

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

According to Erikson's psychosocial theory, human development is characterized by the formation of trust, autonomy, and initiative, which are capacities that depend significantly on the quality of social support and interpersonal relationships (Erikson, 1959). Human development relies heavily on learning, supportive environments, and responsive social interactions, which simultaneously influence behaviours, knowledge, attitudes, and practices (Britto et al., 2017). Scholars argue that disruptions within these relational processes can lead to significant psychological distortions, affecting self-concept and shaping relational patterns into adulthood (Perry, 2009).

Likewise, trauma and abuse have major consequences for mental health, attachment, and behavior (van der Kolk, 2014). Such experiences can include emotional abandonment, physical abuse, and chronic neglect. Traumatic experiences may disrupt an individual's internal sense of safety and fragment the self, forming highly complex deformations of identity (Herman, 1992). A similar concept regarding this disruption is the Five Stages of Abandonment in psychology, consisting of shattering, withdrawal, internalizing, rage, and lifting (Anderson, 2016), which outlines the processing of the pain from neglect, to yearning for comfort, to social and mental recovery. There are many figures in psychoanalytic theory who dive deeper into emphasizing this importance, such as Jacques Lacan. He explains subject formation through the three registers: the Imaginary, the

Symbolic, and the Real. Abandonment and trauma can destabilize an individual's position within these registers, particularly when the Symbolic structures that provide language and social belonging fail to grant stability. As a result, traumatic experiences may return through the Real as anxiety, fragmentation, and psychological disturbance that resist complete expression (Lacan, 2006). These insights align with contemporary trauma research, which shows that neglect and relational deprivation impair the ability to form meaningful human connections later in life (Cook et al., 2005).

Developmental psychologists emphasize that formative experiences exert a disproportionate influence on later emotional regulation and interpersonal functioning (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Stable emotional support and consistent relational bonds serve as important foundations for an individual's sense of safety and identity, contributing to later psychological resilience (Shonkoff et al., 2012). Therefore, human development as a whole is then widely understood as a lifelong process shaped by biological, psychological, and social factors (Berk, 2018). While psychological growth is determined by innate characteristics, the quality and acceptance of social environments play a major role. One notable concept relating to acceptance is the Monitor and Acceptance Theory (MAT), where acceptance is an emotion regulation process characterized by openness and receptivity toward present-moment experiences. It encourages individuals to allow both pleasant and unpleasant thoughts and emotions to arise naturally without becoming overly reactive to them (Lindsay & Creswell, 2019). Experiences of emotional isolation and loneliness may influence how individuals perceive themselves and connect with

others, often leaving lasting psychological consequences such as attention to social threat and self-withdrawal (Qualter et al., 2015).

Literary and cinematic narratives often explore such dynamics through characters whose adult identities exhibit the trace of unresolved mental harm. They frequently recontextualize the aforementioned themes to address contemporary social and psychological anxieties. One film that represents this is *Frankenstein* (2025), in which Mexican filmmaker Guillermo del Toro released as his own film adaptation of Mary Shelley's famous novel of the same title, which has long been interpreted as a text concerned with the ethics of creation, the soulfulness of scientific invention, and the consequences of abandoning responsibility (Baldick, 1987). It follows this tradition by offering a more introspective and emotionally charged image of the Creature. Violence, along with life and death, is a reoccurring theme in *Frankenstein*, but in this particular adaptation, the narrative emphasizes the emotional neglect and rejection experienced by the Creature. This aligns his portrayal with theoretical discussions of trauma, abandonment, and the denial of formative care.

The film *Frankenstein* (2025) presents itself as a work of adaptation that differs from the previous interpretations, in a way that shows the Creature's vulnerability and humanity despite its manmade identity. It retells the story of *Frankenstein*, which narrates the origin and journey of the undead hybrid amalgamated from human corpses, by focusing more on Victor's harsh nature towards his creation and the Creature's desperation in merely being treated like any other human being. Victor's idealism on merging life and death turns into madness and impatience as he lashes out on what is essentially his "child". Cited from

Midwest Film Journal (2025), this version of *Frankenstein* highlights the topic of *“fathers perpetuating cycles of abuse, about men who should not procreate yet do anyway and impose their vicious wills upon their innocent children.”* It does not provide a literal portrayal of a father and his child, but the underlying themes heavily point to that, granting an opportunity for psychoanalytical depth. Moreover, from a podcast by NPR (National Public Radio) titled “Pop Culture Happy Hour”, one of the hosts, Aisha Harris, states how *“Victor becomes increasingly frustrated with the Creature's seemingly slow cognitive progression and begins to abuse him. ... The Creature seeks both retribution and a reason to find his eternal life worth living.”* From the following statements, it is notable that the sorrowful humanity of the not-quite-human Creature is of strong significance within the subthemes of the film.

Although not depicted as a literal parent and child relationship, the central dynamic between Victor Frankenstein and his creation in the 2025 film echoes a metaphor about the psychological structures of abusive parenting, specifically in neglect. Victor's immediate revulsion and subsequent abandonment function as forms of emotional violence that mirror real-world patterns of developmental trauma (Kelly, 2016). The Creature's resulting loneliness, rage, and desire for connection reflect what Melanie Klein identifies as the oscillation between persecutory and depressive anxieties in individuals who lack stable early attachments (Klein, 1946). Similarly, Winnicott's notion of the “unheld” child becomes a lens through which the Creature's suffering can be understood, as his unmet need for recognition leads to destructive and self-fragmenting behaviors (Winnicott, 1965). Through these character dynamics, *Frankenstein* (2025)

constructs a narrative of monstrosity born from the wounds inflicted by abandonment and emotional deprivation from other figures, particularly the creator, rather than inherent evilness.

1.2 Research Questions

1. How is abandonment symbolically portrayed in the creator and creation relationship in *Frankenstein* (2025)?
2. How is acceptance symbolically portrayed in the creator and creation relationship in *Frankenstein* (2025)?
3. How is the creator and creation relationship represented in *Frankenstein* (2025)?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The famous literary work *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley has received various adaptations across literature, theater, and film, each offering a distinct overview of the novel's core themes. In 2025, director Guillermo del Toro released his own interpretation of *Frankenstein*, and it presents a visually and psychologically layered retelling that heavily incorporates themes of abandonment and violence. Victor Frankenstein, the creator of the Creature, is shown to be forced to obey every rule and order given by his mostly-absent yet aggressive father. This results in him exhibiting the long-term effects of formative violence, which he soon reenacts to his undead creation. Therefore, this study seeks to analyse how *Frankenstein* (2025) reconstructs these issues regarding reflections of abandonment and acceptance, as well as how these portrayals are shown by the main characters through the plot.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study examines the horror/sci-fi film *Frankenstein* (2025) by Guillermo del Toro, specifically focusing on the portrayals of abandonment and acceptance through its scenes and script while employing a psychoanalysis-focused framework to unveil the previously mentioned themes.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study grants further insight into how a psychoanalytical approach to film can open up new perspectives regarding the plot and characters' dynamics. Furthermore, it deepens scholarly understanding of how modern cinema represents abandonment and acceptance, particularly within a Gothic-horror adaptation. It expands existing trauma theory applications from areas of literature into the current era of film. Guillermo del Toro's *Frankenstein* (2025) also offers a new perspective through which to examine Mary Shelley's themes, highlighting how the film reframes the Creature's journey through suffering as a narrative about the phases of neglect, adding contribution to reinterpreting classic works.

1.6 State of the Art

A number of previous studies have examined *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley from psychological, moral, and structural perspectives, with particular emphasis on the character of Victor Frankenstein. One study by Fakhruddin (2015) with the title "The Internal Conflict Faced by Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*," analyzes Victor's psychological struggles using Sigmund Freud's personality structure. This study identifies various forms of internal conflict (such as approach-avoidance and avoidance-avoidance conflicts) and concludes that

Victor's decision-making is deeply influenced by his personality structure, which ultimately affects the outcomes of his actions. Another study, by Ikhwan (2023), titled "Caring Moral Development of Victor Frankenstein and His Monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*" focuses on the moral growth of both Victor and the Monster. Drawing on Carol Gilligan's moral theory of care alongside psychoanalytic and structuralist approaches, this research finds that Victor operates at a conventional moral level characterized by self-sacrifice. In contrast, the Monster's moral development remains ambiguous, suggesting that his ethical trajectory is shaped by social responses and the possibility of acceptance or rejection.

Themes of psychological distress are further explored by Putri (2015) in "Victor Frankenstein's Anxiety and Defense Mechanism as Depicted in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*." This study applies Freud's theory of anxiety and defense mechanisms to reveal that Victor experiences reality anxiety, neurotic anxiety, and moral anxiety. To cope with these anxieties, Victor unconsciously employs defense mechanisms such as repression, reaction formation, and projection, highlighting his inability to fully confront guilt and responsibility. Similarly, Safitri (2018) addressed issues of obsession and unconscious drives in "Frankenstein's Over Obsession in *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley," which examines Victor's excessive fixation on creation and the consequences of his obsession for himself and other characters. Another study titled "Id Dominance of Frankenstein's Monster in 'Frankenstein' Novel by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley: A Psychological Approach" by Anggraini (2018) focuses on the Monster, concluding that his psychological

instability and aggressive behavior stem from id dominance shaped by unconscious processes and unresolved inner conflicts.

All in all, these previous studies demonstrate that *Frankenstein* has been widely examined through psychoanalytic, moral, and structural lenses. However, most research centers on Victor Frankenstein or employs psychoanalysis without fully addressing themes of abuse, trauma, and the characters' struggle for acceptance. Therefore, this gap underscores the need for further research that foregrounds relational trauma, social rejection, and personal redemption, particularly in modern reinterpretations such as the film *Frankenstein* (2025) by Guillermo del Toro, which this study aims to fulfill.

