

The Universal Myth in Context

Fathers and Sons and Their Relationships With Each Other in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

BA Thesis English Language and Culture

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24 June 2019

Abstract

Fathers and sons have been the topic of literary research for as long as people have been able to analyse the relationship between fathers and sons in fiction. Conflict between fathers and their sons can be considered a universal myth as it is a recurring topic in fiction. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* has been taken out of context by modern media continually, instead of focusing on the relationships between the fathers and sons the subject of monstrosity and horror is favoured. Academic studies, however, focus mostly on the universal concept and Freudian theories when discussing the father and son relationships. Essentially, at *Frankenstein's* core are relationships between fathers and sons, but these are often still filtered purely through a modern-day perspective. Several different representations of these father/son relationships can be found within Mary Shelley's novel, but the historical context of the time around the Regency can provide a wider view on these relationships. *Frankenstein* is a product of its time, a clear reflection of the Regency crisis and the issues with authority that were the result of this crisis. The father/son relationships in *Frankenstein*, with proper context of the tumultuous change going on around the time of publication in 1818, are examined through a close reading and comparison. Victor's abandonment of the Creature, Alphonse's gentle parenting, and Walton and Clerval's strict fathers are exemplary of the time they were created in, and still relevant to the modern reader.

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Introduction

Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus written by Mary Shelley is ingrained in modern popular culture, but as time passed the family relationships and their importance within the novel have been neglected in popular media. The Creature and Victor Frankenstein are often represented in horror fiction, and this has skewed the general view of these characters and their relationship. There has been many a debate about *Frankenstein* and fathers. Especially Victor's role as a parent is then regularly subjected to analysis. Sigmund Freud and his Oedipal Complex theory are generally used to analyse these father/son relationships in fiction, despite his declining reputation.

Where does Victor get an "oedipal" sense of father-son relations nearly a century before Freud? The obvious answer - that sons have ever felt abused by fathers - is bolstered by a more historiographic source. (Veeder, 378)

By using Freud's theory, the discussion disregards that the troubles between fathers and sons in fiction are not only a universal topic but a product of the time as well, and with *Frankenstein* a product of Regency England. Therefore, this thesis will not focus on Freud's theory, as it has been used by many already and is not the sole method to study father/son relationships.

A more promising approach to parent/child relationships in *Frankenstein* will be to consider the contemporary culture and literature, instead of ignoring them in favour of modern methods and interpretations. To merge the significance of the nineteenth-century context with our modern interpretations will give a broader overview of the importance of these father/son relationships. The context of the time can shed a different light on this topic, therefore my approach will be mainly historicist and focus more on the relation between the context of the time and the relationships between fathers and sons in *Frankenstein*.

Firstly, this thesis will focus on the historic context, especially which developments were occurring around the publication of *Frankenstein* socially, economically, and philosophically. This historic context will be the first chapter of this thesis. When the context of the time is established, it is crucial to discern the difference between father figures and the relationships with their sons represented in *Frankenstein*. A close reading of father figures and sons will be the subject of the second chapter of this thesis. In the final chapter the context of the time will be combined with the close reading of the previous chapter to see which relevance the context has to the representation of fathers and sons in *Frankenstein*. In popular adaptations of the story, which often disregard the actual complexities of the source text, it often becomes a tale of physical monstrosity only. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* is not a novel about physical monstrosity, it is one about the importance of interpersonal relationships and society, and the relationships that are at the centre are those of father figures and their sons.

***Frankenstein* in Historical Context**

Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus by Mary Shelley was first published anonymously in 1818. The more time passes, the more difficult it becomes for modern audiences to assess the contemporary context that created Shelley and *Frankenstein*. The onset of the nineteenth century was a time of radical change throughout the European continent and the British Isles (During, 335). Political reform, economic change, and shifting social classes established an intellectual space that was crucial to the emergence of liberal thought and expression (During, 337; Morris; Rusonis). It was the time of the Industrial and Scientific Revolutions, the Regency, the Enlightenment, and Romanticism (Rusonis; Wilson, 135; Lynch and Stillinger, 5). With the Industrial and Scientific Revolutions in motion, print culture and literacy grew and the reading audience expanded accordingly (Rusonis). To simplify this tumultuous time, well-revered critic William Hazlitt divided “the social and intellectual spirit” of the early nineteenth century into “philosophical radicalism” and the “spirit of conservatism” (Bowerbank, 418). It is, however, not that straightforward to split up early-nineteenth-century Regency sensibilities.

The climate around the Regency period influenced people’s lives greatly (Hofkosh, 55). The nineteenth century started with extremely cold weather, due to a volcanic eruption in Indonesia. This cold weather caused crops to wither and rot. 1816 is also known as “the Year without a Summer”, many people suffered from the freezing temperatures and lack of food (Behrendt, 28). Agriculture suffered from bad harvests and unemployment rose due to the industrialisation of several trades as well (Lynch and Stillinger, 7-8). Cities had already begun to grow in volume for a while, but this economic change marked a “shifted power from country to city” as people moved away from the country in search of employment elsewhere en masse (During, 350). This economic change influenced everyone’s lives and created unrest. Inside and outside of domestic spheres the need for clear leadership was growing

exponentially in response to these changes that were connected to the shift from a feudal society to an industrial society.

While England remained a monarchy, the French Revolution and the subsequent execution of the French royalty had shown that bad kings and queens could be taken down by the people, and that they did not need to blindly endure bad rulership. King George III's declining mental state and the unruly lifestyle of the prince regent, later George IV, did little to alleviate the people's insecurity about the conduct of the English royal family in this time (Morris; Rusonis). The lack of leadership coming from the king was met with contempt in many circles. Insecurity for one's well-being is inevitable when someone incompetent holds significant power, even more so with a reckless king who could impact more people than any other in the country. The king's failure to lead his country did not alleviate the concerns about the rapid change surrounding this era. The monarch is often referred to as the father of the state, and with this in mind "[t]he public revolution and execution of the monarchs of the nation reads, in a familial narrative context, as a rebellion by a populace against its governance, or unhappy children against didactic parents" (Rusonis). The issues with authority concerning the monarchy were reflected in the domestic sphere as well, as it was not merely the monarch failing to rule his people but George III failing to educate his own son to become a suitable king after him as well. The need for human connection and domestic tranquillity is especially emphasised in *Frankenstein*: "my chief concern in this respect has been... the exhibition of the amiableness of domestic affection" (Shelley, 1). *Frankenstein's* focus is on domestic tranquillity by design, in stark contrast to the behaviour of the monarchy in England around the Regency where the monarchy was not exemplary of this domestic tranquillity in any shape or form.

Print culture was crucial to the discourse surrounding "issues of authority", the unknown bounds of science, and social issues (Sleigh, 1). England experienced a wave of

“bibliomania in the first three decades of the century” (During, 338). Journalism, drama, poetry, novels and more were published en masse and kept the “cultural market alive” (During, 346). Female writers, and therefore female perspective, were on the rise and contributed to new views on authority from a woman’s perspective (Lynch and Stillinger, 9). While women writers were not as well revered as their male contemporaries they were allowed to enter the literary sphere in larger numbers than before (Hoeveler, 122). In early-nineteenth-century society the importance put on education in fiction was growing, and novels were the main subject of this practise. Novels became incredibly popular and while they were not considered to be particularly artistic before, they were now slowly gaining prestige due to new narrative techniques that writers experimented with (Wilson, 135-136; Lynch and Stillinger, 25). The novel of education, where morals and lessons were incorporated in the narrative, was a new but well-received genre (Mellor, 44). The Gothic novel’s usage of the unknown was found to be an excellent way to pose questions related to the nineteenth-century family without doing so explicitly. The Gothic novel, however, was believed to teach moral lessons as much as other Regency novels like those of Jane Austen (Lynch and Stillinger, 26-27; Mitchell, 107; Sleight, 4). The discussion by critics after the publication in 1818 regarding *Frankenstein*’s morality was mixed in some respects, but it has been argued since as well that there are several educational lessons to be found in the novel despite the opinion of these earlier discussions (Poovey, 333; Sleight, 4). The relationship between the sexes or within families could therefore be discussed and challenged covertly in Gothic novels. The novel was thus as much of a central part in the discussion of social values as poetry and essays at the time.

The instability of the monarchy, and enormous economic and social change left the English nation in a state of constant uncertainty during Mary Shelley’s life and the publication of *Frankenstein*. This uncertainty can be considered to be reflected in the printed works of the

nineteenth century. With the rise of mass print culture and the rise of the novel, the need for education, morality and guidance was addressed in these works. The king's failure to govern and protect his nation can be interpreted as the failure of the father to the son. Not only the king's failure, however, is the cause of the failed father/son connections found within *Frankenstein* when considering the contemporary environment, but also the son's rebellion. The problematic relationship between George III and his son, the future George IV, is a prime example of the lack of connection between fathers and sons, and this is challenged by Mary Shelley in her novel *Frankenstein* as she puts the focus on domestic tranquillity.

Fathers and Sons, A Close Reading

Central to *Frankenstein*'s plot are the relationships between its characters, most notably the relationships between fathers and sons. It is crucial, however, to remember that Victor is the leading narrator, and that while Walton reports on the tale, Victor "corrected and augmented [the story] in many places" (174). Therefore, excluding Walton's first few letters, Victor has influenced all representations of the characters in *Frankenstein* (Veeder, 374-375). The way Victor speaks of his father can be interpreted in various ways, and other characters within the novel can be observed to have strained relationships with their fathers as well. Additionally, Victor's relationship with the Creature demonstrates this father/son dynamic, although their relationship is more complicated and unconventional. Whether one father is deemed too controlling and the other too indulging, the significance of a character's upbringing is crucial to the understanding of the plot. Although it is difficult to discern the 'truth', because of Victor's influence on the narration, through a close reading different representations can be observed in the text when it comes to these father/son relationships.

Victor's father Alphonse Frankenstein appears as a loving and indulgent father. Initially, Victor's relationship with his father seems very positive. Alphonse is immediately characterised as a man of high social status, well revered by his community and adored by his family, or so Victor tells Walton (16). When Alphonse married and became a father he quit most of his public responsibilities to spend more time with his family and he "devoted himself to the education of his children" (18). When Victor reminisces about his childhood he says: "No creature could have more tender parents than mine" (18). Victor states as well that his parents were "indulgent" and that he was left to decide the direction of most of his own studies at a young age, despite Alphonse's claim of dedication to Victor's studies before (19). There is, however, one scene in *Frankenstein* where Victor is brushed away by his father dismissively, and Victor identifies this as a pivotal point concerning his unhealthy obsession

with natural science and the fascination with creating life from dead matter. “It is even possible, that the train of my ideas would never have received the fatal impulse that led to my ruin” Victor recollects (21). Victor, conducting most of his own studies as a child, had been reading Agrippa, who is known for his writings about occultism and Faustian ideologies concerning immortality. When he showed his enthusiasm about this old-fashioned science his father reacted dismissively and did not explain why the work was “sad trash” (20-21). “If, instead of this remark, my father had taken the pains to explain to me ... under such circumstances, I should certainly have thrown Agrippa aside,” Victor laments to Walton (21). Further Victor seems to fear disappointing his father with his obsession: “although I often wished to communicate these secret stores of knowledge to my father, yet his indefinite censure of my favourite Agrippa always withheld me” (21-22). The previous interaction eventually results in Victor’s avoidance of his family while pursuing his studies in Ingolstadt years later (Bowerbank, 420; Shelley, 40). Especially in the 1818 edition of the novel this scene showcases Alphonse’s possible ability to correct and redirect Victor as the former later in that same chapter conducts some complicated scientific experiments and can therefore be observed to have adequate knowledge on this subject (Shelley, 24; Veeder, 376). In the 1831 edition Mary Shelley rectifies this earlier ‘mistake’ by keeping true to the statement mentioned in both editions, that Victor’s “family was not scientific” (22). Veeder observes that “the son absolves himself of irresponsibility by making the father responsible” by blaming Alphonse in hindsight in his recollection of this particular dismissal concerning Agrippa (377). It might be easier for Victor to blame this one negative interaction with his father as the onset of his decline into darker studies, but this one occurrence is not substantial enough to blame Alphonse’s free conduct concerning his children’s studies for Victor’s manic behaviour.

One other area where Victor feels displeased with his father is the former's departure from Geneva to pursue his studies alone in Ingolstadt after his mother's death, which Victor experiences as forced exile of some sorts. Victor says about his departure: "I, who had ever been surrounded by amiable companions, continually engaged in endeavouring to bestow mutual pleasure, I was now alone" (28). Victor feels little agency in the decision to study abroad: "My father thought it necessary, for the completion of my education" (25). While the departure is described by Victor as a dismissal to live away in solitude, Victor's leave was extended for several weeks after his mother's death to give him enough time to process his loss and to console his family (Shelley, 27; Veeder, 374). It is not just the shock of losing his mother that makes him panic as he leaves, but also leaving everything and everyone that he had known and was familiar with (27). The Frankensteins' domestic bliss results in a codependency on his family and friends on Victor's part. Once removed from his family and home Victor feels as the Creature does in the sense that he feels little connection to humanity. The result of his move was his obsession with his scientific studies and his resolve to create the Creature, so he could artificially construct such a familial connection again. In the 1818 edition this codependency is the reason for Victor's feeling of alienation, as his upbringing was secluded and sheltered from others from birth (28). The 1831 edition is different in this respect, as the Frankensteins travelled continuously during Victor's youth and they only settled when his brother was born about 7 years after Victor, which portrays his youth as less sheltered (*Frankenstein: Parts Edition*, 5-9). Despite Victor's fear that his father might think he had gone mad, Alphonse continuously expresses concern for Victor's wellbeing throughout the novel and offers to help where he can (Shelley, 59; Veeder, 374). It is, however, exactly Alphonse's gentle manner that makes it so easy for Victor to blame his father as it is often easier to blame someone else instead of taking responsibility for one's mistakes.

It is highly ironic that Victor, since he had Alphonse as an example of a nurturing father, is not capable of any compassion when it comes to the Creature. As Victor prepares his Creature's body he speaks about the gratitude the Creature and any later creations would feel towards him. "No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs" (37). Victor never mentions, however, his responsibility in return to his Creature as a creator/father. After the Creature comes to life Victor is unable to accept his creation and abandons it immediately. Lehman is of the opinion that Victor experiences a case of postnatal depression and is thus not entirely to blame for his initial abandonment of the Creature, but Victor's lack of concern regarding the Creature after his recovery shows his total lack of empathy (49). Victor's negligence eventually ignites hatred within the Creature, and thus Victor achieves the opposite of what he originally had intended (Mitchell, 108). The Creature longs for a father figure throughout his own account, to teach him and to love him: "No father had watched my infant days" and "Like Adam, I was created apparently united by no link to any other being in existence" he laments, to name a few examples (100; 107). The Creature's observations concerning the old man De Lacey show his longing for a family and a father (88).

[De Lacey] raised [his daughter, Agatha], and smiled with such kindness and affection, that I felt sensations of a peculiar and overpowering nature: they were a mixture of pain and pleasure, such as I had never before experienced, either from hunger or cold, warmth or food; and I withdrew from the window unable to bear these emotions.

(Shelley, 88)

When the Creature initially encounters Victor, he pleads with Victor to give him a wife, as Victor will not show him any form of compassion despite having created him (80).

"Frankenstein may obscurely recognize that the Monster's desire for his mate may itself be a substitute for his real, his absolute demand, which is for recognition by his creator" (Brooks,

597). Victor's abandonment and the Creature's hatred in return are a symbolic Gothic/Romantic example of a father abandoning his child without concern for that child's wellbeing whatsoever (Hustis, 845). The Creature's pleas for acceptance are ignored by the only person who might hear him, and this is a prime example of how a child abandoned by their father can be damaged severely by such a severed connection.

Two other strained father/son relationships represented in *Frankenstein* are those of Walton and Clerval and their controlling fathers. In the first chapter the reader is introduced to Walton's letters addressed to his sister. Little information is given about his personal life, but what is shown is pivotal. Walton's thirst for knowledge and glory is as central to his narration as it is to Victor's, but he also states that his "education was neglected" and that he is "self-educated" (4; 6; 7). Walton's father passed away when he was young, and his uncle did not treat him well in the aftermath. Something that Walton mentions is that his father's "dying injunction had forbidden [his] uncle to allow [him] to embark on a sea-faring life," while it was Walton's only wish as a child to be a famous explorer (4). Walton talks about the "regret which [he] had felt" when he learned of his father's wishes (4). It shocked Walton that his father tried to control his life even after death, and Walton resents his father for this as he still talks about it as an adult in his letters. While Walton is passionate in his pursuits, not unlike Victor, his father and uncle tried to restrain him from doing so. However, Walton's education and emotions were neglected instead of redirected.

Clerval, Victor's favourite companion, is introduced later in the novel and while he does not speak harshly of his father he does bemoan the control his father exerts over his life and education. Clerval's father believed that higher education was not needed for him as it was his wish that Clerval would become his partner in business. Clerval's association with the Frankenstein family gave him more freedom to pursue his studies while young and he gained a passion for languages and literature (Shelley, 27; Veeder, 378). Eventually, however,

Clerval is allowed to pursue his studies at university despite his father's earlier objections, but his father's initial objection does show the control fathers try to exert on their sons' lives. The representation of Clerval and Walton in *Frankenstein* questions whether any father can control their son's intellectual desires without alienating them.

Fathers and sons are at the centre of the narrative in *Frankenstein*, and the relationships between them set the plot in motion. These father/son relationships, however, do not always have a positive impact on the characters. Victor's domestic life is quite tranquil, but it is this tranquillity that alienates Victor from others as he matures. Alphonse Frankenstein is a loving family man, but his lack of clarification about Agrippa is deemed by Victor to be the catalyst that starts Victor's descent into the dark pursuits that have the novel end in tragedy. Victor's departure to a foreign city after his mother's unexpected death can be identified as the moment when he feels truly removed from his family and father. Victor is left grasping for any significant human connection after his departure but is unable to accept his Creature as a son and the Creature is doomed to endlessly look for any connection and is rejected at every turn. Ultimately, two other characters in the novel, Walton and Clerval, are shown to have strained relationships with their fathers as well. Where Walton is neglected and still in his father's control even after the latter's death, Clerval is denied his passion for classic education for several years. While Alphonse is an example of a compassionate father figure, there is conflict and a disconnect between almost all fathers and sons in *Frankenstein*. "While the sense of the appropriate parameters of parental authority may vary from one culture to another, parents inevitably wield some authority over their children in the simple act of trying to keep them from doing harm to themselves" (Ferguson, 68). Alphonse's compassion juxtaposed with the more controlling nature of Clerval and Walton's fathers raises the question whether there is any proper approach to being a father at all.

Education, the Scientific Revolution and the Connection to *Frankenstein*

“The Regency was mercilessly scrutinized by contemporary writers under the aegis of (obliquely) telling the truth to power” (Mahoney, 103).

What made the time around the Regency such an influence that it could create such a transformative work as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*? The British royal family was not stable and exemplary especially during the Regency, but with the emergence of mass print culture it had been made easier to express these opinions on authority en masse. Mary Shelley may not have consciously written a piece of social critique, however, it has been observed by many that it holds great value in that genre nonetheless. For example, Hustis argues that by “focusing on the issues of paternal negligence and the need for responsible creativity implicit in what is perhaps the paradigmatic myth of the romantic movement, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* deconstructs the story of Prometheus as a masculinist narrative of patriarchal authority and (in)justice” (845). The discussion of paternal negligence and the responsibility of creation are central to the narrative of *Frankenstein*. The topics of education and the Scientific Revolution are ingrained in *Frankenstein*’s narrative as well and are crucial to the understanding of the novel’s importance even now.

The topic of education and the various impacts it has on characters is crucial to the understanding of *Frankenstein*. Education, parenting and its influence was well discussed during *Frankenstein*’s time of publication and opinions varied widely on the topic. For example, John Locke, despite having published his opinions on education a century before was still relevant as he was one of the first people to conclude that someone’s formative years were very significant in their development. Locke “is probably most famous for encouraging parents and tutors to make learning enjoyable for children” (Ferguson, 68-69). When Alphonse ‘directs’ his children’s studies in *Frankenstein*, the Lockean theory is shown: “Our studies were never forced; and by some means we always had an end placed in view, which

excited us to ardour in the prosecution of them” (19). However, “Locke ... insisted that a child should never be indulged” either, which is what exactly happened in Victor’s childhood despite the corresponding education methods Locke called for (Horwitz, 138; Shelley, 19). Locke “was insistent on this point because he firmly believed that children who were denied nothing by their parents would never learn to deny themselves any gratification and would grow up vice ridden” (Horwitz, 138). Victor’s inability to reflect on his actions during his preparation of the Creature is a response to his childhood indulgence when this Lockean theory behind the text of *Frankenstein* is exposed (Shelley, 40).

Another prominent figure who spoke of education extensively was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose writings and philosophy were widely popular around Mary Shelley’s lifetime. Rousseau, like Locke, discusses the theory of children as tabula rasa, meaning that we are all born as blank slates and that education is what separates humanity from animals (Powers, 52; Weiss and Sapiro, 148). The Creature is a perfect example of a tabula rasa. As his consciousness develops we see him “first confused” and “then distinct sensations” develop (Powers, 52). “[A]ll the events of that period appear confused and distinct,” the Creature tells Victor about his first days alive (Shelley, 83). Then “social affections” follow, which can be observed by the Creature’s fondness of the De Laceys, and his introduction to language as a communication device (Powers, 52; Shelley, 91). After the social stage “moral and intellectual judgments” are developed, and this is where the Creature develops in a violent manner as he is met with violence from others wherever he goes: “an object for the scorn and horror of mankind” as the Creature describes it (Powers, 52; Shelley, 116). Coincidentally both Mary Shelley’s parents, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, wrote on the topic of education as well. “[William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley] wrote extensively for and about children and were major innovators in the field of children’s literature” (Carlson, 4). Godwin, especially, drew a lot of his opinions on education from

Locke and others alike (Powers, 6). Like Locke, Godwin stresses the importance of early education as character is developed from infancy (Powers, 16). Education is the key to a more benevolent society in Godwin's opinion (Powers, 37). Wollstonecraft is more known for her essays on the topic of women's education, but also talks about the structure of the family, the tabula rasa and the early education that should follow (Weiss and Sapiro, 148, 202). Locke, Rousseau, Godwin, and Wollstonecraft were all involved in the discussion on education, they all stressed the importance of early education which was in their opinion connected to the child's development. The influence of these prominent people in Mary Shelley's time and life is quite evident in *Frankenstein's* discussion regarding early education and the Creature as an example of a tabula rasa.

The Scientific Revolution and the effect of its developments has played a big part in *Frankenstein*, but most notably the discussion around responsibility in scientific progress can be observed to be within the text. In the novel the Scientific Revolution is mainly represented by Victor's scientific studies and the creation of the Creature. It is, however, curious to see how Victor's interest in the new and old sciences shows the ambition of the Scientific Revolution as well. Alphonse, as the older generation, is not all too familiar with the new developments and therefore cannot lead Victor in his studies as a father stereotypically would (22). The most discussed aspect of the Scientific Revolution reflected in *Frankenstein* is, however, concerning Victor's responsibility to the Creature as the creator. Most notably the "novel explores the ethics of a male creator's relationship to his progeny by questioning the extent to which he incurs an obligation for the well-being and happiness of that creating by virtue of the creative act itself" (Hustis, 846). Hustis shows how the subtitle of the novel "The Modern Prometheus" is ironic, as Victor does not take care of his Creature as Prometheus does in the old myth, but rather shifts the blame to chance and fate (847-848). The Promethean myth is based on Prometheus' empathy toward humankind and attempts to take

care of them by gifting them fire, which is contrasted by Victor's lack of empathy towards his creation. Victor refuses to take responsibility for his superhuman creation, which results in violent disaster and death. Victor's responsibility, or the lack thereof, is second to his lack of empathy however, as Mary Shelley stresses the need for empathy from fathers to their sons in order to nurture them as best as possible. The debate around responsible creativity is still relevant 200 years later and Mary Shelley's example has been crucial to our modern interpretation of this subject.

The enormous amount of change that was happening around the time of *Frankenstein's* initial publication in 1818 creates a rich context to the narrative. The royal family was dysfunctional, and the English public's issues with authority and fathers at the time can be seen as a reflection of the dysfunction in the royal family. Education was a widely discussed topic, and this is reflected in the novel. John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Mary Shelley's parents, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft are central to this debate and reflected similarly in *Frankenstein's* representation of education and its effects on the characters. Victor's early childhood indulgence leads to a lack of responsibility later in life, but the Creature's beginning as a tabula rasa is a true representation of Lockean sensibilities. *Frankenstein's* discussion of the dangers of uncontrolled scientific experiments is one of the prominent features that made this work so well known. The danger of science, however, is only existent in the novel when Victor refuses to take responsibility for the being he created. Victor is mentally unstable and refuses to show empathy towards the Creature, empathy is a trait Mary Shelley explores in this novel through good examples in Alphonse and catastrophic examples in Victor.

Conclusion

At the core of Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* are father/son relationships. The historical context, however, helps understand the views on these father/son relationships, and the troubles found between the father and son represented in *Frankenstein*. While Mary Shelley actively represented "domestic affection" in her debut novel, Victor's rejection of the Creature is undoubtedly a plea for empathy and nurturing fathers instead of ones that control and abandon (Shelley, 1). The early nineteenth century was subject to enormous change socially, emotionally, and scientifically. All this change created on one hand an opportunity for positive change intellectually and politically, a space to challenge earlier constricting norms, and on the other hand it created insecurity and fear of even further change which resulted in more conservative opinions paralleling the newer radical ones. The French Revolution and the inability of George III, and after that George IV, to rule with dedication created instability within the country. As George III's inability to rule reflects his ability to parent his son as well we can connect Victor's madness and inability to connect with the Creature with the Mad King. As novels were becoming more popular in this time, and more well regarded due to their discussion of important issues, Mary Shelley's plea for familial affection found in *Frankenstein* is therefore not just a plea for the social sphere but one for the political sphere as well (Sleigh, 1).

Dedicated and loving fathers are represented alongside more controlling ones in *Frankenstein*. The controlling fathers in the narrative are put into a negative light as can be seen by Walton and Clerval's clear dissatisfaction with their fathers' lack of consideration concerning their intellectual passions. Walton expresses dissatisfaction to his sister about their father's decision to hinder him from pursuing his sea-faring dreams in his early youth, which was his father's "dying injunction" (Shelley, 4). Clerval is similarly restricted by his father to pursue his language studies. Mary Shelley shows clear bias towards the gentle father in

Frankenstein and shuns the strict and controlling father who is only discussed in the narrative in passing. Alphonse and De Lacey are two fathers that are shown to be mild mannered and concerned for their sons' happiness and wellbeing. These fathers' gentle disposition can be seen as a good example of the "domestic affection" Mary Shelley discusses, but it is also a sign of their higher social class and privileged position in society. Alphonse quits most of his work to take care of his children, and this is very clearly a luxury not everyone can and could afford. Therefore, the Lockean ideal of a father educating his own son from the confines of their own home is a classicist ideal which had become easier to achieve as the middle class was steadily growing larger and richer during the early nineteenth century.

However, the Lockean ideal comes with the risk of misinformation being spread from parent to child. With Victor it is not merely misinformation, but his father's lack of knowledge on the topic of natural science that in Victor's opinion leads to his obsession with the raising of the dead. Another of Victor's struggles with Alphonse is Alphonse's insistence that Victor pursues his education away from home to be taught by more knowledgeable people about his interests, as Alphonse is shown to have very little knowledge on these topics from the beginning. This, again, is not a bad insistence as Victor did need a better understanding of natural science since he had mainly focused on outdated works like Agrippa's that discussed immortality and alchemy. Victor's feeling of being outcast by his father comes from his inability to choose for himself in this situation, which is something he rarely experienced before in his life as his parents were "indulgent" (Shelley, 19). Therefore, Mary Shelley vouches for "domestic affection" in *Frankenstein* which can be observed in Alphonse and De Lacey, but Alphonse's affection does little to sway Victor from his cursed fate to abandon and scorn his own son despite his father's affection and support throughout his life.

Frankenstein features several fathers and their sons, and the relationships between them vary wildly. Victor and his abandonment of the Creature is one of the more prominent examples of child abandonment and the wickedness that comes from the trauma that the son experiences at the hand of this abandonment. Victor's mental instability and lack of empathy towards the Creature can be seen as a critique on the monarchy and society as a whole. The ideal father, though by no means perfect, is portrayed to be kind, gentle and nurturing and is primarily represented by Alphonse. The controlling fathers are present in the text as well, but they are not central to Victor's personal narrative and thus little of them is shown. Despite Alphonse's portrayal as a good father, Victor is unable to conduct himself similarly and tries to blame Alphonse for anything that he can as Victor is unable to take responsibility for his actions. Victor's inability to take responsibility as a father is what makes the Creature violent towards the Frankenstein family and everyone closely affiliated, and as this is at the centre of the novel and reflects society at around the time of publication, it should not be forgotten despite the media's insistence that the tale is merely one of monstrosity and violence. Mary Shelley calls for empathy towards one's own family, towards everyone in society, despite their deformities or differences in *Frankenstein*, which put into context is a reflection of the immense change and insecurities about these changes at around the time of publication in 1818.

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