

Frankenstein: the role of parenting in the novel

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In the novel Frankenstein by Mary Shelley, the parent-child relationships that are introduced are surprisingly critical to the manner the novel plays out.

Through each literal and metaphorical pair, the course the child leads is in direct relation to the quality of the parenting. Elizabeth and Victor have very virtuous parents and, as a result, live very positive and fulfilling lives.

Likewise, Henry acts as a caring parent to Victor and tends to him, keeping him away from death. However, Frankenstein's monster receives no basic parenting from his creator leading to tension and turmoil. Justine bridges the gap between kind, warm-hearted parenting and cruel, neglectful parenting being under the care of the Frankensteins and her birth mother. Through her and the other characters of the novel, it becomes clear that love and caring from parental roles are so abundantly important for the wellbeing of their children that a lack of can have deleterious consequences.

Elizabeth receives excellent care from Alphonse and Caroline Frankenstein and lives well throughout her young life. When Caroline first notices Elizabeth in the home of a peasant family, she feels an obligation to take Elizabeth under her and raise her as a Frankenstein. Elizabeth is soon adopted and begins her life anew. Everyone is very "fond of the sweet orphan" (17) as her place in the family is solidified. She constantly receives the upmost care from those around her. This becomes extremely clear when Elizabeth contracts scarlet fever. Although warned, Caroline "attend[s] her sickbed... Elizabeth was saved, but the consequences of this imprudence were fatal" (23). Every action the Frankensteins take improves the quality of Elizabeth's life. They bring her out of "poverty and I want" (17) and afford her a prosperous future. Caroline even sacrifices her own safety and eventually

her life to ensure the wellbeing of Elizabeth's throughout the duration of her sickness. Through her adoptive parents' love and care, Elizabeth attains a life that would normally be out of reach.

Likewise, Alphonse and Caroline raise Victor exceedingly well. As the Frankenstein's first child, Victor receives bountiful warmth from his parents. They "seem to draw inexhaustible stores of affection from a very mine of love to bestow them upon [him]" (16). Additionally, "[his] mother's tender caresses and [his] father's smile of benevolent pleasure while regarding [him]" (16) are his first memories of them meaning that their affection was continually present. As he aged, his parents notice his enthusiasm for the sciences and encourage him to become a student at the University of Ingolstadt to pursue his interests. His parents care about his wellbeing and guide him towards his passions. They always want what is best for him. Recounting his childhood as an adult, he boasts that "no human being could have passed a happier childhood than myself" (19). As a result of the positive parenting Alphonse and Caroline establish over their son, Victor is able to live a happy childhood and grow up to study a subject truly fascinating to him. He is not living a controlled life, but rather the life he wants.

Additionally, Henry Clerval acts as a parental figure when he nurses Victor back to health after he creates the monster. Soon after realizing what horrible atrocity he commits by building the monster, Victor becomes ill with stress and nervousness. The very thought of the monster sickens him. Victor is confined to bed for several months during which Henry stays by his side

and cares for him. Henry sacrifices a great deal of time to ensure Victor's health. " Instead of being spent in study... [he is] consumed in [Victor's] sick room" (39). Even after Victor recovers, Henry continues to act as a parental figure by guiding Victor in his next actions; He encourages Victor to write to his family and assure them of his health. This shows that Henry truly cares about Victor's wellbeing and that of his family. Henry's actions, through love and caring of Victor as a friend, potentially save Victor's life and put him the in the right direction towards normalizing his situation and contact with his family. Without Henry, Victor is helpless.

Justine on the other hand lives under both positive and negative parenting, the sentiment of each antithetical. Justine originally resides with her mother and three siblings before Caroline decides to take her in due to her poor treatment. Living with the Frankensteins, Justine receives a far better home environment and is cared for by those around her. Although a servant to the Frankensteins, Justine becomes educated because Caroline " conceive[s] a great attachment for her" (41). She is loved and comes to like this new life far greater than that while living with her birth mother. Later on, Justine's three siblings die and she is called home to her mother. The very idea of returning to the woman who treats her so poorly makes her weep as she leaves the Frankenstein residence. She comes to prefer the care the Frankensteins give her far more than that of her mother. Although her mother attempts to gain forgiveness, she begins to blame Justine for the death of her siblings and continues her poor treatment. Living under her birth mother, Justine seems completely devoid of any love or compassion. Eventually, her mother dies and she returns to her position as a servant. The

Frankensteins provide her an optimistic and fulfilling life while her mother antagonizes her. Although no extreme negative consequence arise from the quality of her mother's parenting, Justine lives in an oppressive and unhealthy environment, hindered from her full potential. Living under positive parenting proves to be more beneficial for her wellbeing.

Victor's relationship with his monster acts as the epitome of poor parenting which leads to severe negative consequences. While at university, victor embarks on his quest to reanimate a human corpse. He constructs the body by combining parts of the deceased and infuses it with life. Although Victor is the creature's creator and metaphorical parent, he is disgusted by his work. The very sight of the monster makes him sick causing him to simply run away from it. Once Victor returns to his apartment, the monster is gone and he feels relieved in that his problems have disappeared. Unfortunately, his mistakes as the creator lead to the impending consequences. At the monster's metaphorical birth, he is abandoned. Victor fails to acknowledge his creation positively and leaves him to fend for himself. The monster later explains that he was very confused and frightened at this time due to a lack of understanding of his body and environment. As the monster's creator, it is Victor's responsibility to care for him. By failing to do so, the monster acts on solely what he knows about the world, which is not much at all. As a result, the monster learns from his negative experiences and becomes instilled with anger. He does not cope with feelings of hurt, he fights it. The poor parenting exhibited by Victor at the creature's beginning leads to future consequences as basic ideas such as love and compassion are not taught.

Later on, the monster learns language and begins to understand his environment. He realizes that people are disgusted by his appearance and vows revenge on Victor for putting him through this misery resulting in the murder of William. When the monster and Victor meet, Victor fails once again as a parent. The monster promises to leave Victor alone and never return as long as Victor creates another monster “ as deformed and horrible as [himself]” so she “ would not deny herself to [him]” (103). Victor reluctantly agrees, however, he later decides his judgment was poor and destroys his work before finishing it. The monster finds out and becomes enraged leading to the murder of Elizabeth. Victor exhibits poor parenting in this situation due to his decisions. He has the chance to make amends with his creation and make up for his previous blunders but fails to follow through. Instead, Victor deceives the monster which only angers him further. The monster puts trust into Victor and Victor betrays him. As a result, the monster acts in the only way he knows how: to cause pain. Victor’s poor parental decisions are the cause of the monsters disposition and actions.

Through the various parent-child relationships presented in the novel, it is clear that nurturing is key for the development of a character. While positive and healthy upbringings generally result in happiness and fulfilling futures, poor parenting is regarded negatively and, in extreme cases, causes detrimental consequences. The various murders and stress Victor receives could have easily been avoided if he took the time to educate the monster. As seen in the novel, the monster did have a compassionate side. Unfortunately, he just needed help finding it.