Chapter 2

Representations of Women in Relation to Motherhood

> Mother is one of the most fundamental archetypes of woman. The voices of Western society, expressed in proverbs, religious teachings, and the writings of psychiatrists and psychologists, tell us that motherhood is women's ultimate source of power and fulfillment. (Unger and Crowford, 1992 : 401)

Motherhood has traditionally been central to the stereotyping of women in western cultures. Traditionally, women were expected to become mothers. Today, though some women choose to be child-free, motherhood is still considered a primary role for them due to their biology. Shalala (1995 : 261) observes that "Motherhood is a central issue to women everywhere: whether we are, intend to be, or intend not to be mothers ourselves." Women are believed to be the most significant factors in the raising of children, "The motherhood mystique suggests that children need full-time care provided by their biological mothers and that women are uniquely suited to provide such care" (Unger and Crowford, 1992 : 405). It is suggested that mothers who give birth to their children are the most appropriate people to bring up the offspring, and that their children also prefer only their mothers' full care. Because of this belief, women are considered to be especially connected with human life, both as life-givers and the best nurturers.

In the original novel of *Frankenstein,* Frankenstein's attempt to take over the role of nature in creating life is directly and clearly related to the process of natural human reproduction. Given women's centrality in reproduction, Frankenstein's actions must affect women's roles, as well as feminine identity, in the story. Yet, because the story mainly talks about an experiment in the laboratory, the feelings of the male creator, and the consequences of the scientific endeavor, women's roles and feminine identity are not directly mentioned, and certainly not overtly portrayed as in danger.

The portrayals of women in relation to motherhood in Shelley's novel and Branagh's film of *Frankenstein* reveal significant differences. The present chapter, consequently, will analyze and compare the two works in terms of representations of the two major women's roles mentioned above - as life-givers and as nurturers. It will expose the factors influencing both texts in representing their ideas of motherhood and the likely factors determining the differences. This will entail analysis of the different historical contexts, as well as some biographical information, and examination of the unique characteristics of the two media, literature and cinema. This chapter will examine how and why feminine identity is largely neglected and women's roles are limited in both the novel and the film before presenting a brief overview and conclusions. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, media both reflect and create social conditions, so that to study women's issues and their portrayals in relation to motherhood will reveal a particular aspect of the relationships between the different media and feminine identity.

Representations of Motherhood in the Novel

Shelley's *Frankenstein* is the work of a woman, but its readers may actually experience it as a male creation because it is mostly narrated from male narrators' points of view. In this sense, issues concerning feminine identity are likely to be distorted or downplayed. As *Frankenstein* tells about a scientist attempting to create a man through a scientific experiment, the representations of motherhood presented in the novel must be affected. In this section, I will analyze the methods of representation of motherhood in Shelley's *Frankenstein* with regard to the two main roles of mothers – as life-givers (section 1) and as nurturers (section 2), including factors influencing those representations.

1. Mother as Life-giver

In analyzing representations of women as life-givers in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, I will examine Shelley's life and discuss some biographical and socio-

historical variables as well as literary factors influencing the portrayal of women in the life-giving role in the novel.

Research indicates that Shelley had crucial experiences concerning motherhood before and during her composition of *Frankenstein*. These incidents are believed to be influential factors determining Shelley's representations of mothers as life-givers in her novel. The following is a chronology of incidents in Mary Shelley's life that could be seen to relate directly to the issue of motherhood:

1797	(30 August) Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin born at the Polygon, Somers Town, daughter of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, *who dies ten days later*
1815	(February) A girl born prematurely to Mary and Percy Shelley, *but dies a few days later*
1816	(January) *A son, William, born*
1817	(May) *Frankenstein completed*

(*Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, 1992 : xix)

From this chronology, it is evident that Shelley faced terrible experiences concerning motherhood, both as a daughter whose mother died in giving birth and as a mother with a daughter who died after birth. Certainly, these events must have had some effects on her feelings and ideas about giving birth and motherhood. There are various sections in the story which may reflect the influence of such negative feelings. For example, Shelley gives her female protagonist, Elizabeth, a similar background to herself, having her mother die in giving birth. Caroline, Frankenstein's mother, too, has no mother in this story. Only her father is referred to. As mentioned, Elizabeth's mother died, in which respect Elizabeth is not much different from William, Frankenstein's brother, whose mother died when he too was in childhood.

Furthermore, it is also noticeable that Shelley does not create mothers for many of her characters, some of whom are presented as having been without mothers since they were born. This is, especially noticeable, for instance, in the sequence concerning the cottagers: "The youth and his companion had each of them several

names, but the old man had only one, which was father. The girl was called sister, or Agatha; and the youth Felix, brother or son" (Shelley, 1992 : 112). Shelley creates a family with various members - a father, a daughter and a son, but there is no information about a mother in this family. She gives the image of the familial relationship between father and child, but the mother is forgotten and hidden away. Several mothers die or are already dead in the novel - Caroline, Elizabeth's mother and Agatha's mother - creating a significant absence.

This absence may be a consequence of Shelley's life without a mother. Perhaps she did not get the maternal love and maternal care that would help her to create and convey that feeling of being taken care of by a mother in her story. Yarrington (1998) supports this view: "The death of Mary Wollstonecraft during Mary's birth robbed Mary of a maternal presence in her life." Moreover, before finishing this novel, Shelley herself had a chance to have a child, but it died a few days after birth. So it can be said that she did not experience the warmth of maternal love, or of motherhood, being disappointed in both areas. The troubles she had may have influenced her characterization of female characters, making it difficult for her to create an atmosphere or settings with a mother. Mothers are little mentioned and quite lost, so that Shelley's *Frankenstein* mostly concerns masculine ideas, desires and endeavors. Shelley's female characters might be praised as good ladies, as being kind, warm and as good housekeepers, but the problem is that she was unable to convey the significance of maternal behavior and presence.

Shelley's problems and her negative feelings about motherhood might have been aggravated by social norms concerning women's duty to have a child. Unger and Crowford (1992), discussing the motherhood mystique, as analyzed by Michelle Hoffnung (1989) and Ann Oakley (1974), describes the perceived social relationship between motherhood and feminine identity as follows: "Ultimate fulfillment as a woman is achieved through motherhood. Motherhood is a natural and necessary experience for all women… those who want to but cannot [be mothers] are fundamentally deprived" (Unger and Crowford, 1992 : 403). There is a pervasive belief that women who cannot have their own children are seriously lacking

something in their lives. This belief would probably have had some effect on English women in the early nineteenth century and their ideas about motherhood. Shelley was forced by social values to want to succeed in having a child. Unfortunately, she could not, so anxiety that she herself would not be accepted might have arisen from her failure in giving birth. Shalala (1995) thinks that the importance women attach to motherhood reflects women's desire to serve social values. She too notes widespread social prejudices about the relationship between feminine identity and motherhood: "Women learn from early childhood that we ought to want children, that motherhood is venerated, and that adult status is sure to be achieved with motherhood….Thus, motherhood may be a way of seeking social approval and acceptance" (Shalala, 1995 : 266). Shalala argues that women have been taught to understand that they ought to be mothers and that motherhood would fulfill their lives while providing them with social acceptance. Basow (1986) likewise emphasizes that it is not biology alone that forces women to serve the duty of motherhood, but social values. Feminists such as Jeffner Allen (1993 : 103) agree that motherhood is the product of social pressure placed on women: "Women are mothers because within patriarchy women have no choice except motherhood. Without the institution of motherhood women could and would live otherwise." Phoenix (1991) supports this view: "…desire for motherhood as entry to womanhood is not so much a biological desire to become pregnant and nurture a child, but an implicit recognition of apparent privilege unavailable to childless women…related to the patriarchal idealisation of women as mothers" (quoted in Nicolson, 1997 : 383). Both Phoenix (1991) and Allen (1993) agree that social values are a significant factor making a woman want to have a child. They think that women are not born with an aim to have a child, but social values in patriarchal societies make women understand that they are born to be good mothers and to respond appropriately to such duties.

Living in a patriarchal society with social norms requiring women to be mothers, Shelley, who was neither successful in childbirth nor satisfied by maternal care from a mother herself, would have suffered considerably. Yet she could not express her feelings and thoughts explicitly due to the limited opportunities for women to express their ideas at that time. However, she indirectly or implicitly

conveyed her feelings through male characters, above all through the protagonist, Victor Frankenstein. Shelley's deepest feelings towards her mother's death are perhaps displaced into Frankenstein's thought, conveyed by a first-person narrative that allows complete disclosure: "…My mother was dead, but we had still duties which we ought to perform; we must continue our course with the rest" (Shelley, 1992 : 43). Frankenstein seems to be indifferent to his mother's death. He is not very mournful in response to his mother's death and seems to be aggressively practical. His mother seems to be of little significance for him. However, this emotional lack can be interpreted in another way: his attitudes show his masculine need to behave as mentally strong and able to overcome the natural emotion of grief. Shelley might likewise have been sad in losing her mother, but she had to keep her feelings in her mind and continue her life in a patriarchal society that gave little value to familial sentiment.

Another part of this story possibly conveying Shelley's unconscious feelings towards her mother is Frankenstein's dream after the monster's birth:

> But it was in vain: I slept, indeed, but I was disturbed by the wildest dreams. I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form…
> (Shelley, 1992 : 58)

This nightmare could be seen to reveal that Frankenstein's loss of his mother is deeply in his mind. The same might be said of Shelley, who created this scene perhaps as an unconscious expression of her deepest feelings concerning her thwarted relationship with her mother. Frankenstein's and Shelley's feelings towards their mothers both come from the deepest fear and love. Later in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when people paid more attention to psychology, the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) would observe of the dreaming process in his *The Interpretation of Dreams (1922)* that people's dreams tend to be influenced by various factors. One of them is the activity of people's unconscious mind, motivated by the instincts and uninhibited by logic or reason (Hopkins, 1991). It might thus be argued that

Frankenstein's dream of his mother comes from his unconscious and deep need for his mother. Consequently, it might be said that Frankenstein is a character partly created from Shelley's own suppressed feelings about motherhood, conveying Shelley's deep feelings as one who lost her mother.

While Shelley's negative feelings about motherhood, influenced by her experience as a child whose mother died after giving birth, influence her characterization of Frankenstein, her grief as a mother whose baby died after birth might have influenced her creation of the monster. Florescu (1996), studying the sources of Shelley's ideas in composing *Frankenstein*, exposes the possible effect of Shelley's maternal grief on her notion of an artificially created man: "Indeed the pain experienced after the death of her first baby…may have helped prompt an interest in the idea of an artificial man" (Florescu, 1996 : 181). It is possible that the idea of an artificial man comes from Shelley's desire to reincarnate her dead infant child. Hindle (1991 : xv) also notes about the possible effects of Shelley's maternal suffering on her idea of an artificial man, "Some days after the baby died, Mary wrote in her journal: 'Dream that my little baby came to life again; that it had only been cold, and that we rubbed it before the fire, and it lived." She herself may unconsciously have wanted to bring her child back, and thus created Frankenstein in serving her own desire to manipulate life and overcome death. Jackson (1981 : 18) notes the following characteristic of fantasy, a genre of literature with which *Frankenstein* is often identified: "The fantastic is a compensation that man provides for himself, at the level of imagination, for what he has lost at the level of faith." Fantasy may allow its author, along with readers, to make up for the loss of certain comforts. This may be a factor influencing Shelley's fantasy of rebirth.

Yet Shelley has Frankenstein, a male, instead of Elizabeth or other females reproducing the monster and completing her desire. Frankenstein functions as the monster's father. Although he is not biologically father of the monster, he creates and brings the monster to life. Generally a father and a mother work together to create a complete human life, the father playing an important role in providing the sperm that fertilizes the female egg. Importantly, the mother continues the biological process by

taking care of the baby in her womb, providing flesh and blood, and life. However, in the monster's case, Frankenstein, as the "father," plays all important roles, so the traditional mother and motherhood become unnecessary and excluded. Consequently, the novel can be seen to express both the personal desires and suffering of a nineteenth century woman, as well as her anxieties concerning the future of motherhood in a society dominated by men.

There may also be literary-historical reasons contributing to the diminished roles of mothers in the novel. As Shelley had more opportunities to read various literary works, she might have acquired some ideas or styles of writing from those literary sources. Dever (1998), studying the relationship between death, mothers and representations of women in literature observes a significant characteristic of literary works during the Victorian period which might be in part responsible for the absence or the invisibility of mothers in Shelley's *Frankenstein*:

> To write a life, in the Victorian period, is to write the story of the loss of the mother. In the fiction and biography, autobiography and poetry, the organizational logic of lived experience extends, not from the moment of birth, but from the instant of that primal loss. (Dever, 1998 : 1)

Dever explores the idea that literary works from the Victorian period share a similarity in creating absent mothers. She thinks that the loss of mothers in those works might be influenced by the authors' loss of their own mothers. Although *Frankenstein* is not strictly a work of the Victorian period chronologically (1837-1901), it comes just before and can be seen to have been affected by the trend. It might even be one of the works that influenced the trend. Moreover, Dever gives a particular explanation for the absence or presence of mothers in Gothic novels, including Frankenstein: maternal death in Gothic novels is usually a mystery and becomes an immediate problem for a child, especially if the child is a daughter. Dever finds that in Gothic novels mothers are initially associated with safety or unity, so that their death would represent a big disaster or very bad luck to their children. Likewise, Caroline, the significant mother in *Frankenstein*, means safety, comfort and happiness to Frankenstein and other family members. After her death, bad events

gradually but continually come to her family, and happiness is lost. In this respect, the novel is at least in part reflecting literary trends in its treatment of motherhood.

Furthermore, Homans (1992 : 341-342), studying the presentation of mothers in *Wuthering Heights* (1847), remarks the possible influence of patriarchy on the absence of mothers in literary works:

> In virtually all of the founding texts of our culture we can find a version of this myth: the death or absence of the mother sorrowfully but fortunately makes possible the construction of language of culture…the absence or even murder of the mother is necessary for the founding of patriarchal culture is particularly evident in western myths of language.

Homans thinks that mothers in western literature are made absent to indirectly empower the western patriarchy. This might be a factor, then, in the formation of the language and culture in patriarchal society. Thus, Shelley's novel might also be considered as a part of the formation, being influenced, or even dominated by, the patriarchy.

Overall, then, although Shelley does not directly tell of her sufferings and fears concerning childbirth, or even her vision of motherhood, her story seems to convey them implicitly. It might be said that while she is not explicitly relating her life or her experience, her story is deeply concerned with motherhood and its relationship to feminine identity, revealing the influence of her own background and her resulting feelings and ideas about motherhood. Her suffering in failing to give birth were aggravated by social norms expecting women to have a child. In addition, the absence of mothers in the novel might also have been influenced to some extent by particular trends in literary works in western society when the novel was written.

2. Mother as Nurturer

While the story of *Frankenstein* may be driven to some extent by the absence of the biological mother, when women are presented in the novel it is often in a nurturing, and so 'motherly,' role. Traditionally in western culture, mothers not only

have been significant as life-givers, but have also been expected to be the primary nurturers of their children. Society has expected mothers to bring up good citizens who are both physically and mentally healthy. The present section will discuss the ways in which the novel represents mothers in this respect and will explain the possible influence here of Shelley's own background and broader nineteenth century social values concerning women's position as the nurturer.

As Shelley belonged to the middle class, her novel might be expected to present a middle-class woman's perspectives on women's role as nurturing mothers. Significantly, middle-class views were becoming increasingly important in the nineteenth century with the rise of democratic capitalism: "The middle class of the West - business people, prosperous farmers, *professionals* - took an increasing lead in shaping public opinion, particularly those expressed in the widely read books, journals, and newspaper" (Stearns, 1988 : 209). Shelley's parents may be classified as middle-class people, since they were professionals. Yet, it is true that they were not conventional, typical people within that group. William Godwin, her father, was a philosopher and novelist. His *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice (1793)* was widely read at the time. Shelley's mother, Mary Wollstoncraft, was an important feminist. Her most famous work remains *A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792)*. In her work, Wollstonecraft noted that women's education indirectly stereotyped women with negative qualities. Women were *taught* the 'feminine' characteristics which indirectly degraded them:

> The conduct and manners of women…evidently prove that their minds are not in a healthy state…. One cause of this barren blooming I attribute to a false system of education, gathered from the books written on this subject by men who, considering females rather as women than human creatures, have been more anxious to make them alluring mistresses than affectionate wives and rational mothers. (Wollstonecraft, 1972 quoted by Abrams, 1993 : 101)

The system of education for women was arranged by men and with that education women could not be even ideal wives and mothers. Consequently, Wollstonecraft wrote in support of women's rights, wanting people to realize women's abilities and give them more opportunities, particularly and fundamentally in education:

> Wollstonecraft insisted if rationality is the capacity distinguishing human beings from animals, then unless females are brute animals (a description most men refuse to apply to their own mothers, wives and daughters), women as well as men have this capacity. Thus, society owes girls the same education as boys simply because all human beings deserve an equal chance to develop their rational and moral capacities so they can achieve full personhood. (Tong, 1998 : 12-14)

Wollstonecraft argued for giving women education equal to that of men, as she believed that education would bring women better, complete lives, and that all human beings deserved that right. We might expect a female author whose mother was a famous writer to be influenced by her mother. Nevertheless, it appears that Shelley was not heavily influenced by her mother's feminism, since her mother died when she was a baby. Her work shows that, at least in the writing of *Frankenstein*, she was stuck within traditional stereotypes of women. Most of her female characters are created as ideal ladies and nurturing mothers.

While Mary Wollstonecraft's death gave Shelley little chance of acquiring feminist thought directly from her mother, the greater presence of William Godwin, her father, quite possibly influenced her in making fathers more significant characters in her novel. Godwin, raised her. Shelley's lack of her mother, in a way, brought her closer to her father, and this may have provided Shelley the concrete examples of a father-child relationship she would depict in the story. It is noticeable that "fathers" in this story have central roles in advancing the story: Frankenstein's father, Felix's father, and even Frankenstein himself. Frankenstein's father seems to try to mother Frankenstein, much as Godwin had done with Shelley (Hindle, 1991). He plays both a traditional father's role in providing Frankenstein financial support and motivation in studying, and a mother's role in taking care of him and being the representative of his family members in contacting him in Ingolstadt. The father of Felix, the cottager, also plays an important role in his family, although he is old and blind. He is presented as the heart of his family. He is a listener, counselor and comforter for his children. His songs frequently make his children happy during a terrible drought in

winter.   Male characters in the novel, then, assume some of the 'mothering' responsibilities usually ascribed to women.

As I just mentioned, Shelley might have presented something of her life and perspectives as a middle-class woman through her work. I classify Shelley as middle-class not only because of her familial background, but also because of her way of life before and during the time she wrote *Frankenstein*. I pay attention to this period because her experience then is most likely to have had special influence on her writing of the novel. We might notice that although her husband was politically radical, she spent much of this time like an ordinary middle-class housewife, taking care of the family and household: "Travelling, and the cares of a family, occupied my time; and study, in the way of reading, or improving my ideas in communication with his [her husband's] far more cultivated mind…" (Shelley, 1992 : 6). Shelley reveals here that her daily routines and her attention were mostly related to her family and her husband, the poet Percy Shelley. Moreover, she took vacations with her husband and his mostly male friends. Her immediate social circle, then, was dominated by strong males, and when Mary did pursue learning, she did so in submission to her famous husband's supposedly superior mind.   Shelley's life, which was always concerned with the comfort of men, reflects a woman's life in a male-dominated society. Her *Frankenstein* was initially composed during her vacation with her husband and his male friends, and at first was designed for this small, mostly male audience. It consequently portrays the lives of nurturing mothers in a male world in a way that might be expected to please her male audience.

Shelley's life shows that women at that time were expected to be the ones ministering to family members' emotional needs. In a novel in which mothers are generally absent, the characterization of Elizabeth is important in providing a perfect image of such women:

> She indeed veiled her grief, and strove to act the comforter to
> us all. She looked steadily on life, and assumed its duties
> with courage and zeal. She devoted herself to those whom
> she had been taught to call her uncle and cousins. Never was
> she so enchanting as at this time, when she recalled the
> sunshine of her smiles and spent them upon us. She forgot

> even her own regret in her endeavors to make us forget.
> (Shelley, 1992 : 44)

Elizabeth's typically 'motherly' function of comforting and supporting other people in the family is conveyed clearly through this passage. It is achieved through the phrases "to comfort *us*," "she devoted herself to *all*," "spent them upon *us*," and "her endeavors to make *us* forget." The repetition of the word "us" [from Victor's narrative point of view] is significant. It implies a woman's primary concern with other people's well being, according to the traditional female role of supporting other people. All of the above phrases repeat and thereby reinforce the idea that women deal principally and selflessly with others' happiness. Shelley's repetition of the first person plural and superiority pronouns in referring to the male narrators - *us* and *all* - directly implies male privilege and superiority in the society.

In the above passage, Shelley conveys how the desired feminine quality of subservience might be acquired in the words "she had been taught," implying that women were *conditioned* to be willing to comfort and serve other people. This socially constructed conception of the 'motherly' woman persists today. Unger and Crowford (1992) examines how women's position as subordinates and comforters at the end of the twentieth century was determined by the society in general:

> Women are brought up from an early age to discover
> identity, meaning and satisfaction in serving others, so
> they become used to discounting themselves and their
> own needs. In the end it becomes almost second nature to
> define their 'happiness' in terms of the satisfaction of
> others. (Unger and Crowford, 1992 : 61)

Women are taught by social conditioning to please others before satisfying themselves. This belief influences women's tendency to make other peoples' pleasure a prerequisite of their own happiness. This makes women ideal mothers and housewives or the 'angels in the house'. Referring specifically to the nineteenth century, Stearns (1988) remarks:

> The middle-class family itself saw increasing division in
> roles between men and women as work moved outside the
> home… beyond practical tasks, women were felt to be a
> civilizing, moralizing influence, capable of restraint of bad

> passion. As "angels in the house," women were supposed to
> be ideally suited to provide solace after a day's work and
> above all were expected to provide proper moral guidance
> for children in a culture that, almost of necessity, focused
> growing attention on mothers as guardians of the young.
> (Stearns, 1988 : 210)

Women in the middle class during the nineteenth century were separated from men due to their different kinds of work. Women were expected to deal with households and to be efficient in comforting family members and solving their problems. Lerner, Meacham and Burns (1998) likewise notes this conception of mothers in the nineteenth century: "Called in Victorian Britain the '*Angel in the house*', the middle-class woman was responsible for the moral education of her children" (Lerner, Meacham and Burns, 1998 : 760). The term "angels in the house" suited the ideal character of women in the nineteenth century, and Elizabeth, although pre-Victorian, reflects that image of a woman who never does anything wrong. This characteristic in Elizabeth comes from Shelley's own internalized beliefs, influenced by social norms. Taking care of the family members was perceived as a woman's primary task.

While social conditioning may be the primary reason in reality - especially according to non-essentialist feminists - the function of women as comforters is typically related to the concept of "maternal instinct" believed to be possessed by every woman. The sociologist Jessie Bernard (1974) has discussed the traditional belief that all women share a "maternal instinct" (Bernard, 1974 : 431, quoted in Fine, 1992 : 87). As stated in Bernard's *Motherhood Mystique* (1972), the maternal instinct is an exclusively female quality, believed to be the source of the intimate relationship between mothers and their children. Such a belief is actually taught to both men and women, and it makes people misunderstand that only women are suitable for nurturing children. Shelley might also have been affected by this traditional belief, as she created Elizabeth possessing the conventional characteristics identified with the "maternal instinct":

> The saintly soul of Elizabeth shone like a shrine-dedicated
> lamp in our peaceful home. Her sympathy was ours; her
> smile, her soft voice, the sweet glance of her celestial eyes
> were ever there to bless and animate us … she was there to

subdue me to a semblance of her own gentleness. (Shelley, 1992 : 38)

While the family members all suffer from Caroline's sudden death, Elizabeth seems to be the "angel in the house" bringing effective relief and comfort to them. Her attitude and behavior seem to fill their hearts. Though never completely erasing the sense of motherly absence created by Caroline's death, she does to some extent become a substitute mother. Her character as described here might imply that Elizabeth also possesses a maternal instinct, a characteristic of the "angels in the house," which makes her understand and be willing to please her family members without direct teachings or lessons from Caroline.

Social beliefs in a patriarchal society about the appropriate roles of women not only determined Shelley's placement of her female characters in the limited sphere of nurturing, but also influenced the narrative perspective and structuring of the story. It is noticeable that the narrative develops around the actions of male characters. Firstly, the story begins with the letters of Captain Walton to his sister about his trip to the North Pole, then the flash back to Frankenstein's experience through his own telling, and finally the monster's experience in facing the real world outside. The main characters advancing the plot are all male. Moreover, it is a first-person novel, narrated by first-person narrators. Three male first-person narrators in this story tell their own story. This may be useful in giving an accurate sequence of events and psychological detail; however, the first-person narration produces a gender bias. Readers get more information from male points of view. Social norms, especially the continuation of a male-dominant society, influence Shelley in describing her female characters only through the three main male characters. Discussing Frankenstein, Yarrington observes that "This idea of robbing female power by removing their voice is indicative of a society and Romantic writing style wary of female power" (Yarrington, 1998). Silent 'motherly' female characters seem to be promoted by social values in male-dominated society, not letting females exercise their power freely and fully. Consequently, keeping females quiet and replacing their voices with males' may indirectly empower men. For this reason, Shelley's male-dominated narration is clearly significant.

The first female character that reflects this tendency is Margaret Saville, Captain Walton's sister, who functions as a substitute mother. Although Margaret is mentioned, or implied, from the beginning, there is no development of her character. There are four letters from Captain Walton describing his trip to the North Pole to his sister, but there is no response from her at all. There is not even any reference to her feelings or reactions in the four letters. It seems to be a one-way communication. This may be interpreted as confirming broader cultural assumptions concerning the expected role of females in communication. Wood (1999 : 27) observes of men and women in communication that, "…it is usually men who talk while women are supposed to listen." Consequently, like a mother, Margaret is created to play only the role of the passive listener and comforter of her brother.

In fact, in comforting and understanding men, women do not usually 'literally' read men's actions, but they have to understand and give suitable reactions to those behaviors. This is evident in *Frankenstein* in the character of Elizabeth and Captain Walton's sister who function as substitute mothers to listen to and comfort their men. Paludi (1998) refers to a study by Diane Felmlee (1994), asking heterosexual dating undergraduates about female-male power imbalance in romantic dyads, observing that:

> Men were more than twice as likely as women to be viewed as the partner having more power in the relationship. Most men and women reported that the male partner made more of the decisions, was less emotionally invested in the relationship, and in general was "getting a better deal." (Paludi, 1998 : 193)

In romantic relationships, men tend to have more power. They are trusted to make most decisions, being considered more rational. Interestingly, both men and women have traditionally held such a belief. Wood (1999) notes of men's and women's distinct styles in communication that:

> In general, men talk more and get more attention, response and support than they offer to women with whom they are friends. Women often find there is less symmetry in their friendships with men than with other women, a pattern that echoes the male-dominant model in society at large. Thus,

> both women and men perceive women as more attentive,
> caring and responsive…(Wood, 1999 : 211)

Both Paludi (1998) and Wood (1999) agree that one-way communication or communication with less women's talk is due to the traditional demand that women support, listen to, and care for others. According to the traditional idea that women are responsible for, and suited to, comforting and taking care of other people, being able to *understand* men's ideas and desires would help them to meet that requirement. Consequently, women have adopted these characteristics to complete their 'maternal' work. Shelley gave those characteristics to her "motherly" figures, Margaret Walton and Elizabeth, allowing them limited actively expressive roles. For her, those characteristics are common and represent normal female personality.

Shelley's personal ideas and her background as the daughter of a feminist mother, Marry Wollstonecraft, might have led her to express her concern for the roles of women through her story of *Frankenstein.* However, as she grew up in a male-dominated society, where she was not allowed to express her female concerns freely, any ideas concerning problems with feminine identity could not easily be exposed directly. Because she was raised without a mother and then entered the male-centered world of her husband at an early age (she was only 16 years old when she eloped with Shelley), it would have been difficult for Mary to move outside the dominant culture. The influence of the male-dominated culture over Shelley might also be seen in Shelley's limited characterization of passive and submissive women and of women as "angels in the house" who take care of family members in the novel. Studying the portrayals of women in the novel in terms of motherhood is useful in that it shows how women's energies were channeled into restricted roles in the nineteenth century. The female characters in her story, both in their presence and absence, reflect females' marginal status in Shelley's time.

Representations of Motherhood in Branagh's Film

In Branagh's film of *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, Branagh, as the director, tries to keep to the details of the original story as much as possible. The title of his

film clearly shows this by including Shelley's name. Thomson (1998) praises the work for keeping an atmosphere which the audience might expect based on the original novel:

> Kenneth Branagh's film, *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, includes a number of elements of the novel important to the many readers who regret that the arctic pursuit and setting in which Frankenstein tells his story and the creature's ability to talk are absent in previous cinematic treatments. Many of the changes Branagh made preserve and even enhance the story…
> (Thomson, 1998 : 83)

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the novel and the film are quite the same in regards to the sequence of the main events, or the organization of the story. However, as the film is made for the late twentieth century, we would expect some details to be changed. The issue of motherhood is one such point. Although, as mentioned in the preceding section, motherhood in the novel is presented mostly as absent or passive, the way it is represented in the film is quite different due to the film's different social context, different medium and different audience. To study the representations of motherhood in the film, I will therefore focus on the effects of historical changes between the composition of the book and the production of the film. As in my discussion of the novel, I will examine firstly the role of mothers as life-givers (section 1) and then as nurturers (section 2) in Branagh's film of *Frankenstein.*

1. Mother as Life-giver

I will begin my analysis of the representations of motherhood in Branagh's film by looking at the mother's important role as a life-giver, since in the film, the details and portrayals of this role are quite different from those in the novel due to the historical changes that had taken place by the late twentieth century. An important aspect of cultural history I will concentrate on here concerns social beliefs about the close relationship between women and nature – between mothers and "mother nature." I will examine how this association is presented through cinematic techniques to provide images of life-giving mothers in the eighteenth century from a twentieth century filmmaker's perspective. I will also show how Branagh's personal

relationship with childbirth and motherhood influenced the representations of women as mothers in the film.

Since ancient times, women's role as life-giver has been related to nature, as both females and nature have been believed to be the basis of life in most cultures (Ortner, 1993 : 62). In the film, the idea of a connection between motherhood, nature and the feminine is clearly conveyed through images of childbirth.   The central childbirth scene in Branagh's *Frankenstein* involves Frankenstein's mother giving birth to Frankenstein's brother, William.   In this scene, Caroline, Frankenstein's mother, becomes pregnant, but her physical condition is not good enough to give birth. She sacrifices herself to her baby by asking her husband to cut her open to save the baby. The baby survives, but she dies. This not only shows Caroline's strength, but also reminds us of the notion of a maternal instinct, believed to be an innate feminine trait driving mothers to love their children so much that they can sacrifice themselves to their offspring,   "Mothers are assumed to love our children infinitely and unreservedly, to be glad to devote ourselves completely to our role, and to want to be with our children at all times" (Friedan, 1993, quoted in Shalala, 1995 : 264). Therefore it can be said that this scene and Caroline's statement, "Cut me. Save the baby," conveys and strongly reinforces that social belief about a mother's instinct.

The significance of nature is conveyed not only through the supposedly magical features of the feminine here, but also in the great and uncontrollable power of nature. The scene conveys the significance of women in the birth process, and shows the connection between women and nature in general, as both sources of the cycle of life and death. Nature is the masternarrative and the mother is shown to have a special position in that masternarrative.

The various aesthetic elements in this scene, such as the music, camera angles and color, create feelings of danger and unpredictability. They are also used to express the relationship between humans and nature. The loud, grand and exciting operatic music in the birth scene encourages the audience to perceive the significance of human birth and the uncontrollable power of nature. The lightning which happens

at the same time as the baby's birth also suggests the great power of nature in both creating and destroying. Humans cannot easily control such force, but nature provides the power of creating and nurturing humans. However, the music after the mother's death turns to sounds of grief evoked through the violin and cello. The music presents Frankenstein's terrible feelings towards his mother's departure, and also their close relationship. This maternal bond and his grief are for the first time presented as a strong motivation for Frankenstein in studying medicine, the manipulation of life.

Color also evokes intense feelings and conveys the strong relationship between mothers and their children in this scene in which the two are shown to be bound up with each other. The contrast of the red color of the blood and Caroline's white dress also relates to the nature of human life. Blood is traditionally associated with life - which machines certainly do not possess - and the white may imply the purity of the human soul. Both red and white suggest that mothers give the children their lives and soul. This is the emotional significance of natural birth.

Camera movement and camera angles create a feeling of drama and of unpredictability in the hands of nature as well. In this scene, the camera moves in a circle around Caroline as she is giving birth. The object being photographed stays still, only the camera moves, and this forces the viewer to feel the dynamism of the life process, creating an intense emotional impact. The reasonably close and rather graphic shot of the bloodstained Caroline in the chair enhances feelings of danger, risk and physical suffering.

All these techniques evoke the great power of nature in creating life and also the centrality of the mother in natural birth. This scene works effectively to convey the importance of the mother to Frankenstein, as well as the erratic and potentially tragic forces of nature. Caroline's failures in giving birth and the awful bloody image of her at the end of this scene emphasize risks of childbirth in the hands of uncontrollable nature.

The original novel pays less attention to the process of pregnancy than the film does. This scene of childbirth in the film is quite extraordinary as the childbirth process is not often portrayed as graphically and effectively as it is here. Unger and Crowford (1992 : 414), discussing representations of women in the media, remarks that "Women's experience of childbirth is even more invisible in the visual arts." In this respect, then, the film is challenging conventions concerning what can be viewed.

The feelings about childbirth evoked in the film of *Frankenstein* are very different from those the readers get from the novel. Generally, both the author and the filmmaker would overlook the details of the birthing process unless that scene would have a special emotional impact on the audience and these effects advance the story. Likewise, the childbirth scene in *Frankenstein* is important to its main theme, showing the risk and dangers of *natural* childbirth processes. Consequently, the childbirth scene in the film is presented graphically. This might also be partly influenced by Branagh's personal experience of the risk of natural childbirth. His mother, Frances, had her mother die in giving birth: "A complication after the birth ensured that some twelve days later her no doubt exhausted mother died, at the age of thirty-eight" (Branagh, 1989 : 3). Branagh must have been extraordinarily conscious of the danger of natural birth to mothers' lives and this is portrayed in his concrete depiction of risky childbirth. Descriptions of the childbirth part in Shelley's *Frankenstein* would not work as effectively as those in the film no matter how well they were described. The narrated images would not easily be made so explicit or graphic. But, apart from aesthetic factors, another reason why the portrayal of childbirth may be missing in Shelley's novel may be Shelley's deepest fears of and her terrible feelings toward childbirth, based on her own personal experiences, leading her to avoid portraying it.

The significance of the mother in the film is further conveyed in a subsequent scene. Frankenstein climbs up to his mother's grave on a high mountaintop. Both the mountain's height and the framing of the sky may imply Frankenstein's elevated and intense feelings. Moreover, Frankenstein's red clothing boldly contrasts with the white and blue background, perhaps implying his strong passion to fight. Victor loves

his mother very much, so when his mother dies in giving-birth, he is very upset and wants to fight against nature, not letting people die in this way. It is shown in this scene in which he promises to his dead mother that he will find a method to create life and so defeat death. The background of the snowy mountains and the sky encourage viewers to perceive the boldness and significance of his promise.

The Swiss psychologist-philosopher Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) remarked the influence of 'anima', a natural psychic force identified with the feminine, on the male child:

> For the son, the anima is hidden in the dominating power of the mother, and sometimes she leaves him with a sentimental attachment that lasts throughout life and seriously impairs the fate of the adult. On the other hand, she may spur him on to the highest flights. (Jung, 1958 : 29)

His mother is clearly one of the strong fundamental motivations for Frankenstein's later study and experimentation, and this reinforces the significance of mothers. In the original novel, Victors' motivations in studying mostly come from the ambition for scientific knowledge: "I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation" (Shelley, 1992 : 42), says Frankenstein in the novel. But Frankenstein's motivation in creating life in the film is at the beginning identified with the sorrow of losing his mother.

In summary, then, the scenes of the childbirth and Frankenstein's promise to his mother raise the significance of motherhood in the film well above that in the novel, and they also effectively expose the close relationship between nature and women. The greater significance of women as life-givers in the film perhaps shows the influence of historical changes by the late twentieth century in representations of women. It implies changes in social values and people's perspectives on women's role as life-givers. The increase in women's significance in this respect in the film may be seen to reflect more positive social beliefs and open views concerning women's maternal biological role. It also implies the perpetuated conventional social belief about the relationship between women and nature, and further indirectly conveys women's significance through that relationship. However, the images of life-

giving motherhood in the film are still problematical because the film seems to say that natural childbirth may endanger human lives. This is perhaps the result of Branagh's own experience of the risks of natural childbirth. This may suggest that a filmmaker's life experiences can influence his work as much as those of an author (such as Shelley).

2. Mother as Nurturer

In presenting the issue of motherhood, the film, like the novel, not only portrays women's role as life-givers, but it also reflects social beliefs about women's position as nurturers. Again, different historical contexts determined the two media in representing women as nurturers differently. In this section, therefore, I will expose how women's movements, Branagh's background, as well as financial and film production factors in the twentieth century possibly influenced representations of women as nurturers in the film.

It can be observed that although the original story of *Frankenstein* is mainly structured around a scientific experiment and human scientific ambition which is understood to be in conflict with nature, the early part of the film clearly grants a crucial function to a nature-female alliance. As observed earlier, this association has ancient and cross-cultural routes, but in the case of the film, there may also be more immediate factors: the social effects of feminism, for example. For essentialist feminists, motherhood is still the most important function for women and it is viewed as a central platform in fighting for women's rights and acceptance of "feminine" values. As Nielson (1990 : 152) remarks, "They urge the question - why can't men be more like women." In fact, the idea of feminist essentialism relates to Jung's notion of *anima* (discussed in the preceding section) which focuses on women's special value in relation to nature. Such ideas appear to be explored indirectly in the film of *Frankenstein* as it gives more space for mothers, implying that motherhood is still important – perhaps even more important - in the face of technological change.

However, the dramatic effects of feminism may also be seen to influence the portrayal of mothers in Branagh's film in a more indirect way. In a certain respect, the film may even be viewed as *reacting against* feminism. Nicolson (1997 : 375) thinks that the main social change giving women more opportunities at the end of the twentieth century was feminism: "Statistics make it clear that more women in the 1990s were divorcing, separating, marrying later and not marrying than was the case in the 1970s and 1980s, and this data is clearly connected to the fact that women's lives are no longer solely prescribed by their role as mother in the traditional family." Since the rise of feminism, women have had more opportunities, more education and alternatives, and been more independent. Women no longer play only the role of mother. They can select their ways of life, and sometimes they are confident enough to live alone. With this change, social problems concerning the family system have increased: "With the development of the new wave of feminism in the late 1960s and early 1970s, 'the family' became a central focus of concern." Since the rise of feminism, women have increasingly attended to their roles in working, education and politics. They have consciously and unconsciously changed their relationship with the family and their traditional roles therein. The desire for domestic warmth and harmony, typically represented by the mother figure, may become even more attractive in this context. The portrayal of ideal motherhood in *Frankenstein* may come from this expectation. With these social beliefs and social expectations, the media, and particularly cinema, as a purveyor of dreams, presents ideal images of women to provide the 'desired' characteristics of mothers as nurturers. This can be seen in Branagh's film of *Frankenstein*, where mothers nurturing and taking care of their children are positively portrayed.

The first such scene is the flashback to Frankenstein's childhood. In this scene, Frankenstein is a little boy cheerfully dancing with his mother, Caroline. Caroline's love and care for her son are expressed in her words, "You are my wonderful boy." Their dancing shows their close relationship and love, and Caroline is portrayed clearly as being kind and warm, an ideal mother. Such characteristics are foregrounded through contrast with those of Justine's aunt who is shown as solemn

and cold, seldom expressing her feelings. Even with Justine, she seems to be distant and arrogant. Their differences reinforce the image of Caroline as an ideal mother.

Caroline's kindness and warmth are foregrounded again when she and her husband express their sincere desire for Frankenstein to accept Elizabeth as his own sister. Caroline's acceptance of Elizabeth as her own daughter implies her typically maternal care for the young. The happiness and warmth in the family expressed in this scene reflects the social desire for ideal families with ideal mothers in the late twentieth century, perhaps because it was increasingly difficult to find in reality.

Later in the film, Caroline shows her characteristic of being a good mother when she comes to see Frankenstein, who is studying hard. She expresses her concern about his health and wants him to relax: "*You know, Victor. Life shouldn't be all study.*" Here, Caroline clearly presents women's supposed psychological characteristic of needing to take care of group members (Badinter, 1989 : 30). Moreover, she mentions his character and habits in childhood, which reinforces their close relationship, her love and her concern about her son. Furthermore, Caroline is portrayed in this scene as pregnant. As such, she seems to be doubly characterized as a mother.

The idealized mother image Caroline represents is also conveyed through the character of Elizabeth. In the scene where Elizabeth goes into Frankenstein's laboratory in their house, she acts in the same way as Caroline in showing concern about Frankenstein's health: "Will you go outside, Victor? It's such a beautiful day." It seems to convey to the audiences that although Elizabeth is not biologically a mother, her position as a replacement for Caroline tends naturally towards that role. Indirectly, it may suggest to audiences that women adopt the mother role naturally and willingly.

This film should be recognized, then, as attending to the issue and the significance of motherhood. The portrayals of motherhood in the film seem to be perfect, even idealized. This is quite different from the novel. Considering Branagh's family life, it might be said that the happiness and warmth he received from his family

in his childhood were influential factors. For example, his family and his relatives had a meeting at least twice a week at his grandparents' house:

> I sat listening to these grown-ups as they monitored life in the area – who was marrying who, leaving who, abusing who, moving house, moving country – all of this discussed with continual reference to similar incidents in the past. Everything was linked to their fathers and uncles and aunts, and the daily gossip promoted floods of stories…. People like my mother embraced the stories and culture of my grandmother's generation and implicitly encouraged me to do so…. These family nights or 'do's' often began informally, growing out of the normal daily visits, or they were arranged to celebrate the arrival of some distant relative from foreign parts…. My first real impression of my parents comes from these evenings. (Branagh, 1989 : 13-14)

There, on these family nights, Branagh gradually and intensely experienced the warmth and happiness of a harmonious family. This impression might be significant in driving his portrayal of Frankenstein's happy family, with complete parental care from the parents. From the film, the viewers perceive the happiness in Frankenstein's family through their dancing and parties, which convey familial love, warmth and joy. Early in the film, at the first time Elizabeth comes to this family, they are dancing cheerfully, and later, when Frankenstein grows up, Carolyn wants Frankenstein to have a rest by dancing. Importantly, a party is arranged again (and for the last time) before Frankenstein's leaving for study in Ingolstadt. Although Carolyn does not participate in the last party, she is still highly praised by her husband as the strong motivation of her son's study so that the mother retains a strong family presence.

Branagh's motivation in adding the scenes showing the influence of a mother on her child probably comes partly from his own experience. Since he was young, Branagh aimed to be an actor. He applied several times to play on the stage. Initially he failed, but he was finally successful. However, he still had some problems as the director worried that some scenes in the play might affect his psychological balance, so the play's director rang his mother for discussion. Here, his mother clearly shows her maternal role: "My mother's surprising response was to say that she thought I'd be fine, and that if I wanted to be a professional, then I'd better get as much practice as possible. I'd cracked it. Parental acceptance" (Branagh, 1989 : 35). Branagh

clearly has a close relationship with his mother. She gives him confidence to express his abilities in his work. This is similarly reflected in Carolyn's relationship with Frankenstein.

But, importantly, the significance of motherhood is not retained throughout the story; motherhood is presented only in the first half of the film. There are some points in the film where the filmmaker could have continued the theme of the significance of motherhood, but he does not. For example, Frankenstein may have reasonably thought about his mother and her warmth after his failure to remind himself of the natural process involved in giving birth. If there had been a scene in which Frankenstein realizes that he cannot break with the natural processes of human birth and becomes aware of the significance of the mother in that process, the theme of motherhood would be brought to closure. However, it does not happen.

Women's values in this regard are not totally explored. Again, this phenomenon may reflect social conditions. As mentioned, feminism has strongly affected Western societies since the 1960s. However, it does not mean that the treatment of women – and particularly mothers - in films has radically changed. In fact, in this sense they could still be seen to be treated unequally, as somewhat insignificant. The feminist project has not been completed, and still encounters resistance: "Women, like young people, began to assert themselves during the 1960s and 1970s…Yet society seemed unwilling to acknowledge the implication of these changes: that women are equal to men" (Lerner, Meacham and Burns, 1998 : 1079). Women have tried to fight for themselves and promoted some changes in society. Their efforts have successfully caused social changes for women's opportunities and rights. Women have become more accepted in working, education and politics. However, the changes do not mean the equality of women and men in terms of cultural products such as films. Women are still dominant in particular areas, jobs, and social positions. Thus, while compared to the original novel, the film talks much more about mothers and the significance of motherhood, it seems suddenly to forget this point.

The filmmaker does not use his film as a tool in fighting either for feminist liberation or even for a greater appreciation of the significance of motherhood. He does not miss the fact that women are more accepted in the twentieth century but he does not want his film to be a feminist film. Branagh wants his film to be a popular film, which means a film for the typical film demographic. Motherhood is partly overlooked perhaps because it is less attractive to the entertainment-seeking audience. In an expensively-produced popular action-romance film such as *Frankenstein*, an extensive exploration of the motherhood theme would be financially dangerous. There are few popular films about motherhood and the positive values we get from mothers unless they completely concern the mother-child relationship and thus become what are called "women's films", as in "Stepmom" (1999).

Popular filmmaking is influenced above all by financial necessities. As Giannetti remarks, "In short, the profit motive has been the main driving force in the revolution of the American film industry…" (Gianetti, 1987 : 401) *Frankenstein* is a Hollywood film, which basically means the director intends to make a popular film. Money and profit are very important in the Hollywood film industry and culture. It defines success or failure: "Money matters in Hollywood…Money is a tool of power" (Kent, 1991 : 23). Paul Schrader, a writer-director, also supports the view that "Money and power are interchangeable commodities in this business…(Kent, 1991 : 20). Money is important and brings the filmmakers power in the film industry. Consequently, the filmmakers tend to present conventionally popular stories which possibly give them more money and profit. Women are often not positively presented in those stories.

It would seem, then, that the social movements of feminism, together with popular audience demand and business imperatives work together to build up an ambiguous representation of motherhood in the film of *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*. Although feminist movements and Branagh's positive vision of a nurturing mother and family warmth appear to have influenced representations of mothers as nurturers in the film, the representations are still limited due to the social conditions and financial reasons for films in the late twentieth century. Positive images of

motherhood are not thoroughly explored because the film was expected to be a popular film for a broad audience and therefore was forced to avoid debating "feminist" issues.

Conclusion

We may conclude, then, that different historical contexts inform the significant differences between the representations of women as mothers in the film and the novel. As discussed in Part 1 of the novel section of this chapter, Shelley's negative experiences concerning childbirth along with certain literary trends of the nineteenth century probably influenced the exclusion of biological mothers in the original story. On the other hand, traditional social beliefs expecting women to be mothers, and traditional female stereotypes which allow women to be dominant only in the limited domestic area are perhaps responsible for the novel's characterization of females as 'nurturers' and in this sense 'motherly' (Part 2). However, it should be noted that 'motherly' in this sense is identified with a certain passivity and submissiveness.

By contrast, feminism, Branagh's positive background, as well as social central concerns about family warmth in the late twentieth century influenced a more careful and yet positive representation of mothers in the film. However, the representations of motherhood in the film are not completely developed, due to male authority in the film industry and related financial reasons. The centrality of mothers and the mother-nature connection early in the film is conspicuous by its absence in the latter half.

In studying representations of women in both films and novels, a complex of factors has to be considered. In particular, in both *Frankenstein* texts examined here, there would appear to be a combination of historical and biographical factors determining the portrayal of women as mothers. Nevertheless, it is possible to assert that the film suggests some historical development in this respect in comparison with the novel, although this greater concern with the positive role of mothers is ultimately limited.