MAKING DAEMONS OF DEATH AND LOVE: *FRANKENSTEIN*, EXISTENTIALISM, PSYCHOANALYSIS

WILL W. ADAMS holds an M.A. in psychology from West Georgia College and a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Duquesne University. He previously served as a clinical fellow in psychology at McLean Hospital/Harvard Medical School. He works as an associate professor of psychology at Davis & Elkins College and as a psychotherapist in private practice. His scholarship contributes to the growing collaborative dialogue between complementary approaches to the depth dimensions of life, especially psychology, philosophy, ecology, spirituality, and the arts. Recent articles have appeared in *The Humanistic Psychologist*, *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Thought*, and *The Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*.

Summary

Psychology and literature are kindred approaches to the depth dimensions of life. By reading Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in light of existentialism and psychoanalysis, we may develop a deeper appreciation of the novel and of key psychological phenomena such as death-repression, the return of the repressed, and the daemonic. In evading life's challenges, Victor Frankenstein makes daemons of four great existential mysteries: death, love, nature, and spirit. His disowned conflicts return to haunt him in the guise of the creature, in his implicit captivation by death, in his alienation from people and nature, and in perversions of authentic spirituality. In contrast, Shelley was able, via *Frankenstein*, to transform her suffering and hope into a deep, enduring work of art.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a profoundly strange story, a mythic tale whose allure has persisted for nearly 200 years.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: This article was inspired by conversations with my colleagues and students at Davis & Elkins College. I have enjoyed the privilege of participating

Journal of Humanistic Psychology, Vol. 41 No.4, Fall 2001 57-89

Mysterious, horrifying, exciting, haunting, uncanny: These qualities compose the essence of Gothic novels. Yet, they are also the stuff of daily life, usually not so apparent, but pervasive nonetheless. *Frankenstein* is strange indeed, but even further, *life—just as it is—is strange*. Forever colored by our greatest hope and our greatest dread, ordinary existence is awesome, astonishing, bewildering, and inspiring. Everyday life is always deeper than we can conceive and often deeper than we even wish to conceive. If we look carefully we will discover depth in every surface, the extraordinary in the ordinary. Human subjectivity pervades all supposed objectivity. Whenever things are being concealed, explicitly, they are also being revealed, implicitly. Throughout conscious awareness there is unconscious sensitivity. We intuit the mystery that exists within and beyond our conventional lives, but alas, letting ourselves be carried away by busyness or defensiveness, we often overlook it.

Frankenstein addresses this mystery and allows the mystery to address us. It does so by exploring four archetypal realms of human existence, four essential realities we all must face in one way or another: death, love, nature, and spirit. These existential givens tap into the depth dimensions of our lives and call us to bring forth the very best of ourselves. How we respond to this call largely creates our destiny. This was certainly the case with Victor Frankenstein and with Mary Shelley as well.

To provide some common ground for this interpretation of *Frankenstein*, I will mention a few episodes of the novel that are especially relevant. We are given the story in a series of letters from Walton, an explorer and ship's captain, to his sister. We read Walton's version of a tale he hears from Victor Frankenstein, who himself tells the story through the lens of a delirious consciousness while he is just on the verge of death. Long before, when Victor is 4 years old, his family adopts a little girl, Elizabeth. From the beginning his parents prepare the way for these children to marry

---

in various literature courses taught by Drs. Bill King, Bob McCutcheon, and Peter Okun. I especially want to thank Dr. Peter Okun for his scholarly insight and friendly encouragement. A brief version of this article was presented at the 107th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Boston, MA, August 20-24, 1999. David Loy's book *Lack and Transcendence* deserves special mention as a profound exploration of themes central to the present article. Unfortunately, I discovered this brilliant work too late to incorporate it in my discussion.

each other. When Victor is 17, his mother dies after contracting scarlet fever from Elizabeth. Three months later he leaves home to start his studies at the university.

Soon Victor begins the grand project of creating a living, sentient human being from the bodies of the dead. After working for 2 years with frenzied intensity and single-minded focus, he succeeds in bringing a being to life. However, with the first stirring of the creature Victor is horrified and disgusted by its ugly appearance, and he immediately flees. The abandoned creature is never given a name but is deemed a "daemon," "devil," and "monster" by Victor. Struggling to survive on his own, the creature finds shelter in a small hovel connected to a cottage, home of the De Lacey family: an old blind man, his daughter, and his son. Keeping himself hidden, he works diligently to understand these people, to make sense of their language and customs. Eventually he presents himself to the father alone, hoping that the old man, unable to see, will perceive more deeply and discover the sensitivity and kindness that are obscured by his horrible appearance. This strategy works for a few minutes. Unfortunately, the others return, become terrified, and attack the creature. This and a series of other unwarranted rejections lead the desperate creature to seek compensation or revenge from his creator.

The creature encounters Victor's 7-year-old brother William and ends up killing him, perhaps accidentally. Soon thereafter he confronts Victor, eloquently tells him of his struggles, and beseeches Victor to create a female partner for him. His deepest desire is to share understanding and love with another being. Victor first refuses but then agrees. Later, however, Victor destroys the creature's mate when he has nearly completed her. Enraged and despairing, the creature becomes even more murderous. He kills Victor's best friend Clerval and goes on to kill Victor's bride Elizabeth on her wedding night.

Obsessed with wreaking revenge, Victor pursues the creature for 3 years far into the frozen Arctic. Near death from psychosis and physical exhaustion, Victor happens upon a ship trapped in the ice. Moving in and out of a hallucinatory state, Victor tells his strange story to the ship's captain, Walton. Then he dies. The creature finds Victor dead, confronts Walton, vows to make a funeral pyre to kill himself, and (as the novel ends) disappears "in darkness and distance" (Shelley, 1818/1990, p. 165).

THE RETURN OF THE REPRESSED AND THE MAKING OF DAEMONS

Victor frequently curses the creature by calling him a "daemon." This epithet of abomination carries abundant significance, especially when interpreted in light of a key psychological phenomenon, namely, the return of the repressed. Traditionally, daemons were experienced as powerful numinous spirits, spiritual beings, or disembodied souls that could be benevolent, malevolent, and often both. For the ancient Greeks, a *daimon* was "a semidivine being (normally regarded as beneficial to humans) whose nature is intermediate between human and god" (Long, 1987, p. 282). In her dialogue with Plato in the *Symposium*, the wise-woman Diotima teaches that Eros "is a great spirit [*daimon*], and like all spirits he is intermediate between the divine and the mortal" (Plato, circa 360 B.C.E./1953, p. 534). Socrates often spoke similarly of a *daimonion* that guided his life. Around the third century B.C.E., in the earliest Greek version of the Old Testament, *daimon* and *daimonion* began to indicate malevolence exclusively. This connotation continued in the New Testament and other Christian writings where the traditional vast assortment of devils and demons became consolidated primarily into a single, evil archdaemon, the Devil or Satan. The English words daemon and demon were derived via the Latin *daemon* from the original Greek *daimon*. For the past few hundred years, some writers have deliberately chosen the form daemon, in part to emphasize the psychological and spiritual character of these beings who are midway between humans and gods. Whereas demon conventionally connotes an evil monster with an external existence independent of the perceiver—for example, a red devil with horns, tail, and pitchfork—daemon, in contrast, tends to carry a psycho-spiritual connotation and is associated with various manifestations of the perceiver's psyche.

Early in his work, Freud discovered two psychological phenomena, "repression" and "the return of the repressed," which guided him through the rest of his life. Although the foundational insights of a theory tend to be taken for granted, it is often enlightening to reconsider them and to contemplate their enduring significance. Thus, this article explores the nature of daemons in light of the return of the repressed. Freud knew that repression and other defenses help us survive in situations that feel unbearably painful. Further, he demonstrated that whatever we make unconscious

tends to return in some disguised, symbolic form. Dreams, slips of the tongue, and pathological symptoms are common ways in which repressed feelings, thoughts, urges, and aspects of our self reappear in our lives. (I will use the phrase "the return of the repressed" to refer broadly to the reemergence of anything that has been defensively disowned, dissociated, or otherwise split off from consciousness, regardless of the specific defense that is being employed.)

Since Freud and Jung's groundbreaking explorations of paranoia, psychologists have been aware of the defense of projection. This is a phenomenon wherein, mostly without reflective awareness, we repress feelings, ideas, urges, and qualities of our self that feel painful and intolerable. Once these have been split off, they do not simply disappear but rather return and are reexperienced (by the projector) in an externalized (projected) form. For example, a paranoid man does not recognize his own anger, but finds—actually, unwittingly creates—evidence that his coworkers are trying to get him fired. Unwanted or misunderstood aspects of our self can be projectively personified (sometimes in daemonic form) and experienced as if they were external to us. In the hallucinations of a schizophrenic woman, the supposedly separate voices that she hears are usually her own (dissociated) thoughts. From this perspective, depth psychology has demonstrated that some daemons are our disowned characteristics returning in projected, symbolic form. When we become divided against ourselves, aspects of our wholeness can be dissociated and transmuted into (supposedly) external daemons. Such daemons can torment us in dreams, fantasies, delusions, illusions, and hallucinations. Freud (1920/1961a) attested to the "daemonic" force of the return of the repressed (while emphasizing the existential responsibility we each have for our own daemons):

> The impression they [patients] give is of being pursued by a malignant fate or possessed by some "daemonic" power; but psycho-analysis has always taken the view that their fate is for the most part arranged by themselves. (p. 21)

In this sense—and without disavowing the reality of evil—daemons certainly exist as psychological realities.

When a person is engaged in a personal conflict that simultaneously involves an existential or archetypal challenge—a challenge inherent in being human, for example, an interpersonal cri-

sis of love or an artistic crisis of creativity—the powerful energy, emotions, ideas, and actions of this process often manifest in daemonic form. Daemonic, in this context, carries no value judgments, as Rollo May (1969) observed: The daemonic "is potentially creative and destructive at the same time" (p. 162). Daemonic energy is available for us to take up, respond to, and channel as best we can. Thus, the way in which we relate to our psychological daemons is crucial in determining our destiny. If we respond with openness and understanding, then our daemons tend to be integrated as benevolent, creative, energetic guides to transformation and health. But if we react with defensive avoidance, they tend to appear as malevolent, destructive sources of suffering. Fear of pain—and, ultimately, fear of death—is the greatest factor that inhibits our ability to be fully alive in the present and to evolve psychologically. Confronting our painful daemons, therefore, is essential in transforming *excessive* defensiveness into authentic existence and development.

This process is illustrated by the universal mythical theme of the archetypal hero, one who must courageously overcome dangerous daemons or monsters to fulfill his or her calling. Jesus and the Buddha both confronted powerful daemons in the process of their spiritual liberation. During his 40 days in the wilderness, Jesus was repeatedly tempted by the Devil (Matthew 4: 1-11, Luke 4: 1-14, King James Version). And the Buddha, when on the threshold of awakening as he meditated under the Bodhi tree, was attacked time and again by evil lord Mara and his army of daemons (Coomaraswamy, 1916/1964, pp. 32-35). Like these great spiritual sages, we each must acknowledge, understand, transform, and integrate our own psychological daemons lest they return to torment or destroy us. Thus, as D. M. Dooling (1981) described, "a *demon* is: a force that must be conquered in order that it can become one's *ally*, but which, if it is not conquered, becomes a scary monster" (p. 86). May (1969) offered a similar perspective:

> *Identify with that which haunts you, not in order to fight it off, but to take it into your self; for it must represent some rejected element in you*. (p. 131)
>
> The denied part of you is the source of hostility and aggression, but when you can, through consciousness, integrate it into your self-system, it becomes the source of energy and spirit which enlivens you. (p. 132)

As Victor's sad and horrifying tale illustrates, when we don't deal with our daemons, they will deal with us.

Of course, it is much more difficult to actually face our traumas, crises, and fears than merely to affirm we should. Indeed, to engage our daemons consciously is the way of a hero. A hero here is not some superhuman being but an ordinary person aspiring to be fully human, one who calls forth the courage and devotion to be responsively aware in the face of whatever challenges life presents. And whether we choose to confront or repress our daemons, the ordeal will almost certainly be painful. In the wise words of May (1969):

> If we repress the daimonic, we shall find these powers returning to "sicken" us; whereas, if we let them stay, we shall have to struggle to a new level of consciousness in order to integrate them and not be overwhelmed by impersonal power. . . . *Either way will hurt*. (pp. 175-176)

The interrelated phenomena of psychological defensiveness and the return of the repressed exemplify the astounding resourcefulness of human consciousness. When overwhelmed by pain or fear, defense mechanisms spontaneously serve to divert excessively traumatic feelings, thus allowing us to adapt in a threatening situation. Later, when the repressed returns and reveals itself in symbolic form (such as symptoms of psychopathology), we give ourselves the opportunity to face, understand, and integrate our daemons, to master both our present distress as well as the original trauma (or cumulative traumas). In this process, we may deepen our psychological development. By repetitively relying on unconscious, habitual patterns of defense, we simultaneously re-present (and symbolically represent) to ourselves the very daemon that we need to address consciously. Defenses thus work in a paradoxical manner, concealing and revealing, closing and disclosing.

It is often said that the creature and Victor (like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde [Stevenson, 1886/1998]) are, uncannily, two sides of the same being, that the creature represents a repressed aspect of Victor, his double or doppelganger. Even Victor refers to the creature as "my own spirit let loose from the grave" (Shelley, 1818/1990, p. 57). And Victor certainly does behave in daemonic ways. (From this perspective, we find an important psychological truth in the popular misconception that Frankenstein is the name of the mon-

ster in the story.) In a literal reading of the novel, Victor makes a daemon when he creates and abandons the creature. Here the daemon is a distinctly other being. Further, metaphorically and psychologically, the creature is a daemonic manifestation of the disowned forces in Victor's life (such as anger, sadness, guilt, creativity, death, and the yearning for connection and meaning). This helps us make sense of the fact that even though the creature appears strangely alien—a singular, isolated, non-human being with no kin nor friend—he is also strangely familiar, universally understandable, and intimately connected to (even identical with) Victor. Along the same lines, Freud (1919/1955c) associated "the daemonic" with "the uncanny" and discovered that "the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known and familiar" (p. 220). Indeed, he said, the "uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (p. 241). As we shall see, Victor's relationship with the creature is a vivid expression of the inability to integrate familiar but disturbing daemons, thus leading to a kind of daemonic possession (in the form of defensive projection, or more precisely, projective identification). Further still, as part of the same defensive reaction against his fear and pain, Victor daemonizes the great archetypal powers of death, love, nature, and spirit.

MAKING DAEMONS OF DEATH

According to Martin Heidegger (1927/1962) and the existential tradition, to live an authentic human existence we must acknowledge, accept, and be guided by an awareness of our own inevitable death. In staying conscious that we will certainly die—and appreciating that we don't know when or how, that death could come at any moment—we may realize the preciousness of the present moment, of each experience and relationship, and thus, with resoluteness, be more fully awake and alive. This is a heroic aspiration, one that can be actualized only by repeatedly overcoming our urge to turn away from the anxiety of being human, by surpassing our willingness to close off and settle for the tranquilizing consolations of inauthentic existence. Indeed, Ernest Becker (1973) asserted that "*Consciousness of death* is the primary repression, not sexual-

ity" (p. 96). With a remarkably existentialist perspective, Freud also found a crucial connection between death-denial and psychological suffering. Ultimately, in Freud's view, psychopathology is a defensive reaction to the fear of death. For example, Freud (1913/1955b) remarked that obsessive acts are "designed to ward off the expectations of disaster with which the neurosis usually starts. Whenever I have succeeded in penetrating the mystery, I have found that the expected disaster was death" (p. 87).

We are afraid of things that threaten our biological life, of course, but also of things that threaten to destroy our ensconced self-sense and worldview. Both kinds of death are real and dreadful. Even so, facing death—the death of our loved ones, the reality of our own finitude, as well as the death/transcendence of our supposedly separate and exclusive egoic self—can initiate a deep developmental transformation. If we are able to move beyond our habitual defenses and stay open to this process of transcendence, we may experience profound aliveness, growth, and liberation.

In the character of Victor Frankenstein, Shelley presented us with a man who cannot bear the reality of death and who suffers greatly because of this defensive denial. When Victor is 17, Elizabeth contracts scarlet fever but recuperates quickly. However, when his mother goes to care for Elizabeth—"her favourite" child according to Victor (Shelley, 1831/1994, p. 23)—she becomes fatally infected and dies within a few days. His mother's death is a fateful trauma from which Victor never recovers. He considers her death to be "evil," declaring that his "dearest ties are rent by that most irreparable evil" (Shelley, 1818/1990, p. 33). This expression is quite significant. First, it shows how profoundly traumatic it is for Victor to lose his mother. Even though she died of natural causes, he repeatedly associates her death with malevolence and evil. Thus, he daemonizes death, daemonizes a reality that is completely natural and unavoidable. Further, Victor is driven by the unconscious fantasy that her death is not "irreparable" and tries to make reparations by creating a living being.

Strangely, although Victor claims to feel "despair" and the "bitterness of grief," there is no evidence that he actually allows himself to grieve. With intellectualization and isolation of affect he remains aware of the factual idea of his mother's death but not of the feelings associated with the loss: "My mother was dead, but we still had duties which we ought to perform" (Shelley, 1818/1990, p. 33). Ironically, by defending against the sadness, anger, and guilt

evoked by his mother's death, Victor deadens himself. It is just as Becker (1973) said, "The person seeks to avoid death, but he does it by killing off so much of himself and so large a spectrum of his action-world that he is actually isolating and diminishing himself and becomes as though dead" (p. 181).

Three months after losing his mother, Victor leaves his Geneva home to attend the university in Ingolstadt, Germany. Abandoning his grieving father, brothers, and future wife, he flees into the more manageable intellectual tasks of academic study. Once Victor is away, his inability to grieve becomes even more extreme, his defenses even more destructive. He cannot find a way to face the meaning of his mother's death, bear his painful feelings, put her death in some perspective, and reengage authentically his own life. Instead, he resorts to more primitive or immature defenses such as splitting, projection, grandiosity, devaluation, idealization, and hypomanic activity (see Schneider, 1993).

It is often difficult to discern precisely if and when our use of defenses takes a pathological turn, when we diverge from effective coping and begin to react destructively. Nonetheless, we can sense such a pernicious shift in Victor. Consider his extraordinarily haughty reaction upon arriving at university and meeting one of his first professors (Shelley, 1818/1990):

> I did not feel much inclined to study the books which I procured at his recommendation . . . . I had a contempt for the uses of modern natural philosophy. . . . I could not consent to go and hear that little conceited fellow deliver sentences out of a pulpit. (p. 35)

With defensive splitting, Victor elevates himself and devalues Professor Krempe in a manner that rivals the mythological Narcissus. This hostile, demeaning view is coming from a 17-year-old freshman who has yet to begin classes!

Later, after only 2 years, Victor arrogantly believes he has learned all he can and that the university is of no use to him. He briefly thinks about returning home, but instead, with growing grandiosity, he concocts the idea that he can create a living, sentient human being, and hastily begins work. Victor's narcissism and compensatory need for admiration were evident before but now intensify: "A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me" (Shelley, 1818/1990, p. 40).

The way Victor handles this grand project reveals his extravagant efforts to come to terms with losing his mother and his ultimate inability to do so. From the outset, he realizes that to create life he must explore death (Shelley, 1818/1990):

> To examine the causes of life, we must first have recourse to death . . . I was . . . forced to spend days and nights in vaults and charnel houses . . . I saw how the fine form of man was degraded and wasted . . . I saw how the worm inherited the wonders of the eye and brain. (p. 38)

In the 18th century, many people were not buried individually. The poor, especially, were placed in huge open graves—charnel houses or charnel grounds—which typically held between 600 and 1,500 corpses. Often the bodies were just piled on top of each other and left to decay (Aries, 1981, pp. 51-62).

Imagine Victor spending "days and nights" in charnel houses, seeing and smelling putrefying corpses, cutting off and collecting body parts to compose his creature. Victor's intuition that he must confront death is a profound one. Yet, because he takes his intuition literally, he doesn't realize the message he is giving himself. It is true of course that he must confront death, not just to bring a creature to life but, more deeply, because he never mourned the loss of his mother. Victor is drawn to graveyards and charnel houses because there, by facing death literally and materially in the decaying bodies, he is giving himself a chance to face death symbolically, psychologically: to realize that he has not only scientific work to do but the emotional, psychological work of grief as well. He might also remember that his family and friends are still alive and longing for his love.

This is a vivid example of the return of the repressed and the wisdom of the human psyche (with its inherent reparative and healing capability). It may seem strange, yet people often feel compelled to place themselves in distressing circumstances, especially situations that are similar to previously traumatic ones. Freud (1920/1961a) stressed the tremendous, haunting intensity of such confrontations: "The manifestations of a compulsion to repeat . . . give the appearance of some 'daemonic' force at work" (p. 35). Indeed, such situations have an uncanny allure. However, this compulsion to repeat the trauma is not necessarily pathological. It can serve as an opportunity to master, integrate, and grow beyond the trauma. Even if we turn away many times, we also want to deal

with our daemons because they are the source of so much unlived life.

As time passes, Victor's fantasies grow more extreme (Shelley, 1818/1990): "I thought, that if I could bestow animation upon lifeless matter, I might in process of time (although I now found it impossible) renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption" (p. 40). Here, it seems, he literally wants to revitalize his dead mother. (In the end, he certainly resurrects her symbolically, albeit unconsciously, by identifying with her. That is, Victor himself becomes a mother who labours to give birth to a new being. He often uses the term *labour* with regard to his process of making the creature.) Further, if we see the creature as carrying disowned aspects of Victor—as his double—the insights of Freud and Rank become especially revealing (Freud, 1919/1955c): "For the 'double' was originally an insurance against the destruction of the ego, an 'energetic denial of the power of death,' as Rank says. . . . But . . . the double reverses its aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death" (p. 235).

Being intensely anxious, Victor feels compelled to create a living being out of dead bodies, in part because he has not been actualizing his great intellectual and creative abilities, but especially because he is driven by the unconscious, death-denying fantasy of bringing his mother back to life. Ironically, if he could let himself grieve, perhaps he could *bring himself back to life*, back to an integrated existence and to loving participation in the shared human community. Potentially, by dwelling with the dead, his consciousness may deepen and he may understand the symbolic message: These bodies are more than materials for a scientific experiment, they refer to your dead mother and to the deadening of your very own self. Yet, as Victor watches corpses decay and be eaten by worms, he keeps himself protected by the beliefs and goals of scientific materialism. Clinging to the single-minded, literal-minded pursuit of bringing dead matter to life, he unknowingly avoids the pain of losing his mother. Misled by defensive maneuvers, he overlooks the deeper point of his desire. In the poignant words of T. S. Eliot (1943), "We had the experience but we missed the meaning" (p. 39). Alas, Victor experiences death again and again, but the meaning of these experiences is never allowed to break through. Herein we see a recurrent source of his suffering.

Guided unwittingly by his psyche's inclination toward healing, Victor consistently places death right in front of his eyes, giving himself a key symbol to contemplate, a potential resource for revelation. To understand the meaning of any symbol, however, we must go through and beyond the literal significations that lie on the surface. Taking the obvious, superficial, and literal as our point of departure, we move on to see differently, more, and deeper. Yet, this is the very thing Victor cannot bring himself to do. Martin Buber (1921/1965) described this great existential dilemma:

> Each of us is encased in an armour whose task is to ward off signs. Signs happen to us without respite, living means being addressed, we would need only to present ourselves and to perceive. But the risk is too dangerous for us, the soundless thunderings seem to threaten us with annihilation, and generation to generation we perfect the defence apparatus. (p. 10)

Victor actually boasts about his defenses because he doesn't even realize he is being defensive, thinking instead that he is simply engaged in a rational, scientific approach to death (Shelley, 1818/1990): "Darkness had no effect upon my fancy; a church-yard was to me merely the receptacle of bodies deprived of life" (p. 38). Preoccupied with a totally technological solution to his distress, he avoids the psychological work necessary for a real resolution, thus setting the stage for disaster. "*Not to recognize the daimonic itself turns out to be daimonic; it makes us accomplices on the side of the destructive possession*" (p. 129), as May (1969) asserted.

Victor frequently remarks on his maniacally fixed focus (Shelley, 1818/1990):

> A resistless, and almost frantic impulse, urged me forward; I seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit. (p. 40)
>
> I could not tear my thoughts from my employment, loathsome in itself, but which had taken an irresistible hold of my imagination. (p. 41)

This acknowledgment is quite revealing, especially when we listen for the truth that Victor intuits but keeps mostly unconscious. After obliterating his grief and isolating himself from others and from aspects of his own self, he has indeed lost much of his soul. His imagination degenerates into literalism and narcissism, and he is held captive by (what appears to be) a merely technical, scientific project.

Bolstered by the genuinely progressive and emancipatory achievements of Enlightenment philosophy, traditional physical science prided itself on adhering to (what it believed to be) a purely objective, rationalistic, and materialistic approach. However, when scientists like Victor are captivated by an unreflective allegiance to these reductive ideals, they often miss much of the meaning of the phenomena they are exploring. The Romantic movement criticized this trend toward an exclusively physical scientific approach to reality. For example, William Blake (1802/1988) warned vehemently of the dangers of accepting this view as the whole truth, the peril of not seeing more deeply:

> Now I a fourfold vision see
> And a fourfold vision is given to me
> Tis fourfold in my supreme delight
> And threefold in soft Beulah's night
> And twofold Always. May God us keep
> From Single vision & Newton's sleep (p. 722)

Shelley's father, William Godwin, was a philosopher who, influenced by great advances in the physical sciences, advocated a rationalist approach that was extreme and exclusionary. His reaction to his dying wife provides a chilling example of the sleep that can be induced by such "single vision." Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin—one of the first feminists and author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*—suffered an extremely painful death from birthing complications just days after Mary was born. Contrary to her husband's atheistic views, she had sustained her faith in God. It is reported that upon feeling her suffering subside momentarily as she lay on her deathbed, she exclaimed, "Oh Godwin, I am in heaven" (Wolf, 1977, p. 48). Although Godwin loved his wife, at this crucial moment he countered her with the contention that, "You mean, my dear, that your symptoms are a little easier" (p. 48).

We can imagine the effects of such a rigidly rational and antiemotional style on young Mary's development. *Frankenstein* furthers the Romantic attack on the Enlightenment's *exclusive* idolatry of rationality, materialism, science, and technology. (It is important to acknowledge that the novel is complex. In fact, Shelley criticizes certain aspects of Romanticism, such as the move-

ment's propensity—manifested by Godwin, Percy Shelley, and Victor Frankenstein—to excuse narcissistic self-interest and the avoidance of interpersonal responsibility in the name of higher principles. Despite its profound contributions, Romanticism has other shortcomings as well, but they are not the focus of the present article.) With regard to the critique of narrow-minded science, consider Victor's solution to a problem he encountered while making the creature (Shelley, 1818/1990): "As the minuteness of the parts formed a great hindrance to my speed, I resolved . . . to make the being of a gigantic stature" (p. 40). Lost in his fantasy of personal power and death-repression, Victor is consumed by his own egocentric view and needs. Ordinary body parts are merely an inconvenience to him, so he uncritically makes a giant. Spellbound by scientistic "single vision," a monological perspective that conceives no need for interpretative dialogue, Victor can only see the material/mechanical/technological dimension of his work (Wilber, 1995). May (1969) observed that when the daemonic is projected "*imagination and vision are blocked*" (p. 157). Victor's single vision certainly keeps him asleep, anesthetized to painful feelings concerning death and love. Nonetheless, the pain returns in increasingly horrible forms (including murder).

"Suffering is the first grace." This ancient Christian teaching, wisely interpreted, offers tremendous potential for transformation. Paradoxically, when confronted with suffering we are being given the opportunity to realize that something is awry. And with this insight we may begin working to change our lives, gradually growing through and beyond the pain. Victor suffers because he avoids his mother's death and cuts himself off from his loved ones, yet he never discovers the meaning inherent in this suffering. No wonder he is haunted by daemons of death. As Freud (1909/1955a) warned, "a thing which has not been understood inevitably reappears; like an unlaid ghost, it cannot rest until the mystery has been solved and the spell broken" (p. 122). For Victor, the daemonic spell is never broken. He works for almost 2 years and still never discovers the significance of his obsession with life and death. Eventually, of course, he does give birth to the creature. Thus, Victor becomes a mother, accomplishing an identification with his own mother while symbolically bringing her back to life. But this is a far cry from grieving.

DEATH AND LOVE IN SHELLEY'S LIFE AND ART

From the moment Shelley was born, her existence was inscribed with the trauma of tragic death. Her mother died due to complications from childbirth 10 days after she was born. Not only was Mary left without a mother, but she was also haunted by fantasies about her responsibility for her mother's death. When Mary was 17 (and not yet married), her first child was born prematurely and died 2 weeks later. (This was about a year and a half before she began *Frankenstein*.) While she was writing the novel, both her half-sister Fanny and Percy Shelley's wife, Harriet, killed themselves in separate incidents. Jealousy of Mary seems to have contributed to each suicide. At age 19, Shelley finished *Frankenstein* while pregnant with her third child, Clara, who died just a year after she was born. Her cherished son, William, died when he was only 3. When Shelley was 24, she nearly bled to death from a miscarriage, but her life was saved by her beloved husband, Percy. Terribly, he drowned in a boating accident 3 weeks later.

I take it for granted that some of the meaning we discover in *Frankenstein* is a manifestation of Shelley's conscious and unconscious intentions, while the story is also meaningful in ways that transcend the author's intentions. Along with other complex motives (partially in and partially out of her awareness), it is clear that the 18-year-old Shelley used her writing of *Frankenstein* to grapple with her daemonic conflicts concerning death and love, especially the traumatic deaths of her mother and her first child. In creating *Frankenstein*, the pain of these losses returned powerfully into Shelley's awareness. In contrast to Victor's pathological reliance on primitive defenses, however, Shelley is able to receive messages from her unconscious—such as dreams, visions, and memories—and transform them into a work of art. As May (1969) attested, "The daimonic needs to be directed and channeled. Here is where human consciousness becomes so important. We initially experience the daimonic as a blind push . . . . It pushes us toward the blind assertion of ourselves . . . . But consciousness can integrate the daimonic" (pp. 124-125).

Shelley's feelings and fantasies about killing her mother became one of the formative influences in her life. In part, *Frankenstein* is a meditation on the destructive consequences of growing up

without a mother (or consistent father, for that matter). Time and again the creature desperately criticizes Victor for abandoning him (Shelley, 1818/1990): "No father had watched my infant days, no mother had blessed me with smiles and caresses. . . . What was I?" (p. 90). The creature attributes his violence to being deprived of mutual relationships and love: "I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity: but am I not alone, miserably alone?" (p. 74).

Shelley's journal reveals the suffering she endured at age 17 when her first baby died just 2 weeks after being born. Three days after finding her baby dead, she wrote (Feldman & Scott-Kilvert, 1987), "still think about my little baby—'tis hard indeed for a mother to loose [*sic*] a child" (p. 68). It is even harder for a mother to lose an infant after losing her own mother as an infant. A week after her daughter's death, she said, "think of my little dead baby—this is foolish I suppose yet whenever I am left alone to my own thoughts & do not read to divert them they always come back to the same point—that I was a mother & am no longer" (Feldman & Scott-Kilvert, 1987, p. 69). We can sense Shelley's grief along with her efforts to assuage the great sorrow she feels. She is aware that she (like everyone else) tries to manage her pain by diverting herself, by using defense mechanisms to ease her suffering. She also knows that these methods can be successful only temporarily, that the pain will resurface.

Thirteen days after her baby died, Shelley has a powerful dream, poignant in itself, but especially intriguing in light of *Frankenstein* (which she began writing 16 months later) (Feldman & Scott-Kilvert, 1987):

> Dream that my little baby came to life again—that it had only been cold & that we rubbed it by the fire & it lived—I awake & find no baby—I think about the little thing all day. (p. 70)

Naturally, Shelley would wish to bring her baby back to life. Most astonishing, however, is how an 18-year-old girl transforms this dream-fantasy (along with other experiences, hopes, and fears) into a deep work of art.

To understand how significant the themes of this dream were to Shelley, it is important to know that *Frankenstein* was shaped at

its inception by an intense, nightmarish reverie. Shelley (1831/1994) recounts the story of how she, "then a young girl, came to think of and to dilate upon so very hideous an idea" (p. v). Shelley, Percy, their baby William, and Claire (her stepsister) travel to Switzerland to visit Lord Byron. One evening, after reading ghost stories together, Byron proposes that they each write a ghost story. A few days later, while lying awake late at night, Shelley has a terrifying yet thrilling vision (Shelley, 1831/1994):

> My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie. I saw—with shut eyes, but acute mental vision—I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half-vital motion. Frightful it must be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavor to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world. His success would terrify the artist; he would rush away from his odious handy work, horror-stricken. He would hope that, left to itself, the slight spark of life with he had communicated would fade; that this thing, which had received such imperfect animation would subside into dead matter; and he might sleep in the belief that the silence of the grave would quench forever the transient existence of the hideous corpse which he had looked upon as the cradle of life. He sleeps; but he is awakened; he opens his eyes; behold, the horrid thing stands at his bedside, opening his curtains and looking on him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes. (pp. viii-ix)

Having spontaneously given herself this visionary vignette—with images so evocative of her personal conflicts concerning birth, death, life, and love—Shelley courageously shapes it into a revelatory novel. By transforming suffering into art, *Frankenstein* is a beautiful example of the immense human potential for resiliency, sublimation, creativity, and healing. "Art can, indeed," as May (1969) said, "be defined from one side as a specific method of coming to terms with the depths of the daimonic" (p. 127). This is not to suggest that Shelley was completely able to work through her deep conflicts. She struggled intermittently with depression and psychosomatic problems throughout her life. Nonetheless, *Frankenstein* is a tremendously insightful literary and psychological accomplishment, one that continues to speak to us across cultures and eras.

MAKING DAEMONS OF LOVE

After briefly considering how Shelley used her art to work with her tragedies of death and love, let us see how Victor struggles with these same issues. Victor's repression of death is linked inextricably with his inability to love. Although he often proclaims that he loves his family dearly, he never actually behaves in a loving way toward them. After rushing away from his grief-stricken family soon after his mother dies, Victor does not return home for 6 years! It is not until he hears about brother's murder that he forces himself back to the place of his mother's death. Beckoning him home in a letter, his father writes, "Come, Victor . . . . Enter the house of mourning . . . with kindness and affection for those who love you" (Shelley, 1818/1990, p. 54). These words are unwittingly oracular. They testify to the indestructibility of the unconscious and inevitability of the return of the repressed. As we have seen, Victor had never really allowed himself to enter the house of mourning. Instead, he fled the house and family of mourning, displacing his energy and attention into scientific work. Addressing Victor on many levels, his father gives voice to the family's recurrent grief and resentment of his absence.

Yet, even when he comes home he still does not engage authentically in mourning, nor appreciate the pain his family is suffering. Victor's brother, Ernest, greets him when he arrives following William's murder. Ernest cries as he describes his father and Elizabeth's terrible sorrow. With a disturbing lack of empathy, Victor ignores his brother's pain and instead insists that Ernest soothe him (Shelley, 1818/1990): "Ernest began to weep . . . . 'Do not,' said I, 'welcome me thus; try to be more calm, that I may not be absolutely miserable the moment I enter my father's house after so long an absence'" (p. 58). This is a chilling response, one that demonstrates how incapable Victor is of moving beyond his own egocentric perspective and self-interest. For Victor, as for so many of us, fear of death manifests as fear of life and love. His death-denying defense, employed initially to save his life, is now dominating his existence, deadening, and draining him of authentic life. As Norman O. Brown (1959) demonstrated, it is our avoidance of death that is morbid, not death itself:

> This incapacity to die, ironically but inevitably, throws mankind out of the actuality of living . . . the result is the denial of life . . . . The dis-

> traction of human life to the war against death, by the same inevitable irony, results in death's dominion over life. The war against death takes the form of a preoccupation with the past and the future, and the present tense, the tense of life, is lost. (p. 284)

Captivated by such a "life against death" (Brown, 1959), Victor can neither live nor love fully.

"We have to realize," said R. D. Laing (1967), "that we are as deeply afraid to live and to love as we are to die" (p. 49). Intuiting this conflict, but fighting its clear emergence into consciousness, Victor often struggles to reassure himself that he is a loving person. Right after letting the family servant, Justine, be unjustly executed for William's murder—having chosen not to intervene, not to reveal the truth that the creature killed William—Victor proclaims that "my heart overflowed with kindness, and the love of virtue" (Shelley, 1818/1990, p. 67). Victor's intensely conflicted feelings are evident when he speaks of his family in comparison to his work: "I wished, as it were, to procrastinate all that related to my feelings of affection until the great object, which swallowed up every habit of my nature, should be completed" (Shelley, 1818/1990, p. 41). With grandiose ideas, he excuses his lack of love and empathy. He copes with his mother's death by developing a pseudo-amorous relationship with his scientific work. Victor's love for his mother and for Elizabeth (his bride to be) are displaced onto the not-yet-animated creature (who also serves as a symbolic container for his displaced attunement to death).

I have used the term *narcissistic* to characterize Victor's thinking, feeling, behavior, defensiveness, and character style. Although Victor meets the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* 4th ed. (*DSM-IV*) diagnostic criteria for narcissistic personality disorder, I believe that his suffering reflects, more broadly, shared human struggles. We all grapple with narcissistic conflicts, with issues of self-esteem, self-coherence, care for self versus care for others, and so on. The etymology of the word *psychopathology* is especially pertinent in this regard: psychopathology, seen deeply, is the meaningful (*logos*) suffering (*pathos*) of our soul (*psyche*). Victor suffers because he has difficulty confronting the pain of his personal challenges and collective existential realities. In the complex venture of living an ordinary human life, conflicts over love naturally blend with conflicts over death.

Victor's incipient narcissism—his "hyperexpansive" style (Schneider, 1993)—grows to pathological proportions as he moves

closer to animating the creature. "I was surprised," he boasts, "that among so many men of genius . . . I alone should be reserved to discover so astonishing a secret" (Shelley, 1818/1990, pp. 38-39). Victor even places himself above "the wisest men since the creation of the world" (p. 39). After making the creature, he reflects, "I could not rank myself with the herd of common projectors" (p. 155). In this light, consider May's (1969) observation with regard to "the self-righteousness and aloof detachment which are the usual defenses of the human being who denies the daimonic" (p. 132).

When haunted by the death of his mother and the existential reality of human finitude and vulnerability, Victor's grandiose notions serve as a compensatory defense, placing him in a powerful (albeit self-deceptive) position. Victor argues that he wants to benefit all of humankind by the fruits of his labor. This appears to be a noble wish. And to his credit, he certainly demonstrates intellectual and scientific brilliance by creating a living being. Thus, Victor's work resembles sublimation, the mature process of transforming disturbing feelings and ideas into creative, socially beneficial actions and products. In skillful sublimation, we acknowledge, bear, and eventually transcend the pain of our lives. Sexual urges can be sublimated as Freud showed, but so can grief, sadness, dread, guilt, rage, alienation, and yearning for connection. Indeed, all of these are potential sources of creative energy for Victor. His suffering is partially sublimated in bringing life to the creature. However, this process is aborted when he abandons the creature. Human consciousness and actions are usually composed of complex, multiple, conflictual moves both toward health and away from it. Motives are rarely pure or univocal. Nonetheless, Victor's reactions suggest that egoic, self-serving, death-denying motivations outweigh his genuine wish to serve humankind. His possibilities for sublimation, creativity, and altruism degenerate into displacement, splitting, and projective identification.

Eventually, Victor's narcissistic defenses become more destructive than protective. His lack of empathy for the creature is especially painful to witness. (Because of this, most people who read *Frankenstein* identify more with the creature than with Victor.) Focused on self-aggrandizement and his own narrow scientistic perspective, he fills himself with images of fame and glory. Thus, he is never able to see and empathize with the creature as a real other person, a being with legitimate thoughts, feelings, and needs of its own. Because Victor consciously chooses to piece the creature

together from dead bodies and parts of other animals, his horrible appearance could serve as a further invitation to accept the reality of death and the correlative call to love. But again, Victor flees from the potential message that he is sending himself, inauthentically avoids accepting responsibility for his behavior—essentially for his own child—and actively seeks unconsciousness. Consider his reactions in the very first moments of the creature's life (Shelley, 1818/1990):

> I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs. How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe . . . ? . . . now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room, and continued a long time traversing my bed-chamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep . . . . I threw myself on the bed in my clothes, endeavouring to seek a few moments of forgetfulness. (pp. 42-43)

Tragically, unable to process his intense feelings—both of horror and narcissistic injury—Victor's immediate reaction to the creature (in its initial moments of consciousness) is that of defensive abandonment. After just creating a living being, Victor runs away to a nearby room where he hopes sleep will make him oblivious. But our disavowed daemons come back to haunt us. Here the repressed returns, thinly disguised, in a dream that blends seamlessly into a waking life (Shelley, 1818/1990):

> I slept indeed, but I was disturbed by the wildest dreams. I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel. I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed; when, by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window-shutters, I beheld the wretch—the miserable monster whom I had created. He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me. His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. He might have spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped, and rushed down stairs. (p. 43)

It is crucial to recognize that these are the very first experiences of the creature's life. A new being comes into this world and, smiling, yearning, reaches out to its creator, its fused mother and father, but is immediately scorned and rejected. Without any reflection, compassion, or curiosity, Victor misinterprets his child's wish for connection as a threat, presumes its desire for love to be a danger. These consecutive acts of abandonment create a key turning point. If Victor could have had the courage, or we could say the ego strength, to consciously accept responsibility for his grand venture, everything may have turned out differently. But he could not, and daemonic disaster ensued.

In Victor's dream, Elizabeth undergoes a metamorphosis into his mother who in turn metamorphoses into the creature. This deeply disturbing dream provides perhaps the most vivid evidence that his labour of birthing the creature is driven by death-denial and defensive displacement. The dream powerfully illustrates that Victor's scientific work is simultaneously psychological work (however unrealized), work that is permeated with his unacknowledged, unresolved feelings about his mother's death and with his inability to let himself really love. The reemergence of death into his awareness is too much for Victor to bear, so he retreats even further into a psychotic, hallucinatory delirium (the first of several still to come).

Just as Victor is unable or unwilling to face the full reality of the creature, he actively hides this truth from others. Significantly, May (1969) observed that "the most important criterion which saves the daimonic from anarchy is *dialogue*" (p. 154). In fact, the day after animating the creature, Victor encounters Clerval who recognizes something is terribly wrong. Nonetheless, Victor actively chooses to conceal the truth even from his best friend. By neglecting the opportunity to share his story, Victor distances himself from those who care about him and dooms himself to bear the burden of his actions in isolation. However, he is unable to handle this responsibility and is overcome by a psychotic delirium lasting several months. Clerval sees Victor's wild distress and pleas for an explanation (Shelley, 1818/1990):

> "Do not ask me," cried I, putting my hands before my eyes, for I thought I saw the dreaded spectre glide into the room; "*he* can tell.—Oh, save me! save me!" I imagined that the monster seized me; I struggled furiously, and fell down in a fit. (p. 46)

Victor withdraws from others and from reality—he covers his eyes literally and psychologically—and moves into a defensive, reactive psychosis. Nevertheless, visual hallucinations of the daemon haunt him with the truth.

The execution of innocent Justine, noted above, is only one of a series of tragedies that ensue from Victor's self-imposed secrecy and alienation from others. He does make a chilling allusion to the creature in a letter to Elizabeth, but in a manner that can ease only his own anxiety while tormenting his fiancée (Shelley, 1818/1990):

> I have one secret, Elizabeth, a dreadful one; when revealed to you, it will chill your frame with horror . . . . I will confide this tale of misery and terror to you the day after our marriage shall take place. (p. 140)

However, he never fulfills his promise to confide in Elizabeth even though the creature specifically promised that he will wreak revenge on the night of their wedding.

Once Victor brings the creature to life and then flees, it is 2 long years before they have their first (and only) conversation. After murdering William, the creature finds Victor and presents an eloquent plea for love, understanding, and acceptance. Victor immediately reacts with contempt. But the creature is not deterred (Shelley, 1818/1990):

> Begone! Relieve me from the sight of your detested form [exclaims Victor]. "Thus I relieve thee, my creator," he [the creature] said, and placed his hated hands before my eyes, which I flung from me with violence; "thus I take from thee a sight which you abhor. Still thou canst listen to me, and grant me thy compassion . . . . Hear my tale; it is long and strange." (p. 75)

This is a profound moment. By covering Victor's eyes, the creature asks him to see more deeply, to transcend his prejudicial, narcissistic "single vision." He wants Victor to realize that beyond superficial ugliness he is a being with sensitivity and intelligence. Yearning for a real relationship, he hopes "to meet with beings, who, pardoning my outward form, would love me for the excellent qualities which I was capable of bringing forth" (Shelley, 1818/1990, p. 163). For a brief moment, Victor allows the creature's articulate and heartfelt appeal to get through to him: "For the first time . . . I felt what the duties of a creator towards his creature were" (p. 75). Victor has had 2 years to reflect on the meaning of his creation, but

not until this late moment does he even begin to realize the implications of what he has done and to sense the responsibility he has toward the being he brought into this world.

This encounter is an excellent example of what we sense throughout the novel, that in many ways the creature is more fully human than Victor. Psychopathology involves part of a person relating to a partial world. And indeed, Victor does lose much of himself in his efforts to avoid death and real relationship and to compensate for his narcissistic vulnerabilities. Whereas initially the De Laceys are as alien to the creature as he is to Victor, the creature strives to understand them, be kind to them by secretly helping with chores, and eventually communicate with them. This involves entering their world with attentiveness and empathy. Gradually, with tremendous perseverance, the creature learns their language and customs. Even though he is rejected when the De Laceys become terrified by his horrible appearance, he accomplishes (for a while) what Victor is never really able to do. That is, the creature transcends his own egocentric perspective, sees through the eyes of an other, feels love, and acts kindly.

In contrast, lost in his own needs and fears, Victor repeatedly abandons every significant person in his life, the creature as well as his family, friends, and wife. One of the most disturbing examples of this is the way that Victor egocentrically misperceives a threat made by the creature. After the creature watches Victor violently dismember his promised wife, he proclaims his vow of vengeance (Shelley, 1818/1990): "Remember, I shall be with you on your wedding-night" (p. 124). Victor reflects that "then was the period fixed for the fulfillment of my destiny. In that hour I should die . . . . I thought of my beloved Elizabeth,—of her tears and endless sorrow, when she should find her lover so barbarously snatched from her" (p. 125). Victor remains focused on himself, and even his semi-empathy with Elizabeth is evoked only by imagining his own death. Victor has about 9 months to ponder the creature's threat. On the day of his wedding, obsessed with the idea that the creature will try to kill him, he arms himself with pistols and a dagger. Remarkably, however, Victor does not even consider an obvious possibility which looms just beyond his literal and self-referential interpretation of the creature's threat, namely, that Elizabeth may be in danger as well. In fact, when the time arrives for the fulfillment of the creature's revenge, Victor leaves his new wife alone as he searches the house and prepares to do battle. Of course,

the creature takes advantage of Victor's preoccupation with his own safety (and his abandonment of Elizabeth) to murder the bride on her honeymoon bed. Love, disowned and daemonized, returns again as death.

MAKING DAEMONS OF NATURE

In much the same way he treats people, Victor treats nature with an unempathic, literal-minded, utilitarian attitude. Alienated from nature (like he is alienated from others and from himself), Victor aggressively seeks to increase his own egoistic power and dominate the natural world by denying the natural reality of death. For him, nature becomes merely material to be exploited for his own needs. In the first lecture that Victor attends at the university, Professor Waldman praises the "modern masters" of chemistry who "penetrate into the recesses of nature, and show how she works in her hiding places. They ascend into the heavens . . . . They have acquired new and almost unlimited powers . . . and even mock the invisible world with its own shadows" (Shelley, 1818/1990, p. 36). Waldman's aggressive glorification of scientific materialism (and control of supposedly feminine nature) is unforgettable for Victor. He identifies with Waldman, idealizes him (with the same intensity he devalues Professor Krempe), and becomes his disciple.

With this exclusively materialistic and utilitarian view of nature, Victor shows contempt for the psychological and spiritual dimensions of existence. Significantly, these aspects of our lives are usually somewhat hidden. Often they are not accessible, much less understandable, by simply observing the (supposedly) objective, exterior surfaces of things with the monological gaze of physical science. Instead, understanding psycho-spiritual existence requires a dialogical exploration of depths; a hermeneutical meeting of heart, mind, and soul; a mutual conversation that brings forth another being's unique subjectivity and reveals and interprets the *meaning* of experience and behavior (Wilber, 1995). Materialistic science severely limits itself by explaining all phenomena with physical principles exclusively. Through this reductionistic, single vision, the deeper and more complex dimensions of the world (such as consciousness) are minimized, explained away, or ignored. We have seen how Victor misses the psychological mean-

ing of his own and others' experiences and behaviors. This also happens in his relationship with the natural world.

Victor devotes all of his attention to science in part because he is unable or unwilling to engage in reciprocal relationships with nature or other people. Having abandoned Elizabeth in favor of his grandiose and death-denying project, displaced erotic energy pervades his scientific work (Shelley, 1818/1990): "The moon gazed on my midnight labours, while, with unrelaxed and breathless eagerness, I pursued nature to her hiding places" (p. 40). If we didn't know the story, this account would sound like sexual seduction or rape. Strangely, Victor's fear of death, his necrophobia (as it might be called), manifests as necrophilia.

Victor's daemonization of nature gives us an opportunity to acknowledge, briefly, the significance of the sociocultural milieu of Shelley's Europe on the psychology of *Frankenstein*. Waldman and Victor view nature as a woman who must be violently forced to submit to "man's" (supposedly) rational and technological control, to be exploited for material resources that gratify man's desires. In the early 1600s, this way of construing nature emerged as the guiding principle in Francis Bacon's work (Leiss, 1972; Merchant, 1980). It was soon incorporated into the Cartesian-Newtonian paradigm of reality and into the values and practices of the scientific and industrial revolutions.

Consider just a few passages from Bacon, disturbing passages that express a perspective that Victor uncritically adopts and enacts with a vengeance. Bacon's basic premise is that "natural science has therefore no other goal than to more firmly establish and extend the power and domination of men over nature" (Bacon, quoted in Leiss, 1972, p. 48). He exhorted "man" to pursue a relentless "inquisition of nature" (p. 51), "to bind her [nature] to your service and make her your slave" (p. 55), thus making nature "serve the business and conveniences of man" (p. 58). Do not think, Bacon warned, that technology has "no power to make radical changes, and shake her [nature] in the foundations" (p. 58). Bacon exhorts man to torture nature just as "witches" were tortured by the inquisition (Merchant, 1980): "You have but to follow and as it were hound nature in her wanderings . . . . Neither ought a man to make scruple of entering and penetrating into these holes and corners, when the inquisition of truth is his whole object" (p. 168). Justified (in his mind) by the ideal of disclosing (what he conceives as) scientific truth, Bacon believes that man should act violently against nature with no hesitation nor thought of scruples.

Like the great Romantic authors, Heidegger (1954/1977a) realized the terrible danger inherent in this grandiose glorification of human power and reductionistic objectification of nature: "Man . . . exalts himself to the posture of lord of the earth" (p. 27). From this position, Heidegger (1952/1977b) asserted critically, "The world changes into an object. In this revolutionary objectifying of everything that is, the earth . . . itself can show itself only as the object of assault . . . . Nature appears everywhere . . . as the object of technology" (p. 100). To a large degree, according to Heidegger, this worldview is motivated by our efforts to avoid death. And it is this worldview that guides Victor's life.

Recurrent deadly disasters ensue from the way Victor treats nature and the creature. Likewise today, with pervasive environmental devastation, we see the catastrophic consequences of this immature and arrogantly egocentric attitude toward nature. Driven by fear, greed, and misunderstanding, we assault the natural world, but not without daemonic consequences, whether the daemon be a murderous monster or a carcinogenic ecosystem with decimated biodiversity.

MAKING DAEMONS OF SPIRIT

Victor's need to deny death, his scientific materialism, and his narcissistic wish for power interact in peculiar ways, leading him to develop an unconscious identification with God. From a spiritual perspective, it is God or Spirit (by whatever name) that brings life into being. Often the creature castigates Victor for presuming that he could fulfill this role, and ultimately for his failure to succeed (Shelley, 1818/1990): "I remembered Adam's supplication to his Creator; but where was mine? he had abandoned me, and, in the bitterness of my heart, I cursed him" (p. 97). Because Victor focuses exclusively on the material challenges of making the creature and represses the psycho-spiritual significance of his work, his implicit identification with God is especially revealing.

The world's great spiritual traditions and contemporary transpersonal psychology concur in their appreciation of a profound human phenomenon. That is, we each have the potential to discover (via mature conscious awareness) that "Reality," "God," "Spirit," or "Emptiness" is our true nature, our ultimate identity. Of course, it is not that we as individual egos are God—à la the

delusional person who believes he is the historical Jesus—but that in and as our deepest self we (along with everyone and everything) are manifestations of essential, eternal, absolute Spirit. Here we could easily turn to the Buddha or Jesus (among countless others) for supporting words of wisdom but instead we will rely on a spiritual genius from the Romantic tradition. A friend of William Blake (1825/1946) once asked him about "the imputed Divinity of Jesus Christ. He answered: 'He is the only God'—but then he added—'And so am I and so are you.'" (p. 680). In the same conversation, Blake remarked that "we are all coexistent with God; members of the Divine body, and partakers of the Divine nature" (p. 680).

Such a conscious, transpersonal identification with Spirit involves the development and eventual transcendence of a coherent and stable ego: Who we are goes far beyond our supposedly separate self. Victor's grandiosity is evidence of an immature, weak ego rather than a mature, strong one, evidence of dread-driven compensation rather than authentic agency and power. Because of his narcissistic insecurity and vulnerability, Victor is spellbound by an unconscious, egocentric identification with God. Jung would say that he has become possessed by the God archetype. Far from realizing his deepest transpersonal identity with God, Victor inflates his ego, deigns to personally usurp God's position, and thus, becomes blinded by fantasies of egocentric glory. The ancient Greeks warned that such hubris will lead to nemesis, as it indeed does for Victor.

Sadly, Victor's life is consistently marked by aborted psychospiritual development. Often confronted with real and painful challenges, he has the opportunity to learn and grow. Yet, he repeatedly turns away. Along with the implicit, unconscious conflation of his ego and God, the explicit expression of Victor's spirituality is quite immature and misguided. After Elizabeth is murdered and Victor's father dies of a stroke (upon hearing the news), Victor devotes his life to killing the creature. He goes to the graves of his family and in a furious rage invokes "the spirits of the departed," praying that they will help him wreak revenge (Shelley, 1818/1990):

> I knelt on the grass, and kissed the earth, and with quivering lips exclaimed, "By the sacred earth on which I kneel, by the shades that wander near me, by the deep and eternal grief that I feel, I swear; and by thee, O Night, and by the spirits that preside over thee, I swear to pursue the daemon, who caused this misery, until he or I

> shall perish in mortal conflict. For this purpose I will preserve my life: to execute this dear revenge. . . . And I call on you, spirits of the dead; and on you, wandering ministers of vengeance, to aid and conduct me in my work." (p. 149)

Victor actually becomes psychotic (again) as he engages in this quest. Under the influence of delusions and visual hallucinations, he believes that his family has returned to support his murderous endeavor: "The spirits of the dead hovered round, and instigated me to toil and revenge" (Shelley, 1818/1990, p. 152).

Nietzsche (1892/1968) and Freud (1927/1961b) showed how religion can be a defensive, child-like reaction to the fear, pain, and difficulties inherent in human existence. In this type of religion, we evade the responsibility for our lives, abdicate our own resources for managing real challenges, and instead turn to God—the great father in heaven—to protect us and to fulfill our wishes. (In my view, Freud understood half the story of religion and spirituality, being remarkably blind to mature, authentic spirituality. Nietzsche's understanding was more subtle and complex.) With regard to our present inquiry, Nietzsche and Freud's interpretation accurately conveys Victor's psychological condition as he pursues the creature.

Victor's vengeful rage is not an impulsive reaction that quickly passes away, but a state that he sustains, relentlessly and uncritically, for over 3 years, until he dies because of it. Allowing hate to supersede grief, Victor never, in all these years, deepens his consciousness enough to develop a mature and authentic spiritual life, one guided by awareness, wisdom, and compassion. These are the central values of all the great spiritual traditions, but Victor is a stranger to these qualities. Entranced by the accomplishments of the Enlightenment and scientific revolution, Victor reduces psychospiritual depths to superficial materialism and egocentric glory. He confuses his ego with God and tries to create a human being by merely joining dead body parts and charging them with electricity.

In the end, partially recognizing his spiritual impoverishment, Victor confesses that he has devoted himself to "unhallowed arts" (Shelley, 1831/1994, p. 60). Never growing beyond fear and defensiveness, he misses the opportunity for a real evolution of consciousness (see Schneider, 1993). Just before dying, he resorts to a pseudo-spiritual approach, calling on the spirits of his dead family. His hallucinations of his family are another version of the repressed returning, yet another opportunity to become aware and

begin healing. For example, he might have accepted his share of responsibility for their deaths (and for the love he withheld), asked for forgiveness, and eventually resolved the traumas of love and death. Instead, Victor suffers through an unreflective life, tragically consumed with unremitting dread and hostility. Spirit perverted manifests as egoic ambition, again with disastrous results.

THE CALL OF *FRANKENSTEIN* IN EVERYDAY LIFE

With *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley has given us a precious gift, a symbolic offering that calls for contemplation and even transformation. The wayward ways of Victor and the creature are always present as possibilities in every human life. You and I may ponder how we are like these two lost souls. And we may discover how to shape our destiny differently.

Pain is inherent in human existence, but suffering is not. Our destiny depends on how we respond to the individual and collective existential challenges that are sent our way, especially those involving the sacred concerns of love and death. To live an ordinary human life—and to imbue this life with goodness, beauty, and truth, with awareness, wisdom, and compassion—this truly is a heroic aspiration. I need not invoke ordeals of extraordinary trauma here. We are each called to face and overcome great pain simply by dint of being human. Initially, we may need to move away from pain, trusting our psyche's astonishing ability to render just the right defense at just the right moment. But eventually, the challenge that first generated the pain will return. We must answer this call consciously if we hope to create a life of integrity and fulfillment. Otherwise, we suffer.

Because Victor never heard the call clearly nor consciously, he could not find an authentic way to respond. He succeeded scientifically (at least in part) but failed interpersonally and morally. Having deadened himself in reaction to his mother's death—by closing himself off from others and being driven by the unconscious fantasy of bringing her back to life—he was never able to bring himself back to life, courage, care, and responsibility within the shared human community. Fear of death became a fear of being fully alive. He did bring life to the creature, but never brought love to him, nor to anyone else for that matter. Victor's inability to bear death and share love became a daemon, embodied externally as the creature,

but also powerfully present as an unconscious aspect of his own being. This death-dispensing daemon haunted Victor forever because it was never fully faced nor understood. Of all the experiences that can awaken and transform us, love and death are the most profound. These awesome archetypal forces returned again and again, beckoning Victor to break through his dread and narcissism, to deepen his consciousness, and, ultimately, to be loving. But alas, Victor evaded this call, made daemons of life's challenges, and deprived himself and so many others of love and of life.

REFERENCES

Aries, P. (1981). *The hour of our death* (H. Weaver, Trans.). New York: Knopf.

Becker, E. (1973). *The denial of death*. New York: Free Press.

Blake, W. (1946). From Crabb Robinson's reminiscences, 1869. In A. Kazin (Ed.), *The portable Blake* (pp. 675-694). New York: Viking. (Original conversation between Blake and Robinson 1825)

Blake, W. (1988). [Letter] To Thomas Butts, 22 November 1802. In D. V. Erdman (Ed.), *The complete poetry and prose of William Blake* (Rev. ed., pp. 720-723). New York: Viking. (Original letter 1802)

Brown, N. O. (1959). *Life against death. The psychoanalytical meaning of history*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Buber, M. (1965). Dialogue. In *Between man and man* (pp. 1-39). New York: Macmillan. (Original work published 1921)

Coomaraswamy, A. K. (1964). *Buddha and the gospel of Buddhism*. New York: Harper & Row. (Original work published 1916)

Dooling, D. M. (1981). From shaman to shooting star. *Parabola*, *6*(4), 82-87.

Eliot, T. S. (1943). *Four quartets*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Feldman, P. R., & Scott-Kilvert, D. (Eds.). (1987). *The journals of Mary Shelley* (Vol. I). New York: Oxford University Press.

Freud, S. (1955a). Analysis of a phobia in a five-year-old boy. In J. Strachey (Ed. and Trans.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 10, pp. 1-149). London: Hogarth Press. (Original work published 1909)

Freud, S. (1955b). Totem and taboo. In J. Strachey (Ed. and Trans.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 13, pp. vii-162). London: Hogarth Press. (Original work published 1913)

Freud, S. (1955c). The "Uncanny." In J. Strachey (Ed. and Trans.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. XVII, pp. 217-256). London: Hogarth Press. (Original work published 1919)

Freud, S. (1961a). Beyond the pleasure principle. In J. Strachey (Ed. and Trans.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of*

Sigmund Freud (Vol. 18, pp. 1-64). London: Hogarth Press. (Original work published 1920)

Freud, S. (1961b). The future of an illusion. In J. Strachey (Ed. and Trans.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 21, pp. 1-56). London: Hogarth Press. (Original work published 1927)

Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). New York: Harper & Row. (Original work published 1927)

Heidegger, M. (1977a). The question concerning technology (W. Lovitt, Trans.). In *The question concerning technology and other essays* (pp. 3-49). New York: Harper & Row. (Original work published 1954)

Heidegger, M. (1977b). The word of Nietzsche: "God is dead" (W. Lovitt, Trans.). In *The question concerning technology and other essays* (pp. 54-112). New York: Harper & Row. (Original work published 1952)

Laing, R. D. (1967). *The politics of experience*. New York: Pantheon.

Leiss, W. (1972). *The domination of nature*. Boston: Beacon.

Long, J. B. (1987). Demons: An overview. In M. Eliade (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of religion* (Vol. 4, pp. 282-288). New York: Macmillan.

Loy, D. (1996). *Lack and transcendence. The problem of death and life in psychotherapy, existentialism, and Buddhism*. Amherst, NY: Humanity Books.

May, R. (1969). *Love and will*. New York: Dell.

Merchant, C. (1980). *The death of nature. Women, ecology, and the scientific revolution*. San Francisco: HarperCollins.

Nietzsche, F. (1968). Thus spoke Zarathustra. In *The portable Nietzsche* (W. Kaufmann, Ed. and Trans.). New York: Viking. (Original work published 1892)

Plato. (1953). Symposium (B. Jowett, Trans.). In *The dialogues of Plato* (Vol. I). London, UK: Oxford Clarendon. (Original work published circa 360 B.C.E.)

Schneider, K. J. (1993). *Horror and the holy. Wisdom teachings of the monster tale*. Chicago: Open Court.

Shelley, M. (1990). *Frankenstein; or, The modern Prometheus*. In B. T. Bennett & C. E. Robinson (Eds.), *The Mary Shelley reader* (pp. 11-165). New York: Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1818)

Shelley, M. (1994). *Frankenstein*. New York: Dover. (Original work published 1831)

Stevenson, R. L. (1998). *The strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. (Original work published 1886)

Wilber, K. (1995). *Sex, ecology, spirituality. The spirit of evolution*. Boston: Shambhala.

Wolf, L. (Ed.). (1977). *The annotated Frankenstein*. New York: Clarkson N. Potter.

Reprint requests: Will W. Adams, Ph.D., Davis & Elkins College, Psychology Department, Elkins, WV 26241; e-mail: wadams@dne.edu.