

life. Had he pursued the first goal, we would not have the same story.<sup>28</sup>

Victor's shift from outdated theories to the scientific thinking of his own time is roused by observing the devastation of a living tree by lightning during "a most violent and terrible thunder-storm":

*I remained, while the storm lasted, watching its progress with curiosity and delight. As I stood at the door, on a sudden I beheld a stream of fire issue from an old and beautiful oak, which stood about twenty yards from our house; and so soon as the dazzling light vanished, the oak had disappeared, and nothing remained but a blasted stump. When we visited it the next morning, we found the tree shattered in a singular manner. It was not splintered by the shock, but entirely reduced to thin ribbands of wood. I never beheld anything so utterly destroyed.*<sup>29</sup>

Whereas Victor's father's response was not helpful in the past, in this instance his father provides models and experiments to support his son's curiosity, then recommends that he attend a series of lectures on natural philosophy (i.e., the physical sciences, including chemistry). Victor fails to attend most of the lectures and then is confused, overwhelmed, and unable to follow the content when he does show up (much as if he had missed class until the last week of the course). He rejects this entire area of study as a result. Victor studies mathematics and languages (ancient and modern) and teaches his two younger brothers. Victor's positive associations with beauty form one of the subtle threads in the chapter; he notes that both the young Elizabeth and his brother William are exceptionally beautiful. This is our first sign that a belief in physiognomy—the idea that character is visible in external features—determines many of Victor's reactions to others.<sup>30</sup>

## **VOLUME I – CHAPTER II**

This chapter narrates Victor's first major trauma at age seventeen—his mother's death from scarlet fever, which she catches from Elizabeth, who recovers from the bacterial infection. Victor's mother's deathbed wishes—that Elizabeth and Victor would marry, and that she would see them

in the afterlife—are one of the novel's few clearly religious frameworks for thinking about death.<sup>31</sup> Victor's mother's death delays by three months his journey from Geneva to Ingolstadt, Germany, to begin studies at the university there. While Victor has looked forward to leaving the seclusion of his childhood home, he now faces this journey with apprehension. Aside from his deep grief at his mother's sudden death, he feels that it is a radical change to start a new life in a city where he knows no one. His early life has given him "invincible repugnance to new countenances," and he feels "unfitted for the company of strangers."<sup>32</sup>

Victor's meetings with his professors are discouraging at first. He meets M. Krempe, who reacts vehemently when he hears that Victor has been reading Albertus Magnus and Paracelsus, which he calls "exploded systems, and useless names."<sup>33</sup> M. Krempe tells Victor he must begin his studies anew and attend lectures by M. Waldman, a chemistry professor. While Victor is not surprised at the professor's dislike of his reading, Krempe's "gruff voice and repulsive countenance" lead him to be biased against his ideas; he also dislikes what he sees as lack of ambition in the professor's approach to science, preferring the drive for "immortality and power."<sup>34</sup> M. Waldman, in contrast, is appealing in appearance and demeanor, with a sweet voice; further, his description of the work of the modern masters of chemistry inspires Victor:

*They penetrate into the recesses of nature and show how she works in her hiding places. They ascend to the heavens; they have discovered how the blood circulates, and the nature of the air we breathe. They have acquired new and almost unlimited powers; they can command the thunders of heaven, mimic the earthquake, and even mock the invisible world with its own shadows.*<sup>35</sup>

Victor is so pleased with M. Waldman that he visits him to talk about his interests. Where M. Krempe was dismissive of Victor's earlier reading, M. Waldman treats the alchemists with respect. Victor asks M. Waldman to advise him; Waldman agrees and shows him his laboratory, telling him what to read and what equipment to buy for his studies. As Victor describes