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# *Politics and Monsters: The Unmediated Desire for Order and Meaning in Shelley's Frankenstein*

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It is common to regard moderation as key to a community's stability and prosperity. Claiming that it represents the restorative cure for the troubles that besiege human existence, Aristotle, for one, places the notion of moderation at the center of his ethical and political philosophy. Human beings form communities not only to live, but to live well. Yet, a community, Aristotle explains, does not automatically grant a person the *good life*. If it is to offer its members the chance to escape instances of profound turmoil and live well, the community must strive towards the excellence conveyed by the Golden Mean of moderation. Reformulating the Delphic decree that man pursue "nothing in excess" (Μηδεν αγαν), Aristotle argues that a healthy communal environment depends on the acknowledgement of a moderate middle level of existence that avoids the extreme polarities of, on the one side, dogmatic fanaticism and, on the other, radical skepticism. To roam outside this middle level and tend towards the extremes of either excess or deficiency produces situations of emergency which inevitably dismantle order and thwart the human potential for *eudemonia*.

Composed of friends, neighbors, and fellow citizens, this middle realm provides a natural arena for measuring one's private account of *truth* against another's, as well as the incentive

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to reassess one's account. The need to reconcile what appears true to me with what appears true to my friends, neighbors, and fellow citizens provides the means for self-criticism and self-understanding; means that help gauge appropriate conduct, hence possibly hampering the zealous elements that threaten to erupt within the community. In short, the realm of the Golden Mean, where an authentic experience of fulfillment resides, is one of *checks and balances*. It is a place where one's cooperative attachment to others—and the ethical categories and political processes they collectively formulate—mediates one's desire for primordial *truth*, thus preventing its more dangerous expressions.

*A healthy society provides context for self-questioning.*

There are occasions, however, when those around us espouse behavior that exhibits traits of lawlessness and unreasonableness; occasions when the enveloping group of friends, neighbors, and fellow citizens is no longer amenable to enlightened individual effort and ceases to be a measure of moderate conduct. When one surveys the community and can no longer identify that anchor of true order, that reference point of common sense, which the middle level of existence represents, one becomes seized by a disorienting sense of crisis. Thus having no sense of belonging to a state of affairs that increasingly grows in disrepute, one initially suffers the need to pull away in the hopes of salvaging an authentic experience of *truth*. This means that in order to revive a relationship with *truth*, one must go beyond the accepted manners of thought, focus attention away from the *untruths* reflected in the surroundings, transcend the established institutional political practices—which in time of crisis are seen not only as hindrances and annoyances but as symptoms of the corruption bedeviling the community—and move towards a more intimate appreciation of *truth* that develops through the cultivation of individual souls.

Still, this turning away presents significant risks. It can, as demonstrated by the paradigmatic event of Socrates' life and death, result in greater insight into the true principles of existence, thereby potentially reinvigorating a segment of the community which then becomes its ordering force and authority, or it can result in disorder, both personal and communal. By withdrawing into oneself and losing contact with friends,

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neighbors, and fellow citizens, a person gains separation from the immediate troubles, but he also breaks from the ground of restraint. One who pulls away from the middle and plunges into isolation has nobody to tame his imagination or rebuff his potentially reckless inclinations. As a consequence, anything, no matter how outlandish and absurd, is deemed possible. A person's solitary yearning to rekindle a personal experience of *truth* might at times be necessary, but it holds no promises. Derailments are a constant threat. The introverted probing into reality, the search for an order of fulfillment which is awakened by the encircling spiritual disorder, may prove beneficial, yet it may well produce catastrophic results that deepen and prolong the feeling of crisis.

I will, in what follows, offer a close commentary and analysis of one of the finest literary depictions of such a derailed search, namely, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Specifically, I will demonstrate that, amidst scenes of beauty, love, friendship, adventure, and horror, Shelley's work brilliantly exposes all the significant dangers of following an existential path that leads a person to part with the moderate middle level of existence in the solitary attempt to re-construct the structure of reality and re-articulate order in history.

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Hidden in the shadows, shamed by his deed, Adam witnesses the outbreak of hitherto unfamiliar scenes of hatred, war, and chaos. Concealed in a place of darkness, he perceives Sin and Death enter the world while innocence and immortality depart. Adam's mournful eyes betray his mood as he realizes paradise is lost. No longer blanketed by perfect paradisiacal harmony, toil, pain, and loss are now his only assured fate. The unfolding tragedy fills Adam with despair and produces a cry for meaning that bursts out and rips into the created order:

Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay,  
To mould me man? Did I solicit thee  
From darkness to promote me?

—John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, X, 743-745

Loaded with passionate intensity, Adam's anguished call for justification informs the reader of the deep mood of desolation that rages within the individual who, unable to

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recognize any order or purpose in the cosmos, feels himself to have been thrown into an unbearable existence. Milton thus discloses the frame of mind and the spiritual disposition of a person who, out of hopelessness, has broken away from and opposes the natural arrangement of things. The creature who despairs over his creator's deeds is one who questions the limits placed by divine authority, hence preparing the ground for an existential battle between Him who has given life and him who has received it.

Accordingly, this short passage suggests that something powerful is about to erupt, something dramatic is on the verge of occurring. The words spoken are meant to serve as a prelude to existential revolt. Milton places the reader on the threshold of metaphysical rebellion, and it is upon this threshold that Milton's Adam meets Shelley's Victor Frankenstein. Plagued by a severe sense of personal upheaval, both Adam and Victor resiliently express themselves through questions of meaning. Still, although they are faced with the same existential uncertainties, each responds in a different way. Adam never crosses the threshold. He backs away, repents, prays, and finds solace in love.<sup>1</sup> Victor, however, chooses another path. While Adam's response to the occurrence of disorder is to embrace God, Victor's response is rebellion. Thus, by opening her novel with Milton's passionate cry for purpose and identity, Shelley draws attention to the feeling of disquietude and anxiety that may cause one to rebel and abandon the given order in an attempt to fashion new principles of order whose function would be to bestow reason to human existence. Used as an epigraph to Shelley's celebrated novel, the above passage from *Paradise Lost* prepares the reader for an encounter with a figure whose existential needs tear him away from the realm of normalcy and unto the solitary and reckless path of recreation.

Yet before Victor, the reader encounters a young man who,

*Milton's  
Adam  
embraces the  
given order;  
Shelley's  
Frankenstein  
rebels.*

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<sup>1</sup> But rise; let us no more contend, nor blame/ Each other, blamed enough elsewhere, but strive/ In offices of love how we may lighten/ Each other's burden in our share of woe; (*Book X, 958-961*).

Repairing where he judged them, prostrate fell/ Before him reverent; and both confessed/ Humbly their faults, and pardon begged with tears/ Watering the ground, and with their sighs the air/Frequenting, sent from hearts contrite, in sign/Of sorrow unfeigned and humiliation meek (*Book X, 1099-1104*).

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standing on the northern edge of civilization, writes to his sister of his aspirations of conquering a world where “the sun is forever visible . . . [where] snow and frost are banished;” and where a “calm sea” will carry him “to a land surpassing in wonders and in beauty every region discovered on the habitable globe.” Walton, the protagonist of Shelley’s novel, is preparing for a journey towards the ice-covered no-man’s lands of the Arctic in pursuit of the Archimedean point that will allow him to best observe the mysterious workings of nature and discover the elements of true order. With an almost uncontrollable fervor, Walton declares to his sister that the virgin untouched plains of the frozen north will award him a view of reality that is simply unavailable elsewhere, least of all in a town or a city. Far beyond the reach of common human life and representing the extreme side of the created world, the mysterious primordial lands of the Arctic stand in opposition to all that is deemed civilized. Walton’s desire to travel towards the seclusion of uninhabitable lands thereby reflects a desire to escape and break free from the social restraints that impede one’s complete enjoyment of *truth*. Implied is that the image of reality conveyed through the common traditions of the civilized world is contaminated by the inadequacies that typify human historical existence and no longer offers an existentially satisfactory way of being. Walton’s journey then metaphorically displays a need to renew human reality by establishing a direct and unmediated liaison with absolute *truth*, which in the novel is embodied through the image of the eternal Arctic sun “diffusing a perpetual splendor.” The young adventurer wants to find and contemplate *truth* without interruption or interference; he longs to enter the house of *truth*, reality, Being.

*Impatience  
with  
historical  
existence  
blinds one to  
real dangers.*

Clearly, Shelley infects Walton with a strong, at times overwhelming, apocalyptic drive that compels him to reject the moderate middle level of communal existence and head towards the extremes of the Arctic pole where he trusts true order will “reveal” itself. Detailing the great deal of suffering he has undergone, Walton portrays himself in the light of a messianic figure who leads a “great expedition” that will benefit humanity by crushing its enemies, hence inaugurating a new age. The young man’s pathological fervor is further il-

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lustrated by the way he disregards his and the crew's wellbeing. Walton's manic longing for existential satisfaction does not allow him to appreciate the many real dangers that are involved with traveling to the Arctic. The only thing his mind can conceive of as he gazes north is a paradisiacal "region of beauty and delight." From Walton's perspective, all measures, even those that jeopardize men's lives, are acceptable when the goal is the discovery of eternal *truth*. "How gladly I would sacrifice my fortune, my existence, my every hope, to the furtherance of my enterprise. One man's death was but a small price to pay for the acquirement of the knowledge which I sought; for the dominion I should acquire and transmit over the elemental foes of our race." Walton, then, overlooks the potential hazards, for he believes himself to be on a historic, curative mission that began on the northern tip of Russia and would end with findings that would help shape a new utopia.

Although the idea of benefiting humanity is worthy of admiration, Shelley brilliantly depicts the fact that noble intentions are not enough; because of the ever present threat of self-deception and derailment, one's objectives must be constantly reevaluated and reassessed. An overpowering love for the *good*, a profound fascination with *truth*, may, if not sternly scrutinized and properly directed, guide a person toward an irresponsible and perilous road. Human community, and more specifically friendship, is essential in assessing the validity, and sanity, of one's desires and projects. Simply put, because there may be times when one is uncontrollably, and almost incomprehensively, driven by the promise of satisfaction and fulfillment ("There is something at work in my soul which I do not understand"), the restraint of a friend is required. However, as Walton remarks, he possesses no friends, no one to "approve or amend [his] plans." Being isolated from regular human company, Walton is unable to discuss and judge the soundness of his undertakings. The result of having no one to mediate his existential longings is the creation of a fantasy world "where everything is malleable to human will." Possessed by wild "day dreams" of glory, Walton aches for a companion who, out of friendship, will "endeavor to regulate [his] mind." Yet Walton's search steers him away from regular human society; thus whom can he possibly befriend? The answer is plain: One

*Human  
community  
essential to  
assessing  
validity of  
one's desires.*

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*A spiritual brother who "shares the same madness."*

who shares the same maddening pathology.

The "great expedition" is interrupted. As the journey's level of danger rises, as the passions of the crew and captain intensify, two eerie figures appear wandering on the plains of the uninhabitable Arctic as though cast off from the realm of regular human existence. The first figure quickly vanishes, melting into the icy mist, while the second, by the name of Victor Frankenstein, beaten and battered, consents to be taken in by the crew's hospitality. Walton's encounter with Victor is significant, for it not only breaks the young man's profound feeling of solitude, but, more importantly, it represents the possibility of friendship. This possibility develops because both men, as a result of being afflicted by an identical sense of crisis, embark on a quest that draws them beyond the civilized world and towards the frozen terrain of the Arctic. Now it is important to note that Shelley employs the barren desolation of the Arctic landscape as a metaphorical reference to the existential mood that stirs within both Walton and Victor. Indeed, the author, throughout the novel, uses topography to allegorically reflect her characters' emotional, psychological, and existential temperament. And so, from the desert of ice, from a place where one would never imagine encountering another living soul, Walton finds someone he not only considers a friend but a spiritual brother who "shares the same madness."

There is, however, a crucial difference between Victor and Walton. While both undertake similar missions, Walton is still ignorant about the eventual consequences of his actions whereas Victor knows and understands the effects of a search gone wrong. Victor has, in other words, suffered the experiences that Walton seems destined to endure. The ghostly being who boards the ship fulfills the mythical role of the figure who has crossed the boundaries of the natural order and lives to recount the tale. Victor, by virtue of his experiences and his friendship, therefore embodies the prospect of exerting some type of self-discipline on the young man's apocalyptic enthusiasm. Hoping to bring Walton back into the fold of normalcy, Victor begins recounting the events that shaped his life. "I do not know that the relation of my disaster will be useful to you; yet when I reflect that you are pursuing the same course, ex-

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posing yourself to the same dangers which have rendered me what I am, imagine that you may deduce an apt moral from my tale."

Returning to the details of his upbringing, Victor starts by describing his father, Alfonse Frankenstein, as a man of integrity and honor who devoted the prime years of his life to the public affairs of his country. Because of his dedication and commitment to his civic functions, Alfonse neglected his own aspirations of marrying and starting a family. That is, until he encountered Victor's mother, Caroline Beaufort. Victor characterizes his early existence as having been perfectly ordered, and at the apex of this order he placed his mother. In his eyes, she was the wellspring of all beauty and harmony in the cosmos. Strong, courageous, and charitable, Caroline represented all that was good and true. Hence, from his father, Victor discerned the value of civic duty and learned of the virtues of justice, while in his mother, he recognized the possibility of divine love within the limits of the world. Together they represent two opposite but complementary poles that come together and constitute a satisfactory image of a balanced manner of existence (fatherhood, the demands of justice/motherhood, the free gift of love).

As a result of the integral and ordered representation of reality portrayed by his parents, Victor experienced a powerful sense of bliss. So intense is this feeling that he believed himself to be the most fortunate child on earth, and the sudden appearance of Elizabeth only heightened this feeling. This fragile and vulnerable young girl offered Victor the promise of eternal love. "The saintly soul of Elizabeth shone like a shrine-dedicated lamp in our peaceful home. . . . She was the living spirit of love. . . ." Added to this perfect world is the ideal of friendship personified by Henry Clerval. Although a merchant's son, Clerval embodied the noble traits of an aristocratic type who occupied his time "with the moral relation of things." He thus expressed the ideal of male companionship, in much the same way that the elder Frankenstein expressed the ideal of fatherhood, Caroline the ideal of motherhood, and Elizabeth the ideal of a female companion, a wife. All these elements combined to produce the harmonious, joyful, and structured setting that surrounded Victor during his early youth. Con-

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tinuing his narrative, Victor describes growing up amidst “the majestic and wondrous scenes which surrounded [his] Swiss home—the sublime shapes of the mountains; the changes of the seasons; tempest and calm; the silence of winter . . . .” Again, the topography mirrors the mood that reigns within Victor, which in this case, is one of joy. This all-pervading sense of contentment will, however, eventually set Victor up for a devastating fall.

At the tender age of seventeen, Victor endured an event that introduced him to a “most irreparable evil.” While he was preparing to depart for Germany, Elizabeth fell sick with the scarlet fever. The illness was on the verge of realizing its goal of annihilation when Victor’s mother intervened. As a mother and wife, Caroline had good cause not to directly involve herself with Elizabeth’s treatment, yet she could not stay away. Caroline sacrificed her time, strength, and, ultimately, her life to assure Elizabeth’s recovery. But by nursing her adopted daughter to health, Victor’s mother contracted the scarlet fever and succumbed to its ravages. Caroline’s last act was thus one of gratuitous love; the highest earthly example of sublime goodness.

The reality of Caroline’s death stunned the Frankenstein household, especially Victor. Gone was the harmonious cosmic environment that had enveloped Victor throughout his childhood. Death and destruction abruptly appeared and, within a short time, obliterated all semblance of unity and meaning. For how can there be any purpose in the cosmos when an act of absolute kindness is repaid with agonizing death? How can there be meaning when the epitome of goodness and dignity is pitilessly wiped out from the immediate surroundings? Moreover, the effects of his mother’s death were accentuated by the fact that, as a child, Victor had lived a sheltered existence at the heart of a loving family. By being encircled by those few who deeply loved him and by staying away from most others, Victor had succeeded in creating his own little private reality, which collapsed the moment his mother drew her last breath. The statement that “[he] was new to sorrow” betrayed the new experience of brokenness that now characterized his world. Thus, according to Victor’s understanding, death was the corruptor of the good, an evil to be defeated, and a riddle to be solved, i.e., the source of all earthly disorder.

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In describing the components that contributed to Victor's existential *madness*, one cannot ignore the university life that surrounded him at the time of his mother's death. At first, Victor was not very impressed by his new academic environment. His initial reaction was one of disappointment and indifference. Everything changed, however, when, wandering aimlessly, he decided, "partly from curiosity, and partly from idleness," to attend a lecture given by professor Waldman. It proved to be a lecture that the young man would "never forget." With his fiery and eloquent words, the professor created "a state of insurrection and turmoil" within his young student. Victor fell in love with the apocalyptic vision invoked. He fell in love with professor Waldman's suggestion of order progressively quashing all outburst of disorder, of chaos being forever conquered. He became enchanted with the idea of "ascending into heaven." This exciting apocalyptic image subdued all of the young student's doubts and became his "sole occupation." Waldman's declarations that man was on the firm ground of progress and that one day "order would thence arise" firmly ignited Victor's avid "love of the marvelous." The loss of his mother, i.e., the collapse of order, and the appearance of Waldman, i.e., the encounter with a new vision of order, combined to cause Victor to pursue with zeal his scientific interests.

Death took his mother away and was the spring of Victor's experience of chaos. Yet a novel image of order was in view. Leaving behind the world of his family and friends, a world which he perceived to be shattered, Victor plunged into solitary study, hoping to produce a remedy that would restore cosmic harmony. Attempting to sooth his existential anxieties, Victor would alone, through his own powers, recreate order by recreating life. Simply put, death is the problem, immortality the solution. And so, in an effort to discover the "elixir of life," Victor inconspicuously visited the city's graveyard, where he collected body parts from the deceased in order to scrutinize the destruction caused by death. During one of his examinations, something extraordinary occurred which Victor relates in the following manner:

I paused, examining and analyzing all the minutiae of causation, as exemplified in the change from life to death, and death to life, until from the midst of this darkness a sudden light broke in upon me—a light so brilliant and wondrous, yet so

*An attempt  
to recreate the  
cosmic order  
through his  
own powers.*

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simple, that while I became dizzy with the immensity of the prospect which it illustrated, I was surprised, that among so many men of genius who had directed their inquiries towards the same science, that I alone should be reserved to discover this astonishing secret. . . . After days and nights of incredible labor and fatigue, I succeeded in discovering the cause of generation and life; nay, more, I became myself capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter.

*Social norms and religious traditions discarded in pursuit of apocalyptic vision.*

This description of an unusually bright light shining forth and presenting Victor with knowledge capable of saving humanity from the pains of death confirms that Waldman succeeded in transmitting his apocalyptic drive unto his youthful student. The two extreme emotions Victor experienced at this period, one of sorrow (over his mother's death) and the other of ecstasy (over the new scientific theories), created an excessive tension within his mind. The result was an internal sense of disorder that led Victor to be receptive to the revelatory vision of the end of one age of history (represented by his mother's death) and the beginning of another (represented by the new scientific theories). Clearly, Victor fancied himself in an apocalyptic situation, where everything he did prior to his discovery, all the violations, the desecrating of human bodies, the discarding of social norms and religious traditions, were simply necessary stages towards the final realization of absolute *good* and *truth*. As he puts it, "this discovery was so great and overwhelming that all the steps by which I had been progressively led to it were obliterated, and I beheld only the result." Being the only one to have witnessed the disclosure of *truth* and *goodness*, Victor imagined himself standing at the high point of history, where all the scientific work that came before culminated in him and his discovery. Much like the Christian understanding, which identifies the end of history with the appearance of Christ, Victor likened himself to the God-Man who defeated death. "I was like the Arabian who had been buried with the dead, and found a passage to life, aided only by one glimmering, and seemingly ineffectual light." Driven by the dream of immortality, Victor rendered the boundary between life and death irrelevant. "Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world." Yet not only would Victor begin a new era of immortality, he would also, by res-

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urrecting the dead, correct the injustices of the past. Hence, it seems that Victor, in his *madness*, interpreted his moment of discovery as the figurative realization of the Second Coming, when all previous wrongs are made right. Victor, as a living symbol of human ability and power, became the source and substance of order and meaning in history.

The retelling of this story rouses young Walton's thoughts. He too desires to possess and exercise unlimited power; he too wants to be the fountain of order. Victor warns, however, that his search for existential satisfaction, his manic obsession of "[pursuing] nature to her hiding-places" had steered him away from all that was meaningful. "It was a most beautiful season; never did the fields bestow a more plentiful harvest, or vines yield a more luxuriant vintage: but my eyes were insensible to the charms of nature. And the same feelings which made me neglect the scenes around me caused me also to forget those friends who were so many miles absent. . . ." Victor's overworked imagination did not allow him to take part in the world outside of his laboratory-created reality; it did not allow him to make contact with anything that could have calmed his distorted ambitions. Looking back, Victor realizes that his detachment from family and friends was one of the reasons for his downfall. For if they had been privy to his plans they would have certainly attempted to hold him back, and maybe eventually convinced him that, although his intentions were admirable, his designs were imprudent. His separation and isolation led to the construction of a fantasy reality where anything was achievable, even the creation of the greatest mystery of all. Losing contact with all that represented the middle, moderate level of existence, Victor thus locked himself up "in a solitary chamber, or rather cell, at the top of the house," and proceeded with his endeavors.

After choosing the appropriate limbs and placing them together, Victor injected the "spark of life" into the heap of dead matter that lay before his feet. Then, suddenly, "the dull yellow eye of the creature opened." Victor always believed himself born to accomplish great things. Even his name suggests a destiny of triumph and glory. Yet the moment that he was to experience his greatest victory, is the moment he experienced his greatest defeat. The attempt to remold human

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*Attempts to  
remold human  
nature in  
pursuit of a  
fantasy reality  
always futile.*

nature resulted in catastrophe. Victor might have imitated God in the act of creation but, unlike God, who gazed upon his creation and deemed it good, Victor is horror-stricken by what he has accomplished. The splendor and perfection of the dream world he had conjured up in his mind was crushed by the hideous Monster who had come into existence. Victor's imaginary world, which did not allow him to recognize the full implications of his acts, now crumbled at the sight of the repugnant and ungodly being he created. "I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. . . . I had desired it with ardor that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart." Isolating himself from the world, Victor attempted to push away the reality that saw his mother expire and create a new one where death would no longer fit into the equation. Yet as he quickly learned one can very well try to keep reality at bay, but reality seems always to find ways of disrupting the fantastic worlds of ambitious men possessed by a fanatical desire to re-arrange what they perceive to be muddled.

Unable to deal with the situation, Victor ran out of his laboratory and spent the night wandering the city. Victor thus found himself drifting in an existential 'no-man's-land' when suddenly Henry Clerval appeared. The company of his old companion roused Victor's childhood memories of his family, his friends, the home in which he was raised, the fields in which he played. Clerval represented the world that was left behind; the world that Victor once loved yet discarded in order to pursue the completion of his imaginary constructions. But as he received his beloved visitor, Victor's health took a turn for the worse. Without pause or hesitation, Clerval abandoned his studies and dedicated himself to nurturing his friend's needs. This act of selflessness revealed the possibility of goodness in the world and allowed Victor to once again take notice of the beauty of the world. "Study had before secluded me from the intercourse of my fellow-creatures, and rendered me unsocial; but Clerval called forth the better feeling of my heart; he again taught me to love the aspect of nature. . . . Excellent friend!" Unlike Victor's "love of the marvelous," which expressed itself in an overexuberant desire for unconditional

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*truth*, Clerval's love is the type that was neither destructive nor distorted but restorative. For the first time since his mother's death, Victor desired to leave his seclusion and venture back into the community of man. The total failure of his scientific endeavors coupled with the care and kindness of Clerval inspired Victor to begin the task of reacquainting himself with the natural order he abandoned on the occasion of his mother's death. Clerval's friendship and love, in other words, served as a guide back into normal human existence, back to a moderate middle realm of existence.

Victor's reintroduction to normalcy was, however, to be disturbed. A letter reporting the murder of a young sibling came to Victor's attention. The excitement of returning home and seeing Elizabeth helped him forget the actions performed in the laboratory. Yet the consequences of his recklessness were real and their legacy continued to live on. Overlooking his transgression, paying no mind to the results of his deeds, Victor attempted to go about living his life. But he discovered that the aggressive effort to re-create order had repercussions in the actual world that could not be ignored. The effort to merge the invented reality of an overexcited mind with the reality of experience inhabited by concrete individuals has significant, and often deadly, ramifications. Victor did not realize this, and his young brother paid the price. With the creation of his Monster, Victor gave physical shape to his *madness* and unleashed it upon the world; William was its first victim.

*Effort to merge invented reality with the reality of experience has deadly ramifications.*

Still, the tragedy does not end with the death of William. Justine Moritz, a young woman, who worked on the Frankenstein estate and was a close friend of the family, was accused of murdering the young child. The indictment resulted in the innocent woman's death. The turn of events plunged the Frankenstein household into despair, especially Elizabeth, who in her anguish cries out: "I wish that I were to die. . . . I cannot live in this world of misery." Suddenly, cruelty and emptiness defined the human landscape. The hopelessness Victor sought to escape, he in fact increased. Instead of mending the world through his scientific endeavors, Victor spread confusion and turmoil.

Amid feelings of misery, Victor left his family to roam the remote barren mountainous wilderness beyond the city walls.

There he noticed that he was not alone wandering outside the boundaries of normal human community. On the extreme terrain of "an inaccessible mountain," on the frozen summit of Montanvert, on the outskirts of the natural order, creature and creator confront each other with sentiments of hate and vengeance. A brief power struggle ensued where the super human strength of the Monster placed Victor in a disadvantageous position. The fact that the creator harbored sentiments of hate for his creature and that the creature was more powerful than his creator illustrates the inversion of nature's hierarchy that resulted from Victor's indiscretion.

Endeavoring to appeal to Victor's sense of compassion, the Monster began narrating the story of how he tried to enter the community of human beings but was rejected. Because of his hideous deformation, the Monster was chased and banished to the remote mountains outside the city walls. This experience stirred a sense of existential anxiety within the Monster, and questions of meaning began to surface. "What did all this mean? Who was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination?" Mimicking Victor's struggle for order and meaning, suffering all the existential labors that plagued its creator and not wanting to live as the product of some radical project, the Monster sought to enter the moderate middle level of existence. Yet as an extension and manifestation of Victor's fanatical desires, the Monster could never enter the bounds of normalcy. No matter how noble his thoughts and actions, the Monster would always remain outside of the cosmic order. The reality of the situation sent the Monster on a bloody rampage that resulted in William's murder and Justine's execution. The creature would thus extend the despair he endured onto Victor by destroying his family. There is, however, an option presented. It is suggested that Victor bestow harmony to the life of his artificial being by producing an artificial order. With the creation of a mate, the Monster would be part of some sort of community and would no longer be haunted by feelings of futility. As long as there would be someone who would recognize his existence as valid and good, the Monster would find meaning. "I shall feel the affections of a sensitive being, and become linked to the chain of existence and events, from which I am now excluded." Revealing that his prior experi-

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ences have cultivated a sense of prudence that he previously had lacked, Victor refused to again manufacture life. The Monster, promising revenge, vowed to visit Victor on his wedding day—that is, on the day Victor would attempt to re-enter the cycle of nature.

With the encouragement of Clerval, Victor boarded a little sailboat that was to bring him back home, back to civilization. By refusing to craft another monster, the young man demonstrated his desire to set things right. Yet all his efforts were for naught. Instead of being greeted by his friend, Victor disembarked to the welcome of the local authorities who announced Clerval's death, murdered by the Monster. Victor's decision to end his seclusion and re-join the company of his family and friends was, again, abruptly negated. Still showing determination in his attempt to merge with normal human community, Victor returned to Geneva to marry Elizabeth. She was his last great hope for happiness. The recent strings of murders and deaths had dissolved any sense of meaning. But, with the help of his father, Victor came to understand that marriage offered the opportunity to experience once more the joys of an ordered existence. "Heavy misfortunes have befallen us; but let us only cling closer to what remains, and transfer our love for those whom we have lost to those who yet live. . . . And when time shall have softened your despair, new and dear objects of care will be born to replace those of whom we have been so cruelly deprived." From his union with Elizabeth, a new order would arise and encircle Victor. Children would be born, fresh bonds of love formed; life would regain its significance. Victor's marriage to Elizabeth would mark his return to normalcy. Yet there remained an obstacle. With the Monster's warning ("I will be with you on your wedding night") still buzzing in his head, Victor knew the risks involved in marrying. Nevertheless, he could no longer stay away; no man can live isolated in the extremes of existence for very long and maintain a taste for life.

After the wedding ceremony was concluded, the newlyweds promptly departed for a family cottage to spend the night. There soon followed a horrendous scream announcing Elizabeth's murder at the hands of the Monster. Sorrow overwhelmed Victor as he returned home to inform his father of the horrible event. The series of disasters that had befallen his

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once happy family depleted Alfonse's health, and he passed away a few days later. Victor, like the Monster, was now alone. With the elimination of every significant part of his life, Victor decided to dedicate himself to finding and annihilating the Monster he had created. Victor's effort to better man's experience of reality had resulted in the destruction of all embodiments of *good* that encircled him. In short, the overexuberant and reckless attempt to remake *truth* or the *good* ended up destroying all manifestations of actual *truth* and *good*. Victor's "love of the marvelous" disrupted the natural order of things and produced a chain reaction that resulted in the ruin of his entire world. Indeed, nothing is more appropriate for Victor's story than to describe it as one of *Paradise Lost*.

Yet Victor's tragic story seems to have no effect on the young adventurer's zeal. Though Walton never diverted his attention from his visitor's speech and keenly listened to every horrifying detail, he has remained unfazed. In the end, it is the threat of mutiny and not Victor's tale that dissuades Walton from proceeding with his plans. In other words, Walton is saved not because he concedes that his love is both fanatical and immoderate but because of his crew's unwillingness to continue the reckless initiative. Unlike Victor who was completely isolated in his laboratory, Walton is never perfectly alone. Hence, Walton avoids Victor's fate not because he realizes that his actions are excessive but because he inhabits a community of sailors who succeed in pulling him back, thereby restraining his deviant "love of the marvelous." Thus, even when the obvious dangers of an undertaking are revealed in the most graphic manner, they are often rejected by the person who is blinded by a maddening love of *truth* and *good* in the abstract.<sup>2</sup> Possessed by imaginary constructions of reality, Walton is unable to grasp the effects of his actions. And

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<sup>2</sup> Claes G. Ryn has written extensively on this phenomenon. See, e.g., Ryn, "Virtue: Real and Imagined," in *The Unbought Grace of Life: Essays in Honor of Russell Kirk*, ed. James E. Person (La Salle, Ill.: Sherwood Sugden, 1994) and Ryn, "Imaginative Origins of Modernity: Life as Daydream and Nightmare," *Humanitas*, Vol. X, No. 2, 1997. For a book-length treatment of this topic, see Ryn, *Will, Imagination and Reason: Babbitt, Croce and the Problem of Reality*, 2nd revised edition (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1997). See also Glenn Hughes, "Symbols of the 'Depth' of Psyche and Cosmos in Eric Voegelin," *Humanitas*, Vol. XXVII, Nos. 1 & 2, 2014.

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so, the ship's safety depends on the community of sailors who encircled the young adventurer. Indeed, if we view the ship as a metaphor for the state, we can then conclude that it is the duty of the political community to develop cultural traditions, political mechanisms, and ethical rules that can serve to moderate, mediate, and contain the overexuberant elements within it. There are people who, like Walton, will attempt to transform the state into an unrealistic paradisiacal land, and it is the function of the political community to dampen those efforts and restrain depraved expressions of what is termed love, lest the whole state go under.

On the ship's voyage back to England, Victor passes away. With all his family and friends dead, there is only his Monster left to grieve him. Heeding unfamiliar sounds emanating from Victor's cabin, Walton rushes in and interrupts the Monster's expressions of grief. The young adventurer is now face-to-face with the fabulous being that for days has occupied his imagination. The Monster quickly tries to plead his case in the hopes of finding companionship or at least compassion from a human being. He endeavors to explain that his crimes were the expression of his frantic need for a friend, someone who would bestow importance on his existence. Yet no companionship or feeling of compassion is forthcoming. With nothing left for which to live, the Monster has no choice. Unable to withstand the tension that plagues his being, he follows his creator unto death. Victor's madness pulled him away from his fellow human beings and onto the frozen plains of the Arctic, and it is there, on the desert of ice, that he and his madness find their end.