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78. The problematisation of Romantic genius in Peter Ackroyd's *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*[1]

Deniz AYYILDIZ[2]

Abstract

Peter Ackroyd's novel *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein,* as a postmodern intertextual novel, reimagines and rewrites Mary Shelley's seminal novel *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus*, by putting its titular character in the historical conditions in which Mary Shelley composed her narrative. It is proposed in the study that in Ackroyd's novel, Victor Frankenstein is imagined as a Romantic genius figure who is inspired by the Romantic poets of the early 19th century Britain. This study aims to show how Ackroyd's portrayal of Victor Frankenstein as a Romantic artist problematises the very concept of Romantic genius by exposing the shortcomings of genius figures and their lack of self-perception. The concept of genius is discussed by referencing to the Romantic tradition in the British literature and it is inspected how Ackroyd's postmodern novel decentralises the genius figures, by depicting them as productions of a class-conscious society. It is discussed that these historical figures are socially constructed figures who, behind all their idolisations, are fallible human beings. The discussion is expanded by examining the postmodern inclinations of the text which recontextualises the Frankenstein myth. This article questions whether a historical narrative can be considered as valid in a postmodern era in which meaning perpetually multiplies.

Keywords: Peter Ackroyd, Postmodernism, Romanticism, Intertextuality, Historical Fiction

Peter Ackroyd'un *Victor Frankenstein'ın Vaka Defteri* romanında Romantik dehanın sorunsallaştırılması[3]

Öz

Postmodern ve metinlerarası bir roman olan Peter Ackroyd'un *Victor Frankenstei'ın Vaka Defteri* metni, Mary Shelley'in çığır açıcı romanı *Frankenstein ya da Modern Prometheus*'u yeniden tasavvur ederek yeniden yazar ve Ackroyd, başlıkta adı geçen roman karakteri Victor Frankenstein'ı Mary Shelley'nin romanını yazdığı tarihsel koşulların içine yerleştirir. Bu çalışmada Ackroyd'un romanının Victor Frankenstein karakterini erken dönem 19. Yüzyıl Britanyalı Romantik şairlerden etkilenen Romantik bir deha olarak sunduğu fikri öne sürülmektedir. Bu çalışma Ackroyd'un Romantik bir sanatçı figürü olarak Victor Frankenstein'ı tasvir ederken deha figürlerinin öz farkındalık eksikliklerini ve kusurlarını ortaya koymak yoluyla Romantik deha fikrini nasıl sorunsallaştırdığını göstermeyi hedeflemektedir. Makale, deha fikrini Birtanya edebiyatındaki Romantik gelenek referans alarak tartışmakta ve Ackroyd'un postmodern romanının deha figürlerini sınıf bilinçli bir toplumun ürettiği bireyler olarak sunduğu ileri sürmektedir. Romanın, bu kişilerin sosyal olarak inşa edilmiş ve putlaştırılmış mevcudiyetlerinin arkasında hata yapabilen kişiler olduğunu ortaya koyduğu öne sürülmektedir. Tartışma, Frankenstein anlatısını yeniden bağlamsallaştıran bu metnin postmodern eğilimlerinin incelenmesiyle genişletilir. Bu makale anlamın daima çoğaldığı postmodern bir dönemde belirli bir tarih anlatısının geçerli kabul edilip edilemeyeceğini de sorgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Peter Ackroyd, Postmodernizm, Romantizm, Metinlerarasılık, Tarihi Roman

In his 2009 novel *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*, Peter Ackroyd reimagines Mary Shelley's seminal novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818). In his novel, Peter Ackroyd rewrites Mary Shelley's original narrative in order to constitute a new subversive text which situates *Frankenstein* within a historical context. As a reimagination of a pre-existing text, the novel offers many interpretations regarding its intertextual form. Ackroyd re-creates a character in literature, namely Victor Frankenstein, as a semi-romantic artist who sees himself as a genius and who thinks that he can trespass the laws of nature in his grand delusions. His high esteem of himself and of his abilities comes from his aristocratic background which has ensured him a life of privilege. By depicting him thus, the novel opens a way to criticise the central figures in society who gain their positions as a production of their social structures. These so-called geniuses, such as Victor Frankenstein, of the 19th century are presented as individuals who lack self-reflexivity. They are unable to grasp the reality in their own domestic circle while trying to change the world they live in. This study aims to explore how Ackroyd's intertextual and postmodern novel problematises the Romantic notion of genius and how *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* utilises the character of Victor Frankenstein and his close circle of artist friends

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so as to undermine the central locus of genius in the Romantic tradition. While at the same time, the novel criticises the problematic aspects of the early 19th century English society, in order to decentralise the power structures inherent in a hierarchal organisation of power, that has its base in what Michel Foucault terms as 'the regime of truth'. By decentralising the figures of power, the novel creates a multiplicity of critical perspectives.

Peter Ackroyd's *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* narrates the story of an ambitious young student called Victor Frankenstein who is a reimagining of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*'s titular character. Victor is a character who aspires to find the essence that gives life its moving force, and he wants to conquer death by reviving deceased humans. He wants to control the forces that regulates life and cross the boundaries between life and death. In his university years in Oxford, he meets a young poet who is also a historical figure, Percy Bysshe Shelley, who becomes an inspiration for Victor to chase after grand ideas. After many attempts, Victor manages to revive a young man who has been recently deceased. The recently vivified young man becomes a figure of abomination in the eyes of Victor as he bears a frightening countenance. Suffering from loneliness, Victor's recently resurrected creature kills those who are in Victor's close social sphere, like Harriet, who is Bysshe's wife, and Martha, who is a servant in Mr. Godwin's household. At the end of the novel, it is revealed that the Creature and Victor have been the same person all along and the Creature appears to be a manifestation of Victor's delusions.

The ending changes Mary Shelley's original narrative, rewriting it to focus more on the entangled relationship between Victor and the Creature, to the point that the novel constructs its main distinctive idea upon the twist that these two are literally the same person. This method of appropriation, while paying tribute to the original text's influence, also opens it up to a kind of multiplication that can only be achieved by textual imitation. It can be said that as an intertextual novel, *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* is a hypertextual work. Gerard Genette uses the terms 'hypertext' and 'hypotext' in order to discuss his theory of hypertextuality. He states, "By *hypertextuality* I mean any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall of course call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary" (p. 5). Genette's notion of hypertextuality indicates the idea that a hypertext is "[...] any text derived from a previous text either through simple transformation, which I shall simply call from now on *transformation*, or through indirect transformation, which I shall label *imitation*" (Genette, 1997, p.7). Adding to that, Graham Allen (2000) states that "[t]he meaning of hypertextual works, Genette argues, depends upon the reader's knowledge of the hypotext which the hypertext either satirically transforms or imitates for the purpose of pastiche" (p. 109). These terms can prove useful as a way of discussing these novels to refer to the ways they problematise singular meanings. *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* is the transformation of Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*, and, thus, it should be called a hypertext. In this case, Shelley's *Frankenstein* must be called the hypotext. As an intertextual text, *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* contains in itself a mode of writing conveniently dubbed as a postmodernist technique. In this ambiguous and extensive convention, there are some distinct modes of novels. Linda Hutcheon defines such a mode of novel which she refers to as historiographic metafiction. She defines historiographic fiction simply by stating thus: "By this I mean those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 5). Ackroyd's novel is both a rewriting of a pre-existing text and it is a commentary on the historical context of the novel *Frankenstein*. He historicises his text by integrating the political and social background of the time and by using real historical figures as characters in his novel. *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*, through its narrative's intertextual and hypertextual structure, is able to comment upon the issues brought about in Mary Shelley's novel while critically historicising its hypotext. Petr Chalupský (2011) explains this situation by stating that "Ackroyd's narrative permanently

balances be-tween imaginary stories and reality, or, more precisely, between fiction and historically-proven facts, since he understands history as an immense intertextual web and as such it can be traced and partially restored through its miscellaneous written records" (p. 21). In this sense, Ackroyd's rewriting of *Frankenstein* aims to transform its hypotext for the purpose of discussing the social problems of the time and to problematise the idea of the centrality of Romantic genius.

The novel follows its hypotext loosely in terms of its general storyline until the end, until Ackroyd subverts the hypotext with a twist ending. *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* is not a retelling of Mary Shelley's novel, but a reflection on the historical and cultural context of Mary Shelley's novel. The hypertext is filled with allusions to real life personages of the time in which the novel takes place, such as Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron, Mary Shelley and so on. This serves to historicise the hypotext, thus giving it an extra intertextual and metatextual layer. Thus, the text blurs the line between fiction and history. The novel ends with a report from a doctor who works in the mental institute in which Victor Frankenstein is being kept. The last paragraph reads: "*Given to me by the patient, Victor Frankenstein, on Wednesday November 15, 1822. Signed by Fredrick Newman, Superintendent of the Hoxton Mental Asylum for Incurables*" (p. 408). In this manner, the novel ends on its own attempt at historicising the fiction it adapted from its hypotext by revealing Victor Frankenstein as a patient at a mental health institute. By doing this, the novel ends with a negation of its own narrative, decentralising any consistent or reliable meaning. Through this subversion of the hypotext, Ackroyd's Frankenstein becomes not a fiction but a figure from a legal document. Therefore, the novel's form, not only its context, is constructed on a multiplicity that crumbles in the face of any suggestion of certainty. In the hands of Ackroyd, the concept of Romantic genius, represented by both real and fictional figures, becomes a crisis point of fluctuating states of genius and madness. In a world of such multiplicity, especially implied by the twist ending that underlines the likeness of genius to madness, any attempt at centralising and containing singular meaning becomes futile attempts.

The novel can be read as a postmodern take on Romantic literary tradition, and we can simply follow Jean-François Lyotard's famous definition of postmodernism as "[…] incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiv). There have been studies of the novel concerning its postmodernist and intertextual aspects and focusing on the novel's connection with the Romantic tradition. In one such study, Marta Miquel-Baldellou expands upon the discussion on the novel by focusing on intertextual and postmodernist aspects of Ackroyd's novel. In her essay "Are you being serious, Frankenstein?" Transtextuality and Postmodern Appropriation in Peter Ackroyd's *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein"* Miquel-Baldellou regards the novel as a postmodern intertextual work and focuses on the novel as a postmodern rewriting of the romantic myth of *Frankenstein*. The author's discussion includes an assessment of Victor as a Romantic hero figure, emphasizing his Romantic affinity by stating, "Victor is presented as the artistic embodiment of the Romantic temperament" (p. 195). Adding to the author's claim, this study aims to ask the question if such temperament can be viewed in a negative light which enables the text to criticise the idea of the Romantic hero, or the idea of Romantic genius, by showing how the text problematises these ideas through figures like Victor Frankenstein and Percy Bysshe Shelley.

Before delving into the discussion of the representation of the Romantic genius figure in the novel, it might be beneficial to define what it is being referred to when the term Romantic genius is used. The Romantic period, which emerged at the closing of the 18th century, elevates individual talent within the arts, and poetic genius becomes an essential part of the discussion on creativity and imagination in this period. Starting with William Wordsworth's "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" the poet becomes a conduit for

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the emotional world's point of expression, giving the poet the duty of transferring higher ideals. Wordsworth(2013) describes the poet's role by stating:

> He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them. (pp. 103-104)

This statement is the symptomatic attitude of a romantic artist's mindset, concerning his own place and authority in creating an artwork. A Romantic poet is attributed to have "[...] a greater knowledge of human nature" (Wordsworth, 2013, p. 103) that poses a problematic attitude when regarding the authority of a poet. This approach to a poet/genius figure paves the way to negating the experience of multiple truths, creating a fixed position of "universal truth" or "universalities". Elizabeth A. Fay (2012) states that "Romantic-period artists were apt to mystify the concept of poetic authority…" (p. 107) adding "The "poet" is inspired and prophetic, as William Blake, William Wordsworth, and S. T. Coleridge have all pronounced" (p. 107). The prophetic genius of the poet becomes a central idea. Fay (2012) adds, "[i]n Romantic terms, the poet is a genius" (p. 107). M.H. Abrams (1971) in *The Mirror and The Lamp*, discusses the subject of poetic genius in the writings of Wordsworth and Coleridge. He argues that in Romantic criticism, the mind is regarded as a projector, a lamp (pp. 58-60). In other words, the mind of a poet, or an artist in general, projects his or her genius onto the world, illuminating the world in a prophetic light. These ideas, however, under a critical light, reveal some darker undertones. As prophet-poets, these semi-divine artists become central figures in society and occupy a place of power and authority. As stated above, the multiple truths of the world are barred by almost an omniscient prophet-poet. Ackroyd's novel reflects upon the potential problems that can emerge in such situations and criticises the notion of genius by undermining well-known historical figures.

Although he is not a historical person in the literal sense of the word, such a character is Victor Frankenstein, as he is borrowed from the history of literature. In Ackroyd's novel, Mary Shelley's fictional character becomes a quasi-historical figure by interacting with the real historical figures of the 19th century. Victor Frankenstein in *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* has a problematic relationship with nature. When he refers to nature, he expresses his unyielding will by saying, "I, Victor Frankenstein, would solve its mysteries! I would examine the beetle and the butterfly in my earnest wish to learn the secrets of the nature" (pp. 2-3). This may very well be regarded as a symptom of overly ambitious scientists. As the novel progresses, however, his aspirations become even bolder and more daring. He starts to have delusions of overcoming death: "By restoring human life I was about to begin an enterprise that might change human consciousness itself!" (Ackroyd, 2009, p. 127). Victor starts with the curious spirit of a scientist and becomes an obsessive man who starts to have delusions of grandeur. He is represented as a scientist who utilizes the scientific method in order to fulfil his fantasies. Apart from his identity as a scientist, or maybe deriving from it, Victor can also be considered a romantic figure. First of all, Victor sees himself as a poet figure. At the very beginning of the novel, Victor feels himself in tune with nature. He sees himself in a state of having established a connection with the sublime. He describes his feelings as such:

> I felt as if I were dissolved into the surrounding universe, or as if that universe were absorbed into my being. Like the infant in the womb I was conscious of no distinction. It is the state that the poets wish to achieve, when all the manifestations of the world become "blossoms upon one tree." Yet I had been blessed by the poetry of nature itself. (p. 2)

In this passage, Victor seems aware of his position in the universe. He is like a child yet to be born who waits in the womb, not even an infant yet. From this point of having a keen awareness of his

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insignificance in the grand cosmos, he moves towards the path of a scientist. As it has been stated above, this awareness, however, leaves its place to an obsessive search for the mysteries of the universe. This idealist approach to the universe is further fuelled by the poets of his time. His inspiration and ideas come from his close friend Bysshe and from the lecture of the prominent romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Even at some point, Victor explicitly states that "[Bysshe] was, in a sense, my mentor" (p. 109). Victor tries to create life just as these poets compose poems. Here, his identity as a scientist may be regarded as dubious. In his works, however, his ambition comes from his artistic influences. He does not try to understand nature but conquer it. This should not suggest that an artist tries to conquer the world intrinsically. An artist is someone who creates an artwork. Although this is an oversimplified approach, it should be efficient to understand Victor's approach to his work. In his own way, he tries to create an artwork by recreating human life. He uses nature as his canvas and manipulates the laws of nature to create life, just as a poet plays with language in order to compose a poem. His approach to nature as something that should be conquered is a distorted view of the artist's relation to nature. His method of understanding nature differs from these artists. He sees nature as something to be known rather to be felt and expressed. By examining his understanding of art from this point of view, we see a grotesque depiction of art by Victor. It can be speculated that in his mind, he is a daring artist figure rather than a scientist. Victor expresses his egotism when he refers to his early years in his education: "Even then, I believe, I knew that I will carve my passage to greatness" (p. 3). Marta Miquel-Baldellou also sees Victor as a romantic artist figure. She states that the novel "[...] characterises Victor as an eminently Romantic artist, thus transforming Victor Frankenstein into a fictionalised Romantic poet such as Percy Shelley or Lord Byron" (p. 205). However, Victor's Romantic tendencies cannot be considered apart from his social status.

By using the Romantic artist figure, the novel questions the values of the early 19th century and the morality of the figure of the "gentleman" parallel to the poetic figure. The poets present in the novel are from the upper echelons of society. Percy Bysshe Shelley is the son of a baron and Lord Byron comes from the aristocracy as well. Frankenstein is a well-to-do foreign gentleman himself. In the opening lines of the novel, Victor depicts his socio-economic background as: "I was born in Alpine region of Switzerland, my father owning much territory between Geneva and the village of Chamonix where my family resided" (Ackroyd, 2009, p. 1). He is the son of a landowner, and he is also able to study in England without much difficulty. Later, he can rent a house and build a laboratory for himself. These examples point to the fact that he can be regarded as a man who can afford his every wish and whim, and he can be considered as someone who is associated with power. The problem of power relations in society relates to the issue of the privilege of genius figures. For example, Victor sees himself as a genius scientist. He sees his scientific ideas as revolutionary and states his daring attitude: "I considered myself a liberator of mankind, freeing the world from the mechanical philosophy of Newton and of Lock" (Ackroyd, 2009, p. 66). This attitude of Victor brings forth the question of scientific ethics, whether a scientist can go beyond the moral and ethical restrictions of society by using his powerful position in order to achieve scientific progress. Victor, for example, uses his father's wealth in order to fund his research and pay for the illegally acquired dead bodies with ease. This shows that Victor is able to bypass the laws of society and his foreignness through his material wealth and the power it brings to him. Just as Mary Shelley questions the boundaries of scientific endeavour in her *Frankenstein*, Ackroyd also brings forward the issue of the ethical responsibilities of the scientist. However, in Ackroyd's novel, this issue is hinted to be more closely associated with the relationship between class and power. These arguments pave the way for the discussion of the nearly unlimited power given to authority figures.

It is widely known that 19th century English society is a very class-conscious society. Martin Hewitt (2004) states in his discussion on 19th century class systems that "[f]or much of the century class was

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not only the single most important form of social categorization, but also the bedrock of understandings of political and social change, and of the narratives which were constructed around them" (p. 305). Victor, as an upper-class gentleman in society, sees himself above the others. His social and economic background is that of a man who has never felt inferiority before. His social rank creates the illusion that, as he has power over the lower classes, he can also have power over nature as well. As it is stated above, the opening lines of the novel state his well-to-do social and economic situation. This is followed, almost immediately, by his statement, which follows as: "the God of the mountain[…] I see and feel the solitude of your spirit[…]" (Ackroyd, 2009, p. 1). The succession of his feelings of godhood after stating his material condition can be read as an attempt on Ackroyd's side to draw attention to the connection between Victor's ambitions and his privileged condition. As a central figure, Victor signifies a problematic figure. A centre would always try to have dominance over the margins and cannot create an ethical space for others to speak in. A centre's overestimation of itself would not allow it to consider other things around it in an ethical context, as it would build one eternal, universal, unitarian truth.

Ackroyd problematises the 19th century idealisations of social structures with centralised powers. Every society has its own set of rules, regulations, and a way of perceiving its social structure and every society has its own set of truths. Michel Foucault calls this concept "the regime of truth":

> Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth-that is, the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances that enable one to distinguish true and false statements; the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (2010, p. 131)

The 19th century saw the emergence of a new scientific discourse that starts to take root in the social sphere, and it was an age that was ambitious in terms of its achievements. The illusions necessary for a regime of truth depend heavily on the circulation of this new scientific approach, which creates new truth values and heralded brand-new forms of power distribution. As a result, the scientist's influence gains more prominence than before. Thus, it gives an overwhelming authority to those in control of scientific discourse. Like in *Frankenstein*, *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* also questions the authority of the scientist figure, by combining the scientific discourse with overly ambitious and "Romantic" idealism. Both novels depict what happens when a scientist goes beyond the limits of ethics in order to have great achievements.

Victor is obviously a romantic artist, gentleman, and scientist figure who freely takes advantage of his position, and the novel, therefore, decentralises him by exposing his shortcomings. As mentioned, the novel presents the main character, Victor, as a scientist-artist. He is enabled by his wealth and aristocratic background and from the power he gains by being a scientist in the 19th century. He stands at the top of the social hierarchy. Although his status as a foreigner sometimes makes him an outsider figure in society, he does not suffer greatly due to his material wealth. He seems to be regarded as an exotic foreigner. His position as a stranger to British society does not make him a standard English gentleman. However, his moral values seem to be that of a conservative middle-class gentleman. He feels uncomfortable when characters like Lord Byron make statements that are explicit or vulgar. He feels somehow disturbed when he roams the poorer districts of the city. Although his roots do not belong to England, he almost has the same attitudes towards the moral issues of society.

The novel, as stated above, connects the Romantic artist, as in the examples of Victor, Bysshe, and Byron, with the figure of the privileged gentleman. As a postmodern narrative, the novel problematises the centre or a central figure. As it has been described above, a prophetic figure creates a locus of truth that

cancels all other possibilities of knowledge. By acting as a lamp that illuminates the outside world, the poet's narrative becomes a metanarrative. In this case, Victor and his poet friends are the initiators of a metanarrative, that is, the idea of Romantic genius embodied in their persons. Linda Hutcheon states that a postmodern novel "questions the very base of any certainty and of any standards of judgement. Who sets them? When? Where? Why?" (p. 57**)**. As the novel questions the reliability of a central genius figure, it also questions the idea of a centre, which has the power to shape the things around it or illuminate like a lamp. In the novel, the centre, and the metanarrative in that manner, is the idea of genius.

The concept of genius is also closely associated with the concept of idealism. Although Victor is depicted as an idealist, his idealism is not based on his personal vision of a better society, but on his personal sufferings, primally by the pain of his loneliness. At the beginning of the novel, Victor is depicted as a man who loves exploring the mountains. He finds joy in altitudes and this joy of his can be associated with his desire to have power. As he is on top of the mountain, he can look down on all life below, like a God watching his subjects. These mountain trips serve to boost his ego as well as signify his loneliness. His solitude is one of the things that bring about his downfall. It creates a sense of isolation that he feels akin to that of God's. He expresses that feeling when he exclaims, "God of the mountains and the glaciers preserve me! I see, and feel, the solitude of your spirit among the ice and the snow!" (p. 1). When Bysshe and Victor first meet, they discuss abstract concepts such as difference between the government and the word 'government.' Victor's answer to this is by giving an example of the difference between the god and God (p. 6). From the very beginning, it is repeatedly implied that Victor has a God complex. This feeling of superiority forces Victor to live a life of egocentrism. It becomes apparent then that Victor's problematic egotism can be traced to his loneliness in his life. It can even be claimed that his desire to create a new human being may deeply stem from his desire for a companion. Victor, in his life, suffers great losses. He loses his sister, for whom Victor feels great admiration, and he later loses his father. His best friend Bysshe elopes with Harriet, which enrages Victor to the point of ripping apart his letter and swallowing its pieces (p. 110). Although Victor states that he feels enraged because he feels tricked by Bysshe, it can be claimed that his feelings of loneliness and jealousy may have caused him such a fit of rage. Hence, it can be argued that his desire to create a new life is intricately connected with his personal losses. This desire highlights his need to cure himself of his loneliness, rather than creating the perfect human. This need for connection expresses itself in his imaginative outbursts.

Victor is a man who has a great imagination and ambition. His imagination goes as far to the point that he starts to live in a delirious state. When it is finally revealed that Frankenstein has never created a creature and that it had been only Victor's schizoid delusions, Byron's doctor, Polidori states that "[y]ou have lived in your imagination, Victor. You have dreamed all this. Invented it" (p. 407). His imagination is presented not in a positive light in the text. It is represented as something dangerous and uncontrollable. He dreams of becoming an equal to God. His imagination, stemming from his loneliness, drives him to become a man who wants to dominate nature. It mirrors a very 19th century way of thinking. Michel Foucault, in his *History of Sexuality*, discusses that the western discourse is obsessed with knowledge. Foucault discusses the intrinsic relationship between sex and knowledge. The western scientific discourse sees sex as a secret knowledge that waits to be acquired. The truth of sex is imprisoned in a scientific discourse (1978, pp. 53-55). Although the novel does not specifically put sex in its centre, it comments on the mentality of understanding the world only in a scientific context. Victor is like a 19th century Doctor of psychology who is obsessed with sex and wants to capture the truth in it. However, in his case, he is obsessed with nature and wants to capture its secret. His approach to nature is not different from that of a psychologist who wants to capture the essence of sex. He does not enjoy or appreciate nature, but he is rather enchanted by its supposed secrets that wait to be included in his

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scientific discourse. Dominating nature serves as a way for Victor to prove himself. This situation can be considered as an echo of his social position in society. His identity as a scientist only serves to satisfy his selfish desire to become a superior human being. However, this desire is closely associated with his self-perception being challenged.

The problem of Victor can be said to be his inferiority complex in the presence of great poets. As a member of the aristocracy, Victor is at the top of the pyramid in the social hierarchy of his own native country. However, in England, his status is eclipsed by characters like Shelley and Byron. They are both talented poets who have the means to create. Victor wants to be able to have the power of creation like Shelley and Byron. Even Polidori observes that his delirious state comes from his envy. Polidori states that "[p]erhaps you wished to rival Bysshe. Or Byron. You had longings for sublimity and power" (p. 407). His over-estimation of himself is combined with his inferiority complex. His desire to reach the godhead manifests itself in a psychotic murder spree. Adding to his inability to rival the creative powers of his friends, he is unable to take responsibility for what he, later on, creates. Victor is a man who cannot take responsibility and it is an essential theme in both novels. In the hypotext, Frankenstein does not take responsibility for his own creation. Abandons him and thus becomes an irresponsible father figure. In the hypertext, the same story repeats itself. Victor does not create a new monster from different body parts, as he does in *Frankenstein*, but revives a dead man. However, both creatures signify a child figure. The Creature in the hypertext cannot remember his past life. Both creatures in the novels are not able to speak or grasp the situation they are in. However, the twist at the end of *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* creates a second interpretation, revealing that the Creature manifests Victor's psyche's darker parts. Now the text proposes that the Creature is not Victor's child, but Victor himself. The hypertext still discusses the issue of responsibility, but in a different context. Now, the novel opens up the argument on self-responsibility.

In both the hypotext and the hypertext, personal responsibility plays a vital role. In *Frankenstein*, Victor Frankenstein creates the Creature and is regretful of what he has done. He abandons him, and the Creature has to learn the world without the help of a parental figure. The story of the Creature signifies the irresponsibility of Victor Frankenstein. In *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* same issue is discussed in the same manner until the end of the novel. However, in the end, the theme shifts into one's relationship with one's own dark self. The issue of Victor's responsibilities as a parent is transformed into Victor's responsibility as a rational human being. Victor, claiming to be a god, has no idea of his own self. He cannot acknowledge his darker side, leading to his failure to take responsibility. The text plays with Victor's lack of self-reflexivity by showing that a man sees himself as a Romantic prophetic visionary who is unable to perceive his fallacies. As a rewriting, *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* does not try to decentralize its hypotext. It does not subvert the original text but pays homage to it. However, they have slightly difference perspective. The hypotext discusses taking responsibility for one's actions, and the hypertext discusses taking responsibility of oneself and having self-awareness.

This lack of self-reflexivity also extends to other historical characters in the novel. Victor's position as a genius, who lacks self-reflexive vision is also mirrored in his friends too. Characters like Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron also function as central figures in their societies and their positions are also decentralised in the novel. However eccentric they might be, Bysshe being a revolutionary and Byron being open about his sexuality in a conservative society, their presentation in the novel serves the purpose of creating a discussion on the problems of their idolisations as the great geniuses of the Romantic era. The novel destroys the images of these poets and shows them in their weakened situations to present them as human beings who have their own faults. Bysshe makes his friend's sister Harriet sick when he tries to educate her. When he loses his wife, Bysshe does not attempt to raise his daughter

on his own but leaves her to his wife's relatives, from whom he originally tried to save Harriet. This situation also creates a parallelism between him and Victor. Victor is also a figure who cannot take responsibility for his child/creation and, ultimately, his own dark psyche. Byron is not depicted as a sentimental character like Bysshe, but rather a vulgar and short-tempered one. He psychologically torments those who are near to him like his doctor, Polidori. Bysshe is depicted as a sentimental man who acts on his whims and damages the lives of people without realizing. The novel consciously depicts these romantic figures as flawed characters in order to decentralise their central positions as cultural icons.

Bysshe, like Victor, is also presented as a character who seems to have great aspirations for the world. His political ideals show that he is a man who stands for the underprivileged. He is in a revolutionary movement, and tries to educate Harriet, his future wife, who comes from a lower-class family. After his first attempt to educate Harriet, she gets sick from being overly stimulated. It signifies a problem in their relationship. Shelley's idealism harms Harriet, someone who comes from an underprivileged class. It does not signify that Shelley's ideals harm the lower classes, but it shows that Shelley himself, a prophetic poet, is harmful to them without him realising it. He stands for them, but he is unaware of their sufferings. From a house with many poor people, he just chooses Harriet to educate. His actions are careless and not well-planned. In that manner, he is similar to Victor. Victor also wants to change the world by creating a new man who will embrace the idea of a perfect and just world. He explains this to the Creature, "My purpose was benign. I had hoped to create a being of infinite benevolence. One in whom the forces of nature would have worked together to awaken a new spiritual being. I believed in the perfectibility of mankind—" (p. 253). Bysshe Shelley's idealism echoes that of Victor's and vice versa. Victor wants to create a perfect human being, while Shelley wants to have a perfect society. However, they both fail because of their short sightedness regarding their self-perceptions. Shelley echoes the irresponsible father figure of Victor when he decides to leave his daughter with her aunts in the very house from where he previously wanted to save Harriet. Victor wants to become a god and create life gaining dominance over life and death. Ironically, he does not have any control over himself. Shelley wants to create a perfect society, or reform and educate the society, while ironically, he is unable to raise his own child.

The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein as a rewriting of a 19th century novel does not satirise or parodies its hypotext. It rather expands its arguments on ethics and on the idea of power that is bestowed on the central figures. The novel's rewriting of Victor Frankenstein's character reimagines him as a Romantic artist and brings forth the issue of his place in the social hierarchy, implicating that his Romantic characterisation is deeply connected with his social position. The novel shows the dangers of idolisation of genius figures by exposing and narrating the shortcomings of prominent literary figures like Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron, who are conventionally regarded as Romantic geniuses, much like Victor himself. By using the character of Victor Frankenstein, Ackroyd visualises a semi-romantic artist who aspires to conquer great heights while failing to perceive his own shortcomings. Depicting these figures as geniuses who show great promise and focus on their lack of self-perception, the novel criticises the grandiose attitude of trying to change the world while avoiding any self-criticism. By decentring the central genius figure, the novel also undermines the regime of truth of early 19th century England, which itself produces these figures. In conclusion, *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* is a postmodern rewriting of a modern Promethean myth that undermines the presupposed notions concerning the idolised persons by reflecting their fallacies on a caricaturised semi-romantic genius. It shows that the emergences of these central figures are not coincidental, but products of regimes of truths that are produced in society.

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