



# Victor And His Monster: The Projection Of Alter Ego In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

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## Abstract

Frankenstein, a book by Mary Shelley, has been extensively dissected for its intricate themes and characters. The introduction of the work explains the idea of an alter ego and its importance in psychological and literary contexts. The analysis explores the similarities between Mary Shelley and Victor Frankenstein, looking at their shared characteristics, experiences, and motives. It does this by drawing on the theoretical framework. The article also discusses the role of the monster as an alter ego of Victor Frankenstein through a thorough review of the book and pertinent literary criticism. It looks into the ways in which Victor's repressed personality is embodied in the monster's fears, cravings, and repressed emotions.

**Index Terms:** Frankenstein, Mary Shelley, Freud, alter ego, subconscious

## Introduction

Sigmund Freud defines ego as “the representative of the outer world to the id”. (Freud, 1923) The human mind can be divided into three components: the ‘id’, which represents the primal and instinctual urges; the ‘ego’, responsible for decision making; and the ‘superego’, which encompasses one’s values and morals. Within the human mind, there exists a mechanism of repression that suppresses desires deemed unacceptable by society. However, it is important to note that nobody is perfect, and at times, these repressed desires can resurface, as seen in the case of Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. ‘I become the desire You the commitment’ (Ray, 2022) conveys a similar idea on the power of the subconscious mind.

Victor Frankenstein himself hints at the idea that the creature is his alter ego. He calls the creature as, “my own spirit let loose from the grave, and forced to destroy all that was dear to me.” (Shelley, 1818) This supports the notion that Victor manifested and gave life to his deepest, darkest, and most hidden desires from his subconscious mind.

## *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*

Mary Shelley's work *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* was published in 1818. It narrates the story of Victor Frankenstein, a young scientist who upon learning the secret of bestowing animation upon lifeless entity creates a sapient creature. Shelley published the first edition anonymously in London on 1 January,

1818. Shelley's name appeared for the first time in the second edition, which was published in Paris in 1821.

Despite the fact that *Frankenstein* contains elements of the Gothic novel and the Romantic Movement, the English writer, Brian Aldiss has argued that *Frankenstein* is the first true science-fiction story. In contrast to previous stories with fantastical elements reminiscent of later science fiction, Aldiss states that the main character "makes a deliberate decision" and "turns to modern experiments in laboratory" to obtain fantastic results. The novel has had a remarkable influence on literature and popular culture. It has spawned an entire genre of horror stories, films, and plays.

"'Frankenstein' is not only the first creation story to use scientific experimentation as its method, but it also presents a framework for narratively examining the morality and ethics of the experiment and experimenter."

### **Alter Ego- The Concept**

"Every human being aspires to the total unit of his body, soul, spirit - a personal identity that distinguishes him from "others": "I am me and you are you." However, the personal identity of the soul is assumed, not proven."

An alter ego derived from the Latin words "other I" or "doppelganger", is a separate version of oneself that is believed to have a distinct personality from their normal or true self. To discover one's alter ego, it is necessary to find an alternative self with a different set of characteristics. "The ego is our sense of identification with our lives. We have a certain baseline of experiences that we remember from our life. Those experiences accumulated into a holistic picture lead to our self-image. An alter ego is an extension of that self-image."

Alter ego has a different connotation when used in the context of literary analysis, particularly when used in fiction and other narrative genres. It defines a significant character who is created specifically to represent the author or creator of the story. This representation is made possible by indirect parallels in psychology, conduct, speech, or idea, which are frequently used to communicate the viewpoints and authors of the authors.

## **Frankenstein and Literary Alter Ego**

Victor Frankenstein is frequently interpreted in literary analysis as being Mary Shelley's alter ego, according to this theory. Some arguments in favor of this opinion draw comparisons between Victor Frankenstein and Mary Shelley. As an illustration, both people were well educated and fascinated by science and exploration. Both went through periods of loss and sadness, which is represented in the novel's themes of creation, abandonment, and loneliness.

However, the creature can also be seen as the projection of the author's alter ego. "This nameless mode of naming the unnamable is rather good," Shelley remarked about the creature's theatrical billing. She herself had no name of her own. Like the creature pieced together from cadavers collected by Victor Frankenstein, her name was an assemblage of parts: the name of her mother, the feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, stitched to that of her father, the philosopher William Godwin, grafted onto that of her husband, the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, as if Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley, as if Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley were the sum of her relations, bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh, if not the milk of her mother's milk, since her mother had died eleven days after giving birth to her, mainly too sick to give suck- Awoke and found no mother.

### **Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley**

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, an English novelist, was most popular for her Gothic novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818). She was married to the Romantic poet and philosopher Percy Bysshe Shelley and edited and promoted his work. Her lesser-known works like *Rambles in Germany and Italy* reflects that she was a political radical throughout her life. Her works frequently argue that sympathy and cooperation, particularly as practised by women in a family, were how civil society could be reformed.

### **The Creator and the Creature as Alter Egos**

The complex relationship between Victor Frankenstein and his creation serves as the backdrop for Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein's* exploration of the idea of an alter ego. This theme explores the concept of a divided self, in which people carry out multiple identities and wrestle with the repercussions of their choices. Victor's alter ego, his creation, is examined psychologically and morally in Shelley's work as both characters negotiate their respective existences and wrestle with their common humanity.

Victor and the creature each have an alternate identity that reflects the hopes and concerns of the other. The creature seeks revenge as a result of Victor's refusal to take ownership of what he created, echoing Victor's own unwillingness to accept responsibility for his deeds. The creature dauntlessly confronts Victor when he says, "You accuse me of murder, and yet you would, with a satisfied conscience,

destroy your own creature.” (Shelley, 1818) Thus, he hints at the idea that Victor is not above him and they are one and the same.

Both victims and perpetrators of their own inner anguish, the alter egos of the maker and the creation are bound in a circle of devastation and sorrow. Perhaps, they share a very peculiar bond which binds them together. This is evident when the creature leaves an inscription for Victor saying, “Come on, my enemy; we have yet to wrestle for our lives.” (Shelley, 1818: 157)

In *Frankenstein*, Shelley explores the idea of an alter ego as well as the overall state of humanity. She explores identity and the inherent duality in people through the characters of Victor and the creature. The book casts doubt on the idea that there is a distinct boundary between good and evil by emphasizing how the distinction between creator and monster is hazy and how choices have long-lasting effects. As a result, *Frankenstein* is a potent examination of the alter ego that helps to warn readers of the perils of unbridled ambition and the necessity of compassion and understanding in the face of our own inner darkness.

### **Insatiable Curiosity**

Victor and his monster both have a curious temperament in the narrative, but in different ways and with different outcomes. Victor has always been a curious person. The world is a secret to him which he desired to divine. He desires to learn the secrets of heaven and earth and about “the mysterious soul of man.” (Shelley, 1818) Victor becomes deeply involved in the study of natural philosophy and alchemy as a result of his curiosity about the mysteries of life and death. His goal to create life is fueled by his unquenchable curiosity, which also propels him to carry out his groundbreaking experiment.

Victor's interest, nevertheless, turns into an addiction that consumes him. He loses sight of the moral and ethical ramifications of his conduct as he concentrates only on achieving the desired scientific result. His insatiable curiosity drives him to explore the prohibited area while manipulating and disobeying the laws of nature. After days of incredible toil and fatigue, he succeeds in discovering the cause of generation of life. He also becomes capable of bestowing life upon lifeless matter. Consequently, Victor brings to life a creature that defies human understanding, ultimately leading to tragic consequences.

The creature, too, exhibits a curious nature. Once he gains consciousness, the creature's curiosity drives him to explore the world around him. Guided by the bright moon, he discovers a clear stream which supplied him with water and trees which provided shade with their foliage. He also examines the materials of fire. He possesses an ardent desire to be acquainted with words which he considers a “godlike science.” (Shelley, 1818) After applying his whole mind to this endeavor, he moves on to reading books like *Paradise Lost*, A Volume of Plutarch's *Lives* and *Sorrows* of Werter. The creature is curious because it has a strong desire to be accepted by and connected to people. He struggles with issues of identity and purpose while trying to comprehend its own existence.

The creature is curious, but civilization rejects it and is hostile towards it. He is an outcast due to his bizarre origin and ugly appearance, which causes him to feel extreme loneliness and sadness. The creature initially exhibits interest, but as he experiences more suffering and injustice at the hands of people, his curiosity ultimately turns into a thirst for vengeance. His search for enlightenment is overtaken by a destructive drive for retribution.

## Revenge and Rage

Victor Frankenstein and his creation are both motivated by their need for vengeance and wrath. Victor Frankenstein's quest for knowledge and subsequent creation of the monster launched a chain of vengeance-driven events. Victor feels incredibly alone and rejected after leaving the creature, which makes him angry and resentful. While urging Victor to create his companion, the creature declares, "If I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear, and chiefly towards you my archenemy, because my creator, do I swear inextinguishable hatred." (Shelley, 1818) By holding Victor responsible for his pain and demanding that he make a friend to lessen its loneliness, he seeks retribution against his creator. The creature is consumed by this need for vengeance, which motivates him to carry out violent and destructive deeds.

The creature's activities and the destruction he does to Victor's life also cause Victor to become angry. His sense of guilt for his existence and the agony caused by his causes prompts him to become overwhelmed by a desire for vengeance against the creature. After killing Elizabeth, he is consumed with uncontrollable wrath and a devouring need for retribution. Only revenge gave him the strength and composure he needed after being swept away by rage. He asserts, "I devote myself, either in my life or death, to his destruction." (Shelley, 1818) He traverses a vast portion of the earth- the blue Mediterranean, Black Sea and hills of Tartary and Russia. Victor's rage blinds him to the consequences of his actions and fuels a destructive cycle of pursuit and confrontation. It is a sad truth that the two of them would have made good companions if it weren't for the dystopian world in which they lived. Instead, they chose to repress their emotions which came out in a much ugly manner later on. As Kum Kum Ray pens down in her poem, '2020...Life In a Digital Dystopia?' (Flow Free, Breathe Free, 2018):

Every breadth will be mopped up into the cloud,

Like data stored in the google 'box',

Sealed to any leakage for emission...

Revenge and rage intersect in the dynamic between Victor and the creature. As the creature seeks revenge against Victor, he aims to inflict the same pain and suffering he has endured. Meanwhile, Victor's rage intensifies as he realizes the extent of the creature's malevolence and the destructive impact it has on his loved ones. Their mutual desire for revenge leads to a violent and tragic climax, with both characters ultimately paying the price for their unchecked rage.

## The Sense of Protectiveness

Both characters have a sense of protectiveness towards particular people or beliefs throughout the book, despite their frequently harmful activities. The interactions Victor has with his family and close friends are where his protective tendency is most noticeable. He feels a strong need to shield his loved ones from the dangers of the outside world since he genuinely cares about them. His interactions with his younger brother William, boyhood buddy Henry, and lover Elizabeth are particularly clear examples of this. Elizabeth was seen as his, his to adore, cherish, and guard. He travels with Henry as his shadow to watch over him. But as the story goes on, his protective attitude gets warped and damaged. His capacity to perform his protective function efficiently is compromised by his fascination with science and the effects of his creation. He intentionally puts his loved ones in risk rather than protecting them.

Similar to that, the creature also demonstrates a protective nature, especially towards people who are good to him or who might be a source of companionship. The creature is initially drawn to the De Lacey family since the blind guy accepts and cares for him. The creature values their happiness and well-being and watches over and guards them from a distance. He is greatly moved by his human neighbors' desolation and strives to aid in their labors. However, when the creature senses a threat or receives rejection, his protective attitude can rapidly turn violent.

## The Desire for Companionship

Shelley tackles the great want for friendship that Victor and the monster feel throughout the entire book as well as the effects that result from their unmet needs. Victor's need for company is a result of his loneliness and isolation. He neglects his ties with family and friends as he is distracted with his ambitious scientific endeavors, which causes him to become emotionally distant and crave for meaningful connections. Victor longs for a friend who will support him emotionally and have a grasp of his intellectual interests.

Even in his misery, the love and companionship of Elizabeth fills Victor's heart with hopes. He longs for the day the two can unite forever. He says, "It was the

prospect of that day when enfranchised from my miserable slavery, I might claim Elizabeth and forget the past in my union with her." (Shelley, 1818) After her death, he remembers how her gentle voice would soothe him when he was transported by passion and inspire him with human feelings when sunk in torpor. He cries, "She wept with me and for me." (Shelley, 1818)

The creature also yearns for company and looks to others for approval and understanding. Victor abandons the creature once he creates it, sending it into a difficult environment where people judge it by its appearance. He longs for a friend who can see past its outward flaws and connect with his inner humanity

since he feels extreme loneliness. He actively seeks out social connection in an effort to connect with others in order to alleviate his loneliness.

He threatens Victor to create a companion which “must be of the species and have the same defects.” (Shelley, 1818) He ensures Victor that both the monsters will be cut away from the world and he hopes this will make them more attached to one another. He longs to be Adam and her, Eve so he can forget all the tormenting memories of his past and have a companion by his side to start a new chapter in his life.

### **Victims of Isolation**

Shelley examines the devastating emotional and psychological effects of isolation throughout the whole book, showing its negative effects on the characters' well-being and interpersonal connections. Throughout the narrative, Victor Frankenstein encounters several types of isolation. His ambitious endeavor and earnest quest for knowledge first distance him from his loved ones. He loses himself in his profession, disregarding his family, and withdraws from social interactions. His sense of loneliness is exacerbated by this self-imposed exclusion, which also accelerates his mental decline.

Victor becomes isolated as a result of creating the beast. The creature is pushed into a world that despises and terrifies it because of its monstrous looks after being abandoned by his maker. When he learns about various human relationships and bonds, he wonders, “But where were my friends and relations?” (Shelley, 1818) The creature craves company and understanding, but society rejects it with prejudice and contempt. Its sense of alienation and hopelessness are heightened by its physical isolation, which also increases its emotional and psychological isolation.

Victor and the monster both face a spiraling cycle of loneliness and isolation as the book goes on. Victor withdraws further into his studies and cuts himself off from human contact as a result of the shame and anguish he feels for his creation.

When held captive for the wrongful charge of murdering Henry, he says, “no one was near me who soothed me with the gentle voice of love; no dear hand supported me.”

(Shelley, 1818)

Meanwhile, the creature, rejected by society, becomes increasingly embittered and resentful. He infuriatingly questions Victor, “Shall each man find a wife for his bosom, and each beast have his mate, and I be alone?” (Shelley, 1818) His loneliness feeds his rage, which causes him to act violently and further alienate himself from any possibility of acceptance.

## Conclusion

The study comes to the conclusion that the creature can be seen as a manifestation of Frankenstein's subconscious self after carefully analyzing the text. The creature represents the dark and repressed sides of Frankenstein's personality and stands for his unchecked ambition, deep loneliness, and need for recognition and connection.

The paper makes the case that Frankenstein's ambition and desire to go beyond what is human led to the creation of the creature. Frankenstein unintentionally creates a reflection of his own ego by giving the creature life, expressing his goals and the results of his deeds. Frankenstein's mental conflicts and struggles are further highlighted by the creature's physical abnormalities and terrible look.

The paper also emphasizes how closely the two characters interact throughout the book. The creature's decisions and acts are mirrored in Frankenstein's own moral failings and psychological suffering. As the story goes on, it becomes clear that the creature and Frankenstein are intimately connected, with each reflecting the experiences and feelings of the other. The essay further argues that Frankenstein and the creature have a mutually beneficial connection. They reflect the divided character of a single person because they are two sides of the same coin. The implications of rejecting one's own alter ego are illustrated by Frankenstein's rejection and neglect of the creature, which ultimately led to his own demise. In her poem, 'Stories; 'No Age Can Whither'' (Flow Free, Breathe Free, 2018), Kum Kum Ray writes,

'Truth' all alone is hard to digest

Unappealing and harsh, seems like an inquest'

In conclusion, this study gives light on Mary Shelley's Frankenstein's projection of alter ego and emphasizes the author's emotional connection to the story. Knowing that the novel has an alter ego enhances our appreciation of Shelley's creative skill and offers important insights into the themes and reasons that underlie this legendary piece of literature.



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