

VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN'S PSYCHOLOGICAL CONFLICT IN FRANKENSTEIN (2025): A FREUDIAN PSYCHOANALYTIC ANALYSIS

Cintania Dharma Brillianta¹, Rafika Zahra², Novia Diah Lestari³
Universitas Gunadarma, Depok, Indonesia^{1,2,3}

cintaniabrillianta@gmail.com¹, rafiikaza@gmail.com²,
noviadihlestarti@staff.gunadarma.ac.id³

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Abstract

This study analyzes the personality structure, which consists of the Id, Ego, and Superego, as well as the psychological conflict of Victor Frankenstein in Guillermo del Toro's film adaptation *Frankenstein* (2025), based on Mary Shelley's 1818 novel. Using a descriptive-qualitative approach within Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, the analysis examines 16 selected scenes comprising verbal utterances and visual elements that reflect Victor's psychological conflict, chosen for decision-making moments and emotional distress. The results show that Victor's psychological conflict derives from a severe imbalance among his desires and principal pleasure (Id), rational considerations (Ego), and moral responsibilities (Superego). Particularly, the Id emerges as the most dominant structure, supported by 12 out of 16 analyzed data points showing immediate gratification over ethical consequences, which ultimately drives his fear, regret, and psychological suffering. Meanwhile, the Ego and Superego represent only two data points each, indicating their inability to control his instinctual impulses. This study contributes to film analysis by showing how Freudian psychoanalysis can effectively uncover psychological conflict in modern film adaptations.

Keywords—film, psychological conflict, Sigmund Freud, psychoanalysis, personality structure

Introduction

Literature is often used to convey ideas, experiences, feelings, and concepts through language. Furthermore, literary works can be used as a medium to depict the realities of human life, such as morality, social conflict, and even the psychological conditions individuals experience. Psychoanalysis goes beyond the boundaries of medicine or psychology; it provides understanding of philosophy, culture, religion, and especially literature (Hossain, 2017). Nowadays, literature has evolved not only in writing but also in visual forms, such as film. It is a type of visual literature presented in a different dimension, containing elements such as images, sound, and even character expressions that can be seen directly in the story.

As a visual medium, film provides a unique perspective to examine human behavior and mental states through psychological frameworks (Metz, 1982). One of the most frequently used and influential psychoanalytic theories in literary studies is the theory pioneered by Sigmund Freud. Freud explained that there are three main structures of the human personality: the Id, the Ego, and the Superego. The Id is an instinctual drive operating below the principle of pleasure that seeks to satisfy instinctual desires and provide instant gratification. The Ego functions as a mediator between internal desires and external reality. Meanwhile, the Superego is connected to moral standards and societal values (Freud, 1989).

Analyzing psychological conflict becomes particularly convincing in film adaptations of

classic Gothic literature. In *Frankenstein* (2025) by Guillermo del Toro, which is adapted from Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, it gives a recent psychological depth compared to earlier adaptations. Whereas previously film versions often focus primarily on horror tropes or the monster's monstrosity, *Frankenstein's* (2025) adaptation shifts the thematic weight toward the root of Victor Frankenstein's psychological conflict, particularly his unresolved developmental trauma resulting from severe authoritarian parenting by his father and maternal loss. Driven by an obsessive desire to defeat death and exceed his father's authority, Victor's psychological imbalance drives his reckless creation of the creature and his subsequent abuse of it. This particular adaptation presents a nuanced visual portrayal of how repressed childhood trauma triggers an uncontrollable Id, thereby suppressing rational mediation (Ego) and moral responsibility (Superego).

Previous research have widely applied Freud's psychoanalytic framework to examine character personality in film. For instance, Lestari et al. (2026) explored the dominance of the Id in Bella Baxter's character in *Poor Things* film, demonstrating how instinctual drives form emotional responses and decision-making. Similarly, Marcelina & Juanda (2025) analyzed the interaction of the Id, Ego, and Superego in *John Wick* (2014) film, illustrating how revenge acts as an Id impulse mediated by a determined Ego. Furthermore, Loway & Nurochman (2023) demonstrated the Id's primary role in character Kat Stratford's dynamics within the teen-comedy film *10 Things I Hate About You*.

A significant research gap remains, though there has been extensive research on Freudian psychoanalysis in film. Existing studies primarily focus on the action, comedy, or coming-of-age genres, which often treat personality structures as static traits rather than dynamic responses to deep-seated childhood trauma. Furthermore, no research has yet examined Guillermo del Toro's 2025 adaptation of *Frankenstein*, which uniquely recontextualizes the classic gothic trope through modern cinematic portrayals of psychological conflict. To fill this gap, this research examines the following research question: How are the Id, Ego, and Superego structured through Victor Frankenstein's psychological conflicts in the film *Frankenstein* (2025)? Thus, this research aims to analyze the personality structures of the Id, Ego, and Superego as reflected in Victor Frankenstein's psychological conflicts, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the application of psychoanalysis in modern cinematic gothic adaptations.

Literature Review

Literary psychology provides as an interdisciplinary approach that views creative works as representations of psychological phenomena (Endraswara, 2008). It recognizes that fictional narratives portray the complex inner worlds, emotional states, and behavioral motivations of human beings through characterization (Zhang, 2023). Within this framework, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis provides a specific theoretical model to deconstruct these psychological dynamics. Freud posited that the human psyche is divided into the conscious mind, which adapts to external reality, and the unconscious mind, which harbors repressed desires, primal instincts, and unresolved conflicts (Suryabrata, 2011). These dynamics are then depicted through the interaction between the Id, Ego, and Superego, the three personality structures that influence human thoughts, behavior, and feelings. In modern film adaptations, such as Guillermo del Toro's *Frankenstein* (2025), psychological depth is enhanced by juxtaposing narrative perspectives and visual storytelling, allowing the audience to engage with the characters' internal struggles on a more realistic and compelling level (Zhang, 2023).

Freud (1989) structured the human personality into three interacting components: the Id, the Ego, and the Superego. The Id or the fundamental is unconscious component present from birth, governed entirely by the pleasure principle. It contains biological drives, aggressive instincts, and uninhibited desires seeking immediate gratification regardless of moral or social consequences (Hossain, 2017; Shen, 2024). The Ego or the pragmatic is conscious structure operating on the reality principle. It acts as a mediator, regulating mental activity to satisfy the Id's instinctual demands in socially acceptable ways while accommodating the moral boundaries enforced by the Superego (Shen, 2024; Suryabrata, 2011). Also, the Superego or the moral compass of the personality is perating on the perfection principle. Developed through social interactions and paternal internalization, the Superego enforces ethical standards, moral

constraints, and feelings of guilt, actively suppressing the instinctual impulses of the Id (Shen, 2024). These three structures are interconnected and interact to influence an individual's feelings, thoughts, and behavior. The ego, in a balanced psychological state, serves as a mediator among the drives of the id, the demands of reality, and the moral standards of the superego. If one personality structure is more dominant, it can cause internal conflict and psychological imbalance in the individual.

The film *Frankenstein* (2025) is adapted from Mary Shelley’s 1818 novel. Several aspects require close examination during the film’s production, one of which is the psychological portrayal of the main character, Victor Frankenstein. However, this latest film adaptation varies significantly from the original work. The director, Guillermo de Torro has made the film more dramatic and refined the narrative from two points of view: Victor Frankenstein and the creature. Psychological aspects can be highly effective in establishing a character’s inner world, forming an effective psychological foundation for character development. This allows screenwriters to better present the inner lives and desires of their characters to the audience. As the audience can more easily connect with the messages conveyed by the characters, they will perceive the characters as more realistic, and the storyline will become more realistic and captivating (Zhang, 2023).

Research Method

This study employs a descriptive-qualitative method. Qualitative methods are particularly effective for examining phenomena within their natural, contextual settings and for interpreting complex human behaviors and psychological states (Fadli, 2021). The primary data source is the film *Frankenstein* (2025), directed, written, and adapted by Guillermo del Toro, with a runtime of approximately 150 minutes and released on the streaming platform Netflix. Two types of data were analyzed: verbal data, consisting of Victor Frankenstein's utterances extracted from the official subtitles, and visual data, including Victor’s expressions that convey emotional and psychological conflict. Data selection employed a purposive sampling strategy based on specific psychological criteria. If they met at least one of the following scene were included: (1) decision-making scenes in which Victor faces critical choices between instinctual desires and logical reasoning or ethical boundaries; (2) emotional distress and trauma scenes depicting intense emotional friction, violent outbursts, unresolved grief, or visible psychological distress deriving from childhood trauma; and (3) internal conflict scenes showing explicit contradictions between Victor’s spoken statements and his bodily or facial expressions (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025). ata collection followed a systematic four-stage process: (1) multiple frequent viewings of the film to get the narrative arc, identify key scenes, and transcribe Victor Frankenstein’s dialogue verbatim with accurate timestamps; (2) capturing high-resolution screenshots of relevant scenes to document visual indicators such as Victor’s expressions; (3) coding each identified data unit using Freudian scheme, categorizing utterances or actions as driven by raw ambition, aggressive impulses, grief, or immediate gratification (Id), behavior demonstrating deliberate planning, logical reasoning, or adaptation to external reality (Ego), and utterances or visual postures expressing guilt, moral self-reproach, ethical hesitation, or awareness of social or paternal responsibility (Superego); and (4) ensuring analytical reliability by having coding conducted independently by the researchers and subsequently cross-examined through peer debriefing until complete agreement on data categorization was achieved (Syed & Nelson, 2015).

Results

A systematic psychoanalytic analysis of Guillermo del Toro’s *Frankenstein* (2025) film identified 16 data points, including verbal utterances and visual data, which were categorized according to Sigmund Freud’s personality structure (Id, Ego, and Superego). These results are presented in the table below.

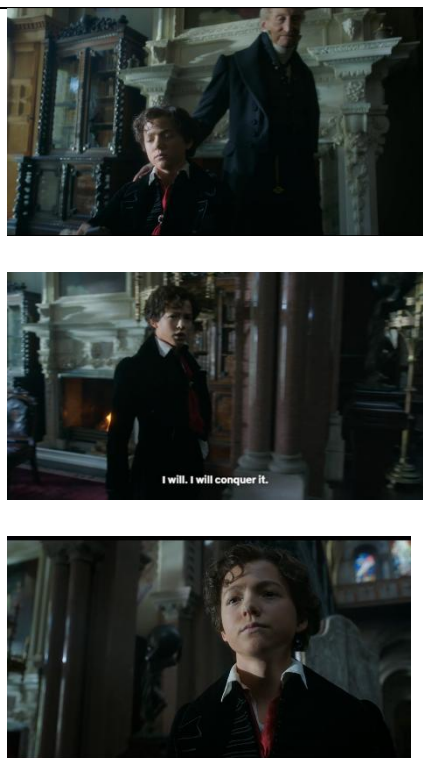
Table 1. The Personality Structures of Victor Frankenstein

No	Personality Structures	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Primary Psychological Conflict
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1	Id	12	75%	Childhood trauma, ambition, erotic, emotional gratification.
2	Ego	2	12,5%	Reality mediation, survival, decision-making under reality constraints
3	Superego	2	12,5%	Reconciliation, spiritual subsystem
Total		16	100%	

The following table presents representative data points for each of the three personality structures, integrating timestamps and utterances, and visual description:

Data 1: Id represents as childhood trauma and ambition

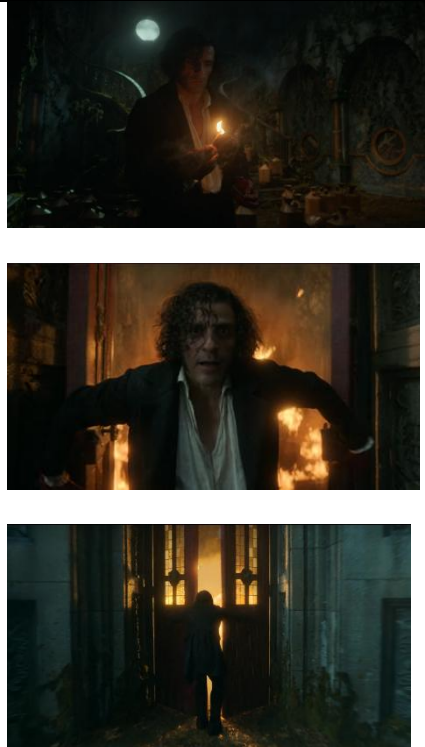
Visual Data	Time and Utterance	Visual Description	Category
	18.54.00— 19.04.00 “I will. I will conquer it. Everything you know, I will know. And more.”	A young Victor stands before his father’s study fireplace. High-contrast side lighting highlights his rigid posture and intense gaze, conveying his internal resistance and repressed anger after his mother’s death.	Id

Data 2: Id represents as erotic or emotional gratification

Visual Data	Time and Utterance	Visual Description	Category
	44.12.00— 44.32.00 “Laughter! And for the very first time, I became more interested in life and	Golden ballroom lights illuminate the scene as the camera follows Victor and Elizabeth as they dance together. Victor focuses solely on Elizabeth, oblivious to etiquette and unaware of	Id

	somewhat less interested in death.”	his brother William’s silent distress.	

Data 3: Ego represents as reality mediation and survival

Visual Data	Time and Utterance	Visual Description	Category
	1.24.49— 1.26.58 “Say one word. One word more. Anything. Make me save you.”	Victor is depicted standing in a doorway framed by a raging fire. His disheveled hair, smoke-stained face, and wide eyes illustrate a sudden transition from violent rage as he destroys the laboratory to rational hesitation upon hearing the creature call his name.	Ego

Data 4: Ego represents as decision-making under reality constraints

Visual Data	Time and Utterance	Visual Description	Category
	09.01.00— 09.30.00 “It will come back... for me. And when it does, you must promise that	Subdued blue daylight enters through a circular, frost-covered ship window. Victor, wounded and pale, maintains steady eye contact with the captain, suggesting a composed	Ego

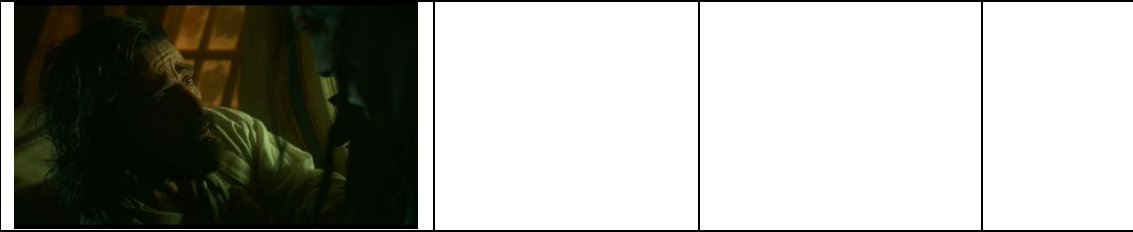
	you will put me out on the ice and let it take me. Please.”	and analytical assessment of the immediate physical environment and possible threats.	
			

Data 5: Superego represents as spiritual subsystem

Visual Data	Time and Utterance	Visual Description	Category
 	12.10.00—12.26.00 “Guardian angel. Sweet companion. Stand by my side and do not leave me. Under your mantle, shelter me, and...”	A young Victor kneeling in a vast, dark chamber before an angel statue. His clasped hands in prayer, illuminated by soft candlelight, visually emphasize his adherence to moral ideals, filial submission, and apprehension of divine judgment.	Superego

Data 6: Superego represents as reconciliation

Visual Data	Time and Utterance	Visual Description	Category
 	2.16.55—2.17.41 “Forgive me. My son. And if you have it in your heart, forgive yourself into existence. If death is not to be, then consider this, my son. While you are alive, what recourse do you have but to live?”	Victor reaching out with trembling hands to touch the creature’s face, tears streaming down his cheeks. This visual composition signifies the complete abandonment of defensive psychological barriers in favor of authentic moral accountability.	Superego



Discussion

The results indicate a significant imbalance in Victor Frankenstein’s psychological conflict, as evidenced by the twelve Id data points. Recent film analyses contend that the prominence of the Id in Guillermo del Toro's *Frankenstein* (2025) represents not only a numerical trend but also a central narrative element, influenced by childhood trauma, grief, and paternal relationships.

1. The Id as a defense mechanism against grief and paternal conflict

Victor’s Id impulse, primarily manifested through an unyielding obsession with conquering death (Data 1), operates according to what Freud terms the pleasure principle. (Abdullah, 2026)observes that Victor’s compulsive drive to mortality serves as a pathological defense mechanism, allowing him to disavow the painful reality of his mother’s death. His declaration, *"I will conquer it... Everything you know, I will know. And more,"* reflects an intense desire to overcome his distant, authoritarian father and assert his own agency. Instead of navigating his loss through healthy mourning, Victor’s Id channels his unresolved grief and emotional distress into an obsessive pursuit of creation (OULAM, 2024). In similar, Data 2 demonstrates how Victor’s relationship with Elizabeth reflects the Id’s amoral pursuit of immediate gratification. Motivated by instinctual longing and an unconscious search for a maternal substitute, Victor disregards broader family dynamics and societal expectations (Wotherspoon, 2025). Contend that the Id recognizes no moral constraints and demands immediate satisfaction, irrespective of external consequences (Feist et al., 2021; Lestari et al., 2026).

2. The limited mediation of the Ego

According to classical psychoanalytic theory, the Ego serves as the executive branch of personality, mediating between the primitive demands of the Id, the moral imperatives of the Superego, and the constraints imposed by external reality (Feist et al., 2021; Freud, 1989). In *Frankenstein* (2025), Victor’s Ego is frequently subordinated to his Id. After Victor creates an unsightly, non-verbal being, his first reaction is violent frustration. This shows an Id-driven urge to get rid of what he sees as evidence of his failure. In Data 3, when the creature calls his name, Victor’s Ego momentarily reasserts itself with the statement, *"Say one word. One word more. Anything. Make me save you."* This brief, logical assessment can hold back the destructive impulse for a while, but it does not stop disaster in the end. Victor's ego functions in an organized manner only when confronted with the imminent threat of death aboard the icebound ship (Data 4). Upon recognizing the genuine danger posed by the creature to the crew, Victor calmly instructs the captain to surrender him, prioritizing objective facts over his instinct for self-preservation. This pattern indicates that Victor's ego is not inactive, but rather subordinate to the id. Situationally, his rational abilities emerge, often as a consequence of manifesting impulsive drives. Therefore, Victor's id dominance is evident in his actions based on ambition, desire, and emotional responses before considering the consequences of his actions. Furthermore, the ego plays a limited role and is not the primary controller of his behavior.

3. Transformation of the Superego

Victor’s Superego undergoes significant transformation throughout the film. In his youth (Data 5), it is closely associated with religious symbols and strict obedience to his father, as indicated by the phrase "Guardian angel..." Shen (2024)notes that the early Superego internalizes external social rules and moral values. Following Victor’s act of creation, his latent fears manifest as anxiety that his "Guardian Angel" has become a judgmental "Dark Angel." Victor’s internal

conflict reaches its peak at the narrative's climax (Data 6). Confronting the dying Creature, Victor relinquishes both resentment and self-preservation. By addressing the creature as "My son" and seeking forgiveness, Victor enables his conscience and ideals to attain genuine morality. He acknowledges his shortcomings as both creator and father, ultimately resolving his internal struggle through empathy and acceptance of responsibility rather than resorting to violence or denial.

Conclusion

The psychological conflict experienced by Victor Frankenstein in Guillermo del Toro's *Frankenstein* (2025) originates from an imbalance among the Id, Ego, and Superego. Victor's actions are predominantly driven by the Id, inflamed by unchecked ambition, unresolved childhood grief, and a desire to surpass his father. He consistently pursues immediate gratification, especially through his fixation on overcoming death and exerting control over creation. Victor's psychological conflict and eventual defeat arise from the Ego's failure to mediate these Id-driven impulses with reality, further exacerbated by the delayed maturation of his Superego's moral framework.

This research explores psychoanalytic film studies by offering a new interpretation of Victor Frankenstein in modern films. Rather than seeing Victor only as a typical "mad scientist" or distant thinker, the analysis shows that his arrogance comes from emotional vulnerability, especially grief after his mother's death and trauma from his father's violence. Several analytical limitations are present in this study. The analysis is restricted to the protagonist, Victor Frankenstein, and does not include a comprehensive psychoanalytic examination of other characters. The research is limited to Guillermo del Toro's *Frankenstein* (2025) film adaptation and does not provide direct comparisons with Mary Shelley's 1818 novel or previous film versions. Furthermore, the analysis is based exclusively on classical Freudian theory, omitting consideration of modern Lacanian or trauma-based approaches. Given these limitations, future research should broaden the scope of psychoanalytic film. Subsequent studies might investigate the intersubjective psychological dynamics between Victor and the creature, specifically analyzing how mutual trauma, rejection, and isolation influence their shared narrative arc. Comparative adaptation studies that explore the transitions from Shelley's literary source text to 21st-century film versions could provide valuable insights into changing cultural anxieties regarding creation and morality. Additionally, employing alternative theoretical frameworks, such as Lacanian psychoanalysis or contemporary trauma theory, may yield deeper critical perspectives on the representation of grief, identity, and moral failure in modern cinematic horror.

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