MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN* AS A DEFENSE OF THE ETHICS OF CARE

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ABSTRACT

Feminist analyses of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* have yielded fruitful interpretations that make sense of what might otherwise be considered inessential details in the narrative. Specifically, the anxieties and politics of birth and motherhood have been brought forward as central concerns of the novel. However, given the influence of the liberal, Marxist, and radical strains of feminism in the period that laid the foundations of feminist *Frankenstein* scholarship (the 1960s-80s), most of this work has focused on the burdens of motherhood, the bonds of womanhood, or the oppressive structure of the family, in some cases accusing Shelley of offering a defense of patriarchy.

These influential strains of feminism were themselves influenced by the most dominant theories in philosophical ethics, deontology and utilitarianism, both of which emerged from the same Enlightenment intelligentsia that included Shelley's parents, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin. However, in the 1980s, a line of feminist inquiry began to yield an alternative to influential moral theories: the ethics of care. In contrast to the dominant theories, which tend to laud principle- or calculus-based ethical reasoning that assumes interchangeability of moral subjects, the ethics of care emphasises particular relationships and the fact that people are not interchangeable, having different vulnerabilities, dependencies, and dependents. Most importantly, care ethics accuses traditional ethics of ignoring children altogether, creating the illusion that the paradigmatic moral subject is neither dependent nor obligated in non-voluntary relationships.

The ethics of care presents challenges for some strains of feminism, particularly in that it takes as given certain natural differences between all people in terms of abilities and circumstances rather than seek to eliminate such differences, and that it argues in favour of the same self-sacrificing values

that many feminists have argued have contributed to women's oppression. Because of this dissent, I have decided to approach *Frankenstein* from the ethics of care, reading it as a criticism of the masculinist values and assumptions embedded in the emerging moral theories of Shelley's period. I will argue that Victor is emblematic of the detached individualistic ethical reasoner valued by masculinist theories and criticised by care ethicists. The Frankenstein family and the DeLaceys both provide examples of caring relations as contrasts to Victor's behaviour. The Creature, offspring of an incomplete moral theory, is both victim and perpetuator of masculinist individualistic, calculus-based moral reasoning. He is more aware than Victor of the necessity of caring relations, but he follows an ethic of retribution inspired by principle-based theories. He knows he needs a partner, but speaks of her in the language that Victor speaks of him—as property. The glimmer of hope in the novel lies with Walton, who, unlike Victor, is willing to engage in dialogue across difference, and finally to set his high aspirations aside for the well-being of his crew.

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INTRODUCTION

While feminist readings of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818, 1831) have become common since the 1970s, the approach has usually concerned women's political issues, with occasional reference to particular philosophers. This is understandable: nineteenth-century literature is famous for its social criticism, and it is natural to read works as commentaries on concrete aspects of society. I intend to approach *Frankenstein*, however, as offering a critique of a set of unstated masculinist assumptions underlying the two emerging philosophical schools of ethical thought that would end up dominating philosophical ethics, and by extension, law, until the present day. Shelley's characterisations of Victor and his creature highlight many of the attitudes typifying the reasoning of both Kantian deontology and utilitarianism, as well as their political companion, liberalism.

A more recent response to the masculinist assumptions underlying these mainstream ethical and political theories has been articulated in the ethics of care. Its proponents, such as Virginia Held, argue that the mainstream discussion of rights in the West assumes able-bodied autonomous individuals with no dependents or dependencies as the normal, natural, and neutral member of society. As a result, it not only runs into difficulties around the rights of spouses and children, it promulgates harmful fictions about personhood, autonomy, and responsibility.

Of particular interest to the *Frankenstein* scholar is the emphasis that the ethics of care places on motherhood. For care ethics, children do not present a difficult exception, they present the paradigm of moral responsibility. Whereas liberal ethics (Kantianism and utilitarianism) and the feminist ethics they have influenced hold that unequal power presents a problem for ethical interaction (because the paradigm interaction is taken to be a free interchange between independent individuals), the ethics of care argues that dependency and vulnerability are universal (everyone begins as a baby and many end

their lives in care) and the impetus to moral reasoning. The mother-child relationship is not an exception to moral life, but paradigmatic of it.

Recognising the primacy of motherhood in morality, the care ethicists have been critical of the detached, universalised approach of mainstream, masculinist ethics. While allowing for the possible compatibility of justice and care, they have also accused the justice-oriented tradition of erasing childhood from the discussion, much as the work of mothering is taken for granted socially. For this reason, *Frankenstein* presents an excellent critique of masculinist ethics: motivated by a desire to benefit "humanity" in general, Victor Frankenstein reneges on his particular duties, spurning his family and the opportunity to create life the traditional way so he can create instead the "perfect" being. It is telling that the perfect creature has no mother and begins life fully grown.

The following discussion will argue that while *Frankenstein* is wide in its philosophical scope, one of its most vital concerns is the masculinist underpinnings of the ethics that emerged from the Enlightenment. Though it may be tempting to read Shelley's critique as a Burkean conservative backlash,[1] the implicit moral argument of the novel is feminist in tone, and most resonant with the ethics of care. Chapter One will explain the ethics of care and consider the most influential feminist readings of *Frankenstein* thus far. Chapters Two and Three will unpack Shelley's critique of liberal ethics and implicit argument for the ethics of care. I will conclude that the novel's final appeal, reflected in the 1831 revisions, is to the values of care—it is a warning against the idealisation of a particular understanding of autonomy, duty, and the body.

[1] Anne Mellor in *Mary Shelley, Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (1988), for example, suggests that Shelley's 1831 revisions signify a conservative turn and that her ideology of the family is essentially bourgeois and partriarchal.

CHAPTER ONE

Kantianism, Utilitarianism, Liberalism, and Feminism: an unhappy family

As it is my contention that *Frankenstein* can be fruitfully interpreted as a critique of masculinist ethics from the perspective of the ethics of care, this chapter is devoted to explaining care ethics, its development as a school of philosophical thought, its tensions with liberalism, utilitarianism, and Kantian deontology, and its relationship with other areas of feminism. After contrasting the ethics of care with mainstream, allegedly masculinist, ethical theories, I will briefly survey some readings of the novel that draw on feminism or that put Shelley in conversation with philosophers who came before her that share similar concerns to the ethics of care. I hope to show that despite Shelley's implied views on family, close relationships, and moral sentiment resembling the conservative domestic ideology of her time, and although some of the important feminist elements of the novel have been identified by critics influenced by various traditions of feminism, the apparent contradiction between the conservative and feminist elements of *Frankenstein* are reconcilable when considered in light of the ethics of care.

The ethics of care has been a hotly debated approach to ethics both because many of its assumptions undermine those of mainstream political theories, including liberal feminism, but also because some critics claim that its values are already implicit in or derivable from other ethical traditions. Liberalism and liberal feminism tend to value detached reason, reciprocity, and equality. By contrast, care ethicists grant a strong cognitive and metaethical role to emotions in moral reasoning, assume that full reciprocity is not possible in normal (rather than exceptional) situations, and that certain kinds of inequality are not only a fact of life, but are the reason that moral deliberation is necessary. Because it embraces rather than rejects motherhood as a worthwhile activity, the ethics of

care must disagree with those radical feminist positions, such as Shulamith Firestone's, that tie the emancipation of women to a rejection of the values traditionally associated with maternity and caregiving.[2] In contrast to these strains, the ethics of care takes the mother-child relationship as the paradigm of ethical interaction and argues that ethical reasoning has to assume interdependency and inequality. It shares with all feminisms the demand for political equality and an end to male dominance, but it rejects many of the ethical and metaphysical assumptions of both liberal and radical feminism. This includes the assumptions about individualism and the value of independence that liberal feminists such as Susan Moller Okin and Martha Nussbaum espouse; it also includes the hostility to heterosexual relationships in a sexist culture exemplified by radical feminists, such as Catherine MacKinnon or lesbian separatists like Charlotte Bunch.[3]

Since the Enlightenment, what can be generalised as “liberal morality” has dominated the political and philosophical spheres of the western world. Popularly, this is a combination the familiar “live and let live” attitude (influenced by utilitarianism along with a Kantian optimism about the ability of reason to regulate actions) and a sense of the sanctity of individual freedom and autonomy. Mary Shelley's own parents, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, were important contributors to the discussion of rights that would become the dominant ideological framework for western societies up until the present day. Allied with the likes of Thomas Paine, they fought a war of words encouraging and defending the revolutions of America and France, while Edmund Burke, once a radical himself, defended the former upheaval yet condemned the latter. The upshot of this debate is one of the most impassioned and intelligent series of political works to be published: Burke's *Reflections on the*

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2 In *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), Firestone not only endorses Engels' advocacy of communal child-rearing, but goes on to argue that labs and incubators should replace traditional conception and gestation.

3 See Okin's *Justice, Gender and the Family* (1989), Nussbaum's *Sex & SocialJustice* (1999), MacKinnon's *Toward a Feminist Theory of State* (1989), and Bunch's *A Broom of One's Own* (1970).

Revolution in France (1790), Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790), Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791), and Godwin's *Enquiry concerning Political Justice* (1793). In 1792, Wollstonecraft effectively established philosophical feminism with *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. The tone of the *Vindication* does not depart drastically from that of Paine and Godwin, but she breaks fresh ground by offering an account of social justice based on the experience of women, rather than one that silently assumes the perspective of an able adult male.

Among the less noble reasons for the development of liberalism was the need to develop a theory of rights that could rationalise the social changes brought on by the industrial revolution. Specifically, liberal rights are

> boundary markers which separate competing egoists in circumstances of avoidable scarcity, which absolve them of responsibility for each other's good, and which, through the coercive guarantees of the state, keep class conflict from erupting into outright class war, while at the same time helping to preserve the dominant class's control over the means of production. (Buchanan 163)

A theory that considers individuals to be autonomous by default, free in the absence of overt coercion, and responsible for their own sustenance only is useful to an economy that prefers workers to compete with one another for their servitude and feel as though they have struck a good deal when hired. Once figures like John Locke and Adam Smith had articulated the political and economic philosophy of liberalism,[4] ethical theories based on the new perspective began to be worked out. The two streams that would become equally important in liberal ethics are deontology, most famously formulated by Immanuel Kant, and utilitarianism. The latter was popularised by Jeremy Bentham, an acquaintance of

[4] In Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* (1689) and Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776).

Godwin, but most famously formulated by John Stuart Mill a generation later.[5]

According to Kant's best known ethical work, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (*Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, 1785), the rightness of an action must be measured by its universalisability. If one could will that action to be the same one taken by any person in any context, it is morally right. If the act could not be willed or conceived as universal, but only as an exception, then it cannot be moral. For example, theft is immoral, because if everyone stole, it would annihilate the system of private property, and without the recognition of property claims, "theft" would not be even possible as a concept. For Kant, an immoral act is discovered as such by showing that conceiving or willing it to be a universal leads to contradictions. Ethics is thoroughly a matter of reason.

Bentham and Mill are rationalistic in their ethics insofar as they feel a moral calculus is possible once the object of morality is established. However, they do not take the object of morality to be some sort of logical consistency of will and act as Kant does. Appealing to experience, they claim that the object of morality is happiness (defined as the absence of pain and maximization of pleasure), ideally the happiness of all who are affected by the action. This differs fundamentally from Kantianism in that the consequences are thought to determine the rightness of an action, not its logical implications. Act utilitarians could in fact claim that a different action may be required for different people in different circumstances (as long as the end is always the most happiness for the most people). There are also rule utilitarians who offer a compromise with deontology, arguing that the action which usually produces the happiest outcomes should be adopted as a rule.[6]

Although Kantians and utilitarians differ in their conception the role of reason, their theories are

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5 See Bentham's *Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1781) and Mill's *Utilitarianism* (1861).

6 For a concise discussion of rule versus act utilitarianism and their relationships with deontology, see William K. Frankena's *Ethics* (1963).

both rationalistic and universalistic in nature, expecting moral judgements to be made impartially through the application of general rules to particular situations. Although such theories when applied ought to be useful for the improvement of society, the reverse has sometimes been the case. Utilitarianism, for example, underlies the reasoning of the growing bourgeoisie of Shelley's day that the plight of the working poor was redeemed by the quality of life the factory system afforded to the middle class. Kantianism, on the other hand, lends itself to a conservative outlook–it does not allow moral exceptions, and revolutions are exceptional by nature (one cannot will revolution as a universal—it is only revolution in contrast to a usual stability: eternal revolution would not be revolution at all, except perhaps in the sense of "revolution" that a planet or vinyl record goes through). Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, both strains evolved but remained dominant in philosophical ethics.

By contrast, many late twentieth-century feminists are especially concerned with the denial of the cognitive/epistemic value of emotions that the dominant theories assume. According to Virginia Held, "for both kinds of theory we are to disregard our emotions in the epistemological process of figuring out what we ought to do" (25). Developed during the Enlightenment, these theories take the models of rational deliberation to be the public legislator or the participant in a marketplace. Such models are not only somewhat removed from the sorts of actual interpersonal moral reasoning people do in their daily lives, they are based on standpoints that at the time were only inhabited by men. Such theories ignore or outright denigrate the moral experience of those who are not in a position to be impartial or to consider only the rational principles involved. In lived morality (as opposed to moral theory) one has to deal with the consequences of choices regardless of whether the choice was made according to the best rational standards or under optimal conditions. Moral theories constructed to reflect the reasoning of the court and the marketplace should not be expected to adapt well to the

domestic sphere.

Although the features of the ethics of care are articulated differently by different theorists, such as its founding figures Sara Ruddick, Carol Gilligan, and Nel Noddings, several common values emerge. According to the ethics of care, ethical obligation is based on needs, dependency, and the nature of the relationship, not on exchange, pleasure, or abstract duty; care ethics focuses "on the compelling moral salience of attending to and meeting the needs of the particular others for whom we take responsibility" (Held 10). Not only does this mean that it is needs-based rather than rights-based, but that attachments to specific people should be considered before abstractions like "humanity" or "society" (Walker 523). For care ethics, the emotions are guides to correct moral action, not impediments; care ethics values emotion rather than rejects it, particularly in moral epistemology. The unequal, dependent relationship of a child and parent is taken to be the paradigm of ethical interaction, rather than an exception. For care ethicists, child rearing is where the ethical conscience is nurtured. Learning morality by rule memorisation or formulation is not considered adequate, for morality is not about rules, contrary to Kant and rule utilitarians–it is about the material needs of specific lives and making sure that those around one have these met. Reasoning about ethics, therefore, will not be a matter of considering an ideal judge or impartial hypothetical citizen behind a veil of ignorance.[7]

Instead, "Concrete circumstances, the actual situations of people's lives, their relations to others and their moral characters, rather than abstract principles based upon assumed conditions (such as free individual choice), are the critical components of reasoning based upon an ethic of care" (Bartlett 1568-69). Rather than conceiving of ethical dilemmas as arising when the desires of independent individuals

[7] The "veil of ignorance" is a conceptual tool used by John Rawls to conceptualise the conditions required for a just society. As the most influential liberal theorist of the 20th century, influenced himself by both Mill and Kant, he is the specific target of many care ethicists' critiques of liberalism. See his *A Theory of Justice* (1971).

come into conflict with one another, people are assumed to always already be enmeshed in relationships. Rather than place the burden of argument on claimants who would make demands of an agent, care ethics takes as given that all agents are already involved in relationships and that the nature of the relationship itself entails responsibilities between its members: “This conception of morality as concerned with the activity of care centres moral development around the understanding of responsibility and relationships, just as the conception of morality as fairness ties moral development to the understanding of rights and rules” (Gilligan 19). Because of the importance and inescapability of relationships, the ethics of care favours a restorative rather than retributive approach to justice and negotiation over conflict.

Virginia Held cites the founding works of the ethics of care as Sara Ruddick's essay “Maternal Thinking” (1980), Carol Gilligan's book *In A Different Voice* (1982), and Nel Noddings' *Caring* (1984). The first of these works brings maternal reasoning forward as a moral practice. The second articulates a distinct method of moral reasoning that stands in contrast to standard theories. The third examines closely the practices involved in the delivery of care. These three works set the parameters for subsequent thinking about the implications of the distinct concerns of care-giving practices for traditional ethical theories. Since judicial and economic models of reasoning assume autonomous agents, and these models are taken as paradigmatic by liberal ethicists, the reasoning of mothers stands in stark contrast. Maternal ethics deals not with autonomous equals testing competing claims, but with unequal relationships of dependency where one party may have far more responsibility than the other. Rather than allow this difference to undermine their theories, the dominant traditions have dismissed the reasoning involved in care as exceptional to the paradigm or as merely instinctive (Held 26).

The phrase “ethic of care” was coined not by a philosopher per se, but by psychologist Carol

Gilligan in her work *In A Different Voice* (1982). Approaching moral reasoning from a psychological developmental standpoint, Gilligan criticises work on moral development, specifically that of Lawrence Kohlberg, as masculinist and as privileging a certain approach to ethics (6). According to Kohlberg's work on child moral reasoning development, “progress” follows a regular pattern from self-centredness to concern for particular others to neutral, detached reasoning from principles. Not coincidentally, this reflects the hierarchy of moral awareness described in common ethical theories.[8] The methodological flaw with his study, Gilligan points out, is that it examines only males. Her own study of female children reveals that rather than progressing toward increased detachment and abstraction, moral reasoning among girls becomes more contextual, relationship-oriented, and concerned to accommodate all parties in a conflict. Moral reasoning among girls studied tends to be expressed in terms of conflicting responsibilities rather than competing rights (Gilligan 19).

According to Kohlberg, children start as egoists, and move through an attachment phase before progressing to more abstract reasoning. After a utilitarian phase, the top of Kohlberg's scale of moral progress includes viewpoints in close alignment with Kantian deontology and John Rawls's liberal theory of justice as fairness (so much so that this view of the moral is simply called “liberal morality” by most subsequent care ethicists). Such systems are predicated on equal treatment as a precondition of moral judgement or interaction despite the very different situations, needs, and constraints experienced by real people.

> The morality of rights is predicated on equality and centred on the understanding of fairness, while the ethic of responsibility relies on the concept of equity, the recognition of differences in need. While the ethic of rights is a manifestation of equal respect, balancing the claims of other

[8] Frankena endorses David Riesman's identification of moral stages: “tradition-directed,” “inner-directed,” “other-directed,” and “autonomous.”

and self, the ethic of responsibility rests on an understanding that gives rise to compassion and care. (Gilligan 164-6)

Attention to the kinds of reasons women studied give for their ethical positions reveals the limitations of abstract approaches to ethics. Whereas males interviewed respond to hypothetical ethical dilemmas by appeal to rules, women interviewed repeatedly respond with questions seeking further context (101).[9] The implied stance of the males studied is one of confrontation and a disregard for personal attachments or circumstance when reasoning about conflict, whereas females appear to approach problems with a concern for the well-being of all parties involved and for the relationships between parties. Gilligan argues that this difference might explain the behaviour of many "heroic" male historical figures who were willing to sacrifice the well-being of their families, or bystanders, for an allegedly noble cause (104). Rather than promote the ethics of care as a superior alternative to mainstream ethical theories, however, Gilligan argues that an ethic of care and an ethic of justice are complementary. The will to preserve relationships at any cost can be as harmful as the pursuit of justice at any cost (100). This last point should pre-empt some of the charges that have been leveled against the ethics of care, but those who accuse care ethicists of being excessively uncritical of the justice of relationships may be thinking of the work of Nel Noddings or Virginia Held, who do take caring values to trump individualist values and considers the relationship to be at least as important as the people within it.

In *Caring* (1984), Nel Noddings sets out to analyse the implications of the alternative voice

[9] Views on whether these differing values are socially conditioned or essential vary. My own is that the question of the origins of this difference is irrelevant to both the applicability of these values to moral life. Whether or not one feels that care ethics can stand without committing itself to gender essentialism, I see no reason that Shelley is committed to such a theory. After all, the caring values in her stories, while exemplified by women, are present in any character worth admiring.

uncovered by Gilligan and deduce its foundations. She argues that the rights-oriented view of morality commits a flaw from its outset: it seeks to justify caring and active duties toward others (as opposed to duties of non-interference). According to Noddings, “the moral viewpoint is prior to any notion of justification... We are not 'justified' –we are obligated–to do what is required to maintain and enhance caring. We must 'justify' not-caring” (95). The problem with the traditional philosophical approach to ethics is that it seeks an answer independently of the nature of our relationships for problems that arise precisely because we are in relationships with others. The question of taking care of others is not, according to her, one of justifying a dependent's claim on a caregiver, but one of how best to carry out what obligations arise from the very existence of inequality. Her work focuses on the dialogue and attentiveness between caregivers and those cared-for. Stating that “the caring that gives meaning to caretaking is too often dismissed as sentiment” (22), Noddings is emphatic that a stance of detachment is anathema to moral reasoning.

Noddings identifies dialogue, patience, and confirmation as “the great means of nurturing the ethical ideal” of caring in those being cared for (182). Noddings also stresses that one providing care is concerned as much with the relationship between caretakers and those cared for as with the parties themselves (3-5). Rather than seeking reciprocation, reward, or harmony with rational rules, caregivers seek completion in their relationships of care. While perfect reciprocity is impossible under conditions of inequality, to actively care for others is to nurture the ideal of caring itself. The one caring for a dependent sets an example for him or her, as well as any other witness to the relationship, who will then “turn about and act as one-caring in the circles and chains within which he is defined” (95). For Noddings, then, caring is aimed not only at the well-being of the cared-for and the preservation of particular relationships, but at its own promulgation as a value. One of her sharpest departures from

many feminists is that she doubts the socialisation theory of gender. Women's oppression, along with other social ills, on her account stems not from the training of women to be self-sacrificing, but from the exclusion of feminine values from the public sphere (129).

In *Maternal Thinking* (1989), Sara Ruddick challenges the dismissive attitude taken by traditional ethical theorists toward the work and moral reasoning of mothers. Neglecting childhood generally, the major streams of philosophical ethics–utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics– tend to start with the assumption that moral agents are independent able-bodied adults whose ethical obligations toward one another result from some sort of implied contract, rational derivation, or abstract ideal. Those who are dependent or disabled are treated as exceptions and those with dependents are considered to only be obliged insofar as they have agreed to the relationship. Within such a tradition, the work of mothers, when acknowledged at all, tends to be considered “instinctual” and therefore not subject to moral evaluation. In contrast to this tradition, Ruddick argues that mothering is not simply instinctive, that it requires deliberation, and that it is subject to moral evaluation. There are better and worse ways to mother. There are norms implicit in mothering. Specifically, a mother (whom Ruddick defines by the role, not the gender, so men could potentially mother) is responsible for the protection, nurturing, and training of children (23). Furthermore, Ruddick goes on to argue that the values implicit in good mothering ought to be held up as ethical norms for all human interactions. Not only are the values of caring worthy of attention by moral philosophers, but they ought to augment, or even supplant, other moral paradigms.

Although arising as a response to the devaluation of women's experiences in philosophy and psychology, care ethics has drawn criticism from feminist critics. Liberal feminists, such as Susan Moller Okin and Martha Nussbaum, worry that it endorses a “stereotypical image of women as selfless

nurturer" (Held 22) and rationalises the relegation of women to caring work. Others, including Catherine MacKinnon, Claudia Card, and Alison Jaggar, warn against uncritically enshrining moral ideals that have been formed under conditions of patriarchy.[10] Although the ethics of care has come to enjoy much broader acceptance among feminists, it remains to be reconciled to deontology and utilitarianism, which are still the dominant frameworks within which scholarly work in ethics is conducted. Indeed, the ethics of care is omitted from some textbooks on ethics, and treated as a footnote in many others.[11]

A representative example of the liberal feminist perspective on maternity can be found in Susan Moller Okin's *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (1989), in which she joins Mary Wollstonecraft in her condemnation of Rousseau's apology for sexual inequality (Okin 33). In *Émile* (1762), Jean-Jacques Rousseau appeals to his own understanding of "natural" differences between men and women and essentially uses what Karen Warren would call "the logic of domination" to justify the subordination of one sex to the other.[12] Like Wollstonecraft in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Okin argues that many of these alleged differences are fictional, as demonstrated in the time since Wollstonecraft. The reforms that Wollstonecraft had called for had been enacted with the result that more women published, more women attained positions of public power, and more women could live independently of men. However, despite advances in divorce law, child support, access to birth control, and some provisions for maternity leave, liberal society renders the necessary activity of procreation a serious burden on women and a barrier to their other pursuits. Unlike care ethicists, who argue that this is the result of an

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[10] See Card's and Jaggar's contributions to *Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics* (1995).

[11] For example, Louis Pojman's *Ethical Theory: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (2002).

[12] In "The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism" (1990), Warren describes the logic of domination as an underlying rationale for the subordination of nature that hierarchicalises moral duties on the basis of similarity and difference between the moral agent and the object of consideration.

undervaluation of the principles of care, Okin takes this to be due to a lack of attention to the principles of justice within families (110).

Because of this fundamental difference with care ethicists, Okin is critical of the movement and disagrees on a number of other points. She accepts that vulnerability is a necessity for children. This much “natural (and therefore unavoidable) vulnerability” (139) is morally permissible in her view, as is the mutual vulnerability of love. However, gender-structured marriage and the most common family arrangements subject women to “a cycle of socially caused and asymmetrical vulnerability” (138). This is socially caused because of an economic arrangement that fails to count reproduction and nurturance as work and so does not adequately compensate it (149). This vulnerability is asymmetrical because it places women in a state of economic dependence while the social expectation that she be the primary caregiver places demands on her by a dependent. Although the ethics of care may agree that society unfairly places caregivers in a disadvantaged position, its proponents tend to take issue with the implied undesirability of vulnerability and dependence. Because, unlike Okin, they take it to be unavoidable that we are all dependent and vulnerable in various ways (especially when a person is considered four-dimensionally; although we may not all grow to be feeble, we did all start that way), they do not seek to eliminate dependency and vulnerability, but to divorce these from injustice. For the ethics of care, vulnerability and dependency are the very ground of morality; there are moral questions precisely because we have dependents, dependencies, and inequality.

Okin's explicit objections to the ethics of care include the empirical question of whether there really is a demonstrable difference in the moral reasoning of boys and girls, and on the theoretical question about whether there is a real distinction between care and justice (15). She does not explore the first challenge at length, although Gilligan's methodology has been questioned by others (Held 27).

Okin's short rebuttal to Gilligan is that even if a “feminine voice” could be found, it would not be clear how much this was the product of patriarchal conditioning. The second challenge is considered as part of an entire chapter defending John Rawls against common feminist criticisms (Okin 89). She argues that, although Rawlsian liberalism is guilty of neglecting to discuss the family, its principles apply and are compatible with feminist aims. As well, like Martha Nussbaum, she argues that accusations that liberalism denigrates sentiment are unfounded (Okin 99, Nussbaum 73).

Martha Nussbaum is unusual among liberal feminists for drawing as much on virtue theory as on deontology or utilitarianism, but her perspectives on law, society, and the family resemble those of mainstream feminism. Where liberal feminists tend to agree with other feminists in the critique of liberalism is on the claim that traditional liberal theory passes over the family and the fairness of the relations within it, often assuming as the neutral, natural, and normal individual someone independent, free to choose relationships, and who has someone else taking care of everything that does not involve the “public sphere.” The public/private distinction itself is also usually brought into question. Like Okin, Nussbaum would rather see the principles of justice applied to the family than what she considers the supererogative selflessness and uncritical sentimentalism of care ethics (74).

Although critical of liberalism, radical feminism tends to be even more distant from care ethics. Taking the form of class analysis, with men as the upper caste and women as the lower, radical feminism is less concerned with the piecemeal gains and policy proposals of liberal feminists and seeks instead to clean the slate of patriarchal concepts and relations. Catherine MacKinnon questions any gender-oriented values that are developed under conditions of oppression, going so far as to say that the caring attitude in women is “what male supremacy has attributed to us for its own use” (quoted in Bartlett 1569). Shulamith Firestone, in *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), considers the family a source of

oppression, but differs (radically) from liberals in her proposals for transforming it: she proposes to replace reproduction with cloning and the family with the socialisation of child-rearing. Such positions rule out of hand the normativity of a woman's sense of duty to her specific children and extended family. The ideal of a world without birth should raise alarms for readers of *Frankenstein*.

Frankenstein became a popular novel for feminist study after Ellen Moers's *Literary Women* (1976) featured a chapter called “Feminine Gothic,” which pays especial attention to Mary Shelley. According to Moers, what sets *Frankenstein* apart from other Gothic novels is that, while many feature a persecuted heroine, this novel achieves its terror “without a heroine, without even an important female victim” (92). Although it is false to claim there is no important female victim in the novel, it is remarkable that in a genre populated by so many female authors writing tales of female agency, the daughter of the age's most famous feminist publishes a novel with only seemingly passive female characters. “Paradoxically,” says Moers, “no other Gothic work by a woman writer... better repays examination in light of the sex of its author. For *Frankenstein* is birth myth, and one that was lodged in the novelist's imagination... by the fact that she was herself a mother” (92). Although it resembles other tales of overreachers, such as Faust and Prometheus, “Mary Shelley's overreacher is different. Frankenstein's exploration of the forbidden boundaries of human science does not cause the prolongation and extension of his own life, but the creation of a new one” (95). Because of this goal, it would be hard to describe Victor as primarily an egoist. In fact, he continually uses ethical rationalisation throughout the novel.

Moers argues that Shelley works through her own anxieties about pregnancy by creating a male persona who comes as close as a male can to giving birth and then commits the most shocking act a new mother can: he abandons his offspring. On this reading, Shelley's tale is a response to the horrors

and consequences of giving birth, and it is “distinctly a woman's mythmaking on the subject of birth precisely because its emphasis is not upon what precedes birth, not upon birth itself, but upon what follows birth, the trauma of the afterbirth” (93). This is in contrast to the usual treatment of birth in novels by male authors, when birth is discussed at all, who tend to focus on “the happy maternal reactions: the ecstasy, the sense of fulfilment, and the rush of nourishing love which sweep over the new mother when she first holds her baby in her arms” (93). In this reading, Victor is an alias for Mary and gives voice to her anxieties about pregnancy. This draws out the distinctly feminine concerns of the novel, which had gone largely unremarked prior to Moers.

Mary Poovey seems skeptical of the feminist import of *Frankenstein* and takes it to be more a symptom of nineteenth-century gender norms rather than a critique. In *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (1984), Poovey identifies two conflicting ideals that Shelley tries to live up to: that of the literary genius, and that of the proper lady (116). Poovey sees Shelley criticizing herself for her own self-assertion, particularly in the 1831 edition as well as in all her later works. According to her view, *Frankenstein* follows the works of Wollstonecraft and the Romantics in its Promethean subject matter and focus on the individual overreacher, “but when *Frankenstein* is considered alongside contemporary works... it proves to be more conservative than her first readers realized,” since its critical target is, “not the social conventions that inhibit creativity, but rather the egotism that Mary Shelley associates with the artist's monstrous self-assertion” (122). Whereas Mary Wollstonecraft lauds independence and Percy Shelley sees creativity as a key to immortality, in *Frankenstein*, independence leads to isolation and creativity leads to death. For Poovey, the increased attention to domesticity in 1831 marks an increased distance from the intellectual influence of Wollstonecraft and Percy Shelley, and a “proto-Victorian” ethic. Victor's world is destroyed by failing to acknowledge his interdependency with his

family. In the novel's associations between Victor's creation and authorship, there is a suggestion that Shelley, too, is transgressing her proper relations to family (138). This supports my own reading of the novel, at least part of it. However, I feel that Poovey misses *Frankenstein*'s important distinctions from tales of egotism and fails to mine the full philosophical depth of the novel. Indeed, much of *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* is devoted to examining the personal circumstances that women authors are allegedly trying to cope with through their writing. If Poovey is to be believed, by 1831 Shelley is writing most of her novels as autobiographical apologies for writing and for her youthful transgressions (117). This undermines the authors themselves, who are not simply working out personal psychological issues, but have thoughtful social critiques to offer. In Shelley's case, this is critique not only of egoists but of the masculinist value-set that holds (the impossible dream of) autonomous accomplishment as a worthy goal.

The third of the works which set the terms for future feminist *Frankenstein* scholarship is Anne Mellor's *Mary Shelley, Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (1988), which paints Mary Shelley conservatively and places her in opposition to Wollstonecraft, claiming that the former celebrates a form of “bourgeois domesticity” in *Frankenstein* (Mellor 39). According to Mellor, rather than propose revolutionary living arrangements or celebrate the free love ideals of the romantics, Shelley implies that the patriarchal family arrangement, exemplified by both the Frankensteins and the DeLaceys, is the best available source of happiness (88). Associating this emphasis on a good family life as a condition of happiness and the development of good character with the views of Edmund Burke, Mellor concludes that Shelley's view of the family is essentially conservative (86). Curiously, Mellor equates Burkean patriarchal domestic values with care ethics. Proposing in her essay, “Making a Monster: An Introduction to *Frankenstein*” (2003) that *Frankenstein* has an anti-revolutionary message, she implies

by the short comment she makes on care ethics that she considers it, too, essentially conservative (23).

A reading of the novel friendlier to care ethics, though not feminist in its focus, can be found in David Marshall's *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy* (1988). Starting with the oft-remarked satire of Rousseau's theory of human development in the Creature's narrative, Marshall also finds that many of Rousseau's traits revealed in *Confessions and Reveries du promeneur solitaire* (1782) are echoed in the character of Victor Frankenstein (Marshall 183-6). He also notes that Shelley devotes a large portion of her life of Rousseau (1839) to the topic of his child abandonment and that this is one of the few places where she takes an unsympathetic tone toward the *philosophe* (187). The position from which Marshall claims Shelley is criticising Rousseau is one rooted in Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* and Godwin's *Enquiry* (189). From this position, “Mary Shelley reflects on eighteenth-century accounts of sympathy and displays her own ambivalent assessment of the moral and aesthetic sentiments that are at stake” (182). According to Marshall, *Frankenstein* plays out Rousseau's theories of language and society in a kind of thought experiment. At stake is the sentimentalist view that the moral imperative derives from a felt affinity arising in communication with, or observation of others.

The novel's engagement with Rousseau is undeniable, and the influence of eighteenth-century philosophers of sentiment is likely, but Marshall's reading implies that Shelley's views can be reduced to those of her parents and the empiricists, passing over the particular way in which she detracts from her predecessors. Although he acknowledges the presence of feminist themes in the novel, he does not distinguish these from the broadly liberal themes to be found equally in the works of Godwin and Rousseau. Furthermore, Shelley's own moral conclusions Marshall takes to be “ambivalent” (182). I, on the other hand, will argue that her position is very clear considered in light of the ethics of care. It may appear ambivalent because it is nuanced and does not fit neatly in to the traditions that Marshall is

considering. It was also written before any clear articulation of the ethics of care existed.

Mary Shelley shares the basic premise of eighteenth-century theorists of sentiment, such as Rousseau, Burke, and Hume, all of whom she read between 1815 and 1818 (*Journals* I: 89-102), that ethical reasoning is as rooted in sentiment toward others as deliberation about matters of fact is rooted in observation of the world.[13] This preference for a felt morality and sensed reality over theories of ethics and epistemology that rely on axioms and logical proofs is common ground for these empiricists and twentieth-century care ethicists. Although Shelley's view has sympathies with earlier influential thinkers such as Hume and Burke, it is still based more on maternal values than either of their fairly paternalistic systems and therefore more aligned with modern care ethics than either Humean ethics or Burkean theories of domesticity. Indeed, if Poovey is correct that "personal identity for [Shelley] entails defining oneself in terms of relationships (not one but many)–not, as Wollstonecraft and Wordsworth would have it, in terms of self-assertion, confrontation, freedom, and faith in the individualistic imaginative act" (126-7), then Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* outlines the very (mostly gendered) division in ethical reasoning discussed by Carol Gilligan in *In A Different Voice* and developed since by theorists of the ethics of care.

One of the reasons that Shelley is better aligned with care ethicists than with her male forerunners is that the eighteenth-century concept of "sympathy" is too limited to cover the kinds of ethical relationships with which she is concerned. "Care" is a more active concept and carries more normative weight. If Victor Frankenstein is judged according to the terms of care ethics, the ambivalence alleged by Marshall and the shortcomings alleged by Poovey and Mellor disappear. I will

[13] See Rousseau's *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1754), Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, (1757), Hume's *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), and Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759).

contend that the debate between an individualistic ethic of entitlements and a relational ethic of obligation is what is at work in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Following the liberal spirit of inquiry and proceeding by the rationalistic rules of science, Victor Frankenstein creates a man without a childhood. The absurdity of the application of Victor's values to the role of parent is demonstrated in the effects it has. A caregiver without an ethic of care can ruin not only the cared-for, but the entire circles and chains of relationships that define oneself. Victor's monstrous motherhood, devoid of genuine caring skills and values, destroys him by destroying his family. In addition to the consequences of failures of caring, this underscores the relational nature of persons.

Virginia Held says, “Two individuals can be personally virtuous in the sense of having virtuous dispositions and yet have a relationship that is hostile, conflictual, and unhelpful to either” (53). It is my contention that this is a perfect description of Victor Frankenstein and his creature. Both possess a strong sense of justice and display signs of benevolence, but they relate to one another in such a way as to destroy both. Victor uses both utilitarian and deontological reasoning through the course of the story at times when they are not appropriate. Victor takes an oppositional masculinist stance against his own creation, debating who has what rights and who owes what to whom, without accepting the fact of their relationship, the unequal needs that the Creature has, and the moral imperatives those create. The Creature has clearer moral perception, borne perhaps of his inability to take family for granted, but can only express his claims in the patriarchal (and vengeful) language of Milton. Chapter Two will examine the influences in Victor's life and the many examples of caring from which he could have learned. Chapter Three will examine three masculine characters who bring about, or almost bring about, the death of all who are close to them: Victor, the Creature, and Walton.

CHAPTER TWO

Swiss Family Frankenstein: a model of temperate, thoughtful, caring relations

In Chapter One, I explained that care ethics has developed in response to the deficiencies and oversights of masculinist ethical theories, which include both utilitarianism and deontology, as well as renderings of the liberal conception of justice. Chapters Two and Three will provide a reading of *Frankenstein* as a critique of these theories, anticipating care ethics. This critique may be roughly divided into two components. The first is an analysis of caring good and bad. This includes the story of Victor's upbringing, his maturation, and his act of creation and abandonment. The second component is a critique of liberal masculinist moral reasoning. This aspect of the tale is rooted in Victor and the Creature's first verbal confrontation and is carried to the end of the story through Victor's pursuit into the Arctic. It is Walton who finally enacts the moral lesson by abandoning his pursuit of a place in history out of concern for the particular individuals dependent on him, namely his crew. The latter half of the novel will be the focus of Chapter Three.

In this Chapter, I will look at the first part of the novel, in which we see several examples of care and abundant commentary on different values. Various aspects of caring values and their masculinist contraries rise and re-emerge at different points in the story, some incidents examining many related values at once. Because of this fluidity, I have ordered the topics in this chapter by story character rather than by features of care ethics. To facilitate reading, I will remind the reader of the distinguishing features of care ethics and their contraries: ethical obligation is based on needs, dependency, and the nature of the relationship, not on debt or explicit contracts; the emotions are a vital part of moral epistemology, not extraneous; the claims of particular others for whom we take

responsibility take priority over those of strangers or “humanity” in general, contrary to the enlightened liberal ideal of impartiality; the child-parent relationship is emblematic of moral negotiation, not an exception as treated in masculinist theories; ethical conscience is nurtured through physical interactions in caring relationships, it cannot be adequately taught discursively; embodiment matters–ethical principles are derived from the material needs of specific people, not hypothetical situations involving detached judges; rather than conceiving of ethical dilemmas as arising when the desires of independent individuals come into conflict with one another, people are assumed to always be already enmeshed in relationships; because of the importance and inescapability of relationships, the ethics of care favours a restorative rather than retributive approach to justice. It is with these eight features of the ethics of care in mind that I will examine Victor Frankenstein and his relationships.

I will argue that different members of Victor's coterie represent different stages of removal from the values of care. Caroline Beaufort is the intelligent, responsible caregiver and Elizabeth Lavenza follows in her footsteps, serving as the moral voice in Victor's life after Caroline's passing. One remove further is Alphonse Frankenstein, who begins involved in public affairs, where domestic concerns meet broad universalistic reasoning, and settles in to domesticity as he matures. Family friend Henry Clerval has public aspirations and is concerned with his place in history, but he is always there for his friends and family. Despite all these examples to learn from, Victor fails in his own caring duties. Rejected by he who should have been his ethical nurturer, the Creature also fails to live morally; however, the Creature seems conscious of this, more so than his maker. Whether Victor comes to learn the lesson himself is unclear at the end of the story; it is left to Walton to translate this tragedy into a change of ethical course.

The first four chapters of the novel, following Walton's initial set of letters, are about origins.

They describe the origins of Victor's parents, of their relationship, of himself, of Elizabeth, of Clerval, and finally, of the Creature. Other than a passing reference to “a second son” (85), and Caroline's mention of “my younger children” (91), Victor's younger brothers are ignored until Chapter 6. In the first two chapters, various moral examples are presented of domestic affection, guardianship, caregiving, and filial gratitude. Mary Shelley's chart of moral progress appears to be the inverse of Kohlberg’s. The latter’s model regards the realm of politics a sphere of higher moral importance than domestic concerns, itself to be governed by higher principles derived from reason. Shelley's chart of moral progress in the novel is actually in the direction away from the abstract and universal. Alphonse Frankenstein begins in the realm of public affairs, but settles down to spend more time with his family. Contrarily, Victor Frankenstein spends a happy childhood deeply involved with his family, but his emotional retreat from them results in his moral decay. Caroline and Elizabeth remain constant to their loved ones; the Creature is never able to form a loving relationship and regards murder to be just. Never having experienced the physical intimacy of nurturing, he regards living bodies in the same detached manner that Victor regards the bodies of the dead.

Victor begins his account by naming both his geographic and genetic origins: “I am by birth a Genevese, and my family is one of the most distinguished of that republic.” He reveals that his family has traditionally been involved in the political sphere: “My ancestors had been for many years counsellors and syndics” and that his father spent much of his life “perpetually occupied by the affairs of his country” (80). The first chapter of volume one presents the man Victor could have been: a compassionate husband and father. The only deviation between the 1818 and 1831 editions in the first paragraph of this chapter is in the last sentence, which refers to Alphonse's decision to marry. In the first edition, “it was not until the decline of life that he thought of marrying, and bestowing on the state sons

who might carry his virtues and his name down to posterity" (1818, 823). In 1831, "a variety of circumstances had prevented his marrying early, nor was it until the decline of life that he became a husband and the father of a family" (80). In the first edition, Alphonse is whole-heartedly involved in political life, and when he decides to settle down, the egoistic desire to pass on his name is cited as a factor in his decision. Note also that he is "bestowing on the state" his sons, suggesting that reproduction is in the service of an abstract entity: the state. The word "family" does not appear, nor does any feminine reference. By contrast, the 1831 edition describes him as a husband, indicating his role in relationship to a wife. Described as a "father of a family," he is also placed in a role defined by a set of relationships. He is not just father "to" a family, but "of" it, and nowhere does this passage indicate a concern with the abstract concept, "posterity." This suggests that as Shelley prepared the work for the new edition, she intentionally further developed the care argument.

As an example of a caring male, Alphonse is shown to be motivated by compassion and relatively unconcerned with masculine notions of honour and independence. When Beaufort, "One of his most intimate friends . . . a merchant who, from a flourishing state, fell . . . into poverty" (1831, 80), Alphonse endeavours to do what he can to help. Although Beaufort "was of a proud and unbending disposition and could not bear to live in poverty and oblivion in the same country where he had formerly been distinguished for his rank and magnificence," Alphonse "deplored the false pride" that motivates Beaufort's retreat into obscurity. To him, friends should be there for one another, and dependency is nothing to be ashamed of. Indeed, he is insulted that Beaufort would rather live in poverty than ask for help, deeming such "conduct so little worthy of the affection that united them" (1831, 80). Rather than debate about who owes whom what, or extend an offer with an expectation of compensation, Alphonse believes that taking care of one's friends is just part of what friendship means.

Rather than admire the myth of the independent man, lauded by so many Romantics, Alphonse scoffs at it.

Alphonse's aid to the needy Beaufort also raises the issue of relationships and exchanges between unequals, something that has been named as a problem both for liberalism, which has been accused of ignoring power differences by feminists (Schwartzman 7), and some strains of feminism, accused of misconstruing the import of of power imbalances by care ethicists. The ethics of care assumes inequality rather than treating it as an exception. For care ethics, not only can there be ethical inequality, ethics is largely about how we treat our dependents and unequals.

Alphonse's decision to marry is an interesting example of the balancing of equality and difference in ethical relationships. Caroline Beaufort is the daughter of Alphonse's friend and much younger than Alphonse. She is also poor, and upon the death of Beaufort, orphaned. It might be tempting to suppose that the differences between a young poor orphaned woman and an older well-off man who has provided charity to the family render such a match exploitive, or at least in danger of being so. Yet, the “bonds of devoted affection” (Shelley 1831, 81) do not suppose material or physical equality nor equivalent reciprocity. Every moment of our lives we are dependent on others who are in various positions of power over us. In the earliest and latest stages of life, we are, hopefully, dependent on others with whom we share genuine bonds of affection. Alphonse's marriage is not motivated by aristocratic or bourgeois concerns of property, status, or advantage. Rather, he is touched by Caroline's devotion to her father in his weakest time. He is impressed by her “mind of uncommon mould” and her “courage.” His decision to marry her is “inspired by a reverence for her virtues and a desire to be the means of . . . recompensing her for the sorrows she had endured” (81-82). Rather than relying on her to tend to the household while he participates in public affairs, as in a common bourgeois marriage,

Alphonse “gradually relinquished all his public functions” (82) to better care for Beaufort and the grieving Caroline. His retirement also marks the beginning of a new family, for “immediately after their union they sought the pleasant climate of Italy,” where Victor, “their eldest child, was born at Naples.” This brings the discussion back to Victor's genetic origins.

Though he identifies himself as Genevese, Victor is in fact born in Italy, “that land of wonders” (82), reputed to have “restorative” powers, that seem to include fertility. From there, his family tours France and Germany. This tour is not dwelt upon, but still worth noting. Later in the novel, the German city of Ingolstadt is equated with alienation from natural sentiment, manifested both in the detached reason vaunted by the university and in Victor's macabre experiments. Here in Chapter One, Naples lies in a “land of wonders,” where babies are born, but that also has a reputation for passionate and ruthless political strife.[14] France is characterised as a place of luxury, but also of strong class divisions and fickle justice, as shown in the story of DeLacey's exile (168). At the nexus of Italy, France, and Germany is Switzerland, characterized as a temperate, stable place next to its romance neighbours, yet compassionate in contrast to the Germans, who are only represented as professors of science. This reflects some of the appeal of republicanism for romantic idealists, but Shelley places the relationship of Alphonse and Caroline above the contractualism of republicanism by stressing that Alphonse leaves public office in favour of domesticity and that both leave rational Switzerland for passionate Italy to restore their spirits in the wake of death, and to create new life.

The character of Alphonse fades into the background in the rest of Victor's discussion of his family, which focuses more on the women. Although Alphonse is painted as an ideal caring father, there

[14] Shelley's fascination with Italy, its tempers, and its intrigues is evidenced in such stories as “A Tale of the Passions,” “Recollections of Italy,” “The Bride of Modern Italy,” “The Sisters of Albano,” “The Brother and Sister: An Italian Story,” and “The Heir of Mondolfo,” (1828-39) as well as the novel, *Valperga* (1823).

is one place in the account of Victor's early life where the former meets with criticism. When confronted with Victor's curiosity, and seeing that Victor is studying such discredited natural philosophers as Agrippa and Paracelsus, Alphonse's reaction is to chastise Victor for wasting time. To this, Victor responds in a manner typical of teenage males: he does the opposite of what his father wills. Victor takes a moment in his recollection of this episode to remark that things may have gone differently had Alphonse approached the situation differently. It is the imperative form and dismissive tone of his father's admonition, “do not waste your time upon this; it is sad trash” (87), that spurs Victor on further. Had Alphonse taken the time to engage in dialogue, Victor avers that he would have listened and probably not gone any further down the path he takes. This reflects the charge care ethicists have made that masculine ethics and politics are too combative and that dialogue and relationship-negotiating should be favoured over the adversarial approach seen in liberal jurisprudence. A contrast is seen in Henry Clerval's father who, although initially resistant to Henry's ambitions of more than book-keeping, maintains an open mind and eventually comes to accept his son's wishes. It is not clear what Henry would have done had his father taken a more dismissive tone, but the case of Victor suggests that such confrontationalism may only serve to radicalise the one being rebuffed.

Although eminently admirable, Alphonse is shown by the above instance to be fallible. The fault is notably along the lines of typical masculine behaviour: confrontation. Caroline and Elizabeth, on the other hand are portrayed without flaws. Selfless heroines are typical of Shelley's fiction and of her contemporaries, so it is tempting to overlook this. However, in early nineteenth-century fiction, heroines are more often portrayed as self-sacrificing yet still dependent. In the gothic fiction tradition upon which *Frankenstein* draws, men in such stories will still usually end up saving the day. In the case of *Frankenstein*, in the absence of women, men are doomed. The story of Victor's age of innocence

closes with the death of Caroline.

Caroline is presented as flawlessly self-sacrificing and intelligently attentive to the needs of others. She is shown to place the highest value upon personal relationships and her act of passing on the moral stewardship of the family to Elizabeth (91) is given too prominent a place in the narrative to be passed over as incidental. She is introduced as not only a traditional dutiful daughter who tends to family at home, but also a breadwinner: “His [Beaufort's] daughter attended him with the greatest tenderness, but she saw with despair that their little fund was rapidly decreasing and that there was no other prospect of support . . . She procured plain work; she plaited straw; and by various means contrived to earn a pittance scarcely sufficient to support life” (81). In fact, Caroline is one of the few prominent characters shown earning an income. Alphonse is introduced at the point of retirement, Elizabeth lives a domestic life, and Clerval and Victor are still at the cusp of their careers.

This self-sacrificing characterisation may seem like a simple portrayal of a standard gender role. However, a few things distinguish Shelley's heroines from stock dutiful daughters. Caroline is shown to be forward, not passive, in her caring. She ambitiously goes out to find work to support her father. Later, she offers to adopt a girl who is not being offered, but whom she can see has needs this family is unable to meet, a family whose own needs are risked by trying to care for their ward. Her intelligence is stressed as one of the reasons for Alphonse's attraction to her. She also makes clear on her deathbed the importance of an intelligent responsible caregiver to the well-being of a family.

It is remarked in the narrative of the Frankenstein family that Caroline is generally caring, a “guardian angel to the afflicted” (83). It is also noted, however, that she places a special emphasis on those in particular relationships to her. This is borne out in her caring for her father, and also in her care for her daughter. When “the life of her favourite was menaced” (91), Caroline devotes herself, to the

point of sacrificing herself, to Elizabeth's recovery:

> Elizabeth had caught the scarlet fever; her illness was severe and she was in the greatest danger. During her illness many arguments had been urged to persuade my mother to refrain from attending upon her. She had at first yielded to our entreaties, but when she heard that the life of her favourite was menaced, she could no longer control her anxiety. She attended her sickbed; her watchful attentions triumphed over the malignity of the distemper – Elizabeth was saved, but the consequences of this imprudence were fatal to her preserver. (91)

The story of Caroline's death is as important, and emphasised, as that of her life. There are four aspects of the circumstances surrounding her death that stand out in light of her role as exemplar of caring agent. The first is the manner in which she contracts the illness that kills her, namely by tending to her infectious daughter. The second is the deathbed request she makes of Elizabeth, to carry on tending to the needs of the family. The third is the relationship between her death and Victor's embarkation on the path to perdition–it is when he loses his mother that he turns his back on his particular duties in favour of the pursuit of universal truths. The fourth is the dream Victor has equating the birth of his creature with the death of both Caroline and Elizabeth.

As Elizabeth recovers, and just as Victor is set to leave for his studies at Ingolstadt, the fever overtakes Caroline. This juxtaposition of endings and beginnings will be echoed in the dream Victor has after bringing life to the Creature. In Caroline's last living appearance in the story, she stresses the importance of a feminine presence within the family unit by pleading, “Elizabeth my love, you must supply my place to my younger children” (91). Given Victor's statement that Caroline's illness is an “omen...of my future misery” (91), such an admonishment at the very moment that Victor starts on his trip to Ingolstadt can be seen as a warning of what will come of his pursuits and a foreshadow of the

murders of the other Frankensteins.

The moral paradigm exemplified by Caroline's act of caring for Elizabeth now falls to the latter to express, a role she takes up immediately: “She indeed veiled her grief and strove to act the comforter to us all” (92). Victor's departure for Ingolstadt also means a departure from this source of comfort and moral guidance. When the mantle of the maternal role is passed to Elizabeth, Victor acknowledges momentarily how significant his mother was in his life and how much a part of himself: “It is so long before the mind can persuade itself that she whom we saw every day and whose very existence appeared a part of our own, can have departed forever” (92). Shortly after this acknowledgement of interconnectedness, Victor leaves. This is both a physical and symbolic departure from his family. Not only is he going away to study, but in choosing this path, he begins his alienation from the “old familiar faces” that characterise his happy earlier life: “I was now alone” (93). This isolation only increases proportionally to Victor's obsession. To his own detriment, he even neglects his correspondence with home.

Victor's relationship to Elizabeth is very complex, and slightly different between editions of the novel. In the 1818 edition, she is a cousin come to live with the family. In the 1831 edition, she is adopted from a peasant family who themselves were foster parents to her. What is distinctly more interesting about this latter version, from the perspective of care ethics, is that it shows that caring concern for others can go beyond those immediately related to oneself, and across differences of genesis, as Elizabeth is the daughter of Milanese nobility, fostered by peasants and finally adopted by a Swiss family. Her mother having died giving birth, Elizabeth begins her life in a similar fashion to the Creature: motherless and proximate to death. The attention paid in the novel to the adoption of Elizabeth also highlights the importance of a caring upbringing (Elizabeth does not grow up alone in a

hovel sleeping on straw, unlike the Creature). As well, it provides an example of the salience of needs– Caroline finds a family "distributing a scanty meal to five hungry babes" (83),[15] and feels drawn to care for one who stands out to her.

Victor and Elizabeth are raised together, yet their adult relationship is romantic in nature. This is not the sole instance of blurred family-lover lines or other complex relationships in Shelley's writing.[16] Rather than take this at a superficial interpretive value and assume it to indicate a preoccupation with incest, whether for psychological or philosophical reasons, it is more productive to treat it as indicative of an interest in the commonalities and differences between all forms of relationship. Indeed, in the 1831 edition, Victor identifies "cousin" as an apt term of endearment for the same person he goes on in the next sentence to speak of in the language of wedding vows: "We called each other familiarly by the name of cousin. No word, no expression could body forth the kind of relation she bore to me – my more than sister, since till death she was to be mine only" (84). This passage also reveals that Victor's attitude even toward loved ones takes a tone of ownership, predicting the tone he later takes toward his creature.

As she grows, Elizabeth is presented as a contrast to Victor. She is associated with the natural and humanistic. She has a deep love for nature as it is, "the sublime shapes of the mountains, the changes of the seasons, tempest and calm, the silence of winter, and the life and turbulence of our Alpine summers – she found ample scope for admiration and delight," as well as for "the aerial creations of poets" (85). This shows a fondness for the living and for the sentimental. Contrarily, Victor's interest in nature is not as a realm of discrete objects and life forms that can be appreciated for

[15] All further references will be to the 1831 edition.

[16] Family is a central theme in most of Shelley's work. Her families are often portrayed in disrupted or warped condition, whether through a falling out, as in *Lodore*, incestuous sentiment, as in *Mathilda*, or outright rejection, as in *Frankenstein*.

their distinctive qualities, but as the manifestations of more important universal laws:

> While my companion contemplated . . . the magnificent appearances of things, I delighted in investigating their causes. . . Curiosity, earnest research to learn the hidden laws of nature, gladness akin to rapture, as they were unfolded to me, are among the earliest sensations I can remember. (85)

The difference between these two “cousins” parallels the difference between the care approach, which focuses on context and uses the emotions as moral cues, and the justice approach, which judges situations based on universal rules abstracted from living (akin to the natural philosopher's “hidden laws of nature”) and considers an ideal judge to be cool and strictly rational. Victor acknowledges the importance of Elizabeth's influence, “I might have become sullen . . . rough . . . but that she was there to subdue me” (86-87), but rejects this influence while shut up in his Ingolstadt apartment, paying “no visit to Geneva” (98) for two years.

This isolation from his family is only interrupted after Victor's creation has run off, when Clerval brings him a letter from Elizabeth. In this letter, the image of the bedside is evoked once again: “I figure to myself that the task of attending on your sickbed has devolved on some mercenary old nurse, who could never guess your wishes nor minister to them with the care and affection of your poor cousin” (112). The example set by Caroline is what Elizabeth wishes to follow now, and take care of her loved one. Note also the reference to personal intimacy as a form of specialised knowledge. Because she knows Victor intimately, she is best qualified to attend to his particular needs. Caroline demonstrates particularity as a form of attachment in her favouritism of Elizabeth; Elizabeth describes particularity as a type of specialised knowledge.

This letter is also very significant for its presentation of the cycle of life in action. After Victor

has missed the passing of seasons, he also misses the growth of his siblings. Ernest, despite the protestations of his family, wishes to enter the foreign service. In a demonstration of caring compromise and concern for what best suits the cared-for, the family is inclined to consent: “I fear that he will become an idler unless we yield to the point and permit him to enter the profession which he has selected” (112). Meanwhile, the younger William “is very tall for his age,” and unlike his adult brother, “has already had one or two little *wives*” (114) (author's emphasis). As Victor has just completed a perverse route to the creation of life, Elizabeth reminds him of the ordinary route, leaving as the last piece of news, that “The pretty Miss Mansfield, has already received the congratulatory visits on her approaching marriage,” and adding with a sore tone, “Her ugly sister, Manon . . . married last autumn” (114). As far as Elizabeth is concerned, the cycle of growth and reproduction is very much a social and interpersonal thing, not an object of scientific study. She also clearly sees participation in this cycle as a completion; the question for her is not whether, but when. It is characteristic of Elizabeth that she is virtually unable to imagine well-being in isolation. For this reason, she implores Victor to accept the company of Henry Clerval.

Clerval is very similar to Victor, but just grounded enough to steer clear of radical enterprises. He appreciates risk and romance, chivalry and songs, but he takes these up in the form of literature. Clerval seeks to be a “benefactor of our species” (86), a loftier goal than the civic functions performed by Alphonse, but still within the social realm of commerce and politics, and far less grandiose than Victor's plan to create “A new species” (101-2). He also differs in that his interest stays broad yet secondary to his concern for friends and family, while Victor obsesses on one thing and prioritises it above all else. Clerval is in many ways the young man that Victor could have been. He shares Victor's curiosity and enthusiasm, but has a playful manner that prevents obsession and does not hesitate to

respond to those in need of care, as evidenced by the time he devotes to Victor in Ingolstadt. Considering also that “Clerval had never sympathized with my tastes for natural science and his literary pursuits differed wholly from those which had occupied me,” echoing a difference between Victor and Elizabeth, he could be seen as a compromise between the two.

Clerval's friendship with the Frankenstein family has a long history, and he too is influenced by Elizabeth in his development, sharing her interest “in the moral relation of things” (86). He functions as a brother, standing in for Victor's family at their request both during his post-partum recovery and on his trip to England to do research towards creating a female (198). In fact, Clerval gets far more attention in the novel than either of Victor's blood-brothers. Although Victor is passionate in his love for his adult equals, Clerval and Elizabeth, the young ones seem peripheral to his world. This suggests that, like liberal political theory, he does not pay attention to the vulnerable and dependent.

There is little mention of Henry's own family, so it is probably significant that when his father is mentioned, it is in the context of an incident that parallels a father-son conflict experienced by Victor and Ernest. Henry's father is disappointed in Henry's ambitions. However, instead of harshly dismissing the youth's dreams, as Alphonse does in his scorn of Victor's alchemical readings, “his love of me at length overcame his dislike of learning, and he has permitted me to undertake a voyage of discovery to the land of knowledge” (108). Like Alphonse with Victor, Henry's father initially objects to his son's pursuits. However, as Alphonse does with Ernest, he keeps the channel of communication open and an agreement is reached. Henry's father is not overprotective or domineering but still supportive and concerned.

This delicate balance is reflected in Clerval's care of his friend. He does not prescribe a path to recovery for Victor; rather, he responds to Victor's needs as they become apparent:

> When I was otherwise quite restored to health, the sight of a chemical instrument would renew all the agony of my nervous symptoms. Henry saw this and had removed all my apparatus from my view. He had also changed my apartment, for he perceived that I had acquired a dislike for the room which had previously been my laboratory. But these cares of Clerval were made of no avail . . . (115)

Clerval's caring skills further stand out in contrast to the insensitive professor, Waldman, who "inflicted torture when he praised . . . the progress I had made in the sciences," and with his dull emotional cognition, "attributed my feelings to modesty . . . He meant to please, and he tormented me" (115). By contrast, "Clerval, whose eyes and feelings were always quick in discerning the sensations of others, declined the subject, alleging, in excuse, his total ignorance" (115). Yet, despite the fact that Clerval is a good caregiver, and the closest friend to Victor, the latter will not confide the reasons for his distress.

Part of Victor's difficulty with caring relationships is that these require dialogue to be successful and he struggles with communication throughout the novel. To begin with, he does not share the humanistic inclinations of Elizabeth and Clerval:

> I confess that neither the structure of languages, nor the code of governments, nor the politics of various states possessed attractions for me. It was the secrets of heaven and earth that I desired to learn; . . . physical secrets of the world. (86)

The consequence of this preference for the universal is more than trivial. While he is shuttered in his lab, Victor's behaviour suffers the flaws of masculinist ethics in the following ways: he neglects particular (concrete) others, namely his family, in service of humanity (abstract others) and posterity (abstract self); he understates the importance, moral and epistemic, of embodiment, separating himself from nature through an objective, clinical stance; following from his neglect of the process (not just the

“spark”) of life, he ignores the necessity of childhood, as well as the maintenance of relationships. The moral decline of Victor is the moral of the story. He begins with the advantage of a loving family, but he rejects their example. He is offered the advice of friends and does not take it. The further he alienates himself from his domestic roots, the more Elizabeth tries to pull him back, but he resists. Even after creating life from the remains of the dead, when he is offered opportunities to take responsibility, such as when the Creature approaches his bed and in the alpine confrontation, he refuses. Care ethicists point out that masculinist ethics, rather than create peace through dialogue aimed at reconciliation, creates further discord and resentment through its blame-oriented system of judgement. The confrontation between Victor and the Creature, debated in the language of rights, is less concerned with how to accommodate the relationship that exists than with who owes what to whom. Chapter three will focus on the rationale of justice used by Victor and the Creature. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to Victor's shortcomings by the standards of care ethics, up to the transgression that sets the train of horrors in motion: his rejection of the Creature.

As has been shown repeatedly in reference to Victor's pursuit of science, he is inclined to neglect such particulars as people, politics, and history in favour of the study of nature's universal laws. This attitude begets two perverse motivations for reproduction, one selfish, “A new species would bless me as its creator” (101), and one partly altruistic, “what glory would attend the discovery if I could banish disease from the human frame and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!” (88) In each case, his concern is with two universals: a species and history. Either way, he is not considering his creation itself, the particular other who will be in a dependent relation to him.

Victor's misunderstanding of the importance and the ethics of relationships manifests in many ways. Not only does he fail in his relationship with his progeny, he harms himself by failing to realise

his own dependency on and constitution by others. Having literally constructed a being out of the parts of others, one might expect Victor to reflect more on the ways in which people are interpersonally constituted. The question of who one is will largely be answered through a description of one's relationships. The Creature, who is the most observant character in the story, has seen the meaning of family and friendship and knows what it is like to be without it. It is to be nameless–a non-person. Using this knowledge, the Creature destroys Victor by destroying his relations.

Because of his blindness to the significance of relationships, even his betrothed, Victor takes a long time to realise the Creature's strategy. Even immediately after having destroyed the Creature's would-be bride, when the Creature promises, “I shall be with you on your wedding night” (213), Victor assumes this is a threat of violence to his own body:

> That, then, was the period fixed for the fulfilment of my destiny. In that hour I should die and at once satisfy and extinguish his malice. The prospect did not move me to fear; yet when I thought of my beloved Elizabeth, of her tears and endless sorrow when she should find her lover so barbarously snatched from her . . . I resolved not to fall before my enemy without a bitter struggle. (213)

Although Victor still fails at this point to fully grasp the significance of others in the constitution of oneself, he does become more appreciative of his relationships with each loss, describing his father's visit after the murder of Clerval, “like that of my good angel,” empowering him to “gradually recover my health” (225). This is in fact the final of many occasions throughout the novel (Caroline for Elizabeth, Elizabeth for Caroline, Clerval for Victor) where the best palliative for an illness is the attention of a loved one.

This connection between family and health may explain how Victor's isolation from his family

contributed to his moral sickness, his blindness to the concrete consequences of his abstract pursuits. Rather than investing his emotions in his relations, “Two years passed . . . during which [Victor] paid no visit to Geneva, but was engaged, heart and soul, in the pursuit of some discoveries which [he] hoped to make” (98). After enough time spent in objective study, free of the emotional fetters of particular people, free also of “superstitions,” Victor is prepared to “examine the causes of life” by “recourse to death” (99). In the process, he treats “mere bodies deprived of life,” as so much “food for worms,” and fodder for experimentation. This objective, objectifying attitude toward flesh is what Ruddick accuses “militarist[s]” (187) of in *Maternal Thinking*. In discussing the connection of masculinist thinking to war, she notes that “women tend to know, in a way and to a degree that many men do not, both the history and the cost of human flesh” (186). Every adult body part has a history that includes a name, a family, and a lot of caring labour to grow the person to which it belonged.

During Victor's study of life through death, he misses out on opportunities to study life through life. Not only is he isolated from his family, but when he embarks on his creation, he loses touch with the rest of the cycle of life. He falls out of phase with the days, “as I proceeded and soon became so ardent and eager that the stars often disappeared in the light of morning whilst I was yet engaged in my laboratory” (98), and eventually the seasons:

> The summer months passed while I was thus engaged, heart and soul, in one pursuit. It was a most beautiful season; never did the fields bestow a more plentiful harvest or the vines yield a more luxuriant vintage: but my eyes were insensible to the charms of nature. (102)

As Victor ironically ignores nature in his study of nature, he also ignores his “human nature,” the emotional/somatic cues that he is doing something wrong: “often did my human nature turn with loathing from my occupation, whilst, still urged on by an eagerness which perpetually increased, I

brought my work near to a conclusion" (102). The eagerness to realise an idea overrides the gut feeling that this is wrong. It is as though "human nature" (conscience) is an impediment to great achievements. Again there are echos of Ruddick's critique of militaristic rationale, but this is also an example of masculinist neglect of the value of emotions in making ethical decisions.

Of the motivations that spur Victor's decisions, concern for the Creature, before or after creation, does not seem to factor in. While Victor does aim for beauty (105), this may well be for his own sake; he refers to Elizabeth in the language of a pretty possession, and it is possible he has a similar attitude, pre-partum, toward his creation. As for the Creature's proportions, "the minuteness of the parts formed a great hindrance to my speed," so he makes "a being of a gigantic stature" (101), a purely utilitarian consideration, and one that significantly neglects the effects such a frame is going to have on this being's ability to develop human relationships. Whereas Caroline Beaufort adopts and cares for Elizabeth because she is moved by the needs of that particular individual, Victor is moved to bring a new life into his by curiosity, ego, and the alleged greater good. Whereas Caroline's reward is the survival of and continued relationship with her ward, Victor awaits a "glory" that would follow his conquering of death (88). For Caroline, death is a very real threat that must be warded off through attentive care to the sick; for Victor, "Life and death appeared to me *ideal bounds* which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world" (101) (my emphasis). While seeking the principle of life, Victor fails to understand the process of life.

In endeavouring to engineer life, Victor is taking a very circumambulatory route to that which he could accomplish much more naturally, traditionally, and pleasantly with Elizabeth. Indeed, this point cannot be stressed enough, for as Moers points out, "*Frankenstein* is a birth myth, and one that was lodged in the novelist's imagination . . . by the fact that she was herself a mother" (90). Having left

the moral influence of women behind in Geneva, Victor seeks to also make life without their involvement. Like ethical theories developed without the input of women, his theory of life fails to take into account the necessity of childhood.

Like the ethicists associated with the liberal tradition, Victor neglects the position of childhood within the development of personhood. In fact, he never seems to stop to think about what this Creature will do or say when it awakes or how he will set about educating it. There is a gap in Victor's plan between imparting the spark of life and receiving the adulation of a new species. It is as though the life of the Creature is incidental to the plan and its education and nurturance (has Victor considered its diet? Does he expect it to arise already toilet trained?) are non-considerations.

Victor's revulsion finally overtakes his eagerness at the moment where he has entered the unconsidered zone of his great plan: the life of his progeny. When the Creature awakes Victor from his feint, it reaches out, grinning, uttering “inarticulate sounds” (106) like a newborn. It is at this moment that Victor is offered the opportunity to take up responsibility for his creation and it is here that he refuses. While there is some merit in interpreting this as a form of ablism–Victor is unable to accept the deformation of his child–I take this as Victor's response to the incongruity between ideal and real. Victor has envisioned an ideal creation, one who would sire a race that would be grateful to him as its creator. He had assumed his creature would be handsome and articulate. At the conclusion of his efforts, finding that his creation is not beautiful, “the beauty of the dream vanished and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart” (105) and he collapses not only from the shock of having his vision shattered, but also under the weight of the realization that he is responsible for this thing. He (Victor) is the one who has to teach it language, clean up the messy lab, and answer for its presence in the world. Far from being at the fruition of his labours, his labours have only just begun. His response is to run.

Feminist critics of liberal individualism have pointed to the ideals of independence and autonomy as dreams borne of male privilege. Because men are positioned to walk away from a pregnancy and an infancy, their conception of ethics assumes this kind of privilege. Victor is a man who has taken these privileges for granted and now has to face the burden of motherhood.

Our judgement that Victor fails as a parent can be predicated on the characterisation of good parenting he gives when describing his own childhood:

> I was . . . the innocent and helpless creature bestowed on them by heaven, whom to bring up to good, and whose future lot it was in their hands to direct to happiness or misery, according as they fulfilled their duties towards me. With this deep consciousness of what they owed towards the being to which they had given life, added to the active spirit of tenderness that animated both, it may be imagined that while during every hour of my infant life I received a lesson of patience, of charity, and of self-control, I was so guided by a silken cord that all seemed but one train of enjoyment to me. (82)

With this example before him of fulfilling one's duties toward the helpless whom one has given life, Victor ought to have responded differently to his creature's approach. Yet, although “My mother's tender caresses and my father's smile of benevolent pleasure while regarding me are my first recollections” (82), it is the Creature who smiles at Victor, and the reaction is horror.

It is generally assumed that the great transgression committed in the novel is the creation of life through artificial means, whether this is assumed wrong as a violation of natural law, or wrong because it is the action from which all subsequent tragedy follows. Viewed as an argument for the ethics of care, however, the great transgression in *Frankenstein* is Victor's rejection of his creation. After all, if Victor had taken up the Creature's hand at his bedside and accepted the role of caring parent, there is no reason

to suppose any murder spree would have followed.

Symptomatic of his unnatural transgressions, the nightmare to which Victor succumbs after completing his labours blurs love and horror, life, sex, and death:

> I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprized, 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, and I saw grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel. (106)

Although this dream can been given many interpretations, what is impossible to ignore is the identification of Elizabeth with Victor's dead mother. I have argued that Caroline represents care. Taken together, that identification, the associations within this dream, and its placement between the creation and the rejection suggest the following: Elizabeth is life, “the bloom of health”; Victor could make new life in her embrace but instead has embraced death (objective/objectified matter) as the source of life; in so doing he has rejected the values that originally nurtured him. This symbolic rejection in his dream portends the actual rejection of his creature and of his responsibilities when he awakes. As an eventual result, the symbolic death of Elizabeth is also realised.

This dream contains the final mention of Caroline. It is here that the principles of caring have been turned on their head and Victor's life begins to unravel. What I have discussed in this chapter is mostly origins and how the principles of caring are displayed or violated in the growth of *Frankenstein*'s major characters. Chapter Three will focus on the Creature's development and the masculinist rationale underlying much of his and Victor's moral judgement.

CHAPTER THREE

A Case of Entitlement: how the logic of rights hastens Victor's tragedy

Victor, Walton, and the Creature all represent varying degrees of masculinism and of self-awareness. In this chapter, the Creature will be presented as the most aware of the three. His situation of having observed care but been denied it allows him to know what it is and its value. Victor and Walton, on the other hand, have led privileged lives and under-appreciate not only the caring work done for them by others, which is typical of patriarchal attitudes toward caring work, but also their own duties and the ethics of care itself. Victor comes to a realisation of the value of relations and how they have supported him up until their deaths. However, after rejecting dialogue or compromise, only to lose all his loved ones, he still fails to achieve an appreciation of reconciliation and dies demanding justice, understood in one of its masculinist senses: retrubution. Walton, on the other hand, is more appreciative of his family from the beginning, and ends up making the right decision according to care ethics by putting the lives of the crew before the “inestimable benefit” (64) to humanity that could come of his voyage. He also demonstrates a willingness to engage in dialogue, conversing with the Creature instead of carrying out Victor’s dying wish of assassination. However, at the end of the tragic novel, Walton still expresses masculinist values.

The creature begins life innocent and full of wonder, but fully formed physically. Chapter 11 describes the development of his senses from “a strange multiplicity of sensations” in which he “saw, felt, heard, and smelt at the same time” (148) to fully functional senses and balance all in the space of a paragraph. Over the next several pages, he learns to forage and use fire. The reflection of Rousseau's “natural” man is clear: this is a man in the state of nature as Rousseau supposes in his *Discourse on the*

Origins of Inequality Among Men (1754) going about his solitary business between mates, unspoiled by the corrupting influence of civil society, "dependent on none and related to none" (174). Rousseau's image of wild humanity is not confirmed by modern anthropology, and certainly doubted by Mary Shelley, who states in her *Life of Rousseau* that "nothing can be more unnatural than his natural man" (337). In *Frankenstein*, this solitary individual, unburdened by relations or dependencies, is shown to be a grotesque reflection of humanity. Victor rejects society and becomes a monster. The Creature is monstrous because rejected. All the examples of healthy, happy humans are those who are surrounded by family.

There are two sets of values the Creature is taught as he spends his time in his hovel spying on the DeLaceys. One is what could broadly be termed a "republican" stream, including the values implicit in the political histories of Plutarch and Volney, as well as the values arising from the conversation between liberalism and Christianity in *Paradise Lost*. By the histories, the Creature is taught that "To be a great and virtuous man appeared to be the highest honour that can befall a sensitive being" (164-5). Both Milton's Satan and Adam provide examples of individual dignity and the idea of a compact between creator and created. Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther* also contributes to this side of the Creature's value-set: despite examples of "gentle domesticity" (173), it confirms the masculinist characterisation of emotions as overpowering forces praiseworthy only when tied to "lofty" (174) ideals (such as Victor's passion for science). The Creature's description also implies a statement about the values of "great men": "I read of men concerned in public affairs, governing or massacring their species" (174). The morality of public life involves control over the lives of others, quite like parenthood, but unlike children, citizens are to be considered impartially. Lives may be weighed in cost-benefit analyses and strong cases made for the elimination of thousands. By contrast, the ethics of

care might recommend a course with a lower overall utility, as long as it preserves the relationships involved. The sharing of poverty by the DeLaceys, as well as their quitting their cottage as a family in order to (they believe) preserve the life of the family father, whom they believe to be in danger from the Creature, shows the importance to humans of their relationships.

It is from the DeLaceys that the Creature learns the value of family and the nature of caring relations: “Nothing could exceed the love and respect which the younger cottagers exhibited towards their venerable companion. They performed towards him every little office of affection and duty with gentleness, and he rewarded them by his benevolent smiles” (156). This is a contrast to the picture of humanity painted by the republican histories, which barely mention family life at all. The histories written by men focus primarily on conflict and conquest, so much so that the moments of nobility are surprising: “Was man indeed at once so powerful, so virtuous, and magnificent, yet so vicious and base?” (165) There appears to be a jab in this part of the Creature’s narrative at Godwin’s anarchism: “For a long time I could not conceive how one man could go forth to murder his fellow, or even why there were laws and governments; but when I heard details of vice and bloodshed, my wonder ceased and I turned away with disgust and loathing” (165). The sort of relations discussed in such histories are mostly based on treaties, and power differences usually result in exploitation in absence of a formal justice system. Even *Paradise Lost* implies that the creator-created relationship is a kind of compact in which the weaker party is granted rights by the stronger and loses them if the agreement is violated. However, there is a compatiblist suggestion that care combined with principles of governance could result in a more stable and happy society: “I was led to admire peaceable lawgivers . . . The patriarchal lives of my protectors caused these impressions to take hold in my mind” (175). Furthermore, the Creature criticises the same militaristic values that are also the target of much of Ruddick’s work:

"perhaps, if my first introduction to humanity had been made by a young soldier, burning for glory and slaughter, I should have been imbued with different sensations [than a preference for peace]" (175). It is not that human society is inherently warlike, nor is it peacefully self-regulating. Rather, as a large web of relationships, it requires constant upkeep in the form of compassionate dialogue and tending to the vulnerable.

Also omitted from the great works the Creature reads are descriptions of the life process. This he learns through observation of the DeLaceys, learning the word "father" (158) in a caring context:

> Other lessons were impressed upon me even more deeply. I heard of the difference of sexes, and the birth and growth of children; how the father doated on the smiles of the infant, and the lively sallies of the older child; how all the life and cares of the mother were wrapped up in the precious charge; how the mind of youth expanded and gained knowledge; of brother, sister, and all the various relationships which bind one human being to another in mutual bonds. (166)

The role of the father in this passage is to "doat," not to command allegiance and awe as Victor or Milton's God would.[17] The mother does the mothering, all her "cares . . . wrapped up in the precious charge." It is easy to read this as the "patriarchal" scene it is explicitly referred to later. However, it is important to note the characteristics of the family emphasised. The family works together for their mutual benefit out of mutual love, not because they have come together for mutual advantage, as in a liberal account of the origins of society, but because of blood. People are bound to one another by the nature of the relationship itself. It is not a voluntary, nor an equal relationship (particularly where Safie is concerned, as will be seen). One does not consent to be born, nor do we have a say regarding to

[17] Victor seems to put himself on the same footing as God in this regard: "A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of their children so completely as I should deserve theirs" (101-2).

whom we are related, or even into what conditions we are thrown. If the DeLaceys are capable of survival and moments of joy despite poverty, it is because they look after one another. Indeed, this picture of patriarchy presents the "patriarch" not as a breadwinner, but a dependent.[18]

Whereas Victor's privilege causes him to take family for granted, only to really appreciate their importance as they die off, the Creature learns very quickly what he is missing: "where were my friends and relations? No father had watched my infant days, no mother had blessed me with smiles and caresses"(166-167). As he comes to understand more about the family, his admiration turns to envy and amplifies his loneliness: "The gentle words of Agatha and the charming smiles of the Arabian were not for me" (166). The more he knows about humanity the more he feels isolated.

The subplot of "the Arabian" is a bit of a riddle in the story. The story of Safie appears designed to provide a model of romantic love in addition to the familial love demonstrated by the cottagers. To note this, however, is to still leave open the question of why Safie must be a Muslim and speak another language. I suspect two reasons for this. The first is, in portraying Christianity as friendlier to women's rights than Islam, Shelley means to imply that Christians ought to take pride in and develop that aspect of their culture. The second reason is that Safie demonstrates the possibility of dialogue across differences: the difference between a Frenchman and a Turk, the difference between a monster and a human, or the difference between a child and an adult. Safie, like the Creature, is learning about this culture for the first time, and is in that regard like a child. Yet, despite being dependent, Safie is also shown as a caregiver when "her attendant fell dangerously ill. Safie nursed her with the most devoted

[18] It may be that Victor's rejection of the Creature is rooted in a failure to understand the significance of contingency–that life must be dealt with on its terms, not ideal terms. He would control life by mastering death (99), and thinks that the ideal human is one created according to principles of utility. Assuming one has the right to consent to the type or quality of offspring one has, the attitude of a consumer in a marketplace, Victor feels justified in rejecting the Creature as faulty goods.

affection, but the poor girl died," leaving the girl, like the Creature earlier, "alone, unacquainted with the language of the country and utterly ignorant of the customs of the world" (172). Yet, as both of them grow in knowledge, simultaneously hearing Volney's *Ruins* from Felix, for instance "Safie was always gay and happy" (164), while he is a "Miserable, unhappy wretch!" (166)

Another, perhaps accidental, implication of the Safie-Felix relationship is that it is possible for genuine caring bonds to exist between unequals. Circumstances have made Safie prisoner to Felix–she is essentially a slave, sold by her father to preserve himself from poverty. This "bondage to which she was now reduced" (169) is an engagement not unlike many others of Shelley's era. Yet, despite its questionable beginnings, the relationship blooms, resulting not only in happiness for the lovers, but "happiness among [the cottage's] inhabitants" (176). A marriage is not just an arrangement between two individuals, but an integration of relationships. In this case, Safie being without nearby family is integrated entirely into the DeLaceys. There are many reasons to question the ethics of this situation and the traditional marriage it resembles. Rather than defending a particular family model, however, I feel that what Shelley is doing here is demonstrating the complex ways in which agency, consent, and fulfilment play out in light of the fact some people must depend on others. Her point is to show that a healthy ethical life is not only for the privileged—that even in conditions of poverty and injustice, there is a place for caring relationships. This also suggests that caring relations have to be established before an articulation of what is and is not just or fair can take place. The Creature's lack of these relations is why he can mistake retribution for fairness.

Seeing the DeLaceys accept an outsider gives the Creature hope at the same time as it deepens his despair. Although Safie is far from her roots, she has a past–childhood is part of her four-dimensional self. As for the Creature, "where were my friends and relations? No father had watched my

infant days, no mother had blessed me with smiles and caresses" (166-7) and "when I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall of envy rose within me" (175). Yet, he "cherished hope" (176) that if he were to make himself known to this apparently very caring family, they might adopt him as one of their own. His attempt to ingratiate himself to the family fails spectacularly and their rejection becomes a formative moment in the Creature's temperament.

Having already scared the first humans he encounters after being abandoned by the DeLaceys, the Creature reasons, "There was none among the myriads of men that existed who would pity or assist me; and should I feel kindness towards my enemies? No; from that moment I declared ever-lasting war against the species" (181). This shift is partly the fault of Felix, who refuses dialogue with the Creature, immediately adopting a confrontational stance. However, this reaction also echoes Milton's dejected Satan and is itself rooted in an oppositional attitude. The simplest reading of the Creature's intense emotional outburst, which involves setting the DeLacey cottage ablaze as soon as they quit their home (184), is that he is a child: his uncultivated emotions will be intense, and he will tend to act impulsively on them. The fortunate thing about normal children is that they are not nine feet tall and possessed of ogre strength. This is yet another difficult area for liberal law and ethics: how to approach the transgressions of those who do not fit the presumed rational agent model. Not only children, but adults of varying cognitive capacity, present exceptional (to liberalism's alleged bias) cases for consent, responsibility, and culpability.[19]

Victor's idea of culpability is simple: the Creature murdered and so should die. The Creature is

[19] The distinction between responsibility and culpability is an important one for any comparison of care ethics and masculinist ethics. In the masculinist discourse, the two terms are often taken to be synonymous. By contrast, care ethics is concerned about the forward-looking sense of responsibility: not the past actions we are "responsible for," but rather the friends and relations we are responsible for and responsible to. Because care ethics is firstly concerned with mending relationships, the assigning of blame is taken to be non-essential to the ethical project, possibly even counterproductive in certain cases.

guilty of murder because his hands slew the victims. Although he would come to feel guilt for his role in the chain of events, Victor never quite comes to fully understand his responsibility to correct the situation–his responsibility to "render [the Creature] happy before I complained of his wickedness" (147), although he flirts with it when he finally grants the Creature's request to "hear me" (146). The Creature, on the other hand, is sure of Victor's responsibility: "you were my father, my creator; and to whom could I apply with more fitness than to him who had given me life?" (184) Victor is his only link to the "chain of existence and events from which I am now excluded" (193), but even he ultimately rejects the Creature.

Despite his oaths against humanity in moments of anger, the Creature's compassion keeps reappearing and lasts through several rejections and murders: "Think you that the groans of Clerval were music to my ears? My heart was fashioned to be susceptible of love and sympathy" (262), before being fully extinguished with the death of Elizabeth: "Evil then became my good. Urged thus far, I had no choice but to adapt my nature to an element which I had willingly chosen" (262). Before this killing spree and decay of character, as he embarks on his quest to find Frankenstein, the Creature's growing homicidal desire is reflected in the climate:

> Nature decayed around me, and the sun became heatless; rain and snow poured around me; mighty rivers were frozen; the surface of the earth was hard and chill, and bare, and I found no shelter. . . . The mildness of my nature had fled, and all within me was turned to gall and bitterness. (184-5)

The season continues to reflect his temperament, spring coming just before the Creature commits an act of caring intervention:

> The day, which was one of the first of spring, cheered even me by the loveliness of its sunshine

> and the balminess of the air. I felt emotions of gentleness and pleasure . . . a young girl came running towards the spot where I was concealed, laughing, as if she ran from someone in sport. She continued her course along the precipitous sides of the river, when suddenly her foot slipped, and she fell into the rapid stream. I rushed from my hiding-place and with extreme labour from the force of the current, saved her and dragged her to shore. (185-6)

This ends discussion of environment within the Creature's narrative, which from this point is dominated by descriptions of emotions. After saving the girl, her frightened guardian immediately assumes a confrontational posture, and ends up shooting the Creature. This refusal to hear out the Creature and consider the context drives the Creature into "a hellish rage and gnashing of teeth," and to again declare "vengeance to all mankind" (186), yet it will be seen that there is still love in him.

The Creature's initial intentions toward his first murder victim are benevolent, if aggressive. Noting that young William "was unprejudiced and had lived too short a time to have imbibed a horror of deformity" (187), the Creature approaches him as a potential friend. Yet again, he finds himself rejected (not that kidnapping was ever a good strategy), but still hopes to persuade the child to accept him (albeit by force): "I do not intend to hurt you; listen to me" (187). It is only upon mention of the name of Frankenstein that his rage is reawakened and the child becomes his murder victim.

This death the Creature triumphs in as an act of justice. Yet faced with an image of femininity, he yields for a moment. When he finds a portrait of Caroline on the body of William, "In spite of my malignity, it softened and attracted me" (187), but as soon as he speculates how one such as her would respond to one such as him, his isolation and bitterness return. This leads him to deviously frame Justine for the murder of William.

Justine herself seems introduced to show man's justice system in action. This is suggested not

only by her name, but also by the fact that she is the only character to go through a full trial and sentencing. In its confrontational approach, the investigators have taken Justine's physical symptoms to be signs of guilt, rather than consider the possibility that it could be grief. They take her confusion to be again a sign of guilt rather than a sign of innocence (126). It may seem commonsensical today with our better understanding of emotions that an innocent person would be flustered and confused in light of a false accusation, but under a more entrenched patriarchy, the masculinist distrust of emotion stereotypes the guilty as out of control and the upstanding citizen as a Stoic who does not fear because s/he has nothing to hide.

This refusal to engage in dialogue with Justine is only part of why she is misjudged. Her character is in fact well known by many, who collectively may have been able to save her if they had spoken in her defence. Instead, their failure of friendship leads to the failure of justice and the condemnation of Justine. Even Alphonse is taken in by the circumstantial evidence combined with a flawed understanding of emotions.[20] At trial, the moral voice of the novel, Elizabeth, steps forward to both condemn this silence and to portray Justine as an exemplary care giver:

> [W]hen I see a fellow creature about to perish through the cowardice of her pretended friends, I wish to be allowed to speak, that I may say what I know of her character. . . . She nursed Madame Frankenstein, my aunt, in her last illness, with the greatest affection and care and afterwards attended her own mother during a tedious illness . . . She was warmly attached to the child who is now dead and acted towards him like a most affectionate mother. (131)

This fails to move the jury, and Justine is unjustly executed. The "cowardice" responsible for this extends to Justine's friends in general, but unbeknownst to Elizabeth, to Victor in particular.

[20] Perhaps the same flaw that motivated him to take a confrontational stance against Victor's early reading.

Victor witnesses the Creature “in the gloom” (123) immediately following the death of William. It takes no time for him to realise that this is the murderer. Following his feelings, his moral instincts, Victor rushes to see his father: “My first thought was to discover what I knew of the murderer and cause instant pursuit to be made. But I paused when I reflected on the story I had to tell.” Not only does Victor pause, he talks himself right out of action: “These reflections determined me and I resolved to remain silent” (124). Ignoring once again an emotional imperative, Victor rationalises inaction on the grounds that according to his hypothetical weighing of outcomes, he would not be believed and the Creature would escape anyway.

When Alphonse, the most caring male in the novel, writes to Victor about the death of William, he makes a point of warning Victor against confrontationalism:

> Come, Victor; not brooding thoughts against the assassin, but with feelings of peace and gentleness, that will heal, instead of festering, the wounds of our minds. Enter the house of mourning, my friend, but with kindness and affection for those who love you, and not with hatred for your enemies. (120)

The family has been ruptured and the important matter is to heal it. The pursuit of justice-as-vengeance will not bring peace. Still, Victor's commitment to principle over compromise leaves him intransigent in the face of the Creature’s demands.

The initial confrontation between Victor and the Creature shows Victor arguing in the language of the ethics of justice, while the Creature’s perspective partakes of both justice and care. The confrontation also reveals contradictions within the liberal tradition that arise specifically because of its failure to account for children. According to the Lockean theory of property, the Creature is an object of Victor's labour, and so his to command. Yet, according to Milton's depiction of Adam, a creator owes

love and guidance in exchange for this obedience. The Lockean tradition assumes fully-formed self-owning individuals from the outset, which is why it cannot account for the labour that goes into creating a person. Even as Victor develops an awareness of his culpability in the monster's acts, he fails to recognise his responsibility for the Creature's care.

Two languages continue through their confrontation: the language of justice and the language of care. Victor uses mostly the former, the Creature uses both. The Creature pleas for sympathy and appeals only to the duties he feels a creator should have toward its creation: "I will even be mild and docile to my natural lord and king if thou will also perform thy part, the which thou owest me" (145). This is feudal language, but also familial. Even more familial is the assertion that, by the very nature of their relationship, Victor cannot be free of the Creature and his claims on him: "Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us" (145). The basis for these duties is unarticulated. The "ties" implied seem stronger than those of Milton's creator and created–Satan's rebellion severs his ties with Heaven. The kind of duty the Creature has in mind, then, is more likely that he saw enacted among the DeLaceys.

Besides the nature of caring relations, the Creature also learns about the interrelational nature of the self from the DeLaceys, coming to know his first-studied humans by role as much as proper name:

> 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." I cannot describe the delight I felt when I learned the ideas appropriated to each of these sounds[.] (158)

Having witnessed the social and interdependent nature of humans, the Creature's plea for a mate is not simply to put an end to pangs of loneliness or open the possibility of a more pleasurable life; he needs

completion. Only in relation to another does a life make sense. In *Paradise Lost*, "Satan had his companions, fellow devils, to admire and encourage him,"and Adam was sent out of the garden with Eve, but "no Eve soothed my sorrows nor shared my thoughts" (176). Without a companion, and specifically without a feminine influence, the Creature is incomplete and lost.[21]

Some of the Creature's argument, such as the passage, "be not equitable to every other and trample upon me alone, to whom thy justice, and even thy clemency and affection is most due" (145-6) challenges the disinterested position of utilitarian ethics and highlights the special moral claims that arise from the nature of one's relationship with a particular other. The foregoing passage also differentiates "justice" from "affection" and implies that while the former may be due to humanity at large, the Creature has a special claim to something more. The distrust of utilitarianism is expressed even more harshly when the Creature exclaims, "You accuse me of murder, and yet you would, with a satisfied conscience, destroy your own creature. Oh, praise the eternal justice of man!" (146) For what he believes would be the greater good, Victor is prepared to sacrifice his only son. Again, the contrast between what "eternal justice" recommends (killing one to potentially save many, regardless of who the "one" is) and what a caring perspective recommends (meeting the needs of your dependents before they turn antisocial) is highlighted. In this light, the utilitarian perspective looks grotesque.

Victor, for his part, initially refuses dialogue: "I will not hear you. There can be no community between you and me; we are enemies" (146). He forms his words in a tone of judgement and threat of punishment: "Devil . . . do you dare approach me? And do you not fear the vengeance of my arm wreaked on your miserable head?" (145) He also implicitly endorses the justice-as-punishment ideal,

[21] It is interesting that Shelley's Creature leaves out reference to the passages unflattering to Eve. As far as he and the moral of the story are concerned, Eve and Adam, made of the same clay, complete one another. The liberal individual, resembling the defiant Satan, and an exclusively masculine perspective are both deformities.

and with “oh! That I could, with the extinction of your miserable existence restore those victims you have so diabolically murdered!” the justice-as-compensation ideal, both typical of masculinist thinking and institutions. The entreaty, “Have I not suffered enough, that you seek to increase my misery?” (145) is only met with more resistance. Convinced a killer is owed no sympathy, Victor will not quickly budge in his conviction. This is reflective of Kantian ethics which, because of its rationalistic method of formulating principles of right and wrong, does not admit of exceptions.

At first, the Creature’s need does not move Victor any more than appeals to his paternity, aside from his momentary sympathy when he deigns to listen to the Creature’s story (146). However, after the Creature has told his tale, in a moment that might be a missed opportunity to stem the tragedy, Victor is “moved” and “felt that there was some justice in his argument.” He is persuaded at this point that his relationship to the Creature does entail particular duties: “did I not as his maker owe him all the portion of happiness that it was in my power to bestow?” (191) Yet, this moment of compassion is short-lived, overwhelmed by considerations of utility: acceding to the Creature’s demands and creating a mate for him might double the destruction wrought: “you will then have a companion to aid you in the task of destruction” (192). The speculative needs of the many outweigh the demonstrated needs of the one child, and having reasoned his way to a conclusion, Victor will not let further considerations distract him from his resolve:

> The idea of renewing my labours did not for one instant occur to me; the threat I had heard weighed on my thoughts, but I did not reflect that a voluntary act of mine could avert it. I had resolved in my own mind that to create another like the fiend would be an act of the basest and most atrocious selfishness and I banished from my mind every thought that could lead to a different conclusion. (215)

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Victor's failure to consider the interrelational constitution of self leads him to misinterpret the Creature's threat about his wedding night. It may be that this failure is why he cannot believe that the Creature would indeed become peaceful upon gaining a partner. He does not realise that the Creature's deficiency in controlling his impulses and basic morality is due not only to a lack of upbringing, but also to a lack of kindred: "You must create a female for me with whom I can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being" (190). A social being like humans, the Creature needs the society of at least one other to temper his impulses and engage him in the dialogue that keeps the peace.

Eventually, Victor agrees to provide the Creature with a mate, but in the spirit of exchange, not care: "I consent to your demand, on your solemn oath to quit Europe forever, and every other place in the neighbourhood of man, as soon as I shall deliver into your hands a female who will accompany you in your exile" (193). This oath, however, reveals a tension between deontology and utilitarianism. According to Kant, who considers it of the nature of moral principles that they do not admit of exception, promise-breaking cannot be good under any circumstances. Yet, utilitarian reasoning leads Victor to renege on his promise: "I shuddered to think that future ages might curse me as their pest, whose selfishness had not hesitated to buy its own peace at the price, perhaps, of the existence of the whole human race" (211). Again, his particular duties to his Creature, and the reasons the Creature needs this mate (whose potential feelings in the matter no one is bothering to consider) escape the imagination of Frankenstein.

The Creature finally drives the lesson home all too painfully. Understanding the interrelational nature of self, the Creature "destroyed thee [Victor] by destroying all thou lovedst" (261). Victor's narration of the tale gives some signs that his experiences have increased his awareness of caring

values. Telling the story of creation, during the passage marking his blindness to the changing seasons, Victor reflects, “If the study to which you apply yourself has a tendency to weaken your affections and to destroy your taste for those simple pleasures in which no alloy can possibly mix, then that study is certainly unlawful” (103). This appears to be an insight into the role of emotions in determining value. Although his call for a “calm and peaceful mind” could suggest detachment, the distinction between “affections” (good) and “passions” (bad) implies that there are in fact better and worse ways to emote– that, far from being impediments to decision-making, emotions are central to it.

A realisation about liberalism is made when discussing Elizabeth’s final letter: the good is not reducible to liberty. Speculating that he might one day be free of the Creature, Victor laments, “Alas! What freedom? Such as the peasant enjoys when his family have been massacred before his eyes, his cottage burnt, his lands laid waste, and he is turned adrift, homeless, penniless, alone, but free” (232). Finally, on his deathbed, Victor has come to realise the irreplaceability of particular relationships:

> when you speak of new ties and fresh affections, think you that any can replace those who are gone? Can any man be to me as Clerval was, or any woman another Elizabeth? Even where the affections are not strongly moved by any superior excellence, the companions of our childhood always possess a certain power over our minds which hardly any later friend can obtain. They know our infantine dispositions, which, however they may be afterwards modified, are never eradicated; and they can judge of our actions with more certain conclusions as to the integrity of our motives. (255)

Not only has he realised the necessity of relationships as the antidote to loneliness, he sees how our relationships help to determine our moral character. The self-regulating individual is seen in this novel to be fickle. Reason itself is shown to be fickle, as Victor reasons his way into and out of the same

attitudes. The only constant is the constancy of friends and family, some (the women) more constant than others.

Throughout, Victor is both comforted and pleaded with by his family. I covered much of this in Chapter Two. Towards the end of the novel, Victor becomes more appreciative of what his family has been doing for him. When he leaves for England, Victor discovers that "Without previously communicating with me, he [Alphonse] had, in concert with Elizabeth, arranged that Clerval should join me in Strasbourg" (198). Because he has a secret, Victor seeks isolation, but his family knows well that no man is an island. Narrating this point, Victor also observes, "it was her [Elizabeth's] care which provided me a companion in Clerval – and yet a man is blind to a thousand minute circumstances which call forth a woman's sedulous attention" (199). In retrospect, he seems to understand that heeding a woman's perspective might save one from tragedies such as the one he has created.

The character of Victor Frankenstein is prefigured by Robert Walton, a "romantic"(67) who would find the fabled Northwest passage. Like Victor, he justifies his project in the name of a greater good: "you cannot contest the inestimable benefit which I shall confer on all mankind to the last generation" (64). Also like Victor, he has left his family behind to pursue his goal. Both Frankenstein and Walton are connected to a woman by letters, the difference being that Walton writes to his sister, Margaret Seville (whose full initials are also those of the novel's author), while Elizabeth writes to Victor. Elizabeth, aware of human interdependence, sends Clerval to keep Victor company. Walton, resembling in the following passage the Creature more than Frankenstein, is perfectly aware of his need for companionship: "I have no friend . . . there will be none to participate in my joy . . . no one will endeavour to sustain me in dejection" (67). Furthermore, he is aware of the sort of companion he needs, one "who could sympathise with me, whose eyes would reply to mine" (67), as well as the sort of care

he needs: “my daydreams . . . want (as painters call it) keeping; and I greatly need a friend who would have sense enough not to despise me as a romantic, and affection enough for me to endeavour to regulate my mind” (68). The sense and affection Walton seeks are the qualities of good caring: attentiveness and engrossment. He seeks the patience and understanding required to assist a juvenile mind along the way to maturity. Given that his letters are in part a defence of his journey to rest the concerns of his sister who would temper his ambitions, it is ironic that he pines for a “man” (67) to fill this role for him.

Not only is Walton, for all his self-consciousness, oblivious that what he seeks is someone to play a caring role (just as masculinist philosophy and history ignore the work of care givers), he also takes for granted the crew he has chartered to sail him. This persistence is the sort of headstrong ambition valued by masculinist ideology, especially when it is rooted in a quest for a greater good. It is only after facing unconquerable weather conditions and hearing Victor’s tale that he agrees to put their lives ahead of his dream. Even then, he fails to shift ethical paradigms, judging the turnaround as a defeat: “Thus are my hopes blasted by cowardice and indecision; I come back ignorant and disappointed. It requires more philosophy than I possess to bear this injustice with patience . . . I have lost my hopes of utility and glory” (258). The tragic mode of the novel might have hinted toward a happier future, but although Walton does the right thing, but it is unclear whether his reasons are defeatism or concern for his crew. His continuing references to “cowardice,” “injustice,” “utility,” and “glory,” leave room for speculation about his progress.

A further sign of Walton’s masculinism is his gushing praise of Frankenstein. “Noble and godlike” (253), Walton calls Victor in spite of his story, “glorious spirit” (260) upon his death. The passage, “He seems to feel his own worth and the greatness of his fall” demonstrates Walton’s

admiration for Frankenstein's quest–after all, it was for the greater good, it just happened to go wrong. The consequences are deemed evils, but in Walton's estimation, Victor is blameless for having followed a good principle in his initial endeavour. Although Walton has a change of mind about his voyage, he does not have a complete change of heart about masculinist ethics.

Walton comes to realise that glory means little if not shared, but still holds glory and "the greater good" as ideals. After sequestering himself for the sake of his research, only to have his research run amok beyond the lab, Frankenstein realises the necessity of kin and the folly of untempered masculine ambition, but dies wanting vengeance. The Creature understands throughout the novel the need for society, but without an upbringing, and without anyone willing to engage in dialogue, he has no fair means to seek fulfilment. When reasoning fails, and threats fail, the Creature destroys Victor by destroying his family. *Frankenstein* presents a contrast between masculinist ethics, including utilitarianism and deontology, as well as the ideal of the autonomous individual lauded by liberals. This is not a liberal feminist story which would hold that only conditions of true equality can enable ethical life. This is not a radical feminist story that would do away with the "traditional" family unit. Rather, this story is written from the perspective of care ethics, emphasising the importance of and responsibility that comes from particular relationships, and acknowledging the distinct moral insights afforded those who are care givers or who are without a care giver.

CONCLUSION

"My Dear Sister": reading from the standpoint of M.S.W.

Like most of Shelley's other novels, such as *Lodore* (1835), *Falkner* (1837), and *Mathilda* (written 1819-20 but unpublished), *Frankenstein* focuses on issues of family and features as an essential plot detail the absence of a mother. As with *Lodore*, *Falkner,* and *Valperga* (1823), *Frankenstein* features female characters with values in conflict with men or with society. In *Valperga* and *Frankenstein*, the feminine voice goes unheeded by ambitious men, and tragedy ensues. In *Falkner*, the feminine influence triumphs (Ellis 159-61). This recurring interest in the absent mother and unheeded voice of daughters and lovers invites study of Shelley's ouvre for any scholar interested in literary articulations of the ethics of care. *Frankenstein* in particular, takes a very direct and philosophical approach to the ethics of masculinism, creating a monster's mind from classical, romantic, and liberal texts, then putting this monster in conflict with his father, his only parent. The contrasting values supplied by the DeLaceys and Frankensteins point to what Victor could have had if he had only followed the natural sentiments that he suppresses for the sake of effecting his grand vision.

It is oft remarked that *Frankenstein* is a cautionary tale against ambition, but the distinctly feminist tone of the caution is sometimes missed. Considered in light of the ethics of care, the message becomes clearer: ignoring the feminine voice will lead to moral decisions that do not work in the real world. A person exists as the nexus of a set of relationships. Taking that nexus as essential while considering the relations themselves contingent and extraneous to paradigmatic moral dilemmas will result in the annihilation of those relations and the destruction of oneself.

The Creature with only a man for a parent and only masculine authors for guides, but with an

appreciation for the value of family that Victor only achieves too late, has a higher moral awareness than his father, but he is morally half-formed, willing to use his knowledge of the importance of family to destroy Victor by destroying his. As much as he is Victor's parallel in many regards, in this he is Victor's opposite: whereas Victor sequesters himself in his study, taking books and a lab to be all he needs, negligent of his family, the Creature needs nothing more than companionship, and attaining that would be willing to abandon all else.

The framing narrative of a series of letters addressed to Walton's sister, who shares Shelley's initials, indicates that this novel presents a woman's perspective on the behaviour of men, while also reminding the reader that woman's own voice remains suppressed. Besides providing this key to approaching the novel, the framing narrative provides an opportunity to end the tragedy with a glimmer of hope for the cycle of masculinist ethics to be broken, and for universal principles and grand visions, “the eternal justice of man” to start giving way a little to the demands of particular relationships and basic needs.

The ethics of care provides a lens for reading *Frankenstein* that makes sense of the whole. Ambition and scientism certainly come under scrutiny, but the novel is dominated by discussions of family, references to marriage, and calls for the recognition of paternal duties. The loss of Victor's mother is indicative of this lack of maternal influence, and the letters from Elizabeth are the feminine voice that he has banished from his conscience. The placement of Margaret Walton Seville in the reader's seat indicates that we as readers are supposed to consider this tale from her perspective—that of caring family.

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