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Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus and Social Identity Theory

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Abstract

This paper delves deeply into the intricate themes woven throughout Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Frankenstein*, illuminating critical aspects such as family dynamics, societal expectations, isolation, the pursuit of ambition, and the inherent fallibility of human nature—all of which play pivotal roles in the formation of identity. The analysis begins with a thorough exploration of the complex relationships within families, highlighting how these connections can both nurture and hinder personal growth. It scrutinizes the rigid structures of society that dictate individual roles and aspirations, particularly in light of the sweeping changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution. This period not only transformed economies but also reshaped social hierarchies, leading to pronounced class disparities that are crucial to understanding the text's context. Employing social identity theory as a framework, the paper enriches our comprehension of how individual ambition can be stifled or propelled by societal rejection. This dynamic is particularly relevant during the Romantic era, when class struggles were at the forefront of social consciousness. Moreover, the investigation of identity in relation to ethical considerations and the intricate nature of human connection reveals significant insights into how *Frankenstein* was perceived by nineteenth-century audiences. By examining the societal factors that contributed to the text's mixed reception—from fears surrounding unchecked ambition to anxieties about the moral implications of scientific advancement—this paper provides a nuanced understanding of why Shelley's work initially faced adversity and controversy, enriching its relevance then and now.

Keywords: Alienation, identity, oppression, relationships, society, humanity

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Frankenstein, by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, is a novel that explores the themes of family, society, isolation, ambition, and fallibility. Published in 1818, *Frankenstein* was written during the Romantic era and reflects Shelley's style, perspective, and preoccupations. Concerning Shelley's writing style and preoccupations, *Frankenstein* strongly exhibits her interest in Gothic elements and Romanticism, including her preoccupation with writing stories utilizing said elements. Using a social identity theory approach allows for a closer exploration of how family, society, isolation, ambition, and fallibility function within *Frankenstein*. This perspective is beneficial because it draws attention to how each influences an individual's identity, ultimately shaping a more nuanced reading of the narrative and its characters. Shelley's *Frankenstein* intricately explores the theme of class identity within the context of the Romantic era, employing a range of literary devices such as allusion and simile to critique family, society, ambition, the Industrial Revolution, and class issues, which impacted how 19th-century society received the text.

Frankenstein is a story about how one's ambitions can become so addictive that one suffers from isolation and fallibility. Specifically, Robert Walton, an explorer, is working on a project where he documents each encounter with Victor. He frequently writes letters to his sister expressing his experiences while on his expedition. In one letter to his sister, he states, "I have no friend, Margaret: when I am glowing with the enthusiasm of success, there will be [no one] to participate [in] my joy; if I am assailed by disappointment, no one will endeavor to sustain me in dejection," illustrating how his ambitions lead to his isolation and fallibility (Shelley 15). In other words, Walton expresses that he becomes so preoccupied with his success that he fails to build relationships. Because of his lack of valuable relationships, Walton feels isolated once he realizes that no one will be there to celebrate his success or comfort him when he is fallible. In his final letter to his sister, Walton further illustrates his ambition and fallibility when he writes, "You seek for knowledge and wisdom, as I once did; and I ardently hope that the gratification of your wishes may not be a serpent to sting you, as mine has been" (Shelley 25). The metaphor Shelley uses emphasizes how ambitions make individuals fallible. Like Walton, an individual can become so devoted to themselves and their self-improvement that they do not realize the immediate pleasure they receive will not last long-term. Through Walton's letters to his sister, Shelley depicts how ambitions can negatively impact an individual's life by making them isolated and fallible. Walton's self-perception changes because of social isolation as he realizes he has no one to go on adventures with. When Walton sees how his lack of socialization puts him at risk of living a life like Victor's, he wonders whether he wants to risk becoming isolated by fulfilling his passion for exploring, ultimately transitioning his emotional state from romanticism to uncertainty.

Additionally, Frankenstein describes instances in which family and society can negatively impact one's life by causing an individual to feel misunderstood and isolated. Shelley reveals these negative impacts when the Creature says, “All men hate the wretched; how, then, must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things! Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by annihilation of one of us” (88-89). In other words, the Creature states that everyone, especially his creator and society, despises him because he is different. The Creature expresses his complete and utter shock when he discovers that his creator detests him as much as, if not more than, the rest of society. The repetition of the term *hate* that Shelley uses emphasizes how the Creature was misunderstood. Neither Victor nor society had seen a creation like the Creature. Additionally, the Creature says, “When I looked around, I saw and heard of none like me. Was I, a monster, a blot upon the earth from which all men fled and whom all men disowned” (Shelley 107)? In other words, the Creature realizes that society has misunderstood him because they see him as a monster rather than a human being like them. When the Creature describes himself as a blot, he emphasizes how the mistreatment he receives from everyone has negatively impacted him by making him feel like his creation was a mistake or that he does not belong on Earth. Ultimately, Shelley’s use of repetition and the specific terms she uses strongly demonstrate the negative effects that family and society can have on an individual, making the novel an excellent choice for analyzing issues of class identity as they happened in the Romantic era.

Frankenstein is an excellent text for understanding issues of class identity during the Romantic era. According to Julia Moses and Julia Woesthoff, practicing endogamy was highly common during the Romantic era. Moses and Woesthoff explain that endogamy is when an individual marries another individual of the same social group (441). In *Frankenstein*, Shelley illustrates this class issue of endogamy when the Creature says, “I am alone and miserable: man will not associate with me, but one as deformed and horrible as myself would not deny herself to me. My companion must be of the same species and have the same defects. This being you must create” (Shelley 128). The Creature emphasizes that his loneliness is causing him to suffer from depression because he does not fit in with the established social circles. However, the Creature understands the importance of having a companion in life. When the Creature says that his “companion must be of the same species,” *species* is another term for social class, emphasizing that his partner must be within his social circle. Additionally, when the Creature expresses that his companion must “have the same defects” as him, the term defects emphasizes that the Creature wants someone who will understand him for who he is. Since the Creature is a unique individual, no one is like him in society, so he tells Victor that he must create a companion for him, be part of a social circle, and have someone who understands him.

Ultimately, through her illustration, Shelley demonstrates the class issue of endogamy and how people were confined to their social circles, which led to some individuals becoming isolated and depressed.

Analyzing *Frankenstein* through social identity theory will enhance the analysis by revealing how Shelley illustrates the theory's key concepts of identity and meanings. According to Jan E. Stets and Richard T. Serpe, social identity theory focuses on how likely an identity will be revealed in various situations and the importance of such identities to individuals. Additionally, social identity theory explains how one's identity impacts one's behavior, feelings, emotions, and physical health, including how identity affects one's concept of oneself and their position within society (Stets and Serpe 31). Identity theory applies to the topic because the Creature struggles to discover his identity as he cannot identify with other society members and struggles with feeling like he belongs in society. Shelley demonstrates these concepts of social identity theory in *Frankenstein*.

Through the character of Victor, Shelley illustrates the concept of identity. According to Stets and Serpe, within social identity theory, an identity consists of various meanings that are linked to one's role in society, social groups, and an individual's self-image (34). Victor reveals his identity when he says, "Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow" (Shelley 47). Here, Victor warns others about the dangers of gaining too much knowledge. He gives this warning because he speaks from personal experience that being obsessed with acquiring knowledge can ruin someone's life since obsession takes away from more important aspects of life, such as relationships and sanity. Ultimately, Victor does not want others to have the same consequences; thus, he gives the warning. He reflects on his own life and realizes that by trying to go beyond human limits—by "aspiring to become greater than his nature will allow"—he ended up suffering deeply. He says that someone who stays in their small world, content with a simple life, is happier than someone who seeks greatness through knowledge. Shelley is showing the reader something important about Victor's identity. In the novel's opening, Victor sees himself as a brilliant scientist. Except, by the time he speaks this quote, he's lost so much: his loved ones, his peace, even. Ultimately, Shelley shows how knowledge can be dangerous by illustrating how it takes control over Victor's life.

Additionally, Shelley illustrates the concept of meanings through Victor's character. According to Stets and Serpe, when an individual performs a self-reflection on their role in society, who they are within their social groups, and who they believe themselves to be, the individual's response to their self-reflection is defined as meanings (34). Victor illustrates meanings when he says, "Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds,

which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world" (Shelley 48). Here, Shelley shows the dangers of ambition through Victor's belief that he can control life and death to help the world. In other words, Victor sees himself as a god. But the novel later reveals the tragic consequences of this mindset, making the quote an early sign of Victor's downfall—and a warning about going too far in the name of progress. Victor sees himself above ordinary people, worthy of challenging life and death. Victor believes he's bringing light, but Shelley shows that this *light* can blind, mislead, and harm. That shows meaning because Victor reflects on his knowledge and capabilities and how they impact his societal role, including how he views himself. Victor sees himself as a kind of hero or savior. By saying he would "pour a torrent of light into our dark world," he imagines his discovery will bring humanity knowledge, hope, and progress (Shelley 48).

For the analysis of *Frankenstein*, the literary theory of social identity theory has been selected, as it includes several key concepts essential for understanding the text, such as salience. Identity salience is how likely an individual is to develop a certain identity based on their situation and circumstances. An individual whose identity has a higher level of salience is more likely to respond in a certain way, verbally or behaviorally, compared to someone with a less salient identity (Stets and Serpe 36). Victor illustrates the concept of salience when he says, "For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardor 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 51). In terms of salience, Victor's ambition is most likely to be presented and seen when he works on his creations. The salience of his ambitiousness is illustrated when Victor says he "deprived [himself] of rest and health." When he says he "desired [his work] with an ardor," he shows how passionate he can become about his work when he is in his laboratory (Shelley 51). However, now that he had finished creating the Creature, he realized that his ambition had clouded his vision, preventing him from seeing that he was producing a monster rather than a human that would fit in with society. Here, Victor's ambition and passion for science become highly salient when he creates the creature, as he achieves something that has never been attempted.

In *Frankenstein*, Shelley uses the symbolism of light to reveal the novel's historical context, illustrating how the Industrial Revolution significantly impacted the story. The revolution increased production via machines and factories, reducing the intensity of work individuals were required to perform by hand (Groumpos 465). However, society members began to fear the increase in machines and factories. Shelley illustrates the fears developed from the Industrial Revolution through Victor. When Victor realizes that the Creature is watching him from behind a tree, Victor exclaims, "A flash of lightning illuminated the object, and discovered its shape plainly to me; its gigantic stature, and the deformity of its aspect more hideous than

belongs to humanity, instantly informed me that it was the wretch, the filthy daemon, to whom I had given life" (Shelley 68). In other words, Victor expresses his intense fear of his scientific creation. The phrase "a flash of lightning" symbolizes how the Industrial Revolution was a time of scientific discovery as the lightning strike revealed that Victor's discovery that his creation was more dangerous than he had imagined. Additionally, when Victor refers to the Creature as an "object," his word choice emphasizes how the Creature is a product of the Industrial Revolution; Victor had ultimately created a destructive machine. By showing Victor's fear towards his creation, Shelley demonstrates how the machine production from the Industrial Revolution created intense fear and dread in civilians.

In addition to the Industrial Revolution, Shelley presents the class issue of poverty throughout her novel. The Poor Law Amendment Act limited the amount of support that poor individuals could receive, using fear tactics to prevent anyone other than those who were severely impoverished from applying for assistance (Melander and Miotto 1248). Shelley illustrates the importance of the passage of the Poor Law Amendment Act through the Creature's actions. For example, the Creature states, "I had been accustomed…to steal a part of their store for my own consumption; but when I found that in doing this I inflicted pain on the cottagers, I abstained, and satisfied myself with berries, nuts, and roots, which I gathered from a neighbouring wood" (Shelley 100). Based on the Creature's contrast in actions, going from stealing from his neighbors to realizing the consequences created by his actions and learning to provide for himself, Shelley illustrates the issues that arose due to poverty. Shelley's use of contrast delivers a critique of the Poor Law Amendment Act. If welfare payments and relief are taken away from poor individuals, the lower classes will have to seek other options when it comes to providing for themselves and their families. For instance, they might be forced to steal from their neighbors or those more fortunate. Ultimately, Shelley demonstrates how the Industrial Revolution and poverty significantly impacted the story of *Frankenstein*.

As previously stated, the Industrial Revolution had a significant impact on *Frankenstein*. Although this movement brought many advantages, it also brought several disadvantages for businesses and workers (Mpofu and Nicolaides 2). In other words, although the Industrial Revolution created threats for some individuals, Shelley uses the advantages and disadvantages of the event to establish the overarching theme of the dangers of knowledge and power to create *Frankenstein* (Graubard). In her novel, Shelley uses the consequences of the Industrial Revolution to warn society about the threats of seeking knowledge and power. This warning comes from Walton's letter to his sister as he describes his experiences of visiting Victor.

Shelley uses antithesis to warn her audience about the dangers of how the Industrial Revolution encouraged people to seek knowledge and power. In his letter to his

sister, Margaret, Walton tells Margaret about an important lesson he learned about seeking knowledge and power. For example, Walton writes, “Seek happiness in tranquility and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries” (Shelley 192). In other words, Walton explains that, by witnessing the negative impact of knowledge and power on Victor, Walton realized that seeking happiness and peace is better than suffering the consequences of trying to gain so much knowledge and power that innocent lives are put in danger. Shelley uses antithesis in the contrast between “happiness in tranquility” and “ambition” to warn her audience that ambitions can push people into isolation and fallibility, urging them to seek happiness and peace over knowledge and power (Shelley 192).

In addition to the Industrial Revolution, the class issue of poverty also significantly impacted *Frankenstein*. According to Joshua Schouten de Jel, Shelley was one of many well-known English writers and authors who suffered the negative consequences of poverty, specifically social poverty (7). Shelley depicts her and others' experiences with social poverty through Victor’s sister, Elizabeth Lavenza. In her letter to Victor, Elizabeth writes, “Clerval, [who is one of Victor’s closest friends], called forth the better feelings of my heart; he again taught me to love the aspect of nature, and the cheerful faces of children. Excellent friend!” (Shelley 63). In other words, Elizabeth tries to emphasize to Victor the importance of relationships and socialization over seeking knowledge and power; a lack of socialization leads to social poverty or isolation. When Elizabeth tells Victor that she learned to love, which brought her joy, she emphasizes the crucial role of families in avoiding social poverty. Shelley reveals her struggle with social poverty through Victor’s story. Similarly to how Victor obsessed over his scientific experiments and creating life, Shelley became obsessed with the Industrial Revolution and writing *Frankenstein*, she suffered social poverty. Upon realizing how she fell into social poverty while writing *Frankenstein*, she used Victor to represent her struggles, warning her readers against falling into the same trap as she did, and focusing on the joys of life over seeking knowledge and power.

Romanticism had a substantial social influence in addition to the impact of the historical context on *Frankenstein*. According to Noah Heringman, Romanticism was an artistic and intellectual movement that predominantly focused on themes of knowledge and science (463). Romanticism can be identified throughout *Frankenstein*. For example, Victor says, “I remained, while the storm lasted, watching its progress with curiosity and delight” (Shelley 36). This quote reveals that Victor is fascinated by understanding the science behind weather formation. Victor’s fascination with gaining scientific knowledge about how storms form and progress emphasizes the themes of Romanticism, specifically knowledge and science. Here, Shelley highlights how the

Romanticism movement had a significant social influence on the themes *Frankenstein* employed and explored.

Moreover, the Gothic tradition influenced the novel culturally. This custom involves topics of darkness and feelings of unease (979). Although each element is prevalent throughout the book, horror and emotional distress are predominant. For example, the Creature states, "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 195). This quote reveals that the Creature believes Victor's negligence resulted in the Creature's isolation; Victor made the Creature go from an angel to a devil, emphasizing the traditional Gothic theme of destruction and highlighting the novel's overall isolation theme. Additionally, this quote reveals the Gothic element of emotional distress. Due to Victor's fallibility, the Creature's statement, "I am alone," emphasizes how the Creature is forced to suffer from emotional distress and isolation since he does not have a class identity and does not fit in with society.

On the other hand, *Frankenstein* influenced awareness of social issues such as ethics in science. Frankenstein has encouraged discussions in various interdisciplinary fields, including morals (2791). Through Shelley's vivid imagery and graphic depictions, it becomes clear why the novel influenced ethics in science. When Victor discusses how and where he obtains the items needed for creating the Creature, he says, "I collected bones from charnel-houses and disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame" (Shelley 49). In other words, Victor obtains the body parts needed for making the Creature from the gravesites of deceased and decayed people. Victor's action raises ethical concerns, which is why scholars and other experts have used the novel to discuss ethics in science. Victor was attempting to play God by creating new life, which is immoral and unethical, especially during a time when most, if not all, people believed in the God of Christianity. Shelley demonstrates that when one's ambitions become as powerful as Victor's, they become dangerous, especially if they inflict physical and mental harm. This demonstration reflects the fear many Romantic individuals experienced; with the rise in scientific experiments, people feared scientists would bring more harm than good. Ultimately, *Frankenstein* encouraged scientists like Victor to find more ethical ways of experimenting with the human body rather than disturbing the deceased and committing a criminal offense by digging up gravesites and stealing the bodies of deceased individuals.

Likewise, there were many cultural influences from *Frankenstein*, including an effect on Gothic literature. One way *Frankenstein* influenced literature culturally is by spreading medievalism and persuading other writers, like Bram Stoker and Robert Louis Stevenson, to delve into the Gothic genre (Waham 3). For instance, *Dracula* and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* incorporate an outsider or abandoned creature like *Frankenstein*. The Creature and Count

Dracula represent the abandoned creatures in *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*. On the other hand, Victor and Dr. Jekyll represent the outsider in *Frankenstein* and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. The abandoned creature has been banished from society for its differences, whereas the outsider belongs to a social group; however, they choose to self-isolate and dedicate themselves to their work rather than be active members of society. This illustration shows the cultural influence *Frankenstein* had on Gothic literature.

When Shelley first published *Frankenstein*, society did not receive it with the excitement that most writers wish to see for their work. Society did not think the novel would be successful and even branded it "as a minor horror story" (Fishelov 4). Considering that Shelley's husband was Percy Bysshe Shelley, a renowned writer, it is interesting that *Frankenstein* received the negative reaction it did. One might think that society would appreciate works from the wife of a highly respected author. This contemporary reception raises the question: Why did *Frankenstein* garner such a reception?

Frankenstein garnered a negative reception because many critics felt that Shelley did not focus enough on Romanticism's themes of knowledge and science. Additionally, critics felt the novel was melodramatic because of Shelley's heavy use of vivid imagery. For instance, Shelley writes, "I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs" (51). In other words, Shelley's description of the Creature was so vivid that critics felt she put too much effort into writing a horror story when she should have focused more on depicting the horrors of knowledge and science. The vivid imagery used to describe the color of the Creature's eyes and bodily movements as it came to life is why critics labeled *Frankenstein* as a "minor horror story" (Fishelov 4). However, some critics failed to realize that Shelley's description of the Creature's yellow eyes is symbolic because it foreshadows the betrayal that the Creature would soon experience from Victor. Instead of being "a minor horror story," *Frankenstein* illustrates how one's ambitions can become so powerful that they cause the individual, like Victor, to abandon and betray those closest to them (Fishelov 4). While *Frankenstein*'s story treads off the beaten path of the typical Romantic era novel, which is why it received a negative reaction, it explores similar themes as other Romantic era novels, only in a more gothic sense.

Both *Frankenstein* by Shelley and *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen address the theme of family, revealing how strong an impact family can have when one is trying to find their identity. For example, Shelley writes, "If for one instant I had thought what might be the hellish intention of my fiendish adversary, I would rather have banished myself forever from my native country and wandered a friendless outcast over the earth than have consented to this miserable marriage" (169). Victor illustrates how the Romantic era in literature was characterized by an embrace of isolation and melancholy when he expresses that his obsession with creating

new life through scientific experiments led to his ultimate isolation and melancholy feelings once he became isolated. Victor's expression emphasizes a family's impact on one's identity when he reflects on the loss he experienced--Victor dedicated his life to his experiments rather than his family. Had Victor prioritized his relationship with his family, they could have helped him find his identity more healthily instead of becoming addicted to gaining the power of a god.

In comparison, *Pride and Prejudice* also address the theme of family, revealing how strong an impact family can have when one is trying to find their identity. For example, in the novel, Elizabeth expresses to her sister, Lydia, the following:

> Our importance, our respectability in the world, must be affected by the wild volatility, the assurance and disdain of all restraint which mark Lydia's character. Excuse me—for I must speak plainly. If you, my dear father, will not take the trouble of checking her exuberant spirits and teaching her that her present pursuits are not to be the business of her life, she will soon be beyond the reach of amendment. (Austen 299)

Elizabeth illustrates how the Romantic era prioritized individual experience. Although Lydia and Elizabeth valued their ability to express themselves freely, Elizabeth was more concerned about how others viewed her than Lydia was. The influence of family on identity links to Romanticism because there is an emphasis on individual experience. Lydia's and Elizabeth's relationship with their family members influences their choices, values, and emotional struggles.

Frankenstein plays a significant role in the literary context of Romanticism. This is because *Frankenstein* did not follow suit in terms of structure with other Romantic era novels (Schug 607). The fact that *Frankenstein* does not perfectly illustrate Romanticism makes the novel significant for its time because its non-congruent form ultimately had a noteworthy cultural and historical impact on the future of literature, as it paved the way for future writers like Shelley. Shelley illustrates why the literary context of *Frankenstein* had such a significant impact on the Romantic era, literature, and contemporary and future writers when she writes, "Was there no injustice in this? Am I to be thought the only criminal, when all humankind sinned against me?" (Shelley 195-196). This quote reveals that the Creature is a victim of injustice because of how he is mistreated based on his physical appearance and obvious differences from the rest of society, suggesting that Frankenstein is a significant text in the literary context of the Romantic era, which highlights that Shelley, like the Creature, differed from others and struggled to feel like she belonged in a societal group.

The social identity theory relates to *Frankenstein*'s historical context. During the Industrial Revolution, many individuals were forced to relocate for employment (Hogg 85). Unfortunately, because social groups were being broken apart as people moved, any possibility of someone achieving financial

stability was destroyed (Hogg 85). Hogg reveals how social identity theory relates to the Industrial Revolution, suggesting that, from a social identity perspective, individuals who experienced the Industrial Revolution struggled to develop their self-concept because of the frequent relocations for work, as they could not become established within one social group. Analyzing *Frankenstein* through social identity theory reveals how Shelley illustrates the negative impacts of the Industrial Revolution through the Creature. For example, the Creature says, "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 92). The Creature reveals that his inability to become a member within a social group has caused him to become depressed and identify as a "wretch." The Creature's self-concept of helplessness and wretchedness emphasizes the connection between social identity theory and the Industrial Revolution. Through the Creature, Shelley ultimately illustrates that the Industrial Revolution caused individuals to become miserable, like the Creature, because they had no sense of belonging.

The relationship between social identity theory and the Industrial Revolution informs the argument that family, society, and ambition can negatively impact one's class identity. For instance, the Romantic era encouraged individuality; however, the impasse that the Creature illustrates is how someone can practice independence and affability simultaneously (Beenstock 406). Shelley demonstrates this dilemma of how one can be sociable while also participating in Romanticism's philosophy of individualism. For example, the Creature states, "If I have no ties and no affections, hatred and vice must be my portion; the love of another will destroy the cause of my crimes, and I shall become a thing of whose existence everyone will be ignorant" (Shelley 131). The Creature reveals that the Industrial Revolution's influence on individualism significantly prevented him from producing sociability and finding his class identity. He discovers that his individuality ultimately resulted in him having no connections to society and becoming a deeply hated being. This revelation highlights how reading *Frankenstein* from a social identity perspective reveals that individualism cannot produce sociability; practicing individualism requires focusing on the self, which is the opposite of sociability.

Through the lens of social identity theory, family, society, and ambition negatively impact individuals, leading to isolation and fallibility. One of many messages that Shelley presents throughout *Frankenstein* is that if society decides that a newcomer or an individual does not fit in with or belong in the community, society will do everything to distance itself from the outcast (Sarkar 29). Sarkar reveals that, through a social identity lens, readers of *Frankenstein* can understand why society alienates the Creature, highlighting how society can negatively impact an individual, causing them to suffer from isolation and fallibility. The Creature says, "I am no coward to bend beneath words. Leave me; I am inexorable" (Shelley 149).

Through a social identity theory, the Creature reveals how societal judgment can have negative impacts, leading him to become isolated from the rest of society. However, the Creature reveals that he used society's alienation of him to his advantage, which suggests that the Creature has taken society's attempt at isolating him and turned it into a beneficial experience for himself, providing himself with the moral strength to realize that he is the one who decides what his identity will be rather than society.

Attachment theory has previously been used to analyze *Frankenstein*; however, it is not appropriate to this argument. Attachment theory explains that if a child has a strong attachment to their parents, they will also have a close relationship with them. However, if the attachment between child and parent is not strong, their future relationship will gradually dissipate. Analyzing *Frankenstein* using attachment theory, critics can better understand the Creature's relationship with Victor (Jackson 51). Although attachment theory might be appropriate for understanding how and why the Creature's relationship with Victor progresses the way it does, the theory does not effectively provide insights into how familial and societal relationships impact the Creature's ability to shape his class identity, whereas social identity theory does deliver those insights. For example, Victor says, "I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body" (Shelley 51). From an attachment theory perspective, Victor's confession reveals that he is more devoted to his work than to relationships. This statement suggests that Victor developed this way of thinking and life by watching his father devote his life to work and abandoning him as a child, highlighting why attachment theory is inappropriate to this argument, as the theory does not reveal how society and ambitions can impact an individual's experience in finding their identity, in addition to family.

One literary device used in *Frankenstein* that effectively supports the argument is allusion. An allusion is a literary device that helps writers construct stories that absorb readers, ultimately having a long-term effect on the audience and literature (Arcilla 72). Arcilla reveals that Shelley's use of allusions in the text effectively supports the argument because she uses famous fictional and historical figures to support her illustrations of how family, society, and ambition can cause individuals to fall victim to isolation and fallibility. The first allusion appears when Shelley references Prometheus in the novel's title: *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*. Prometheus is the Greek god of fire. When other Greek gods gave Prometheus the gift of fire, Prometheus decided to gift fire to humans, providing humans with the same power that a Greek god held, thus making it so humans could become like the gods (Conboy 120). In the novel's title, Shelley compares Victor to Prometheus, which suggests that the narrative is about an individual who, like Prometheus, abuses a God-given gift, highlighting the argument that

ambition and playing God have negative consequences on society.

Another literary device used in *Frankenstein* that supports the argument is a simile. Similes enable writers to illustrate a topic or theme in a way that allows the readers to imagine the scenes (Kao 163). Shelley's use of a simile further clarifies Kao's argument about the impact of similes on thoroughly expressing a message in a text. When Victor describes the rush of dopamine that he receives from gaining knowledge, he states, "Sir Isaac Newton is said to have avowed that he felt like a child picking up shells beside the great and unexplored ocean of truth" (Shelley 35). Here, Shelley's use of a simile, comparing Victor's joy from gaining knowledge to the joy that a child might feel gathering seashells from the ocean, emphasizes how one's ambitions can be so strong that their identity revolves around their desires.

The synthesis of *Frankenstein*'s historical themes and literary devices significantly contributes to the scholarship around the text. A group with status and power, who sees themselves as competent and warm, can be positive if that group uses their status and power to benefit more than just themselves. However, if they are the only ones who see themselves as competent and warm, they do not fully see how their status and power negatively impact others (Oldmeadow and Fiske 1). Oldmeadow and Fiske reveal that class dynamics and social structures significantly influence how an individual's identity develops, which Shelley also illustrates through the Creature's story. For example, the Creature says, "Beware, for I am fearless and therefore powerful" (Shelley 149). This quote reveals that the Creature understands how he can use society's fear of him to his advantage and warns society to maintain caution around him, which suggests that his experience with class dynamics and social structure has caused him to develop an identity that revolves around using other's fear to gain power over them, highlighting how the novel's historical context and Shelley's use of literary devices contribute to the text's scholarship.

Additionally, using social identity theory contributes to the scholarship around *Frankenstein*. By analyzing *Frankenstein* through a perspective that focuses on the Creature's place in society, readers gain insight into how one's journey in finding themselves and who they are is challenging, especially when society tries to tell them they do not belong (Chen 5). From a social identity perspective, Shelley's audience can understand why the Creature sees himself the way he does. For example, when the Creature says, "I am malicious because I am miserable," he sees himself this way because his societal membership caused him to develop such a self-concept (Shelley 129). Here, Shelley reveals the Creature's class identity, which suggests that he sees himself as an evil creature because of his somber state based on his inability to become an established member of society, highlighting how social identity theory contributes to the scholarship around *Frankenstein*.

Lastly, this analysis of *Frankenstein*'s perspective on class issues situates the argument uniquely within the scholarship around the text. When stories utilize multiple perspectives to tell one story, readers can find a character they relate to, ultimately enabling them to learn more about themselves and discover their identity alongside the characters (Altun 381). Altun reveals how, by reading *Frankenstein* through a social identity viewpoint, the reader better understands their self-identity, highlighting why this analysis of *Frankenstein*'s perspective on the issues situates the argument in a unique place within the scholarship around the text. For example, the Creature says, "I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend" (Shelley 89). Here, the Creature reveals that although he tried treating society as equals, society's mistreatment towards him because of his differences turned him into an evil creature, which suggests that individuals' identities are formed based on how others view and treat them, highlighting the novel's moral themes and conflicts. The moral theme of the story is not letting family, society, or ambitions control your life and shape who you become. The conflicts arise when Victor and the monster allow that to happen, which negatively impacts their experience in forming an identity as well as their morality, which ultimately leads to their isolation and fallibility.

In conclusion, Shelley uses a variety of literary devices and techniques in *Frankenstein* to critique family, society, ambition, the Industrial Revolution, and class issues by revealing the negative impact they can have on one's identity. Analyzing the text through social identity theory reveals the effects of family through the Creature's and Victor's character, the Creature's struggle with finding his identity because of his negative experiences with Victor and society, and how ambition and fallibility created Shelley's illustrated tensions between families and society members through Shelley's use of literary devices and techniques. This analysis is important because it reveals the 19th-century society's reception of the text, which deepens the understanding of why *Frankenstein* did not garner a positive response. Understanding 19th-century society's reception of the text enhances the reader's insight into its themes, particularly the importance of family. Shelley highlights this theme in response to the familial divisions caused by the Industrial Revolution, emphasizing that people should prioritize their family over their temporary jobs. Familial relationships endure, while jobs do not. It also highlights how *Frankenstein* helps the audience understand themselves better and how their actions impact others, demonstrating the importance of understanding that no one is perfect and of having a sense of belonging.

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