gigantic: what did this mean? Who was I? whence did I come? What was my destination? These questions continually recurred, but I was unable to solve them (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 15)

Leading to an existential crisis further coupled with his initial failed attempts to integrate into society then met with hostility resulting in an identity shaped by rejection and isolation and unlike Victor whose ambition pushed him towards spiraling out of control the Creature ambition is rooted in the fundamental human need for connection as Shelley illustrates

When I looked around, I saw and heard nobody like me. Was I, then, a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled and whom all men disowned? I cannot describe to you the agony that these reflections inflicted upon me: I tried to dispel them, but sorrow only increased with knowledge. Oh, that I had forever remained in my native wood, nor known nor felt beyond the sensations of hunger, thirst and heat! (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 13)

This desperate ambition to be part of human society led to his growing awareness of his isolation. However, as he faces continual exclusion and cruelty, his sense of self warps and his identity becomes defined by the hatred imposed upon him which mutates his ambition for love and companionship into relentless desire for vengeance on his creator Victor Frankenstein as he swears and proclaims “this death will carry despair to him, and a thousand other miseries shall torment and destroy him.”(Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 16) demonstrating how unrestrained ambition when repeatedly denied can lead to catastrophic psychological consequences

As for The Creature’s descent into vengeance is a direct consequence of his denied ambition for companionship as initially he displays a capacity for empathy and kindness,

studying the De Kacey family and hoping to integrate into the human society, learning language and observing human behavior while longing to be accepted, however, when he finally reveals himself he is met with horror and violence and the moment of rejection cemented his alienation as he recalls

Who can describe their horror and consternation on beholding me? Agatha fainted, and Safie, unable to attend to her friend, rushed out of the cottage. Felix darted forward, and with supernatural force tore me from his father to whose knees I clung; in a transport of fury, he dashed me to the ground and struck me violently with a stick. I could have torn him limb from limb, as the lion rends the antelope. But my heart sank within me as with bitter sickness, and I refrained (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 15)

As this defining moment of rejection that shatters the Creatures' hope for acceptance after all the careful studying of the De Lacey family and believing that their kindness could extend to him he instead was met with pure shock from Agatha, instinctive fear by Safie fleeing from him and hostility with aggression by Felix attacking him believing he is protecting his family from a monster as The Creature desperately attempted to cling to the blind father the only person who had treated him with kindness symbolizing his last hope for human connection, which is literally torn away from him triggering a momentary impulse towards violence "I could have torn him limb from limb" contrasting with his ultimate restraint showcasing his was still holding on the desire for acceptance but this rejection coupled with his failed ambitions is what ultimately sets him on his tragic path of vengeance Pushing him toward a darker sense of self as he later expresses this transformation explicitly: "I am malicious because I am miserable. Am I not shunned and hated by all mankind?" (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 17), and this rhetorical question

reveals the depth of his internal suffering as his malevolence is not inherent but rather a direct response to the relentless cruelty he endured by being rejected by his creator and by society alike shaping his identity from an initial potential for goodness to vengeance.

Lastly, Klein's Object Relations Theory provides a psychological framework for understanding this shift as it suggests that early relational experiences are crucial on shaping self-perception and emotional development as an example infants develop their sense of self through their caregivers and when these foundational relationships are nurturing, a stable identity forms on the other hand, when these relationships are defined by neglect or rejection, the individual internalizes feelings of unworthiness and anger as was the case for the Creature, being deprived of any nurturing bonds leads to him experiencing precisely this kind of psychological fragmentation as the absence of a parental figure illustrated in Victor's immediate abandonment leaves the Creature without the validation necessary to construct a positive self-identity as a result, he absorbs the rejection he faces, believing himself to be as monstrous as others perceive him to be and this internalization fuels his eventual turn towards vengeance framing how the denial of ambition becomes a destructive force when it lacks external validation.

Conclusion:

As a conclusion, this chapter shows how unbound ambition in Frankenstein is both a force of self-destruction and a catalyst for progress shown throughout history from tales of old to the modern literature and specifically in the Gothic literature, basically redefining personal identity as Victor's scientific obsession shatters his sense of self into pieces while the Creature's unrealized ambition for belonging transforms him into the very monster society perceives him to be showing how the novel demonizes ambition not only as a mere drive to innovation and discovery but as a path to moral decay and psychological fragmentation if untampered, causing

irreparable damages, and upon analysis from the perspective of psychology Victor's ambition can be observed to be an application of Freud's death drive, an unconscious drive towards self-destruction as his single-minded pursuit of knowledge blinds him to the ethical considerations of his work creating a disconnect from his humanity and leading to his fall which is further supported by Jung's theory of the shadow self which portrays his fall as he fails to identify the dark corners of his psyche that then materializes externally in the form of the Creature, allowing his shame and remorse to consume his already shattered identity destroying his very sense of self, leaving behind a hollow character whose identity is defined by his obsession and failure of his ambitions. Similarly, the Creature's ambition for understanding and acceptance follows the same path of self-destruction as Victor's as it is initially he exudes innocence and genuine yearning for human contact, but successive rejection and cruelty deprives him of his sense of self-worth sending him into an identity forged from anger and despair as Klein's Object Relations Theory illustrates how the Creature's psychological development is stunted due to the absence of nourishing relationships to further show the notion of his transformation and that his identity crisis is manufactured due to unresolved trauma. Ultimately, their broken-down identities show that ambition when divorced of ethical responsibility or failing to live up to its potential may lead to fragmentation, guilt and trauma. Through analyzing ambition from psychoanalysis points of view Shelley warns of the danger of allowing unchecked ambitions to be the sole decider of one's identity.

Chapter Two: Trauma and the Manifestation of Grief

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Introduction:

Trauma and grief are central to the psychological depth of *Frankenstein*, shaping the lives of both Victor Frankenstein and his Creature and while ambition serves as the catalyst for their suffering it is their inability to process trauma and loss that ultimately seals their fates as this chapter will be exploring the psychological consequences of trauma and grief in *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, analyzing how both Victor and the Creature experience suffering through rejection and isolation by applying Psychoanalytic Theory, Trauma Theory and Object of Relation Theory it reveals how unresolved trauma dictates their actions and descent into self-destruction all because of the downfall resulted by their uncontrolled ambition making the aim of this chapter to ultimately demonstrate that trauma and unresolved grief are central to the psychological collapse of both Victor and the Creature, reinforcing the argument about the destructive consequences of ambition and emotional suffering as it shifts focus from ambition as a driving force to its aftermath.

2.1. Understanding Trauma Through Psychological Theories

2.1.1. Freud's Psychoanalytic Perspective on Trauma

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory offers valuable insight into the effects of trauma especially through his concept of repression and the repetition compulsion as he suggests that traumatic experiences when not properly processed are instead repressed into the unconscious mind, where they continue to exert influence in the form of intrusive thoughts and particularly compulsive behaviors as his theories provide a foundational framework for understanding the psychological distress experienced by Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

Victor Frankenstein exhibits classic symptoms of repression following his creation of the Creature illustrated in his immediate horror and subsequent avoidance of his creation which further indicates an unconscious effort to suppress his guilt and fear as Marry Shelley described his reaction:

I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body, for this I had deprived myself of rest and health, I had desired and ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created. (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 5)

Rather than confronting his actions, Victor flees allowing his trauma to manifest through paranoia and hallucinations as this behavior aligns with Freud's concept of repression, as outlined in *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), where he states: "The shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as through it were an object, the forsaken object." (*Mourning and Melancholia*, p 249), suggesting that unprocessed grief and guilt are projected onto the self-leading to a fragmented identity precisely what happens to Victor:

I remained for several days motionless and in apparent lifelessness. Then, indeed, I was for ever deprived of rest and health. I shunned the face of man; all sound of joy or complacency was torture to me; solitude was my only consolation-deep, dark, death-like solitude. My father's care and attentions were ineffectual: once I felt that I must quit Geneva for ever and wander like an outcast over the earth." (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 9)

As his psyche deteriorates under the weight of his unresolved trauma and his avoidance of responsibility increased his paranoia which reinforces Freud's notion that repression does not eliminate traumatic experiences but forces them into the unconscious, where they return in pathological ways and the concept of the repetition compulsion is also evident in Victor's behavior throughout the novel as according to Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920): "We must be prepared to find the patient yields to the compulsion to repeat, which now replaces the impulsion to remember..." as this concept explains why individuals unconsciously re-enact unresolved trauma in an attempt to gain mastery over it furthermore, Victor's relentless pursuit of the Creature after the deaths of his loved ones can be seen as an example of this phenomenon because rather than addressing his initial mistake of abandoning the Creature, he continually repeats his pattern of avoidance and vengeance, unable to break free from the cycle of trauma hinting at his psychological deterioration marked by hallucinations and compulsive behaviors which aligns with Freud's assertion that repressed trauma resurfaces in the unconscious.

2.1.2. Cathy Caruth's Trauma Theory: The Lingering Effects of Unresolved Suffering

Cathy Caruth expands on Freud's ideas emphasizing that trauma is not merely an event but an ongoing psychological wound that resists resolution and according to her, traumatic experiences are often relived involuntarily manifesting in flashbacks and dissociative states which suggests that trauma disrupts linear time causing individuals to remain psychologically trapped in the moment of suffering as Shelley wrote:

I wandered like an evil spirit, for I had committed deeds of mischief beyond description, horrible, and more, much more (I persuaded myself) was yet behind. Yet my heart overflowed with kindness and the love of virtue. I had begun life with benevolent intentions and thirsted for the moment when I should put them in

practice and make myself useful to my fellow beings. Now all was blasted: instead of that serenity of conscience, which allowed me to look back upon the past with self-satisfaction, and forward to the future with hope, I was seized by remorse and the sense of guilt, which hurried me away to a hell of intense torture such as no language can describe.” (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 9)

Unlike conventional memory, which allows for past events to be assimilated into an individual's understanding of self and history as traumatic memory intrudes upon the present forcing the sufferer to re-experience their pain in fragmented and uncontrollable ways as Caruth, in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996) states: “Trauma is not simply an effect of destruction but also, fundamentally, an enigma of survival.” (Unclaimed Experience, P 58), this assertion underscores the paradox of trauma: while it is tied to past suffering, it also defines the survivor's existence and the inability to process trauma prevents healing leading individuals to exist in a state of perpetual suffering.

Both Victor and the Creature embody this cyclical nature of trauma, since Victor's repeated visions of his dead loved ones, particularly his hallucinations of Henry Clerval and Elizabeth

The forms of the beloved dead flit before me, and I hasten to their arms; but lo! They fly from me; I strive to grasp them, but they vanish, and leave me alone and helpless. Even now, as I write, a darkness were the only objects that pressed upon me.” (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 23)

Reinforcing Caruth's assertion that trauma persists beyond the initial event rather than accepting responsibility for his actions, Victor keeps on experiencing recurring nightmares and breakdowns,

illustrating Caruth's idea that trauma is not confined to a single moment but continuously disrupts the psyche. Victor's refusal to confront his guilt leads him into a state of obsessive repetition, where his avoidance of the Creature mirrors his avoidance of the trauma he has inflicted upon himself and instead of integrating his suffering into his consciousness, he remains trapped in the past, a state that ultimately drives him to madness and self-destruction.

Caruth's Trauma Theory ultimately reveals that 'Frankenstein' is more than a narrative of ambition but that it goes in tandem with trauma as the novel is a meditation on the inescapable nature of trauma and the consequences of unresolved suffering as both Victor and the Creature exist in a psychological limbo, perhaps unable to move forward because their pasts continuously intrude upon their present, and by applying Caruth's framework, it becomes clear that Shelley's novel does not merely depict horror and destruction but also explores the complex ways in which trauma shapes identity and relationships, as it does not fade away, but rather intensifies repeating itself across time in relentless and inescapable cycle.

2.1.3. Judith Herman's Model of Trauma and Recovery

Judith Herman's trauma model focuses on the psychological responses to trauma, particularly in cases of prolonged abuse and isolation, in *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), Herman establishes three key stages necessary for healing : safety and stabilization, remembrance and mourning and reconnection with society when and if these stages are disrupted or unattainable, individuals remain trapped in a state of psychological distress, unable to process their suffering in a way that fosters personal growth or emotional recovery. Her model is particularly useful in understanding the tragic trajectories of both Victor Frankenstein and the Creature in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, as neither character achieves any form of psychological resolution, leading instead to their natural destruction.

Victor's psychological distress stems from his refusal to confront his trauma, effectively preventing him from entering the first stage of recovery (safety and stabilization) and according to Herman, this initial stage requires an individual to regain a sense of control over their emotions : "Trauma robs the victim of a sense of power and control; the guiding principle of recovery is to restore power and control to the survivor."(Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p112) , something that Victor actively avoids as his first reaction to the Creature is one of terror and rejection, and rather than seeking stability, he flees from the consequences of his actions as he puts it : "I rushed out of the room and continued a long time traversing my bad-chamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep." (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 5). His paranoia, recurring nightmares and self-imposed isolation all indicate his inability to establish psychological safety, and instead of working through his trauma, Victor exacerbates it by suppressing his guilt and projecting his fears onto the Creature, whom he sees as an external manifestation of his own moral failure. As the novel progresses, Victor also fails to engage in the second stage of trauma recovery (remembrance and mourning) as this stage requires an individual to acknowledge their trauma, processing their grief and integrating the experience into their personal narrative, but Victor, however, remains in a state of psychological denial, refusing to take responsibility for the suffering he caused as he states

I grasped his hand, and in a moment forgot my horror and misfortune; I felt suddenly and for the first time during many months, calm and serene joy. I welcomed my friend, therefore, in the most cordial manner, and we walked towards my college. (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 5)

And this inability to mourn his own moral failings manifests in his obsessive quest for vengeance since instead of reflecting on his action and seeking closure, he fixates on eliminating the

Creature, which serves as a coping mechanism for avoiding his deeper guilt and this very destructive repetition aligns with Judith Herman's assertion that unresolved trauma leads to compulsive reenactment rather than healing.

The final stage of Herman's model (reconnection with society) remains entirely unattainable for Victor, since by the end of the novel, he is entirely isolated, having lost all meaningful relationships due to his unbound ambition and refusal to confront his trauma as later he laments "But it is even so; the fallen angel becomes a malignant devil. Yet even that enemy of God and man had friends and associates in his desolation; I am alone." (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 24), and since his failure to reintegrate into society solidifies his tragic fate, as he dies alone, still consumed by vengeance and unresolved guilt, furthermore, Herman argues that reconnection is essential for true recovery, as trauma is fundamentally a relational wound that must be addressed through renewed human bonds as such, Victor's tale embodies what happens when an individual remains trapped in the cycle of avoidance and isolation.

The Creature's trajectory similarly aligns with Herman's trauma model, particularly in how his inability to move beyond rejection prevents him from recovering from his suffering as his desperate attempts to establish safety and stability through connection with others first with Victor, then with the De Lacey family. They are repeatedly met with violence and abandonment and without this foundational stage of safety, he remains trapped in a perpetual state of fear and vulnerability reinforcing his perception of himself as an outcast and this lack of security fuels his deepening rage, which eventually transforms into a destructive force. This eventually mirrors the psychological deterioration seen in individuals who have experienced prolonged trauma without support as for the final stage of recovery.

Reconnection with society remains permanently out of reach for the Creature as his attempts to integrate into human life are consistently met with rejection, reinforcing his belief that he is incapable of belonging. Unlike Victor, who isolates himself by choice, the Creature is forced into exile, making his trauma even more profound, as his ultimate decision to disappear into the Arctic, resigning himself to death, reflects his acceptance that reconnection is impossible.

In contrast to Herman's ideal model of trauma recovery, where reintegration fosters healing, Herman's model underscores the necessity of confronting trauma, suggesting that the fates of both Victor and the Creature could have been different had they been able to acknowledge and process their pain constructively as Herman state: "The core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others. Recovery, therefore, is based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections." (Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, P 94), and since neither Victor nor the Creature achieves this empowerment or connection, reinforcing the central argument of *Frankenstein*: trauma, when left unprocessed leads to cyclical suffering and destruction.

2.2. Victor Frankenstein's Trauma and symptoms of Psychological Distress

As mentioned before in the research paper Victor Frankenstein's psychological retrogression throughout *Frankenstein* is deeply rooted in trauma, as his experiences of loss and obsessive ambition led to severe psychological distress, manifesting in symptoms consistent with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Acute Stress Disorder, which can be proven by analyzing Victor's behaviors through the lens of psychoanalytic and trauma theories, it becomes evident that his unresolved trauma contributes to his ultimate downfall that started with his uncontrolled ambition combined with his inability to process grief which caused him psychological fragmentation and a compulsive drive towards self-destruction.

Victor's trauma begins early in his life, shaped by loss and intense fear of mortality as his mother's death profoundly affects him, serving as the catalyst for his obsession with conquering death through science as Freud's psychoanalytic theory suggests that Victor's inability to process grief leads to repression, fueling his unconscious drive to defy natural laws and according to Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), unprocessed grief does not dissipate but instead manifests in unconscious ways, often leading to compulsive behaviors such as Victor's fixation on reanimating dead tissue which perhaps it is a manifestation of his repressed mourning, a subconscious attempt to undo the loss that defined his childhood, and this need for control over death mirrors Freud's concept of the death drive, in which individuals exhibit self-destructive behaviors in an unconscious effort to resolve unprocessed trauma.

Victor's early academic pursuits isolate him further from emotional attachments, as he becomes wholly consumed by his scientific experiments, and this detachment from nature and human relationships is evident in his own words:

Winter, spring, and summer passed away during my labours; but I did not watch the blossom or the expanding leaves-my eyes were insensible to the charms of nature. (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 4)

As it underscores his emotional detachment, an early indication of his psychological fragmentation, as moving forward his ambition becomes a defense mechanism, shielding him from confronting his grief. Cathy Caruth's Trauma Theory supports this interpretation, as she argues that trauma often manifests as a refusal to engage with the present, leading individuals to become psychologically trapped in their suffering making Victor's obsession with his scientific pursuits a way to escape the pain in his past, yet it ultimately exacerbates his psychological distress.

Victor's most significant traumatic event occurs when he brings the Creature to life as it show rather than feeling a sense of accomplishment, he is immediately overwhelmed with horror and regret:

I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into are inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. But now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 5)

His reaction is emblematic of trauma-induced dissociation, where an individual emotionally detaches from a distressing event, and according to Caruth, trauma disrupts the normal experience of time, causing individuals to remain trapped in the moment of their suffering, as Victor's immediate abandonment of the Creature suggests an inability to process the magnitude of his actions, resulting in avoidance and repression, since he rather to flee than confront the ethical and emotional implications of his experiment, allowing his trauma to fester in his subconscious.

This avoidance manifests in repeated physical illness, hallucinations and paranoia as Victor experiences recurring visions of the Creature and those he has lost, such as Henry Clerval and Elizabeth, indicating symptoms of PTSD, particularly intrusive thoughts and hyperarousal. Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* (1992) outlines how unresolved trauma leads to cycles of reliving past suffering, preventing individuals from healing as she notes:

They cannot resume the normal course of their lives, for the trauma repeatedly interrupts. It is as if time stops at the moment of trauma. The traumatic moment

becomes encoded in an abnormal form of memory, which breaks spontaneously into consciousness, both as flashbacks during waking states and as traumatic nightmares during sleep. Small, seemingly insignificant reminders can also evoke these memories, which often return with all the vividness and emotional force of the original event. Thus, even normally safe environments may come to feel dangerous, for the survivor can never be assured that she will not encounter some reminder of the trauma. (Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 1992)

As Victor's obsessive pursuit of the Creature reflects this pattern, as he remains psychologically trapped in the trauma of his initial creation, furthermore, instead of seeking closure he fixates on destroying the Creature, reenacting his trauma rather than processing it. Freud's concept of the repetition compulsion is useful in understanding Victor's behavior as rather than solving his guilt, he continuously repeats his cycle of avoidance and pursuit of the Creature. As Victor's trauma deepens, his physical and mental deterioration accelerates, as he becomes increasingly paranoid to the point of believing the Creature is always watching him, waiting to strike:

A fiend had snatched from me every hope of future happiness... one by one, my friends were snatched away; I was left desolate. My own strength is exhausted... my ravings, as I afterwards heard, were frightful; I called myself the murderer of William, of Justine, and of Clerval. Sometimes I entreated my attendants to assist me in the destruction of the fiend whom I had let loose among mankind. (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 21)

His physical decline mirrors in a sense his psychological collapse, reinforcing the connection between unresolved trauma and self-destruction as his last obsession with vengeance,

rather than reconciliation, highlights his complete descent into trauma-induced madness making Victor Frankenstein's psychological distress a direct consequence of his inability to process trauma, as through the frameworks of the psychoanalysis and trauma theory, it is evident that his unchecked ambition and repression of grief contributes to his ultimate downfall.

2.2.1. Symptoms of PTSD and Psychological Breakdown

Victor Frankenstein's slump into psychological instability is marked by a series of symptoms that align with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Acute Psychological Distress since his experiences of intrusive thoughts, avoidance, hypervigilance and physical deterioration mirrors the psychological effects observed in trauma survivors, however, unlike individuals who attempt to process and heal from their trauma, Victor actively resists confronting his guilt as he said: "But revenge kept me alive; I dared not die and leave my adversary in being." (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 24), fixating on revenge as this failure to address his suffering through healthy coping mechanisms exacerbates his mental and physical decline, reinforcing the destructive cycle of unresolved trauma.

One of the most prominent symptoms of Victor's PTSD is his intrusive thoughts and hallucinations, particularly those concerning the Creature and the corpses of his loved ones, as throughout the novel, Victor is haunted by the consequences of his hallucinations are particularly pronounced after the murder of Henry Clerval and the death of Elizabeth as it is noted that: "The human frame could no longer support the agonies that I endured, and I was carried out of the room in strong convulsions. A fever succeeded to this. I lay for two months on the point of death; my ravings, as I afterwards heard, were frightful." (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 21), suggesting an inability to process grief in a healthy manner, and according to Judith Herman's *Trauma and*

Recovery (1992), trauma survivors frequently relive their past suffering through intrusive memories that disrupts their perception of reality as Herman notes:

Long after the danger is past, traumatized people relive the event as though it were continually recurring in the present. They cannot resume the normal course of their lives, for the trauma repeatedly interrupts. It is as if time stops at the moment of trauma. Spontaneously into consciousness, both as flashbacks during waking states and as traumatic nightmares during sleep. Small, seemingly insignificant reminders can also evoke these memories, which often return with all the vividness and emotional force of the original event. Thus, even normally safe environments may come to feel dangerous' (Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 1992, P 26)

As Victor's repeated visions of the dead demonstrate his entrapment in the traumatic moment, preventing him from moving forward, and rather than coming to terms with his guilt, he experiences persistent flashbacks that reinforce his suffering, making his psyche unable to integrate his traumatic memories into a coherent narrative, leaving him psychologically fragmented and unable to distinguish past horrors from his present reality.

In addition to intrusive thoughts, Victor exhibits avoidance and emotional numbing as put in his own words: "Every night I was oppressed by a slow fever, and I became nervous to a most painful degree; the fall of a leaf startled me, and I shunned my fellow creatures as if I had been guilty of a crime." (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 4), which are key indicators of PTSD. As following traumatic events, survivors often withdraw from social interactions to protect themselves from further emotional distress, and Victor's avoidance is evident in his decision to distance himself from his family and friends, refusing to disclose the truth about the Creature or his own

culpability in the tragedies that unfold. Adding to that, his refusal to speak openly about his trauma isolates him further, mirroring the behavior of individuals suffering PTSD, who often suppress painful memories as a defense mechanism, furthermore his lack of emotional response was manifested by his psychological numbing, as he becomes increasingly desensitized to loss, and rather than mourning, he channels his grief into his obsession with vengeance, depriving himself of the opportunity to heal. Victor also displays hypervigilance and paranoia, another common symptom of PTSD, as his trauma deepens, he develops an obsessive need to track and destroy the Creature, convinced that his creation will continue to haunt him unless he eradicates it. This state of heightened alertness prevents him from engaging in rational thought, instead pushing him toward a compulsive and self-destructive mission, adding to that his relentless pursuit of the Creature across icy landscape symbolizes his psychological entrapment, forever chasing a representation of his own guilt, unable to escape the burden of his past mistakes, and Freud's concept of the repetition compulsion, discussed in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), provides insight into Victor's fixation:

The patient cannot remember the whole of what is repressed in him, and what he cannot remember may be precisely the essential part of it. Thus he acquires no sense of conviction of the correctness of the construction that has been communicated to him. He obliged to repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, remembering it as something belonging to the past." (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1920, P 42)

Rather than processing his trauma, Victor unconsciously reenacts it by pursuing the Creature, mirroring his initial mistake of abandonment, and this inability to break free from his cycle

reflects the pathological nature of unresolved trauma as without proper resolution, it perpetuates itself, leading to further psychological deterioration. Victor's mental distress is further compounded by physical deterioration, as his psychological suffering manifests in severe bodily symptoms, as he frequently collapses from exhaustion, fever and stress experiencing somatic symptoms commonly associated with trauma survivors

I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart." (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 5)

His body weakens as his mind deteriorates, demonstrating the deep interconnection between psychological trauma and physical well-being, and this correlation is discussed in modern trauma studies, which emphasize how chronic stress and PTSD can lead to severe health issues, like chronic fatigue, and this deteriorating health serves as a physical representation of his fractured psyche and his inability to address his trauma results in both mental and bodily collapse.

To sum it up, Victor Frankenstein's symptoms of PTSD and psychological breakdown highlights the profound and destructive effects of trauma when left unaddressed, furthermore, his intrusive hallucinations, emotional numbness, hypervigilance and physical decline collectively illustrate the devastating toll of unresolved guilt and grief, and by refusing to process his trauma, he becomes trapped in a cycle of obsession and deterioration, mirroring the struggles of real-world trauma survivors who lack the means or support to confront their past. Shelley's depiction of Victor Frankenstein's mental and physical disintegration reinforces the novel's broader theme: that ambition, when unchecked and unprocessed, can lead to psychological devastation as his fate

ultimately serves as a grim warning about the dangers of denial and repression at the expense of healing.

2.3. The Creature's Trauma Stemming from Rejection and Loneliness

2.3.1. From Innocence to Vengeance: Trauma's Role in the Creature's Transformation

The Creature's journey from innocence to vengeance is a tragic narrative of psychological deterioration, shaped by relentless rejection and emotional deprivation, as initially his disposition is not one of hostility, but rather of curiosity and an earnest desire for companionship, however, as he experiences repeated social exclusion and animosity, his psyche undergoes a profound transformation. Besides this, the gradual accumulation of trauma manifests in defensive aggression, aligning with Judith Herman's model of trauma, which posits that prolonged suffering without pathways to recovery results in reactivity and eventual violence making the Creature, rather than a being born monstrous, into one sculpted by the cruelty of the world around him.

From the moment of his creation, the Creature is denied the most fundamental form of human connection: parental care, as Victor Frankenstein, his creator and supposed guardian, immediately flees upon witnessing his animate form, repulsed by his own work and this very act of abandonment initiates the Creature's first experience of profound loss, depriving him of the foundational security necessary for emotional development. As in Melanie Klein's Object Relations Theory, the parental figure plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's psychological stability, and when this parental bond is severed, the child-much like the Creature-is left to navigate the world with an unstable sense of self, because of this lacking an object of attachment, he searches desperately for acceptance, yet every attempt at integration is met with fear and hostility.

His early observations of the De Lacey family exemplify his yearning for belonging, as he watches them from a distance as he notes:

I saw no cause for their unhappiness; but I was deeply affected by it. If such lovely creatures were miserable, it was less strange that I, an imperfect and solitary being, should be wretched. Yet why were these gentle beings unhappy, they possessed a delightful house ... the more I saw of them, the greater was my desire to claim their protection and kindness.” (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 12)

Believing that he, too, can be part of such warmth, as along the way he learns language, internalizes human emotions, and cultivates an idealized perception of companionship, however, when he finally reveals himself, his dream is violently shattered, as Felix attacks him with “supernatural force”, reinforcing the idea that society will never see beyond his grotesque exterior. This makes this moment a psychological breaking point since the family he had regarded as the epitome of human goodness rejects him as a monster, and this abrupt and brutal nature of this rejection mirrors what Herman describes as the shattering of the assumptive world”, wherein trauma victims experience an existential rupture between their expectations of the world and its cruel reality, and until this moment the Creature had maintained hope, believing in human kindness, with the final rejection, his perspective darkens irrevocably.

The psychological consequences of his rejection are further compounded by his isolation, as social creatures, humans rely on interpersonal validation to develop a coherent sense of self, however, the Creature exists in a vacuum of isolation, unable to establish an identity beyond what society projects onto him, as he is told he is monstrous, and thus, he begins to believe it, in which Judith Butler’s theory of performativity suggests that identity is not an inherent quality but one that is constructed through repetition and social reinforcement, and as the Creature is continually

met with fear and violence, he internalizes the role of the outcast making the transition from innocent observer to vengeful figure a psychological inevitability and not a conscious choice.

Furthermore, his confrontation with Victor Frankenstein encapsulates the full extent of his transformation and no longer being the hopeful creature who once gazed longingly at the De Lacey home, he now demands justice for his suffering, as his famous declaration “I am malicious because I am miserable. Am I not shunned and hated by all mankind?”, is not merely a statement of anger but a plea for recognition, as he does not seek destruction for its own sake; rather, his actions are a desperate assertion of his existence in a world that refuses to acknowledge him.

In Cathy Caruth’s trauma theory, the concept of belatedness suggests that trauma is not fully experienced in the moment of its occurrence but is instead relived in cycles of repetition, leading the creature to enact vengeance as a way to assert control over the narrative of his suffering, unable to process his trauma in real-time. By targeting Victor’s loved ones, he forces his creator to feel the isolation and grief that he himself has endured. Yet, even in his acts of vengeance, there is a lingering trace of the being he once was, and the remorse following the murder of William, his anguish over his actions, and his final lament on the ice suggest that his transformation is not absolute, unlike Victor, who remains rigid in his ambition and moral failings.

The Creature exhibits self-awareness, as he does not revel in his crimes but sees them as the inevitable consequence of a life deprived of love and acceptance, in this way, Mary Shelley presents him not as a villain but as a deeply tragic figure; a victim of both scientific hubris and societal prejudice. As the final analysis, the Creature’s descent into vengeance is a study of trauma’s corrosive effects on identity, had he been nurtured, had he been given the chance to integrate into society, his fate could have been vastly different. Instead, he is pushed to the

periphery of human experience, forced into the role of the monster that others perceive him to be, as his story shows the ways in which rejection and isolation can distort the psyche, transforming innocence into despair, and despair into wrath.

2.3.2. The Cycle of Trauma and the Need for Recognition

At the heart of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* lies a haunting portrayal of trauma not merely as a singular psychological rupture but as a cyclical and self-perpetuating condition, intricately tied to the subject's need for acknowledgment and human connection. Nowhere is this more poignantly rendered than in the figure of the Creature, whose suffering is not only born of rejection but is continually re-inscribed through his acute self-awareness and unfulfilled desire for recognition, positioning him as both victim and mirror of the emotional failure that permeates Victor Frankenstein's world.

Unlike Victor, who remains emotionally dislocated and psychologically evasive, constantly repressing the trauma he himself sets into motion through an obsessive pursuit of forbidden knowledge, the Creature possesses a startling clarity about his pain and his profound alienation from the world that gave him life yet refuses to name or nurture him-this recognition of suffering without the balm of validation becomes the very mechanism that deepens his psychic wounds, transforming sorrow into rage and rage into vengeance, yet never quite allowing the wound to heal.

Melanie Klein's Object Relations Theory becomes particularly illuminating when we examine the Creature's longing for attachment and the catastrophic effects of its denial, as Klein emphasizes that the formation of the self is inseparable from early emotional bonds; the internal world is structured through relations with primary figures who mediate the infant's ability to integrate feelings of love and hate, of unity and separation. As the Creature having never

experienced a nurturing object (neither a mother's care nor even the symbolic gesture of naming or acceptance) exists in a perpetual state of psychic fragmentation, suspended between a longing for connection and the unbearable realization of his otherness, and his request for a female companion when he demanded: "You must create a female for me, with whom I can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being." (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 17), is thus merely a practical plea to end his solitude but a desperate act of psychic preservation, a final attempt to stabilize his fractured internal world by securing an object that would affirm his right to exist, to be loved and to belong. Victor's refusal, framed as a moral judgement against the dangers of reproduction is in fact an abdication of responsibility, for the emotional chaos he has unleashed, and it is violently withdrawn that the cycle of trauma becomes irreversible, setting him on a path that will consume both creator and creation.

Moreover, this need for recognition is not simply a quest for empathy but a demand to be seen as fully human, a demand tragically unmet at every turn as he exclaims:

Like Adam, I was apparently united by no link to any other being in existence; but his state was far different from mine in every other respect. He had come forth from the hands of God a perfect creature, happy and prosperous, guarded by the especial care of his Creator; he was allowed to converse with, and acquire knowledge from, beings of a superior nature: but I was wretched, helpless, and alone. Many times I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition; for often, like him, when I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall of envy rose within me." (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 15)

The Creature's encounters with society mainly his rejection by the De Laceys despite his eloquence and kindness, the villagers violent reactions to his appearance, and Victor's persistent

framing of him as a “daemon”, each underscore the profound gap between self-perception and social identity. Furthermore, as the trauma of these rejections is not confined to the moment of experience but is carried forward through memory and fantasy, it replayed endlessly in the Creature’s mind as evidence of a world that denies him a coherent place within it. Cathy Caruth’s theory of trauma shows the latter as an incomprehensible event that returns in the form of belated repetitions becoming especially pertinent here, for the Creature does not simply suffer from what has occurred but from what continues to occur each time he is denied, misnamed or unseen, making his trauma not historical but recursive-it lives not in the past but in the unrelenting present, always returning, always unresolved.

Furthermore, the emotional crescendo of the novel, found in the Creature’s final lament over Victor’s corpse, encapsulates the futility of vengeance as a path toward closure, as in this moment, stripped of the object of his hatred and the hope of relational healing, the Creature stands not as a triumphant avenger but as a tragic figure consumed by the very trauma he sought to extinguish. Adding to that, his recognition that Victor’s death does not alleviate his pain but instead deepens it suggests that trauma, particularly when unrecognized or invalidated, cannot be purged through retribution but rather clings to the psyche like a shadow, shapeshifting and enduring across time. In this context, Caruth argues that trauma fundamentally dislocates the subject from the linearity of time, producing a paradoxical relationship to memory and narration, one in which the traumatic event is both unforgettable and unknowable, simultaneously present and absent, and this is evident in the Creature’s final words, as he declares that “he was soon borne away by the waves and lost in darkness and distance” (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 24), a line that resonates not only as a physical exit into the arctic wilderness but as a symbolic surrender to the unending exile of the traumatized subject.

Accordingly, *Frankenstein* offers not simply a tale of monstrous creation but a tragic meditation on the necessity of recognition as a slave for trauma, as the Creature journey from hope to despair, from innocence to vengeance, underscores the unbearable cost of emotional abandonment and the way in which trauma, when unspoken and unshared, festers into obsession and destruction, since his pain does not lie solely in what has been done to him but in the fact that no one bears witness to it as no one, not even his maker, affirms the legitimacy of his suffering. This showcases that Shelley's narrative transcends its Gothic frame to articulate a deeply modern anxiety: that without recognition, the self dissolves into the margins of experience, where grief becomes unnamable and trauma a silence too vast to contain.

2.4. Comparative Analysis of Grief in Both Characters

Grief functions as the psychological axis around which both Victor Frankenstein and the Creature revolve, dictating their responses to suffering, their perceptions of the world and their fates, yet while grief unites them in a shared experience of loss and trauma, the manner in which they process and embody the pain diverges radically, revealing the intricate psychological consequences of bereavement and unprocessed trauma. Victor's grief manifests as a deeply internalized burden, consuming him from within, shaping his self-perception and dictating his actions through an ever growing cycle of guilt and self-imposed isolation, whereas the Creature externalizes his grief, transforming sorrow into anger, abandonment into vengeance and rejection into a destructive force that mirrors the very cruelty he has suffered at the hands of those who refuse to acknowledge his humanity, and this psychological divergence, where one turns inward and deteriorates under the weight of melancholia while the other lashes out in violent protest against his exclusion, illustrates the duality of grief's manifestations, highlighting the way in

which trauma, when left unresolved, either worsens within or erupts outward, demanding recognition through destruction.

Victor's journey into grief begins long before the Creature ever enters his life, first taking root in the loss of his mother, an event that fractures his sense of security and sets the stage for his increasing emotional detachment, as Freud's theory of melancholia suggests that when grief is left unresolved, it ceases to be a temporary state of mourning and instead transforms into a pathological condition in which the lost object is not merely grieved but absorbed into the self, leading to a psychic rupture that manifests in self-recrimination and motional paralysis along with the inability to engage with life in a meaningful way. This is precisely the trajectory Victor follows, for rather than confronting grief, he attempts to circumvent it through scientific ambition, seeking mastery over life and death as a means of undoing what has already been lost as he states: "Wealth was inferior object, but what glory would attend the discovery if I could banish disease from the human frame and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!" (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch4), yet this pursuit only deepens his suffering, for in creating the Creature, he unwittingly sets into motion a series of events that will force him to relive his original loss over and over again, as the deaths of William, Justine, Henry and Elizabeth serve as reminders not only of his failure but of inescapability of grief, and rather than mourn in a healthy manner, he represses his emotions, redirecting them into an obsessive fixation on vengeance that echoes Cathy Caruth's assertion that trauma, when unprocessed, does not remain confined to a singular event but repeats itself compulsively, forcing the subject into a cycle of re-experiencing loss without resolution.

Adding to that, Victor's paranoia and hallucinations following these deaths further reinforce the notion that his grief has not only consumed his identity but eroded his grip on

reality, for in moments of heightened distress, he begins to perceive the Creature as a specter haunting him rather than a being of flesh and blood, a manifestation of his guilt that follows him relentlessly, whispering reminders of his failures and demanding retribution, and this psychological fragmentation aligns with trauma theory's assertion that when grief is not properly processed, it distorts perception, trapping the subject in a state of perpetual return, wherein the past continuously intrudes upon the present. Moreover, Victor's relentless pursuit of the Creature, framed as a quest for justice, is in reality a futile attempt to externalize his guilt, to locate the source of his suffering outside himself so that he might destroy it and, in doing so, eradicate his own torment. However, the deeper he delves into this pursuit, the further he falls into self-destruction, for grief, once internalized, does not dissipate through acts of violence but instead metastasizes, growing more insidious with every act of repression.

In contrast, the Creature does not internalize grief in the manner Victor does but rather externalizes it, making it visible and inescapable for those who have wronged him, and unlike Victor, whose grief is tied to tangible losses in the deaths of his loved ones and the dissolution of his idealistic visions, the Creature's grief is existential, rooted not in the loss of something he once possessed but in the absence of what he has never had: love, acceptance and a place within the social order. This made this form of grief more of an insidious one, for it is not confined to a single event but is instead an ongoing state of being, an unrelenting condition that defines his every moment, besides his transformation from a hopeful, inquisitive being into a force of vengeance. This state of mind mirrors Judith Herman's trauma model, which suggests that individuals who experience prolonged trauma without resolution often resort to aggression as a means of asserting agency over their suffering, for in a world that denies him recognition,

violence becomes the only form of expression available to him, the only means by which he might demand to be seen.

Equally, this is evident in the way he frames his vengeance not as an arbitrary act of cruelty but as a direct response to the pain inflicted upon him, stating: “I am malicious because I am miserable. Am I not shunned and hated by all mankind?” (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 17), a declaration that positions his rage as a byproduct of his grief rather than an innate characteristic, his suffering is made all the more acute by his awareness of it, for unlike Victor who suppresses his emotions, the Creature fully acknowledges his pain, yet this acknowledgment offers no solace, for without an outlet, without recognition or reciprocation, his grief festers, compounding into something monstrous. Furthermore, object relations theory provides insight into this transformation, suggesting that his aggression stems not from an inherent malice but from the failure of formative attachments, for at every turn, his attempts to forge connections are met with rejection, his longing for companionship dismissed as unnatural. His identity reduced to that of a “wretched outcast” whose very existence is deemed an aberration, making his request for a companion, not merely a demand for company but an appeal for psychological survival, for without an object to anchor his emotions, he remains adrift in an endless sea of suffering.

Ultimately, the final moments of the novel bring this comparative trajectory to its tragic conclusion, as Victor succumbs to the weight of his unresolved grief, dying a man consumed by regret and exhaustion, while the Creature, left with nothing and no one, retreats into the arctic void, his final words underscoring the inescapability of his suffering; “I shall die, and what I now feel be no longer felt. Soon these burning miseries will be extinct,” (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 24). This closing moment encapsulates the ultimate consequence of grief left untended, for while Victor’s death is a result of his self-imposed isolation, the Creature’s exile is the final proof that

his pain has no place in the world, no resolution, no end beyond self-erasure. Caruth's theory of trauma as an unending return finds its fullest expression in the Creatures' disappearance, for though he removes himself from the physical world, his suffering lingers, unresolved, lost in the "darkness and distance" into which he vanishes. Thus, Shelley's depiction of grief in *Frankenstein* is not merely a study of personal loss but a meditation on the broader consequences of unprocessed trauma, on the way suffering, when denied acknowledgment mutates into something insidious, consuming both self and other, for Victor and the Creature, despite their antagonism, are bound together by the same affliction, two figures caught in the same cycle of pain, driven by the same unfulfilled need for recognition, a need that, when denied, leaves only ruin in its wake.

Conclusion

In summary, this chapter proves that trauma and grief serve as the psychological undercurrents driving both Victor Frankenstein and his Creature, shaping their choices and sealing their tragic fates, and through the lens of psychoanalytic theory, trauma theory and object relations theory, this chapter has revealed how unresolved suffering perpetuates cycles of destruction and self-destruction. From Victor internalizing his grief, succumbing to paranoia and obsessive vengeance, mirroring Freud's theory of repression and the compulsion to repeat unprocessed trauma, to the Creature externalizing his anguish, his transformation from an innocent being to a vengeful force aligning with Klein's Object relations theory and Judith Herman's model of trauma, wherein prolonged suffering fosters aggression rather than healing.

As both characters are trapped within the inescapable confines of their unresolved grief, their psychological wounds dictating their fates and leading them toward isolation, violence and ultimately destruction, and while Victor's relentless pursuit of revenge consumes him, the

Creatures' final mourning over his creator's body underscores the hollowness of vengeance, reinforcing Caruth's argument that trauma remains an open wound, unresolved and inescapable.

As a matter of fact, Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein", serves as a profound meditation on the devastating consequences of unprocessed grief, highlighting how the failure to confront trauma dooms both victims and perpetrator alike, and as the next chapter will explore, even the attempts at coping mechanisms prove futile, further illuminating the psychological toll of suffering and the fragile boundary between resilience and ruin.

Chapter Three: Coping Mechanisms and Their Failures

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Introduction:

In *Frankenstein*, both Victor Frankenstein and the creature struggle to deal with their trauma, yet their efforts to manage the victim, instead of offering any path of healing, deepened their descent only in destruction. Victor, to pass his crime and take revenge, using his pursuit of the creature, both as a means to externalize his suffering and as a distraction from his own conviction, while the creature rotates his pain outwards, as a shape of rejection and loneliness, as the shape of rejection and loneliness to the creature.

Both characters' respective failures to find the resolution reflect the widespread psychological themes of suppression, projection, and malicious sexual system, all of which can be examined through lenses of psychoanalytic theory, trauma theory, and existence psychology. To avoid victorious grief as illuminated by the concept of Daman and Cathy Caruth's trauma model, it ensures that he got trapped in a self-styled cycle of vengeance, standing as his offspring and separation in pace and unresolved for the destructive consequences of unresolved trauma. On the contrary, the creature initially seeks associate and understanding, yet repeated experiences of social rejection motivated him to embrace vengeance, his psychological change with insight on the initial attachment and emotional fragmentation of the Melanie Klein.

This chapter will trace their respective failures through four major sections: Victor's transformation of grief into obsessive vengeance, the Creature's descent into violence shaped by psychological rejection, a psychoanalytic analysis of their emotional disintegration through trauma and fractured identity, and finally, a broader reflection on *Frankenstein* as a meditation on psychological collapse and the human cost of emotional abandonment. By examining these approaches, this chapter argues that Shelley's novel is not only a cautious story about ambition,

but also a deep psychological study of trauma, indicating that unresolved pain - whether internal or external - only for destruction.

3.1. Victor's Attempts to Escape Guilt Through Revenge and Obsession

In *Frankenstein*, Victor Frankenstein's mental degeneration is motivated by his inability to feel guilt. Rather than acknowledging his responsibility for the Creature's life and the destruction it causes, he fixates on vengeance as a means of guilt management. His compulsive pursuit of the Creature illustrates a deeper need to externalize his guilt, a trend consistent with Freud's theory of repression and Cathy Caruth's trauma model. Victor's obsessive quest for revenge is his avoidance of guilt and the annihilating force that ultimately devastates him. The initial reaction of Victor to the destiny of his scientific passion is avoidance. He flees from the Creature as soon as it is created, hoping that his negligence will clear him of any responsibility. But when the Creature begins taking revenge on Victor's loved ones, his suppressed guilt transforms into an uncontrollable obsession with revenge:

O! what a miserable night I passed! the cold stars shone in mockery, and the bare trees waved their branches above me: now and then the sweet voice of a bird burst forth amidst the universal stillness. All, save I, were at rest or in enjoyment: I, like the arch-fiend, bore a hell within me; and, finding myself unsympathised with, wished to tear up the trees, spread havoc and destruction around me, and then to have sat down and enjoyed the ruin. (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 16)

Freud's repression theory explains Victor's psychological state—his refusal to accept responsibility pushes his guilt into his unconscious, where it festers and is channeled into obsession. Rather than accepting responsibility for the Creature's suffering, Victor transfers his

remorse to the Creature, viewing the Creature as some external force that must be destroyed in order to reassert his control.

Furthermore, Victor's incessant pursuit of the Creature is a method of avoiding his own guilt. By shifting responsibility to his creature, he is able to stage a situation where he is victimized rather than being the aggressor. This mirrors Caruth's argument that trauma victims attempt to replay their trauma in endless loops and are unable to leave the past behind. His search across vast distances—chasing the Creature from the Swiss Alps to the Arctic—symbolizes his descent into self-destruction. His relentless obsession blinds him to his physical deterioration, symbolizing the all-consuming nature of unresolved guilt:

And now my wanderings began, which are to cease but with life. I have traversed a vast portion of the earth, and have endured all the hardships which travellers, in deserts and barbarous countries, are wont to meet. How I have lived I hardly know; many times have I stretched my failing limbs upon the sandy plain and prayed for death. But revenge kept me alive; I dared not die and leave my adversary in being (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 24).

Revenge has become no longer a means to justice but obsession driven by the inability of Victor to face the past. The refusal to explain sorrow results in a cycle of suffering that destroys him. Adding to that, his vengeance is greater than an attempt to restore justice and is an act of self-destruction. His final days, careening around the Arctic in unremitting chase of the Creature, are the culmination of his obsessive guilt. In a last-minute realization, he regrets, too late remembering that his life has been consumed by vengeance:

That he should live to be an instrument of mischief disturbs me; in other respects, this hour, when I momentarily expect my release, is the only happy one which I have enjoyed for several years. The forms of the beloved dead flit before me and I hasten to their arms. Farewell, Walton! Seek happiness in tranquillity and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries. Yet why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed." (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 24)

This reflection is one of regret—Victor realizes that his vengeance was in vain, but he cannot change the course of his fate, as his death is the ultimate price of unhealed trauma and the dangers of allowing guilt to become destructive obsession, and his attempts to avoid guilt through revenge and obsession a tragic example of the psycho-emotional price of relentless trauma. Rather than coming to terms with his moral failing, he redirects his guilt into a self-harming venture that consumes his self and causes his destruction. In the contexts of psychoanalytic and trauma theory, the reading is rendered clearer that Victor's inability to work through mourning in a healthy way results in a painful cycle of suffering, as the Creature, too, is formed by trauma, evolves from victim to perpetrator, further illustrating Frankenstein's exploration of psychological deterioration and vengeance.

3.2. The Creature's Transformation from Victim to Aggressor

In "Frankenstein", the Creature undergoes a dramatic psychological transformation, evolving from a vulnerable being who yearns to be accepted into a vengeful character motivated by hatred. His descent into violence is not inherent in his nature but a response to the constant rejection and abuse that he endures. Using trauma theory, object relations theory, and psychoanalytic theory, it is evident that the Creature's victimization promotes his violence,

showing his aggression as a reaction to unresolved trauma rather than as a component of his inherent nature. Since the moment of his birth, the Creature is subjected to rejection and solitude. While Victor isolates himself willingly due to his one-minded zeal, the Creature's isolation is imposed on him. His first moments of consciousness are clouded with confusion and vulnerability as he attempts to make sense of his position in a foreign world. This sense of bewilderment is seen through his complaint:

It was dark when I awoke; I felt cold also, and half-frightened, as it were instinctively, finding myself so desolate. Before I had quitted your apartment, on a sensation of cold, I had covered myself with some clothes; but these were insufficient to secure me from the dews of night. I was a poor, helpless, miserable wretch; I knew, and could distinguish, nothing; but feeling pain invade me on all sides, I sat down and wept. (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 11)

His initial interactions with mankind cement his status as an outsider, as he is met with fear and hostility rather than acceptance. The De Lacey family, which he observes in his attempts to understand social relationships, offers a glimmer of hope for companionship, but the violent rejection by Felix De Lacey shatters this hope:

At that instant the cottage door was opened, and Felix, Safie, and Agatha entered. Who can describe their horror and consternation on beholding me? Agatha fainted; and Safie, unable to attend to her friend, rushed out of the cottage. Felix darted forward, and with supernatural force tore me from his father, to whose knees I clung: in a transport of fury, he dashed me to the ground and struck me violently with a stick. I could have torn him limb from limb, as the lion rends the antelope. But my heart sunk within me as with bitter sickness, and I refrained. I saw him on

the point of repeating his blow, when, overcome by pain and anguish, I quitted the cottage and in the general tumult escaped unperceived to my hovel. (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 15)

This is a pivotal moment in the Creature's psychological development, as it represents the final rejection of his desire for companionship. Melanie Klein's Object Relations Theory holds that the failure to bond leads to deep emotional wounds, yielding defensive aggression. The Creature's desire for friendship is rejected, and he has no option but to redefine himself as a reaction to society's aggression.

Even more, with the repeated rejection he experiences becoming internalized by the Creature, his emotional state shifts from anger to bitterness. His lamentation indicates his growing resentment: "I am malicious because I am miserable. Am I not shunned and hated by all mankind?" (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 17), as Cathy Caruth's Trauma Theory argues that trauma, if not treated, drives its victims to re-enact their victimhood. The Creature, having no acceptance, begins to cause suffering to others as a means of proving his existence. His violent actions, including the murders of William Frankenstein and Henry Clerval, are not acts of spontaneity but acts of calculation precipitated by his suffering. All acts of revenge are attempts at making Victor pay attention to his suffering, making him experience the same suffering the Creature has experienced. Judith Herman's trauma model also illuminates the Creature's transformation, propounding that recurrent trauma has the effect of conditioning a victim into internalizing violence as a strategy for survival. The Creature, having no channels for healing, turns to brutality as the only means of existence. His vendetta is not thus spurred on by cruelty but by a profound need for legitimation and vindication of pain.

In spite of his brutal actions, the Creature is very conscious of his tragic fate. While Victor denies his guilt, the Creature wholly accepts his part in the chain of ruin. His dying words prove his deep remorse:

"But soon," he cried, with sad and solemn enthusiasm, "I shall die, and what I now feel be no longer felt. Soon these burning miseries will be extinct. I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly, and exult in the agony of the torturing flames. The light of that conflagration will fade away; my ashes will be swept into the sea by the winds. My spirit will sleep in peace; or if it thinks, it will not surely think thus. Farewell."(Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 24)

This action reveals the truth that the Creature's aggression was never so much cruelty—it was a desperate act to obtain meaning in his suffering, as his last self-exile and death affirms the futility of revenge as a means to mend, proving “Frankenstein” timeless message that uncontrolled trauma begets cyclical patterns of misery. And as The Creature's shift from victim to offender is the direct result of his repeated rejection and unsuccessful quest for bonding. By psychoanalytic and theory of trauma, it is understood that his violent nature arises not from any intrinsic evil but from the long period of psychological agony. His tale is a moving critique of the impact of ambition and trauma, proving that individuals deprived of mercy can end up accepting the very cruelty endured by them. As the story progresses, both Victor and the Creature become captives of their own misery, further demonstrating the wider implications of unchecked trauma in *Frankenstein*.

3.3. Psychoanalytic Perspective on Their Coping Failures

3.3.1. Victor's Repression and Projection of Guilt

Victor Frankenstein's descent into psychological turmoil is deeply intertwined with his inability to confront the weight of his own guilt, and rather than acknowledging his responsibility for the suffering caused by his creation, he represses this awareness, allowing it to fester within the unconscious mind, where it distorts his perception of reality and fuels his obsessive need to destroy the very being he brought to life. Freud's repression theory argues that traumatic events, if left unprocessed, are pushed into the unconscious, but they don't just disappear; rather, they emerge in distorted forms, influencing thought processes, behavior, and emotional reactions in ways the person usually isn't aware of, and for Victor, this repression is apparent in his initial response to the birth of the Creature, when he runs out of the laboratory, leaving behind his creation in a frantic attempt to wipe away what he has done, but running away does not clear him—it only deepens the guilt further, leading to his later psychological breakdown, and the extent of Victor's repression is most clearly seen in his compulsive refusal to speak of his creation, as he refuses to tell the truth even when it could prevent tragedy, and when Justine Moritz is falsely accused and ultimately executed for the murder of young William, Victor is silent, paralyzed by his own fear and denial as he narrates:

thousand times rather would I have confessed myself guilty of the crime ascribed to Justine; but I was absent when it was committed, and such a declaration would have been considered as the ravings of a madman, and would not have exculpated her who suffered through me.(Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 8)

his guilt a heavy burden that he cannot bring himself to acknowledge, and yet, despite his knowledge of the Creature's guilt, he continues to refer to himself as the true murderer, exhibiting

an unconscious acknowledgment of his own guilt while simultaneously refusing to bring this awareness into conscious thought, a conflict that Freud would recognize as the conflict between the id, ego, and superego, where Victor's sense of morality—the superego—accuses him while his ego seeks to repress this guilt through avoidance, resulting in a fractured psyche wracked by unresolved trauma.

Additionally, repression is not forgetting—it is an ongoing process of denial that takes continuous psychological energy, and for Victor, this energy comes in the form of his deteriorating mental and physical well-being, as his nightmares are filled with terrifying images of the Creature, and his body withers under the burden of endless worry, demonstrating Freud's theory of the return of the repressed, in which what is repressed into the unconscious will always come back in masked and frequently destructive forms, and Victor's suffering is not so much a result of outside misfortune, but a direct consequence of his denial of reality, a self-punishment that drives him further into obsession, as he becomes fixated on killing the Creature in a misguided attempt to purge the guilt that he cannot consciously bear. This externalization of blame, this process by which Victor places upon the Creature his own failures of morality, is a turning point in his psychological decline, for rather than regarding the Creature as an expression of his own irresponsibility, he redefines it as the expression of all his suffering, a tale in which he is victim and not perpetrator, and thus exculpates himself at least on the surface, though at a price, for no deception is so tenuous as one based upon the continued functioning of its deceit, and Victor's agony never ceases, his nightmares persist, and his mad pursuit of the Creature becomes less about justice, more about his inability to shake what he has done, which, under Freud's repetition compulsion, is an unconscious effort to recreate and reenact trauma in a never-ending cycle, to master a past which remains unmastered, and Victor's relentless pursuit across

the Arctic is not a physical one, but a psychological one, as he seeks to kill the Creature as a means of killing part of himself which will not be silenced.

As a result, Ultimately, Victor Frankenstein's projection and repression of guilt reveal the devastating impact of unresolved trauma, since his failure to accept his own guilt drives him in a whirlwind of fixation, self-destruction, and persistent agony, and rather than coming to terms with the ethical cost of what he has done, he prefers to bury them, but repression is not the solution—it is poison that kills him slowly, distorting his world, pushing him towards inevitable mortality, and revealing that guilt, when it is repressed, does not dissipate but comes back with revenge in ugly ways, both within the mind and, in the case of Victor, in the very creation that he had sought to unassemble.

3.3.2. The Creature's Struggle with Identity and Projection of Pain

The Creature's identity crisis is rooted in the rejection and alienation he experiences from his birth, and unlike Victor, who represses his trauma, the Creature is acutely aware of his pain but lacks the mechanisms by which to work through it in a way that will result in healing, rather being forced to exist in a world that repeatedly reminds him that he is different, building his self-image in profoundly damaging ways. Carl Jung's concept of the shadow self is particularly relevant in considering the Creature's psychological development, as he represents the very aspect of Victor's mind that his creator refuses to confront—his uncontrollable ambition, his guilt, and his loneliness, and in that sense, the Creature is the external embodiment of Victor's darkest impulses and unresolved emotions, a projection of all that Victor fears about himself. Adding to that, Right from the start, the Creature is forced to grapple with his own self amidst absence of meaningful human interaction, and his first attempts at self-discovery are guided through observation, watching the De Lacey family and wanting to be a part of their world but when he

musters up the courage finally to look for friends, he is not met with acceptance but with savage rejection, an experience that marks a turning point in his psychological make-up, as it is here that he begins internalizing the hate and fear the others put upon him, shaping his notion of self through the mirror of society's rejection:

You are in the wrong," replied the fiend; "and, instead of threatening, I am content to reason with you. I am malicious because I am miserable. Am I not shunned and hated by all mankind? You, my creator, would tear me to pieces, and triumph; remember that, and tell me why I should pity man more than he pities me? You would not call it murder if you could precipitate me into one of those ice-rifts, and destroy my frame, the work of your own hands. (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch17)

he laments, revealing the depths of his misery as well as the huge link between his misery and his growing ferocity, since his cruelty is not a natural inclination but an acquired reaction to the persistent cruelty to which he is exposed, an acquired reaction to the misery which marks his existence.

Furthermore, Melanie Klein's Object Relations Theory is a compelling one for understanding the psychological condition of the Creature, because under her theory, individuals who endure early relational trauma such as abandonment and rejection develop unstable self-concepts and resort to externalizing pain through aggression, and in this Creature's case, his failure to form genuine connections means that he is emotionally broken, so that his suffering appears as violence and not as proof of innate evilness but as a desperate attempt to assert his presence in a world that will only label him something monstrous. His identity, rather than being self-determined, is conditioned by the aggression he receives, and deprived of love or belonging, he learns to define himself by the same rejection he has experienced, reflecting the same

aggression and fear projected on to him, becoming the very thing society thinks he is, and this process of projection is most apparent in his interaction with Victor when the Creature begins to see his creator as being responsible for all his pain, projecting his own pain onto the outside source by blaming only Victor for his woe, thus making his act of revenge justified as an ultimate form of projection, a psychological defense mechanism wherein feelings he cannot merge into himself are displaced onto some outside target.

Further, Victor represses his own guilt and directs it towards the Creature, finding him responsible for all his troubles, so too does the Creature direct his pain onto Victor and believe that he can only attain recognition and some measure of peace by making his creator suffer. Yet, this revenge only serves to worsen his anguish, for with each act of vengeance he is reminded of his own failure to escape the wound that makes him what he is, and in place of healing, he grows deeper entrenched in his hurt, illustrating the damaging potential of underworked trauma as well as how pain, unless it is resolved, creates an endless cycle of violence and emptiness.

Lastly, the Creature's struggle against identity is a tragic display of his deep desire for acceptance and the disastrous consequences of his continued rejection, and while he is an innocent creature seeking companionship at the outset, he is shaped increasingly by the cruelty he endures, his actions the product of the hostility he experiences. His development from lone outcast to seeker of vengeance is no inevitability but a result of his trauma, a reaction to the misery that defines his life, and in so doing, his journey is a powerful exploration of the way that suffering, if not addressed, warps self and induces vicious circles of destruction, mirroring the mental breakdown of Victor, for whereas one internalizes his suffering and the other externalizes it, both are ravaged by the horrors to which they are unable to resist.

3.3.3. The Shared Failure to Integrate Trauma

Both Victor and the Creature are bound by a shared inability to resolve their trauma in a way supportive of psychological healing, both suffering similarly in a cycle of denial and self-harming repetition, and though their responses are different—one through repression, the other through projection—both ultimately prove unable to unify their shattered psyches as necessary, being kept forever in psychological distress. Sigmund Freud's structural model of the psyche provides a compelling framework by which to approach their difficulties, as Victor's untrammelled id, manifest in his remorseless hunger, overwhelms his ego's ability to negotiate between desire and duty, and with a undermined superego, his moral sense is rendered useless, allowing him to rationalize his acts while evading their consequences, while the Creature, though first driven by egoistic desires for attachment and self-understanding, comes more and more under the sway of the brutality of his id as successive rejection erodes his capacity for rational self-control, leaving him torn between a cringing need for acceptance and savage lashing out at a world that rejects him.

Carl Jung's individuation theory, whereby an individual integrates their shadow self in order to become psychologically whole, is also vital in coping with their mutual descent, because Victor's inability to confront the darker impulses of his psyche—his unbridled ambition, his guilt, his fear of flaw—means that he ultimately denies responsibility altogether, his shadow self-externalized in the form of the Creature, who becomes the living embodiment of all the things Victor wants to keep suppressed, and the Creature, unable to disassociate himself from the persona given to him by society's rejection, does not merely cope with his shadow but is totally consumed by it, becoming the very monstrosity that Victor ascribed to him. Their own failure to reconcile these broken pieces of self prevents any form of self-knowledge or resolution,

confirming the novel's general theme of psychological fragmentation, wherein creator and creation both are unable to transcend the pain that defines them, their unresolved trauma leading them to perpetuate cycles of guilt, rage, and destruction, their fates tied in an endless mirror of each other's deepest wounds.

Furthermore, Freud's repressive theory supposes that trauma, if unaccepted, persists but festers in the unconscious, manifesting in deformed forms that shape behavior of which the individual need not be conscious, and, in Victor, his refusal to acknowledge the truth that he is accountable for the Creature's being causes obsessive denial, his mind incapable of noting the degree of his guilt, and rather than accepting his own moral failing, he projects it, setting up the Creature as the sole antagonist, justifying that the monstrosity unleashed upon mankind is not his doing but some force beyond his control, and this forgiving himself manifests in his nightmares, delusions, and compulsive determination to destroy the creature he created, but through the process, he extends his psychological suffering because his chase of the Creature is nothing but an unconscious wish to come to terms with the very part of himself which he went out of his way to deny throughout his existence.

In contrast, the Creature, deprived of the luxury of repression, is faced with his pain in its most raw form, but deprived of the theoretical context for understanding and synthesis of his trauma, has only one course of response available to him—externalizing his pain through revenge, his sense of self entirely defined by the rejection and cruelty to which he is subjected, and Klein's Object Relations Theory explains the manner in which this cycle of abandonment creates an unstable sense of self, for deprived of the nurturing environment within which to construct a cohesive sense of self, the Creature internalizes the aggression directed towards him and projects it back out onto the world, his violence a desperate declaration of being in the face of

those who have rendered him invisible. While Victor suppresses his guilt, the Creature assigns to himself the villainy imposed upon him, and in so doing, both transgresses and fulfills society's expectations, his development from innocent outcast to avenging figure illustrating the monstrous consequences of unhealed trauma, in which the injured party endures always again the hurt inflicted upon him, a perpetual cycle of suffering from which neither he nor Victor can escape.

Adding to that, Jung's idea of the shadow self also accounts for their psychological entrapment, for while individuation calls for an embracing of one's darkness, each character neglects to achieve this necessary integration, Victor persistently disowning the monstrous aspects of his ambition, and the Creature, never having had an identity of his own, coming to represent the very shadow Victor seeks to annihilate, and so they are not so much adversaries as they are mirror images of one another, fated to be forever bound within a cycle of mutual destruction, their inability to accept their shared affliction ensuring their tragic fates. Shelley's tale, therefore, is a profound reflection on the legacy of unintegrated trauma, where repression and projection are inadequate as survival mechanisms of the psyche, and Victor and the Creature are both doomed to haunt the wasteland of their own making, pursued not only by each other but by the split selves they could never integrate.

3.4. Broader Implications for Psychological Resilience and Human Suffering

3.4.1. The Absence of Psychological Resilience

Psychological resilience, or the ability of an individual to resist, adapt to, and recover from adversity, is nonexistent in both Victor Frankenstein and his Creature, whose respective struggling with trauma, guilt, and rejection only compound their psychological wounds rather than building any potential for healing. Judith Herman's trauma model, in which she outlines the necessary stages of recovery—safety, mourning, and reconnection—provides a paradigm for

understanding why neither character finds freedom from suffering because they both remain caught in destructive patterns of avoidance, isolation, and revenge, neither one of them able to establish the stability and supportiveness needed for psychological healing. Without resilience, their traumas stew, dictating their fates in a progressively tightening spiral of self-destruction, their common downfall underscoring the catastrophic consequences of untreated psychic wounds.

To begin, Victor, rather than confronting the full measure of his moral failures, becomes a victim of an all-consuming, self-destructive search for the very being he had initially attempted to bring to life, his mind tormented by the ghost of the Creature he has spurned. His inability to cope with his own guilt in the events that are happening shows not only a breakdown of resilience but also a breakdown of self-awareness, for rather than fitting himself to the facts he has created, he goes on into fantasy, comforting himself that all his misery is exclusively external in origin. His relentless pursuit of the Creature is a manifestation of his inner torment, his refusal to confront his own contribution to his sufferings leading him to pursue ruination rather than reconciliation, and in doing so, he permits himself to remain stuck in the position of forever suffering, his mind unable to conceive any redemption. The very pursuit extends his agony; in that each step he takes towards the destruction of the Creature distances him from any possibility of psychological integration. This resistance to resilience is made specifically visible in Victor's total denial of support structures which otherwise could play a role towards his recovery. He repels relatives and friends, refusing even in his lowest point to seek consolation, and rejecting Elizabeth, who might otherwise have comforted him, shows his refusal to accept the kind of human relationship which would have helped to provide him with emotional balance. His unwillingness to keep himself apart is a reflection of his deeper inability to come to terms with himself, his banishment self-inflicted a sign of the extent to which he has lost himself in his own

suffering. With no need to find comfort and no capacity to work through his sorrow in a positive way, Victor is his own worst enemy, his trauma never resolved, perpetually feeding his own ruination.

Similarly, in the same way, the Creature, no matter how different from Victor in his understanding of his pain, equally does not have strength to his woes, his agony becoming bitterness and thence to vengeance. As opposed to Victor, who represses his guilt, the Creature touches his pain entirely but with no means of utilizing it for good, he gets bogged down by his own sorrow, every encounter nourishing him with the belief that he is unforgivable. The rejection he is met with at every turn wears down his ability to imagine any conceivable future in which he might find peace, and his increasing violence is a desperate means of asserting himself in a world that will not allow him an existence beyond monstrosity. His slide into violence is not merely a personal act of vengeance against Victor but a way of projecting the pain that has characterized his life, for without any course of reconciliation, he reflects the aggression he has received, continuing the same cycle that has contributed to his isolation. Furthermore, Judith Herman's trauma model stresses the necessity of reconnection as the way out of trauma, yet the Creature is methodically denied this possibility, each of his attempts at making a connection met with terror and violence, confirming his otherness and further traumatizing him. His encounter with the De Lacey family is the nearest he comes to forming a connection, but their violent rejection annihilates whatever hopes he may have had of being accepted into society, his mental resilience shattered by the repeated abandonment. His destiny is sealed from this moment, his pain giving way to anger, his aspiration for acceptance supplanted by an aspiration for vengeance. The absence of even a single accepting relationship ensures that his suffering is impenetrable, his isolation assuming the position as the defining force of his existence.

Ultimately, Had Victor or the Creature at least demonstrated some ability to recover from their tragedies, the tragic course of their tale could have been altered, but their shared inability to demonstrate resilience only ensures their further descent into psychological ruin. Victor's failure to assume responsibility renders him incapable of moving past, and the Creature's inability to be tolerated leaves him trapped in a self-reinforcing cycle of vengeance, both mimicking each other down into an evil reproduction of their intertwined fates. Their own tragic journeys testify to the necessity of psychological resilience, showing that without the ability to process trauma and try to reconnect, misery can only beget more misery, leading not to salvation but to certain ruination.

3.4.2. The Role of Suffering in Human Experience

Existential psychologists believe that suffering is not only an obstacle to be eliminated but a requirement of human life, a determinant of identity, perception, and purpose. Viktor Frankl, in *Man's Search for Meaning*, contends that one must make sense of his or her pain in order to transcend it, but neither Victor nor the Creature can draw meaning from his suffering in *Frankenstein*, and so his suffering is a force of ongoing destruction rather than transformation. Their inability to integrate pain into themselves in a constructive manner ensures that they are trapped in cycles of sorrow, guilt, and revenge, their fates bound to their inability to manage suffering in a way that brings transformation. Through their persistent harassment, Mary Shelley condemns human endurance limits, showing that affliction does not ennoble but instead consumes the soul, bringing inevitable devastation without either external intervention or internal concession.

First of all, Victor Frankenstein, as great a mind as he has, is totally incapable of finding any sense in his suffering but rather allows it to consume his very existence. His grief over the deaths of William, Justine, Clerval, and Elizabeth is insufficient to lead him to self-awareness or

moral reflection but only serves to fuel his constant pursuit of revenge against the Creature. Rather than turning to his own agency in the catastrophes that befall him, he externalizes his suffering, venting his anger only on the creature he has brought into being, as if to excise the Creature would excise him from his own pain. His tenacious pursuit of revenge, condensed in his unyielding refrain— "I pursued him; and for many months this has been my task" (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 24) —indicates his inability to consider suffering as anything beyond a curse to be avenged rather than as an event to be understood. His inability to integrate pain into a coherent personal narrative result in psychological collapse, as he is reduced to a shadow of the man he once was, devastated by an exile of anger and grief he has willingly subjected himself to. Similarly, the Creature, despite his immense intelligence and emotional depth, is unable to construct an identity beyond his suffering, his existence marked only by the rejection and violence he endures. His deathbed lament—"I shall die, and what I now feel be no longer felt. Soon these burning miseries will be extinct" (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch 24)—illustrates his resignation to despair, his suffering having no redemptive purpose but instead heralding his complete emotional collapse. Contrasted with Frankl's optimism of suffering as a gateway to meaning, the Creature's suffering collapses into an inescapable abyss, annihilating all potential for personal growth.

The failure of Victor and the Creature to accept their suffering helps to emphasize Shelley's broader criticism of society's refusal to nurture those in pain. The Creature, with his potential for love and generosity, is rejected, his need for friendship systematically denied. His meeting with the De Lacey family is the strongest that he is able to form any bond, and even within that moment of hope, he is ruthlessly rejected, validating the impossibility of his integration into human society. Having no hope of being accepted, his suffering boils into vengeance, his unfulfilled desire for attachment demonstrated through actions of destruction.

Shelley suggests that while suffering is inevitable, its character depends on external forces—if the Creature had been welcomed with kindness rather than cruelty, his suffering might have been a different form, even possibly a cause of growth rather than ruin. Victor's suffering is, to a great extent, self-imposed, yet his inability to acknowledge this reality ensures that he never conceives of any possibility of redemption. He isolates himself from those who will attempt to comfort him, shunning Elizabeth's advances and withholding confidences from his father, his anguish thus one which cannot be overcome but a fact to be rationalized and interpreted. His inability to share his suffering with others renders him incapable of finding purpose in it, and his dying moments, spent tracking the Creature across the tundra, serve as an assertion of the utter futility of his suffering, for he dies not in a gesture of illumination or forgiveness but in one of unrelieved rage and guilt.

The juxtaposition of Shelley's description of suffering and existentialist concepts of meaning shows the outcome of a non-integrated existence, where suffering is a heavy burden rather than a transformative force. By denying their pain access to the power of shaping them in meaningful ways, Victor and the Creature deny themselves the possibility of healing. Their tragic fates serve as a cautionary tale, illustrating that suffering, when met without understanding or support, does not refine the soul but instead erodes it, leaving behind only devastation.

3.4.3. Lessons on Emotional Adaptability and Healing

Victor Frankenstein and his Creature are tragic examples of what becomes of people who cannot adapt to suffering, who lack the psychological flexibility to integrate trauma into their sense of self in a manner that encourages growth rather than devastation. Their failures, each separately, illustrate that resilience is not a function of endurance alone but of transformation—the ability to reinterpret pain into something that will not consume the self. Conversely,

individuals who heal from trauma possess three qualities: emotional regulation, cognitive flexibility, and social connection. Psychological research with trauma survivors indicates that individuals who find meaning in pain, reach out for connection, and reinterpret their experience are far more likely to heal than those who suffer in isolation. Yet in *Frankenstein*, the absence of these elements condemns both Victor and the Creature, illustrating that suffering without adaptability entails an unavoidable chasm, devouring identity, ethics, and hope.

Adding to that, Victor, as scientifically talented as he is, is emotionally rigid, incapable of reinterpreting his suffering so that it opens him to self-awareness or change. He sees pain as an external force and not as a state from within that is to be worked out and understood. His dogged pursuit of the Creature—his insistence that "for many months this has been my task" (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Ch24)—is his failure to move beyond loss, as he becomes fixated on revenge rather than introspection. His tragedy is not that he suffers, but that he refuses to accept the deeper meaning of that suffering, using it instead to drive further destruction. The choice, the acceptance of responsibility, the reaching out for reconciliation—never strikes him. Instead, he alienates himself from those who might have brought him to wholeness, rejecting Elizabeth's friendship, denying his family, and wallowing in a state of maniacal, self-induced isolation. The ethical Shelley is teaching through Victor's failure is clear: in healing, one must allow pain to be acknowledged rather than exploited, accepted rather than rejected.

The Creature, though different from Victor in his burning awareness of pain, also fails to gain emotional flexibility. Unlike his creator, he does not suppress his trauma; he feels it deeply, he articulates it, and he understands its origin. But this awareness is incomplete without the capacity to transform pain into something other than vengeance. When he is rejected by the De Laceys, his last hope for human connection is ruined, and with it, his potential for emotional

growth. Shelley presents a scathing critique of the place of external validation in the process of healing had the Creature been met with even a single source of acceptance, his suffering might have been lessened, his rage diverted, his self-shaped by something other than rejection. Yet having no position in the world, he is without a context in which to constructively work through his sorrow.

Consequently, the creature has only one outlet—vengeance—and in this, he mirrors Victor's demise, illustrating that anguish without integration yields cyclical ruin. Judith Herman's trauma model stresses the necessity of safety, mourning, and reconnection for psychic healing. Victor denies himself the possibility of mourning in a way that leads to insight and is instead consumed by anger and fixation. The Creature, though he wishes for connection, is systematically denied it, so that his pain is never alleviated by the presence of another. Their concurrent collapse is not simply the result of exterior pressures but of their inability to assimilate suffering, to fashion pain into a force not destructive of the self but expanding knowledge.

Shelley's novel finally suggests that it is not suffering that shatters, but the inability to come to it in a meaningful manner, to bend rather than break beneath its force. At the conclusion of the novel, the Creature's lament—"I shall die, and what I now feel be no longer felt. Soon these burning miseries will be extinct" (Frankenstein, Ch 24)—is not the cry of a creature who has found peace, but one who is utterly devastated by his misery. His self-imposed exile is not a sign of determination but of defeat, the last proof that without flexibility, pain turns into an unforgiving force of devastation. The lessons of Frankenstein are stark: pain is unavoidable, but healing is contingent upon whether one can accept pain in a way that permits transformation, not obliteration. Those who cannot reframe their trauma, who refuse connection, who allow vengeance or guilt to dominate their lives, are doomed to self-destruction.

Finally, Shelley's restraint is one that goes beyond the Gothic setting of her novel, one that concerns human resilience itself. Emotional strength is the pediment between suffering and survival, the mechanism by which one transmutes their wounds into wisdom rather than weapons. Victor and the Creature's own tragic fates are a testament to what happens when this flexibility is lacking, when sorrow and anger are uncontrolled, when pain gets to rule without the balance of resilience. *Frankenstein* finally suggests that healing is not in the avoidance of pain, but in its confrontation with the willingness to be transformed, the courage to seek connection, and the capacity to allow suffering to mold and not break the self.

Conclusion

In *Frankenstein*, ambition and trauma as intertwined forces that propel Victor and the Creature towards their destructive destinies, and grief as the common thread that multiplies their suffering. Victor's obsessive quest for knowledge, an initial quest for greatness, becomes a death-spiral of self-destruction which estranges him not just from mankind but makes him incapable of metabolizing loss. His unchecked ambition, severed from ethical consideration, is a perpetually burning fire that drives him to ruin. William's, Justine's, Clerval's, and Elizabeth's deaths are not so much external tragedies as signs of Victor's failure to understand the limits of human power and the moral responsibility of creation. His grief, rather than serving to prompt contemplation, rather fuels his inescapable fixation on vengeance, reverberating the very monstrosity he perceives in the being he created.

The Creature, on the other hand, is born of suffering, spurned and abandoned, his anguish shaping his identity in ways that resonate yet deny Victor's mental deterioration. He is not troubled by untrammelled ambition but by the abhorrent burden of unwantedness, his tragedy resulting not from deprivation of what he possessed but from deprivation of what he never had—

love, belongingness, and recognition. His hope of acceptance transforms to rage, his pain funneled out in savage reprisal as he is ritually excluded from humankind.

The lack of psychological resilience in Victor and the Creature is reflective of their common failure to incorporate suffering into a positive framework. Neither attempts true reconciliation; rather, they both fall prey to cycles of devastation that leave them irreparably wounded, revealing the inescapable nature of bereavement when unresolved. As the chapter shows from the lens of psychoanalytic and trauma theory, “Frankenstein” reads as a study of the devastating impact of uncurbed ambition and unfinished trauma, showing how, if sorrow is not worked through, it does not disappear but festers, begetting cycles of loss and despair. Victor's inability to keep his passions in check and the Creature's anguish about rejection illustrate the fine lines between ambition and ruin, sorrow and revenge, creation and destruction.

As a result, Shelley's book is thus as much a warning as a wise inquiry into the fineness of the human mind against the weight of its own ambition. It denounces the dangers of isolation, society's failure to provide pity to the suffering, and the psychological cost of ambition uncorrected by moral responsibility. Ultimately, Victor and the Creature are tragic figures, not simply because of their own failures but because their mutual fates demonstrate the ruinous consequences of a world where sorrow, if not healed, can lead only to destruction.

General Conclusion

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* remains an unparalleled exploration of the psychological terrain of ambition and trauma, playing out a compelling Gothic drama in which scientific ambition and emotional abandonment saw catastrophic consequences. This dissertation has argued that the novel is more than a cautionary tale against technological hubris, but a richly self-reflexive psychological case study on the breakdown of integrating personal loss, moral responsibility, and emotional resilience. With Freudian psychoanalytic thought, Object Relations Theory, and trauma models developed by Freud, Klein, and Caruth, this study has traced the closely intertwined paths of Victor Frankenstein and his Creature to demonstrate how unresolved trauma and unchecked ambition confuse the self, twist social relationships, and ultimately create psychological devastation.

Victor Frankenstein's professional life is characteristic of a classical overreacher whose obsessive quest for knowledge becomes a desperate attempt to ward off the horror of loss and death. His ambition, Promethean and Faustian in its guise, is motivated by an unconscious wish to turn back death and master nature. But his refusal to confront the moral consequences of what he has done and his psychological repression of guilt result in disintegration of self, alienation, and a descent into compulsive revenge. In Victor, Shelley illustrates the dark potential of scientific hubris when divorced from emotional responsibility and empathy.

Concurrent with this is the trajectory of the Creature—a creature of ambition but denied nurture and human recognition. With his eyes, Shelley constructs a portrait of trauma wrought by serial rejection, failure of attachment, and absence of empathetic social integration. Through the precepts of Object Relations Theory, the dissertation has established how the psychological fragmentation of the Creature is not inborn but constructed through his environment. His path

from being empathetic, inquiring being to becoming one of vengeance only serves to emphasize the destructive power of abandonment in society and human failure in such closely binding relationships. Moreover, the concept of grief is central to both narratives—not as a healing process but as a lingering wound. Drawing on Cathy Caruth’s trauma theory, this research has argued that Frankenstein stages grief as a return, an unclaimed experience that recurs and disorients. Both Victor and the Creature exist in a state of suspended mourning, unable to process or integrate loss into a coherent self, perpetuating a cycle of suffering that is as psychological as it is moral. Their inability to metabolize trauma mirrors the Gothic tradition’s obsession with haunted psyches and emotional paralysis.

Moreover, the failures of coping mechanisms employed by both Victor and the Creature serve not merely as individual shortcomings but as a broader Gothic critique of psychological resilience under duress. Shelley’s characters are not afforded the structural or emotional supports typically emphasized in trauma recovery—neither community nor emotional regulation, nor reflective introspection. Instead, they are consigned to isolated suffering, locked in inward spirals where the self becomes both prison and torturer. Victor’s obsessive vengeance, his retreat from loved ones, and his pathological repression of guilt reflect a psyche in disarray, incapable of confronting grief in a constructive or transformative way. Similarly, the Creature, formed with the capacity for emotional depth, intellectual curiosity, and relational longing, is systematically denied every opportunity for meaningful attachment or recognition. His suffering festers not because he lacks humanity, but because he is denied it—his trauma exacerbated by the cruelty of rejection and the silence of a society that refuses to see him. In these mirrored collapses, Shelley captures the essential tragedy of human suffering when it is met not with empathy but with abandonment.

In contrast to modern psychological paradigms, such as those proposed by Judith Herman which advocate for mourning, reconnection, narrative processing, and emotional reintegration as key components of trauma healing, *Frankenstein* presents a world where grief is static, resilience is absent, and trauma is cyclical rather than curable. There is no catharsis in this narrative—only re-enactment, silence, and the uncanny return of repressed pain. The novel's emotional universe is one in which the failure to name grief, the inability to bear witness to pain, results not only in personal devastation but in moral and existential disintegration. Shelley seems to suggest that in the absence of compassion and recognition, creation becomes grotesque, knowledge becomes a curse, and ambition, stripped of love and accountability, begets ruin.

In short, *Frankenstein* lives on not only as a literary meditation on the volatile intersection of morality and science, but more profoundly as a profound psychological study of how unrestrained ambition and unresolved sorrow conspire to annihilate the human spirit. It is a novel about absence—of love, of validation, of responsibility—and of the consequences of giving life without first understanding what it means to sustain it emotionally. Shelley's vision is prescient in anticipating many of the major concerns of modern psychology: the cost of emotional repression, the imperatives of interpersonal relationships, and the psychological collapse that occurs when pain is not given its due.

Victor and the Creature, though positioned on opposite sides of the creator-created divide, are joined in their shared inability to metabolize loss and fashion identity from pain. Their destiny is not decided by fate, but by the incremental breakdown of the self when sorrow is not faced and healed. And Mary Shelley's enduring achievement is in bringing Gothic horror into the realm of psychological reality. From personal tragedy and philosophic contemplation, she has crafted a timeless tale that confronts the most vulnerable aspects of human existence: the desire to

transcend, the fear of not being loved, the pain of rejection, and the risk of striving for greatness without compassion. This research thus places Frankenstein firmly in not only the literary tradition of Gothic fiction but also, more importantly, an ongoing interdisciplinary conversation regarding mental illness, emotional toughness, identity construction, and the ethical duties of the creative act. It remains a warning that ambition devoid of compassion, and loss without solace, will generate monsters in body along with the mind.

Questions:

- 1- You mention that Shelley's own narrative structure and use of embedded narratives reflect fragmented identity. How does the form of *Frankenstein* mirror the psychological fragmentation experienced by the characters?
- 2- Why do you think Mary Shelley chose to frame the novel using multiple narrators (Walton, Victor, the Creature)? How does this narrative structure support your discussion of identity and trauma?
- 3- What is the central argument of your dissertation, and how does it connect ambition with trauma in both Victor and the Creature?

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