Chapter 5

Conclusion

It is evident that in Mary Shelley's early nineteenth century novel, *Frankenstein* and Branagh's film of Frankenstein (1995) representations of women are different due to the different socio-historical contexts and media. I have examined representations of women both in the novel and the film in three areas: motherhood, desire and science. My study has attempted to expose the extent to which women's roles are limited in the two texts. I have examined three main areas of influence in this regard: the biographical contexts, the socio-historical contexts of the texts' production, and certain characteristics of their respective media. In this final chapter, I will briefly review the main points from each of the preceding chapters before presenting an overview and finally making suggestions for further research.

Summary of Conclusions

1. Representations of Women in Relation to Motherhood

My study has shown that the personal backgrounds of the author and the director, certain patriarchal values in the nineteenth and the late twentieth century, as well as women's roles more specifically in the literary society and the film industry all contribute to the marginalization of life-giving and nurturing mothers in the two texts. Shelley's and Branagh's personal experience contributed, though differently, to their representations of women in relation to motherhood. Shelley had mostly negative experiences of motherhood as a daughter whose mother died a few days after giving her birth and as a woman herself unsuccessful in giving birth. These biographical facts may be considered as possible reasons, at least in part, for the insufficiency of representations of motherhood in the novel. Reflecting her own background, most of Shelley's characters are created without mothers (Walton, Margaret and the cottagers) or with mothers who died very early in their children's

lives (Elizabeth and William). Consequently, there are few and only vague images of women as life-givers and nurturers in the novel. Furthermore, Shelley's personal background as a motherless daughter might have influenced her to make fathers in the novel central to advancing the plot, becoming surrogate mothers for their children (Alphonse and the old blind man). Although Frankenstein, the most significant "father", does not complete his role in taking care of the monster, his fatherhood is the main focus of the story.

Branagh also had a negative experience of the dangers concerning natural childbirth, so such an experience might have influenced him in presenting in his film how natural human reproduction might be fatally harmful to humans. By contrast, his pleasant childhood might have made him better attend to positive images of maternal care and women's significance. As he personally had a positive perception of maternal care and love as well as familial relationships, he added scenes presenting positive images of maternal care and happiness in a family, indirectly reminding the audience of women's significance.

Yet, apart from biographical factors, social organization and beliefs current in the society in which an author or a director lives must also affect their works. The representations of women in relation to motherhood in the novel, therefore, could also be seen to be influenced by patriarchal values in the nineteenth century concerning middle-class women's function as nurturing mothers. Women in the nineteenth century were expected to be ideal mothers and wives, 'the angels in the house', taking care of family members' physical and mental wellbeing. Produced in a society with such a belief, a novel is more likely to present female characters with such qualities (Caroline and Elizabeth). Characterized in such a way, women in some respect are presented positively, but the few positive portrayals of women as nurturers do not entirely improve representations of women as they ultimately imply women's subordination to men.

My research found that several critics (Basow (1986), Unger (1992), Allen (1993) and Hoffnung (1996)) combined historical and biographical contexts, attributing Shelley's hesitancy here, as well as her development of a plot around the

notion of an alternative method of human creation, to her failure to become a mother in a society that considered this the primary function of women. Furthermore, the absent and dead mothers in the novel can be viewed as reflecting a literary tendency in the nineteenth century that would reach its peak in the Victorian period. It is found that literature during that time often made mothers invisible (Dever, 1992). Shelley's novel is believed to be both determined by and contributing to that tendency.

The persistence of patriarchal values in the late twentieth century likewise influenced representations of motherhood in the film. The rise of feminist movements, a crucial social change around that time, made women pay more attention to their rights and their images in the media, and to a limited degree their efforts achieved success, as seen in changes concerning female characters in television and in films, including Branagh's *Frankenstein*. This is most clearly reflected in Branagh's adding the scene of giving birth, reminding the audience of women's significance, although the original novel did not so directly represent women's role as life-givers. The feminist movements may also have indirectly effected some unintentional changes in representations of women as nurturers in the film. In making women increasingly attend to equal rights in western societies, feminism changed women's attitudes towards their traditional roles in the family. More women refused to marry and to have children. Eventually, by the 1990s, there was a reaction in popular media against the perceived threat to the family posed by feminism, and the film seems to indirectly reveal that social anxiety. We can speculate that its added scenes praising maternal care and family warmth, with ideal mothers possessing the maternal instinct and dedicated to taking care of others reflect a nostalgia for a time when gendered family roles were simpler and more comfortable. Motherhood in the film, then, seems to be made significant, but in the end, it dramatically disappears and has little impact.

Consequently, although Branagh's positive experience and the rise of feminism made some improvement in representations of women in the film, women are ultimately limited to certain stereotypes of domesticity, reflecting the perpetuation of women's marginalization and male power in the mass media. I have noted that representations of women in both texts were influenced by men's control of the

artistic context – the literary society in Shelley's case and the film industry in Branagh's.

2. Representations of Women in Relation to Desire

My research has suggested that patriarchal values in the nineteenth century influenced representations of women in relation to desire in the novel, specifically in terms of objectification and the treatment of women's expressions of love. The novel can be seen to objectify women through the conventional male gaze. In the male gaze, an expression of male power, men are the observers while women are the "watched." Women's value, then, is indirectly identified with their physical appearance. The objectification of women was also indirectly influenced by women's limited education under the control of men. Having limited education, women tended to have limited active roles, allowing them to be constructed from a male perspective as aesthetic objects serving men's desire. Female characterization in the novel - Elizabeth, Agatha and Safie – reflects this broader social value. Women are physically described, but there is no information about their intellect. Shelley's novel also shows how social constructions concerning women's objectification may be transmitted across generations and even be internalized by women.

A patriarchal social system and values, stereotyping women as listeners would seem to be one likely reason for the general absence and silence of female characters in Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Margaret, the addressee at the beginning of the novel, is completely silent, serving only as the audience for Walton's narration. Elizabeth and Justine are not as totally silent as Margaret, but they are made silent in terms of arguing for themselves. Both of them remain largely possessive just to take revenge on Frankenstein and without voices until ultimately silenced as the victims of a male conflict.

Patriarchal values in the nineteenth century also influenced the presentation of romantic love in the novel. Male power in the literary society of the time forced Shelley to narrate her novel completely through males so that romantic love must also

be presented from male points of view, thus favoring men's practical instrumental concept of love over women's expressive love. Through male narration, women's feelings and love become largely passive, indirect and distant, and utterly subordinate to men's success.

Similarly, social values in the late twentieth century must have affected representations of women in the film. Despite feminism, male power in the patriarchal society at that time perpetuated the objectification of women in film through the male gaze, a process which happens to be uniquely adapted to the visual medium. Women in the film, then, became objects both in the eyes of male characters and in the eyes of cameras in men's hands. Representations of women in the film (Elizabeth, Justine, Caroline and Justine's aunt) reflect the continuation of women's limited stereotypes in terms of physical appearance. Moreover, the suicide of Elizabeth when she becomes ugly reinforces the strong identification of women with their visual image.

Again, the continuation of patriarchal values in the society influenced limited representations of women's love in the film. Late twentieth century feminism may have increased the capacity for female characters to express love, since Shelley's novel. However, women in the film are still portrayed within limited domestic areas. Male desire is presented as superior to women's love and women's stereotypical romantic love also indirectly implies their subordination to men. Romance, though indirectly devaluing women, remains popular and influential. Thus, although there have been great changes in social beliefs concerning women's right and abilities in the twentieth century, the popular film medium has tended to perpetuate male power through limited depictions of female desire.

3. Representations of Women in Relation to Science

Science has been a factor in western societies since the industrial revolution, but in the different historical contexts of the early nineteenth and the late twentieth centuries, its significance was not the same. This affected representations of women in

relation to science in the two texts. Shelley's discussion of science might imply women's participation in this field of knowledge. However, her use of male narrators while referring to science reflects male control of science in her patriarchal society. Shelley was a woman with much scientific knowledge, but it is notable that she did not express her own knowledge through female characters. Female characters in the novel reveal no scientific interest. This could be seen to expose Shelley's need to understate females' scientific capacities. It seems likely that this is because western patriarchal societies in the nineteenth century did not readily accept women expressing their ideas and abilities directly in most fields. Shelley's 'hidden authorship' reveals a female writer's strategy in relation to this problem.

The limited opportunities and roles of women in relation to scientific endeavor are likewise presented in the film, and are even more explicit, although women by the late twentieth century had more opportunities and their abilities were somewhat more accepted. Branagh's Frankenstein, in representing male scientists, treats women practically as outsiders, observers and merely as intruders on men's scientific work. While the film can here be seen to follow the novel, as a non-realist text and one that in fact does not follow the original text completely, this argument is not completely convincing. Thus, Branagh's *Frankenstein* can be seen to continue the tendency to divorce women from science. The novel and the film, here, similarly present the marginalization of women from scientific endeavors in male-dominated society.

My study found that both the novel and the film might be viewed as implicitly conveying women's perspective and social anxieties concerning possible negative consequences of destructive science on women and, significantly, on society as a whole. In order to avoid a direct gender confrontation, both texts work indirectly to criticize the potential excesses of science. In the novel, Shelley presents her critique through a woman/nature connection, implying possible negative consequences of male domination of science through the effects of science on nature. Women and nature are presented as the critical 'others' of male-dominated science.

Similarly, the film has the woman/nature connection indirectly expose the global interest of some negative effects of destructive science, in case of the film,

advanced genetic science, on society, particularly on women. In the film, women are presented as close to nature with a similar position as roots of lives and happiness. The strength of this idea in the film may reflect the influence of essentialist feminist, focusing on women's fundamental connection to nature.

The novel and the film also have male characters - Frankenstein, Walton and the monster - criticize possible negative consequences of destructive male science, but the monster is the most crucial. In the novel, the monster, a victim of male scientific ambition rejected by society and its own creator, is presented as close to nature. He criticizes Frankenstein's scientific ambition and his irresponsibility and describes how a human might be affected by such a scientific experiment. Certain critics (Hindle (1991) and Florescu (1996)) have argued that the monster speaks for Shelley and women as well as nature here.

In the film, as in the novel, the monster is presented as 'the other' of male science. The film relates the monster to nature through uniquely filmic techniques. Importantly, the monster is also related to women by being characterized with feminine qualities. Yet, as a male, he has the freedom to speak directly and Branagh utilizes this quality in making him explicitly criticize male science, seemingly expressing a "feminine" anxiety.

The two texts present what might be considered a "feminine" perspective on possible negative consequences of science not only through the woman/nature connection, but also through the tragic plot. Everyone concerned with the ambitious scientific experiment dies, seemingly to expose that male scientific ambition may endanger human lives, including the innocent, who are usually female. The tragic plot in the film seems to work more effectively in this respect by having Elizabeth suicide. The scene creates great emotional impact and presents women's dissatisfaction with male science. Thus, the novel and the film similarly suggest that male scientific ambition, a form of aggressive masculinity, might endanger society, but neither mentions directly how feminine qualities might solve those problems. Here, they can be seen to avoid openly debating women's issues.

Overview

The original novel reflects how an author's background amid patriarchal values could influence a woman's literary work in the early nineteenth century. In relation to the issues of motherhood and female desire, in particular, it was found that biographical factors may have been an influence, but that socio-historical factors relating to the position of women were especially important. In relation to the issue of science, my study also exposed certain strategies that a female author might consciously or unconsciously employ to criticize male-dominated enterprises. These include using conventional beliefs concerning a special connection between women and nature, and the use of male characters to speak for her to avoid making her own work unacceptable to the male-dominated society.

The film utilizes similar indirect techniques to express social anxieties concerning some possible negative consequences of human scientific advancement, especially genetic science, a special concern in the late twentieth century.

However, as the film was produced in a different time, its situation is naturally changed. Representations of women in the film are also determined by the director's background and patriarchal values, but there are some changes possibly due to the rise of feminism in the twentieth century. Nevertheless, my study reveals that representations of women in relation to motherhood, desire and science, here, though made in a different socio-historical context and presented through a different medium, are somewhat limited. Women in the film are similarly presented in restricted domestic areas, subordinate to men, objectified, and distant from scientific endeavor. I have found that this can *only in part* be explained by the eighteenth setting of the film.

Male values were powerful in the nineteenth century English literary society and continued to be dominant in the late twentieth century film industry. I have found that these values contributed significantly to the way women were presented in the two texts I have studied.

Suggestions for Further Study

This study focuses on the roles of female characters in the texts, which to some extent reflect the roles of women more generally in the societies in which the texts were produced. While studying these texts, I found the following significant issues, outside the scope of my thesis, which might be usefully studied:

1. Male characters both in the novel and the film are central to advancing the plot, but some aspects of their characteristics and roles in the novel were changed in the film, possibly to meet certain demands of modern popular film production. Studying changes in males' roles in these two texts might provide interesting insights concerning representations of men and concepts of masculinity in general.

2. There are various films concerning Frankenstein and even the bride of Frankenstein. Unfortunately, these films were not available for the present study. Further research might usefully compare the various film versions in terms of the same issues that I have examined here: motherhood, desire and science.

3. A comparative study of Asian and American films dealing with men's or women's situations with respect to reproductive engineering would provide significant insights concerning reactions to biotechnological advances across cultures.

4. A broader survey of females in films would be useful right now in the 'post-feminist' period.