Partners in Crime or a Better Half?: A Comparison of the Friend and Assistant Relationships with Victor Frankenstein in *Frankenstein* and Film

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Within Mary Shelley’s novel, *Frankenstein*, the character of Henry Clerval is clearly defined as being Victor’s best friend. Nowhere in the novel does Victor acknowledge to Clerval that he is engaged in any studies which could be considered anything but innocent, so that throughout the piece Clerval is entirely innocent of any knowledge of Victor’s engagement in the less than savory business or creating life. Movie adaptations, however, tend to shy away from this importance of the innocent friend character and instead replace that role with a semi-informed friend and the assistant-figure of Fritz, such as the 1931 film, *Frankenstein*, or to merge the assistant and friend roles in the character of Igor, as is done in the 2015 film, *Victor Frankenstein*. This second adaptation bridges the gap between having a strictly friend-figure and a strictly assistant-figure in such a way as to return to the theme of the importance of friendship that is evident within the novel in a way that is quite different from the 1931 film which barely emphasizes friendship at all. By replacing the importance of relationships and an anchoring friend-figure with a prominent assistant, adaptations change the development of Victor and bring into question the compatibility of the two roles. Comparing *Frankenstein* the novel to *Victor Frankenstein* the film in this way shows how the themes present in the novel have been translated into movie adaptations, and how the role of Clerval and Igor affect Victor in more meaningful ways than previous adaptations have accounted for by showing the friend-figure to have an influence on Victor’s actions in order to exemplify the importance of friends on affecting the his choices and development.
Within the 1818 text of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Shelley gives Victor a narrative in which he starts by describing his childhood in Switzerland. In telling this part of his life, he emphasizes his connection with both his adopted sister, Elizabeth, and with his best friend, Clerval. Shelley gives extra attention to these two relationships along with the relationship with his parents in shaping Victor’s place within Switzerland and with his own identity. This importance on Victor’s relationships with others in defining his place and purpose can be seen in how he changes somewhat dramatically once he is involved in his studies in Ingolstadt. Once Victor delves into his work and neglects his family and friends, his meaning in life becomes the pursuit of knowledge and personal glory, rather than having relationships or duty to family influence his choices. This all-consuming passion for his work, however, ultimately is shown to destroy Victor in a number of ways. After he finishes making and animating his creature, he falls ill and is nursed by Clerval who has just arrived to begin his own studies, before going home to Switzerland on the death of his youngest brother. It is after the death of the family’s maid who was falsely accused of the murder, that Victor has an opportunity to talk with the creature and ultimately agrees to make a mate for it. He travels to England with Clerval, where, after the pair splits up so that Victor can make the second creature in solitude but ultimately destroys it, Clerval is murdered by the creature and washes up on the shore of Ireland. With the death of Clerval, Victor returns to Switzerland to marry Elizabeth, and after her murder, makes it his goal to destroy the creature, which ultimately leads to his death on Walton’s ship, near the Arctic, concluding the narrative after the long string of unfortunate events.

Much has been said by critics on the importance of relationships in shaping Victor’s character. In looking at criticism on *Frankenstein* and its various adaptations, one can see that it is clear that love and friendship are two of the driving factors in developing Victor’s interactions.
To what extent this effect takes, however, is widely debated. Leila Silvana May, in her article, “Sibling Revelry in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein,*” looks mainly at Victor’s relationship with Elizabeth in order to show how Victor’s interactions with friends and relatives shaped his behaviors. When May turned to Victor’s relationship with Clerval, she did so to argue that Clerval’s help while Victor was ill added a depth of understanding for Victor by having the illness cast him “into the role of the creature by virtue of his being “restored to life” by Clerval” (680). Looking at this role of friendship in a much more elevated manner, Eric Daffron argues in “Male Bonding: Sympathy and Shelley’s *Frankenstein,*” that it is Victor’s relationships with other men in the novel which are important in shaping his actions. Where this differs from May’s interpretation is that Daffron reads past simply more sympathetic relationships into believing there to be deeper, more homoerotic motivations with the creature yet not with Clerval. Because Daffron reads homoerotic love into Victor’s relationship with the creature but not into his one with Clerval, his argument gives strong support to the relationship being deep yet platonic. In his review of the film, *Victor Frankenstein,* Andrew Barker takes a view of Victor’s friendship with Igor as moving away from the platonic nature of Victor’s and Clerval’s within the novel, stating that while other aspects of the film were poorly executed, the “most memorable innovations come from the constant doses of homoerotic tension” (127). William Crisman, however, argues very much on the contrary to all of these views in his article, ““Now Misery Has Come Home”: Sibling Rivalry in Mary Shelley’s “Frankenstein.”” Crisman not only claims that Victor felt virtually no positive relationships without subconscious hatred attached, but that the murders the creature committed were Victor’s murders as well due to sibling rivalry (30). By looking at these four articles, one gets an idea of the wide range of interpretations on the role of Victor’s relationships that are already available. What is left relatively unsaid, is how the insertion of an
assistant within film adaptations affects Victor in a way that removes much of the importance which the role of Clerval had previously involved.

This friendship between Victor and Clerval is something that Victor discusses many times throughout his narrative in various ways which emphasize the closeness between the two. As Victor says early on, “In this description of our domestic circle I include Henry Clerval; for he was constantly with us… and we were never completely happy when Clerval was absent” (Shelley 22). This joy in their friendship does not diminish throughout the novel, and all of Victor’s thoughts on Clerval can be read as kind and pleasant ones. As Victor says on the arrival of Clerval in Ingolstadt after the creature has been created, “Nothing could equal my delight on seeing Clerval; his presence brought back to my thoughts my father, Elizabeth, and all those scenes of home so dear to my recollection. I grasped his hand, and in a moment forgot my horror and misfortune; I felt suddenly, and for the first time during many months, calm and serene joy” (41). This happiness was followed closely by Victor falling ill, and Clerval being his only aid who knew that Victor “could not have a more kind and attentive nurse than himself” (43). Little is said on their friendship after Victor leaves Ingolstadt to return home, but when they meet again on their tour of the country to visit England, Victor breaks the narrative in order to bemoan the upcoming death of his friend. For three whole paragraphs and a verse from Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” Victor eulogizes his dead friend with evident feeling, as he interrupts his own story to grieve the loss.

Clerval! beloved friend! Even now it delights me to record your words, and to dwell on the praise of which you are so eminently deserving. He was a being formed in the ‘very poetry of nature.’ His wild and enthusiastic imagination was chastened by the sensibility of his heart. His soul overflowed with ardent affections, and his friendship was of that
devoted and wondrous nature that the worldly-minded teach us to look for only in the imagination… And where does he now exist? Is this gentle and lovely being lost for ever?... Pardon this gush of sorrow; these ineffectual words are but a slight tribute to the unexampled worth of Henry, but they soothe my heart, overflowing with the anguish which his remembrance creates. (130)

By reading this account of Clerval from Victor’s perspective, it is impossible to say that he did not feel the loss of his friend deeply and sincerely, and that their friendship had been anything less than full of ardent affection on both sides.

In reading Victor’s feelings about his friendship with Clerval, one might attempt interpret the relationship to be homoerotic in nature; however, despite the closeness between the two, it could also be said, and probably more accurately, that their relationship was purely platonic. Eric Daffron does not shy away from interpreting homoerotic themes within Frankenstein in his article, “Male Bonding: Sympathy and Shelley’s Frankenstein.” Where he focuses this, however, is on Victor’s relationship with the creature not with Clerval. In his article, Daffron delves deeply into why he believes Victor had sexual feelings for the creature, yet when discussing Victor’s relationship with Clerval he writes that “Shelley situates Frankenstein’s relationship with Clerval,[as] a perfect example of close friendship. Though Frankenstein indicates no sexual desire between them, Clerval “sincerely sympathized in [his] feelings” (65-66) and “overflowed with ardent affections’ (154). In turn, Frankenstein “loved him with a mixture of affection and reverence that knew no bounds”” (Daffron 424). Because this view of the relationship between the two is shown by Daffron as an example of the innocent nature of friendship, one can consider this “perfect example of close friendship” to exemplify what could have been considered an appropriate male friendship during the early 1800s, although the reason nothing beyond
friendship occurred between the two could have come from the differences of the individuals involved.

As has already been shown by looking at Victor’s opinions of Clerval, Victor believed his friend to be a most innocent and perfect human being, and it could be interpreted that the reason this relationship was simply friendship was due to the fact that Victor believed Clerval to be far too good and pure for him. As Victor says when describing their meeting at the beginning of their tour, “Alas, how great was the contrast between us! He was alive to every new scene; joyful when he saw the beauties of the setting sun, and more happy when he beheld it rise, and recommence a new day… ‘This is what it is to live;’ he cried, ‘now I enjoy existence! But you my dear Frankenstein, wherefore are you desponding and sorrowful’” (128)? This difference between the two friends offered a view of opposites which could point to a perception on Victor’s part as being not pleasant enough to merit Clerval’s friendship. If this was Victor’s way of thinking, it would only point to the goodness of Clerval in staying with his friend and trying to cheer him up, even when Victor was dreary and full of gloom. Despite the spirit of despair and gloom which Victor felt during his tour with Clerval, one cannot go so far as to claim that the two were complete opposites. During the tour, Victor even says that he sees a picture of his former self in Clerval: “he was inquisitive, and anxious to gain experience and instruction… the only check to his enjoyments was [Victor’s] sorrowful and dejected mien” (131-2).

This idea of Victor and Clerval mirroring each other in a way is something which Leila Silvana May touches on in her article, “Sibling Revelry in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*.” Although the article mainly focuses on the roles Elizabeth was placed in throughout the novel, May takes some time to discuss how many identities within the novel are shaped by others and not solely by oneself. In relating this to Clerval and Victor, May argues that “Victor is
metonymically cast into the role of the creature by virtue of his being “restored to life” by Clerval… This act also transforms Clerval into Victor by placing the former in the role of “animator” (680). May continues with this reasoning in order to fit it with her argument on the theme of sororal desire within the novel. Looking at this episode in and of itself, however, shows Clerval and Victor mirroring each other which raises the question of why this matters with regards to their friendship. In looking at the similarities and differences between the two men, one can tell that it is evident that the two were not friends based solely on their similarities, although there was a parallel on the level of academic talent despite it being in different fields. Victor emphasizes this similarity early on when first describing Clerval, stating that he was “a boy of singular talent and fancy” (21), and later when Clerval came to Ingolstadt to study, Victor admitted that he, “was no natural philosopher. His imagination was too vivid for the minutiae of science” (49). Because Clerval was not engaged in the same subjects as Victor was, a connection between the two can be made in order to show the innocent nature of Clerval and to emphasize the pureness which can come from ignorance in such studies as Victor was engaged in.

Although one can easily look at the connection between Victor and Clerval in a positive light, William Crisman argues that Victor does not appreciate the friendship between himself and Clerval, but rather that he resents it. In his article, ““Now Misery Has Come Home”: Sibling Rivalry in Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein.” Crisman takes the view that Victor wanted to be the center of attention for everything and that any interference from anyone, including Clerval, bothered Victor. Some of his evidence for this comes from the 1831 version of the novel. As Crisman argues for why it is possible that Victor could dislike Clerval: “The jealousy involved in admiring Clerval’s writing may explain the resentment latent in the 1831 edition. Instead of providing a source of “amazement” through his poetry that his fellows volunteer to “act” (1818,
30), Clerval now “tried to make us act out plays” (1831, 236 f.) The enjoyment becomes a burden” (36). This change in the two versions, however, seems hardly sufficient enough to remove the amount of platonic love that is undoubtedly present between the two as, even if such petty childhood rivalries truly mattered to Victor, his joy on seeing Clerval arrive in Ingolstadt and the break in narrative to eulogize him is virtually the same in both editions (Shelley, 1831, 37 & 113).

One of the points Crisman makes on the matter of the rivalry between Victor and Clerval which is justifiably important, although not in the way that Crisman analyses it, is when he discusses the intellectual characteristics of both Elizabeth and, more importantly, Clerval. He writes that,

While Victor pretends to admire these airy, poetic spirits, he also moves rivalously to undercut the admiration. He wants to understand “facts relevant to the actual world” ([Shelley] 30). Though this description may appear at first neutral, Victor quickly freights it with value. He advocates matters “real and practical” as opposed to matters merely “chimerical” (33). His own enterprise ascends over that of his supposedly admired siblings. (Crisman 36)

This analysis of Victor dismissing the accomplishments of Clerval because they were different from his own area of studies, is something which fits with Crisman’s view of Victor’s relationships, but it disregards the multiple places within the novel where Victor quite vocally and fawningly declared the joy he received from their friendship, and Crisman does not discuss the amount of time which Victor took out of the narrative to bemoan and grieve over the death of his friend. This argument also places too much emphasis on Victor’s view of his own studies, as by the time he is relaying all of this to Walton, Victor’s opinion on the worthiness of his own
area of studies is undoubtedly of nowhere near as dismissive of other, arguably purer, areas of study as Crisman claims it to be.

The question of the role and effect of friendship on Victor is something which comes into view with different interpretations in various film adaptations of the novel. In looking at some of the earlier movie adaptations of the novel a brief recognition of the presence of historical film theory and a short look at sundry previous interpretation is important. Johannes Von Moltke discusses the worth of historical film theory well in his article, “Out of the Past; Classical Film Theory,” where he looks at some of the various interpretations of historical films with an argument against the previous claim regarding the lack of a position in modern interpretation of old films. As he writes, “Rather than redraw territorial demarcations within the broader field of theory—between ‘classical’ and ‘contemporary’, between ‘film theory’ and ‘media theory’, and so on—we should work towards a promiscuous popular front of theoretical inquiry” (399). This perception of film theory and its various uses in regards to application on historical films can be useful in looking at the older film adaptations of Frankenstein in order to remind oneself that just because the pieces were created almost one hundred years ago, their contents are still valid to look at in comparison with modern views. In James A. W. Heffernan’s “Looking at the Monster: Frankenstein and Film,” one application of critical film theory can be seen and offers an example of what one can focus on while critiquing films. While looking at various adaptations of the novel, Heffernan emphasized how certain themes came out in the 1931 film version of Frankenstein. Heffernan references André Bazin’s theory of “the language of cinema” to shows how it was in part due to the medium that the literal language of film changes critiques of visual adaptations (134). Heffernan writes that it is “This stubborn visuality of cinema—or, rather, our habit of considering it predominantly visual—may help to explain why film versions of
*Frankenstein* have drawn so little attention from academic critics of the novel” (135). By acknowledging this “stubborn visuality,” Heffernan focuses much of his analysis of the two films on what effects the visual aspects of the film had, and uses his analysis to center on this concept. Heffernan’s example of studying adaptations offers an excellent model as it shows how the focus of film critiques can delve beyond simple comparisons and instead can offer comparisons of themes. For Heffernan, this meant studying the visual nature of the film adaptation of *Frankenstein*, but it also applies well to show how the theme of friendship come through in adaptations.

Ron Watkins exemplifies a less analytical method of film critique in his article, “Frankenstein Was Not a Doctor.” In this piece, Watkins essentially summarizes the plot of the novel and contrasts it with the inaccurate decisions made in the 1931 film version. While this would be useful if one were wishing to critique film adaptations on the grounds of their “accuracy,” Watkins’ piece misses the point that just because there are differences, one can view the changes as conscious choices meant to make a point and bring out understated themes, rather than as accidents brought about by ignorance and for no real purpose. Looking at another aspect of film critique, one can see that it is evident that film reviews are generally equally shallow as Watkins’ comparison with the novel. This can be seen in Andrew Barker’s review of *Victor Frankenstein*, which gives a mostly unjustified opinion along with a brief summary. What can be seen as similar with both Barker’s and Watkins’ views on the adaptations of the novel, is the manifested opinion that the most important aspect of a review or analysis is in the precise details of the plot. For Watkins, this was in how it differed from the source material. For Barker, it meant a selective summary so that audiences would know what they were getting into. Comparing all these different views and styles of film critique shows one the potential avenues
available for studying adaptations; however, given the goal of this paper to investigate the various relationships Victor has with Igor and Clerval, differences cannot be automatically treated as faults on the part of the adaptations.

Before continuing into interpretations of the 1931 film, *Frankenstein*, and the 2015 movie, *Victor Frankenstein*, short summaries are useful to show some of the plot differences which led to the different roles of friendship and assistants. The 1931 film begins its focus on Frankenstein, called Henry Frankenstein within this adaptation, close to the end of his journey to make and animate a creature which is called a monster throughout the film. The characters of Clerval and Elizabeth are introduced early on, as well. Elizabeth as his fiancée, and Clerval, called Victor Moritz, as Frankenstein’s friend who is in love with Elizabeth. They, along with Doctor Waldman are present with Frankenstein and his hunchbacked assistant, Fritz, when the monster is animated. After its creation, all parties remain silent on the subject of the presence of the creature and do not warn anyone of what has happened. After Fritz provokes the creature enough to drive it to kill him, however, Frankenstein and Waldman acknowledge that the creature should be killed. The manner in which this was attempted but failed leads to the death of Waldman, and later a young girl once the creature escapes into the countryside. This happens on what should be Frankenstein’s wedding day, but before the wedding the creature breaks into the house and frightens Elizabeth, which, combined with the death of the girl, causes the town to hunt for the creature. At the end, it is presumed that the creature is burned to death when the villagers set a windmill on fire, and Frankenstein is shown to survive.

The 2015 film, *Victor Frankenstein*, vaguely follows this telling of the story, although, this film is shown through the perspective of Igor Straussman, a previously nameless hunchback who had been miserably working for the circus. When Lorelei, the love interest of Igor, falls and
breaks her clavicle and shoulder, Victor Frankenstein is impressed with Igor’s knowledge of anatomy and breaks Igor out of the circus in order to come work with him as an assistant. Victor fixes what everyone had assumed to be a hunchback for Igor, and gives him the name of his old roommate as the two are accused of murder and are hiding from the police. They succeed in giving life to a grotesque, chimpanzee-esque creature which piques the interest of a rich young man, Finnegan, who offers financial support for Frankenstein to create a humanoid creature. Before actually starting on the creature, Victor’s father visits and shows his disapproval. Here the name of Henry is dropped, and it is later revealed that Victor’s older brother was named Henry and he died in a blizzard when they were boys. The fact that Victor believes that he killed his brother is what drives him to create the creature, despite Igor’s warning that Finnegan plans to kill Victor once the creature is complete. The creation is successful, but once Victor acknowledges that the life he gave the creature is not really life but rather mere animation, he accepts that it needs to be destroyed. Once that is complete, Igor and Victor go their separate ways: Igor to Lorelei and Victor off somewhere, with the promise that he might one day required Igor’s services again and will contact him when such is the case.

One of the most important areas of difference in these two adaptations compared with the novel is in Victor’s treatment of friendship and his studies, which differs drastically from the novel and from both film adaptations. Within the novel, Victor’s friendships are separated quite sharply from his studies, with the only overlap coming from when Clerval goes with Victor on the tour to England in order to create the second creature. Despite how close these two get to blending, Victor keeps his work and the knowledge of the creature away from those he cares about. Never does it occur to Victor to involve anyone directly with his studies, nor does he wish to burden his friends with so much as the knowledge of the creature’s existence. This burden and
the guilt which came from knowing about the creature he had created led Victor to relative solitude for “Company was irksome to me [Victor]; when alone, I could fill my mind with the sights of heaven and earth; the voice of Henry soothed me, and I could thus cheat myself into a transitory peace. But… I saw an insurmountable barrier placed between me and my fellow-men; this barrier was sealed with the blood of William and Justine” (Shelley 131). This guilt and wish for solitude was only breached by Clerval, and even then, it only allowed Victor to be happy so long as Clerval did not know about the creature. This choice to remain silent led Victor to study alone, and to separate himself from his friendships in order to facilitate to the creature’s desires.

In contrast to the novel, the 1931 film, *Frankenstein*, also separates Victor’s friendships and studies, but only partially. Unlike in the novel, Victor does not work on the creature in solitude, but instead he has a hunchbacked assistant named Fritz. In the film, Fritz is treated solely as an assistant and not as a friend, Victor clearly feeling a sense of superiority over him and treating him merely as an aide in accomplishing his grand goal of creating life. The friend figure of Clerval is present in the movie, but the friendship between him and Frankenstein is not as separate as it is within the novel, as Clerval, called Moritz, knows of the creature even though he did not personally help create it. The greatest difference in their friendship within this film and within the novel is that it is evident from the audience’s first time meeting Moritz that he is in love with Elizabeth. While this does not directly relate to the creature, the fact that Moritz is evidently jealous of Frankenstein and wants his fiancée, shows that there is a wedge in their friendship which could quite easily drive them apart regardless of Frankenstein’s studies. By having two of Frankenstein’s relationships in the film being an assistant who dies quite early on and a friend who is not as wholly sincere as he might think, puts the question of the importance of relationships to Frankenstein into question. The advice of his friends is clearly not enough to
make him stop animating the creature, and it is only after the death of Fritz that Frankenstein decides that it is time to kill the creature. While this fits well with the Victor of the novel in his choices being made solely by himself, by having others within the film around during these decisions, trying to get him to stop, one can interpret the Frankenstein of the film to view these relationships with less of a sense of duty, love, and importance than the Victor of the novel.

While this could simply be considered a creative choice which had been made in the process of adapting the novel into a movie, because Shelly’s work puts such a strong emphasis on the role of relationships affecting Victor, by disregarding this theme within the film, the 1931 version almost entirely loses the importance of friendship and of positive relationships on affecting Victor as is apparent within the novel.

The 2015 movie, *Victor Frankenstein*, offers an interesting blending of the roles of assistant and friend with the character of Igor Straussman. Unlike the 1931 film, Igor is of a comparable intellectual level as Victor and it is because of this that Victor breaks him out of the circus and makes him his assistant. This situation changes through the film, with Victor calling Igor his friend, albeit casually at first, and his partner once they succeed with their first attempt to bring life to a creature they had made. Despite these claims, however, Victor still treats him as an inferior. In the movie, Igor is the first to consider Victor and himself friends in any meaningful way rather than merely saying it in passing within a conversation. The depth of this sentiment on Igor’s part appears to remain one-sided until the very end of the film when Victor writes Igor a letter and finally addresses him meaningfully as a friend. Despite this more familiar relationship with an assistant than is shown within the 1931 film, there is still an imbalance in the feelings of the two men.
Some of the most remarkable differences in the portrayal of friendship within *Victor Frankenstein* is due to the changes which had been made to the story in adaptation. Unlike the novel, *Victor Frankenstein* is told from the perspective of Igor which shifts any interpretation of the friendship between Igor and Victor from solely coming from Victor’s view of the relationship to coming mainly from Igor’s. Because of this, when comparing the friendship between the two there must be an acknowledgement that Victor’s views on the relationship in the movie are portrayed in a manner similarly to Clerval’s view of the friendship in the novel, as Shelley’s work did not allow for Clerval’s feelings to be portrayed independently of Victor’s perception of their friendship. One of the ways in which this view of the friendship changes the result is due to Igor’s perception of his status in the relationship. Although within the novel, Victor and Clerval are seen from Victor’s view as one of equals, throughout *Victor Frankenstein*, Igor believes himself to be indebted to Victor for saving him from the circus and giving him a chance at a new life, an opinion which Victor himself voices on occasions throughout the film. This view leads any friendship between the two to be built on relatively shaky ground, as Igor’s view of Victor being superior influences his actions in a way that ultimately hurts Victor.

Some of the key scenes within *Victor Frankenstein* where the relationship between Victor and Igor develop are due to actions by Igor which encourage Victor in his studies. One notable occasion of this is after Victor’s father had visited and condemned his son’s choice of studies. Victor was ready to give up, despite having already gained support from Finnegan to create a full-sized man. Instead of letting Victor stop his studies, as Igor believed was the correct course of action after the debacle with the first creature, after the berating the elder Mr. Frankenstein gave his son, Igor’s sympathy towards Victor caused him to ignore his earlier opinions on the matter and instead encourage the pursuit. While this action led Victor to bond more with Igor,
the encouragement of his studies did not help Victor to mediate his obsession, but instead led him to gravely injure a police officer in an attempt to flee the law in order that he might continue with his studies. It was after this escape and the uncovering of the fact that the real Igor Straussman had died and Victor had harvested his eyes and was keeping the body on ice, that Igor decided once again that Victor was going too far. These changes of heart which occurred so shortly after one another, showed that because Igor considered his and Victor’s friendship to be on delicate footing and he did not want to upset Victor, the importance of being of use to Victor’s studies was of greater significance to Igor than helping Victor do what was right.

Because Victor’s studies are the reason adaptations tend to change the role of the friend into the role of an assistant, it is important to consider how critics have interpreted these studies and Victor’s process of completing them. For Thomas H. Schmid, the fact that the novel was written around the time that addictions were just beginning to be labeled and treated as such can affect the interpretation of Victor’s studies. In his article, “Addiction and Isolation in *Frankenstein*: A Case of Terminal Uniqueness,” Schmid views Victor’s actions in the story within the context of what scientists say about addiction. He writes of the novel on the connection between Victor’s studies and his isolation that, “such radical incommunicability characterizes the layered first-person narratives within *Frankenstein* as well, each character’s story spinning a tale of personal isolation to an essentially uncomprehending listener of varying sympathies” (23). By looking at isolation and addiction in this way, Schmid gives a sound picture of Victor’s solitude during his studies as being harmful to himself. Similarly, Claudia Rozas Gómez also believes that Victor’s studies were destructive. She, however, sees the problem not lying in addiction, but rather in Victor’s perception of knowledge which in turn led to his social disconnection. In her article, “Strangers and Orphans: Knowledge and Mutuality in
Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein,*” Gómez writes that “Victor’s downfall… can be read as the consequence of pursuing knowledge on one’s own, devoid of critical dialogue and engagement with others” (365). This view of the isolation that came from trying to gain knowledge within the novel, fits with the literary analysis in “Stitching Together Creativity and Responsibility: Interpreting *Frankenstein* Across Disciplines,” which remarks on Victor’s relationship and responsibility towards the creature. Halpern et al. note therein that “Victor’s advice to Walton, which swings wildly between warnings against hubris and exhortations to continue at any cost, reveals that he has still not entirely learned his lesson from his arduous campaign against the creature, whom he still sees as a “demon” rather than a fellow person and even an abused, neglected child” (52). This blending of Victor’s studies with the question of duty fits well in looking at *Frankenstein* and *Victor Frankenstein* as, while there are differences in the perceptions of the core problem of Victor’s studies, it is evident that isolation and a sense of duty are two themes which come through in both the novel and in adaptations.

Within *Frankenstein* the novel, there is evidently a change in Victor’s character once he begins his studies in Ingolstadt. Even before discovering the secrets of creating life, Victor does not visit his family in Geneva for two years (32). The change that occurred during his studies altered not only his character but also his person. During the time his “cheek had grown pale with study, and [his] person had become emaciated with confinement” (36). This investment in his studies excluded Victor from the influence of his family and friends. Victor’s father did write to his son in an attempt to encourage him to pick up regular correspondence again, but such had no effect on Victor. What is important to consider when viewing this solitude during Victor’s studies, is that it is after the creature is animated and when Victor feels at the worst that he is
pulled out of these miseries by the figure of Clerval. The arrival of his close friend, positions comradery and close relationships as part of the remedy to the horrors created by Victor’s study.

Comparing this view of study with the picture of such endeavors in Victor Frankenstein, a stark contrast can be seen. Friendship while engaging in studies and their achievements is a cornerstone of the plot of the film, as Victor is pleased to have someone of comparable intelligence working with him towards a common goal. This goal, however, changes slightly when viewing the entire process as including an assistant who has a substantial role in leading to its conclusion. In her article, Gómez considers Victor’s and Walton’s studies to be driven by “a clear and confident sense of the endpoint or outcome of their pursuits… they desire to each be the ‘only one’ to have discovered and contributed something to society” (363-4). In Victor Frankenstein it is clearly shown that Victor believes the studies he and Igor are engaged in to be ‘his studies’ with Igor assisting and helping to pursue ‘his goal.’ This is evident even when Igor advances from mere assistant, up to partner, and eventually to friend. Victor never entirely gives up the purpose to be ‘their purpose’ partly due to his wholehearted obsession with it and Igor’s lack of such an engulfing view of the work.

Part of the reason Victor might have been wary to share his purpose with Igor in the film or with anyone in the novel could have come from his addiction to the work. This is a view which Thomas H. Schmid takes in his article on the topic, and one which fits well when applied both to the novel and to Victor Frankenstein. As Schmid writes on the topic of addiction itself, “that actual or perceived isolation from friends, family, and community often accompanies addictive relationship to substances and behaviours has been well established in both clinical research and modern-day treatment paradigms. As with nearly every aspect of addiction studies, however, the place of isolation in the process and development of addiction can be seen as
shifting, at times appearing as either cause or effect or both” (21). For the Victor of Shelley’s novel, this isolation is self-enforced and, while the work on the creature is ensuing, it is almost absolute. For this reason, the breaking of the addiction is attached to the breaking of isolation. With the arrival of Clerval to Ingolstadt, Victor’s solitude ends and a calmer realization of what he has done can occur. This process was by no means easy within *Frankenstein*, but if one views Victor’s studies and actions related to the creature as being an addiction which needs overcoming, the difficulties he faces in trying to cope and deal with the creature can be better understood.

In looking at how addiction affected the Victor of *Victor Frankenstein*, one’s perception on what the role of the friend-figure is in breaking the isolation differs given the nature of the friendship between Victor and Igor, and the fact that Igor was present during Victor’s studies. It is evident in the film that Victor is comparably obsessed with the goal of animation as he is in the novel. As this is being accomplished in the film, however, there is not the sense of total isolation as is evident in the novel. Victor can be seen to become more frantic and single-minded as the film progresses, but never does his “cheek grow pale” or his body become “emancipated with confinement” (36). While one would find it difficult to argue that Victor was not addicted to his studies in *Victor Frankenstein*, the addiction is not accompanied by the same form of isolation that was present in the novel. Victor’s isolation in the movie was one that separated him from outside society, yet it did not involve absolute isolation from meaningful human contact. The presence of Igor in the work allowed for Victor to have someone around to talk to, yet he was never truly drawn out of his isolation, as Igor pulled Victor towards his studies and not away from them like Clerval did in the novel.
This view of solitude and obsession within Victor’s studies in *Victor Frankenstein* as being interpreted with Igor adding to Victor’s isolation, is one which begs the questions of who holds the moral duty towards the creatures that are animated and what is that duty? Within the novel, Victor, the sole creator, immediately abandons his creature, eventually resolving on the need for its death after it had committed several murders. In the film, however, Victor fairly willingly killed the first creature after it ran wild and chased Igor over a banister. This was done, however, after Igor declared that it had to be killed. This question of the need to kill the creature was brought up once again on the animation of the full-sized creature, although once he realized that the life he had given it was not what he had hoped it would be, Victor agreed speedily to kill it. Igor came in again here to help kill the creature, though it was Victor who dealt the final blow. This speediness to decide that the creature needed to die was something that can be seen with a slight comparison to the horror the Victor of the novel felt on first seeing the ghastliness of the creature, yet the fact that Victor and Igor actually killed both of the creatures shows a different view on what the creators believed was supposed to be done about their creation.

The rather inhumane treatment of the creatures in the film, is something which leads one to look at the comparison of the creature from the novel to the two in the movie. As Halpern et al. note in their article: “the creature… was not born a monster imbued with fiendish traits prior to his existence. He was made into a monster by those around him” (52). This quote is of course discussing the creature within the novel who was given a voice and who existed long enough to grow and change; however, it is interesting to view in light of the creatures within the film. In *Victor Frankenstein*, both creatures were not animated for more than fifteen minutes before Victor killed them, and as such, only a poor comparison can be made in determining Victor’s view of long-term responsibility towards his creations. In fact, the two animated creatures within
the film show hardly any similarities with the creature of the novel, not only in that they were
only around for such a short while, but also in that they did not speak or develop. This virtual
lack of almost any deep connection to the creature of the novel is something that can lead one to
wonder if a better comparison to the creature would be made in another character within the film,
particularly that of Igor.

In trying to determine if there really is a counterpart to the role or symbolism of the
creature on a comparable level within Victor Frankenstein, one can consider Igor to be
metaphorically in the role of the creature and not merely as a friend or an assistant. In the film
Victor not only changed Igor’s appearance but he also gave him an entirely different life. At one
point in the movie when Igor returned to his view that Victor was going too far and decided not
to follow Victor on the rest of the journey to complete the creature, Victor chided Igor’s wish to
leave with the words, “I created you” (1:12:40). By viewing Igor in this role of being a symbolic
connection to the creature and not as a true friend, his assistance with Victor’s studies can be
seen as not coming from an outside companion who could anchor Victor to the real world or to
familial connection, but rather his presence only drew Victor’s attention back to his studies. By
viewing this role of Igor’s assistance in this way, Victor can be seen as having a stronger sense
of duty towards his creation in this adaptation; however, as in the novel, once again he abandons
any duty he might have had by leaving Igor with only a letter at the end of the film.

Regardless of what edition of Frankenstein one is looking at, in the novel, it is clear that
Victor is affected by those around him. From reading the novel, one can clearly tell that Henry
Clerval’s friendship with Victor is one which shapes many of Victor’s actions in a positive way.
Clerval pulls Victor away from his studies and isolation and acts as an anchor to the more
beautiful parts of life which the dark nature of Victor’s studies had led him to forget existed. This
rather innocent portrayal of their friendship, shows Clerval to be a character who was essential in
the novel to keep Victor sane and healthy after the animation of the creature was complete, and
whose death was one which was felt deeply by his friend. This positive effect of Clerval or even
other friends and family is least evident in the 1931 film which mostly dismisses the importance
of relationships, especially close friendships, on Victor’s development. The film also disregards
this true friendship of the novel by replacing it with a duplicitous friend and an assistant. By
doing so, the 1931 adaptation of *Frankenstein* completely lost the theme of friendship and the
effect of positive relationships, and so removed some of the most important parts of the novel.

While the importance of a close friend was ignored in this earlier adaptation, *Victor
Frankenstein* presented a picture of friendship which more closely resembled the one between
Clerval and Victor in the novel. Unfortunately, because much of where Clerval’s benefit to
Victor came from was in his ignorance of all the horrible things which Victor was doing, the
friendship within the novel naturally differed from the friendship in the movie. In *Victor
Frankenstein* there is evidently a comradery between Igor and Victor, but because Victor sets up
the relationship in such a way as to claim to be Igor’s benefactor and superior, no equality
between the two could ever be found, and as such the friendship again does not compare entirely
with Clerval’s friendship with Victor.

Henry Clerval’s effect on Victor Frankenstein is something which has received little
study up to this point. This short shifting of the friendship disregards the rather substantial, albeit
somewhat subtle, role Clerval plays within the novel. Without Clerval’s friendship, after the
animation of the creature, it is questionable what would have happened to Victor. *Victor
Frankenstein* does rather well to emphasize the importance of friendship within the story, but it
fails to create a bond between Igor and Victor of a similar strength as the one shared with
Clerval. Despite this lack of an equally potent portrayal of friendship, *Victor Frankenstein*’s depiction of friendship and its long-term effects on Victor goes leaps and bounds beyond other film adaptations. By emphasizing the importance of friendship within the film, *Victor Frankenstein* opened a door to the further study of the role of these sorts of non-familial relationships within *Frankenstein*. While the friendship portrayed in the film was not a perfect one or one that was of an entirely similar nature to the one between Victor and Clerval in the novel, by viewing the differences in the relationships and the different outcomes in the plot between the adaptation and the novel, one can begin discerning what effects friendships had on Victor Frankenstein and the importance of the existence of such relationships.
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