

Monstrosity in Horror Literature

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Abstract

Horror literature hinges on one unique characteristic rarely found outside of the genre: monstrosity. Although monstrosity is often criticized for being designed to elicit specific responses (terror, horror, and revulsion) from readers for the sake of catharsis, uncritically and without a loftier in mind, it remains largely unexamined in terms of its literary value.

Monstrosity is an abstract convention which has been approached in several ways. However, its purpose and function in horror literature have been neglected because the genre tends to be critically dismissed as a pop phenomenon. A number of theories on monstrosity may be applied to this study, but until an argument which addresses monstrosity as an integral property of horror literature is presented, the genre cannot be evaluated properly.

By refining applicable, existing theories on monstrosity in conjunction with horror fiction, an innovative method of evaluating the genre can be established. This method could be limited by the vagaries of interpretation, since horror draws on anxieties personal to readers, but a crude system for studying monstrosity in terms of function and purpose can be established to provide a new point of view from which horror fiction can be analyzed. Such a system might profitably divide all monstrosities in horror literature into two categories: monsters, extrinsic manifestations of monstrosity, physical beings judged on the basis of aesthetics, and the monstrous, intrinsic manifestations of monstrosity, psychological phenomena judged on the manner of manifestation. This separation between monsters and the monstrous is valuable because it allows us to approach horror literature in an improved way by reading it accurately through the monstrosity it hinges on. Since monstrosity is a representation of the fears of humanity, understanding it is crucial.

Monstrosity in Horror Literature

Although horror stories are popular enough to demand their own section at any local book store, they are often criticized for being constructed primarily to trigger sudden responses and carrying little literary value. This criticism has limited the genre significantly in terms of structured analysis and research. To understand horror fiction's place in literature accurately, a sweeping, canonical argument covering literary principles in conjunction with historical foundations is necessary. Substantial research concerning horror fiction's most notable characteristic, monstrosity, which is rarely found outside of the horror genre, is crucial for this argument. Although monstrosity is often criticized for being designed to elicit specific responses (terror, horror and revulsion) from readers for the sake of catharsis, uncritically and without a loftier objective in mind, it remains unexamined in terms of its literary value.

Monstrosity has been researched extensively in an assortment of formulations. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen approaches monstrosity in order to understand cultural movements historically. He presents seven theses that are essential for understanding monstrosity culturally in his *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. Cohen's insights include that a monster's body is pure culture, meaning that it embodies a movement (the time, feeling, and place) within culture; that the monster always escapes, even in death (bound to be reincarnated by means of a sequel); and that monsters refuse easy categorization, although their abnormal traits are usually figures of culture, politics, race, economic status, or sexual preference/orientation (Cohen 4-7). His premise—that monsters are pure culture, embodying time, feeling and place—is very important. If a monster embodies a culture and simultaneously is an agent meant to induce fear in readers, what it represents must be the fears (apparent or subconscious) of the culture. Cohen concludes that the monster is always a “difference made flesh, come to dwell among us,” emphasizing that

what a monster represents is something unnatural and worthy of fear (Cohen 7). Although these insightful theses provide an adequate place to begin examining monstrosity, they were developed as a way to analyze culture, not the literary value and function of monstrosity. Cohen's method, for literary purposes, is inverted. Rather than reading a monster to understand the cultural conditions that led to its creation, we need to read culture to understand the representative, indicative quality of monstrosity. Once this is done, a monstrosity's existence alone carries literary value for establishing a complicated extended metaphor capable of describing the human experience, even if the author's method requires the contradistinction of the inhuman.

Richard Kearney argues that monsters can be easily divided into two groups, "real" and "imaginary." He explains that real monsters are generally regarded as freaks of nature such as human dwarfs and giants, conjoined twins, hermaphrodites, and the like. Where these were not sufficient, imaginary monsters had to be invented. These displayed much more imagination, often confusing nature's categories by mixing body parts or crossing human with animal features (Kearney 115). Therefore, monsters generally are "metaphors of our anxiety"; they demonstrate our confusion with genesis and they terrify because they defy borders. They can do what we cannot and remind us that we don't know who we are (Kearney 117). This division between the real and imaginary is useful but still insufficient in terms of literary analysis because this definition excludes the monstrous. The monstrous cannot be assessed aesthetically, since it is commonly manifested psychologically within a seemingly natural host, similar to a parasite. A horror story such as "The Rocking-Horse Winner" by D. H. Lawrence, for example, contains no physical body which can be labeled a monster; however, the greed of the mother possesses the young boy of the story, Paul, in a way that warrants the label. This story, which contains no supernatural paraphernalia, is most easily interpreted in Freudian terms, with subconscious desire

being the only notable “monster.” The monstrous can be difficult to evaluate wholly, but as it is a fundamental pillar of many horror texts, a definition of monstrosity must account for it.

Popular horror writer Stephen King, in his nonfiction publication *Danse Macabre*, looks at monstrosity as deviation from the normal, although he never says so explicitly. He asks, for example, “how fat does a person have to be before he or she passes over the line into a perversion of the human form severe enough to be called monstrosity?” (King 36). The problem with this offering, unfortunately, is that it poses an unanswerable question. In the end, every reader has a different idea of how substantial physical deviances such as height or weight need to be before a person is considered a monster. We must remember that monstrosity plays on a diverse group of readers, all with different perceptions of what monstrosity truly is. Fortunately, although monstrosity in real life is far from black and white, in horror literature, literature intended to cause catharsis via the contrast of inhuman deviations with humane norms, it tends to be. After all, an author cannot have readers confused over whether or not a monster is actually scary. Outside of literature, our culture has friendly ghosts that can be hugged and romanticized vampires that glitter in the sunlight, but horror literature rarely follows this trend. Romanticized monsters, and the confusion they have brought, rarely represent horror literature as defined rigorously. With this in mind, if horror literature realizes its monstrosity in a way that is clear to readers, whether it is physical or psychological, explanations of the functions of monstrosity in horror literature are obtainable within that context.

King also suggests that monsters in modern horror fiction can be boiled down to fit into three “pop-archetypes.” The Vampire, representing perverse and sexual desire, serves as a source of what King calls outside evil, being a physical being that presents a threat. This is exemplified in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*. The Werewolf, in contrast, functions as a representation of inner evil

waiting to manifest itself; King cites Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* to elucidate this category. The "Thing without a Name" is a being that desires inside status but cannot have it. Here, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* serves as an ideal example (King 50). Although the ideas of inner and outer evil provide a serviceable division to establish groups within an infinite body of monstrosity, the mechanism of "pop-archetypes" is imprecise. King's archetypes provide a strong framing concept, but they are equally indefinite as his premise regarding monstrosity as being a deviation from the normal because they involve only a few vague qualifiers. Many "typical" monsters, such as Count Dracula or Frankenstein's monster, fall into categories neatly. However, all monsters can be classified with similar ineffectual ease. Major players in the field of monstrosity, beings like H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu or the malevolent, parallel-dimensional beings in Algernon Blackwood's "The Willows" fall into these categories so easily that their place within the taxonomy is valueless. In the end, the crude qualifiers that outline King's structure provide an insignificant classification system.

Peter Brooks writes that the monster is such a unique creation that it is unable to be classified in any way; even its effects are not understood by readers or writers (Brooks 218). This critical evasion assumes that a convention of literature such as monstrosity cannot be clarified to a significant extent. However, it is clear that monstrosity's *effects* are well recognized because they are a key way of identifying antagonists as monstrosities. Perhaps Allen S. Weiss approaches monstrosity most sufficiently in his "Ten Theses on Monsters and Monstrosity," stating in his tenth thesis, "imagine a disembodied blood-curdling scream" (Weiss 2). This statement epitomizes monstrosity as I understand it, explaining that monstrosity can only be known by its effects. Although this claim seems abstract and somewhat poetic, it is the best way

of describing the confounding phenomenon that is monstrosity. Monsters and the monstrous can be identified and categorized based on other qualifiers, especially through a division between extrinsic and intrinsic manifestations, but monstrosity itself is known only through its consequence. Significant analysis regarding various depictions of monstrosity in horror literature will greatly expand and clarify this thesis.

Monstrosity is an abstract convention which has been approached in several ways. However, research concerning its purpose and function in horror literature have been neglected because the genre tends to be critically dismissed as a pop phenomenon. A number of theories on monstrosity may be applied to this study, but until an argument which addresses monstrosity as an integral property of horror literature is presented, the genre cannot be evaluated properly. In order to accommodate the breadth of the horror genre, I have elected to address the figuration of monstrosity in foundational texts. The chief novels chosen were *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* by Mary Shelley and *The Haunting of Hill House* by Shirley Jackson. After reviewing established theories concerning monstrosity (whether they are designed to be read for cultural, historical or psychological analysis), I was able to advance an argument that approaches monstrosity in a manner that properly credits the literary dimensions of the horror genre.

By refining applicable, existing theories on monstrosity in conjunction with horror fiction, an innovative method of evaluating the genre through the monstrosities it realizes can be established. This method could be influenced by the vagaries of interpretation, since horror draws on anxieties personal to readers, but a system for studying monstrosity in terms of identification and purpose can be established to provide a new point of view through which horror fiction can be analyzed.

Bram Stoker's *Dracula*

Count Dracula, from *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, was not the first delineation of the vampire legend, but he is easily the most famous. Known for his bloodthirstiness and sexual presence, Dracula is a pop phenomenon. It is not the cult following that has grown around him that makes him literary, however; it is the themes he makes possible in the novel that give him value as a monster. Dracula has come to represent unnatural and immoral forces metaphorically, such as the spread of disease, the threat of sexual perversity, the longing for immortality, and the seductiveness of evil.

The Victorian period was marked by a variety of cultural anxieties. Samir Elbarbary suggests the period was singled out by “primitivism and degeneracy,” which undermined scientific progressivism and growth (Elbarbary 113). People were looking backward instead of forward in this fin de siècle period. Eric Kwan-Wai Yu likewise cites fears of atavism, reverse colonization, and miscegenation as apparent themes in *Dracula* (Yu 145). Dracula is atavistic because he is a degenerate. In the late nineteenth century, Europeans began developing mug shots in order to identify criminals using aesthetic judgments. Dracula certainly fits the bill, easily representing this ideology. With red eyes and sharp white teeth, Dracula has a monstrous appearance characterized by threatening facial structure. Reverse colonization is evident through Dracula's attempt to take over England, which goes hand in hand with the fear of miscegenation, made clear by the many mixtures of blood through transfusion in times of crisis throughout the novel. Other scholars, such as Judith Halberstam and Ken Gelder, have found subtle but well supported anti-Semitism in Dracula's fear of Christian memorabilia and tendency to hoard money (Halberstam 337-41; Gelder 14-15). Stoker's exploration of these untraditional principles,

which reflect a characteristic Victorian psychology and way of life, could only be done through a physical body, a monster like Dracula, who represents everything the Victorians feared.

These important themes of *Dracula*, which correspond to the culture of the time, are all implemented by vampires. Stoker's monsters are necessary because they are literary tools used to describe the culture and free-floating anxieties within it from a normative point of view. As demonstrated throughout the story, characters such as Dr. Seward or Van Helsing are bound by convention. They cannot be invasive like Dracula, and they only kill if they can justify the action in a way that readers can condone. Dracula, through his appearance and behavior, is a monster, which makes his actions condemnable without trial. It is easy to label him as evil, making his actions apprehensible, and even predictable, to readers. Therefore, Dracula is more than a character, he is an enabler. Dracula allows Stoker to explain a culture because he can have Dracula do anything, unlike his conventional Victorian characters. Dracula is not bound by Victorian conventions because he embodies immorality. Consequently, Stoker was free to use him to explore behaviors that were considered unnatural.

Of course, the fin de siècle period also produced the controversial figure of the new woman, a threatening redefinition of sexual relationships. Although earlier in the Victorian period separate roles in society for men and women were more concretely established, the recognized cultural distinctions between genders were eroding. Efforts to gain equal rights for women had been in progress for nearly a century, beginning with Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Senf 4). This breakdown of traditional Victorian standards is apparent through the predatory and dominating attributes of female characters in *Dracula*, specifically the vampire-women and Lucy Westenra, who initiate sexuality rather than waiting

for men to promote it (Senf 8). Stoker uses these characters to demonstrate the monstrosity that was associated by some Victorians with the changing times.

When Jonathan Harker first encounters the vampire-women, he immediately notes the ruby color of their voluptuous lips, golden hair, eyes like pale sapphires, and their sweet “silvery, musical laugh” (Stoker 51). These women invoke a great sexual desire in Harker, but although he experiences something “honey sweet,” he also senses a “bitter offensiveness, as one smells in blood” (Stoker 52). This juxtaposition represents the confusion and horror males felt from the new woman’s assertiveness, as well as the perverse sexuality that grew from the repression of the Victorian era. Although this passage can be read as a projection of masculine anxiety concerning the dominating characteristic of the new woman, the anxiety comes from a supposed unnaturalness that Stoker realizes through a representation of monstrosity.

A more repulsive variation of perverse sexuality expressed in *Dracula* is seen when the Count invades Mrs. Harker’s bedroom. Dr. Seward and Van Helsing burst into the room to see the Count forcing Mina’s mouth against his bosom, which is smeared with blood from an open wound (Stoker 337). Mina was forced to drink blood from her husband, Jonathan Harker, before Dracula forced her against his own chest. As Dracula forces his fluid transfer, Dr. Seward notes how the count’s hand “tenderly and lovingly stroked” Mina’s ruffled hair (Stoker 340). This scene has been interpreted in many ways, sometimes as a ménage à trois and sometimes as forced fellatio. Either way, it shows a secret desire created within males from years of repression by using monstrosity as an enabling condition. From this example, as well as through the aforementioned sexual representations, we can identify Stoker’s realization of monstrosity through their effects. Vampires in *Dracula*, thematically, represent phenomena such as gender

anxieties, repression and desire, but since they do so through a physical body that is ugly and invasive, they are monsters—aesthetic, physical realizations of immoral anxieties and behaviors.

The best representation of fin de siècle sensibilities in *Dracula*, however, does not concern the new woman. The changing times are characterized best by the pursuit of Dracula and his death. Dracula makes his enemies encounter inhumanity when they abandon their traditional roles in order to overcome him. The only way to defeat Dracula is to use sacred symbols and artifacts to restrain him while he is essentially murdered crudely by driving a stake through his heart and beheading him. This behavior is unconventional, especially for the Victorians, whose morality was distinguished by restraint and dignity. Dracula is the character that Bram Stoker needs in order to fully explore this changing time period; he functions as a physical representation of the unnaturalness that the changes that the fin de siècle brought. Dracula embodies monstrosity by being Stoker's representative figure for the frustration, confusion and anxiety that the Victorians felt during this time period.

We can determine a great deal about the characteristics of monsters from *Dracula*. First, all monsters, like Count Dracula, must have a physical presence. A monster has to be a physical being capable of maintaining an identity within a story. This condition will establish the monster as a functioning character within the story, and the effects of its disruptive actions will undoubtedly push the plot forward. A monster's presence does not have to be visible, although invisible incidence is rare. One example of an invisible monster occurs in Ambrose Bierce's short story, "The Damned Thing." The Damned Thing, a physical being that exists within an octave of the chromatic scale that we are unable to see, is still able to interact with other characters within the story because it has a physical presence. The effects of the monster's physical presence will help establish its implicit immorality as a form of monstrosity for other

characters in the story as well as for readers because they are indicative of presence, power, and perversity, of the natural order overturned.

Judgments regarding the identification of monsters are ordinarily sensory because of their physical presence; these judgments are mainly aesthetic, which is the quickest way to establish a monster's iniquitousness. A monster's presence alone, without action, is enough to establish that it is unnatural in one way or another. When Jonathan Harker meets Count Dracula, for example, he notes that Dracula's mouth is "fixed and rather cruel-looking, with peculiarly sharp white teeth; these protruded over the lips." Furthermore, he describes his hand as being "as cold as ice—more like the hand of a dead than a living man." Harker also notes that Dracula's breath, which caused in him a horrible feeling of nausea, was rank (Stoker 23-6). Similarly, everyone who meets Dracula mentions his red, gleaming eyes (Stoker 112). One does not have to get to know the Count to feel his discernible, unnatural presence; an aesthetic judgment is more than enough to establish him as a monster.

Later in the novel, Harker views a remarkable scene. At this point in the story, Harker is aware that there is something evil about Count Dracula, although he does not understand what it is exactly. Van Helsing has yet to enter the story, let alone diagnose the count as Nosferatu. Stoker writes, in Harker's journal, upon seeing the Count stretching out of his window,

my very feelings changed to repulsion and terror when I saw the whole man slowly emerge from the window and begin to crawl down the castle wall over that dreadful abyss, *face down*, with his cloak spreading out around him like great wings... I saw his fingers and toes grasp the corners of that stones... just as a lizard moves along a wall. (Stoker 47-8)

Aside from the wing imagery foreshadowing the Count's bat-like abilities, this passage marks the first time when Harker questions what manner of creature the Count might be based on an aesthetic judgment, as well as the first time he realizes that he is encompassed by terrors he cannot escape. Dracula's demonstration of strength and supernatural ability—violating norms of biology and physics—during his downward-facing climb marks another important characteristic that monsters share: monsters must possess power.

Dracula's powers are numerous. For instance, as Van Helsing explains, vampires cannot die by time alone; they are able to flourish as long as they can acquire living blood. Immortality is a common power amongst monsters because it is entirely inhuman. It is the epitome of otherness. Vampires also have the ability to infect others with vampirism. Furthermore, they are able to grow younger when food is plentiful (Stoker 289). The Professor states that Dracula has the strength of twenty men; can command all the "meaner things," such as rats, owls, bats, moths, foxes and wolves; and is able to transform himself into a wolf or bat, as well as shrink small enough to squeeze through minute cracks (Stoker 286). Finally, the Count has the ability to create thick mist that he alone can see through because of his incredible vision (Stoker 289). Dracula demonstrates that a monster must have some type of superhuman capacity.

Interestingly, whether monsters are seemingly omniscient or omnipotent, they *can* have weaknesses. Dracula, even with his astonishing power, has several. For example, one limitation is the effect of the sunlight or religious artifacts on his powers. He is also warded off by garlic and cannot survive unless he can rest on Transylvanian soil (Stoker 290, 298). These vulnerabilities, more than anything, demonstrate the contradiction that illogical beings like monsters are able to embody. Only a monster can be unstoppable unless stopped by a simple but unusual contrivance, or immortal but killable. The duplicity we see between Dracula's powers

and his weaknesses demonstrate a monster's unnaturalness through their irrationality of the folklore that surrounds them.

The main, and most paradoxical, weakness of Dracula, however, is that although he is immortal, he can be "killed." Based on superstitions, Van Helsing tells his friends that if a vampire is beheaded and has a stake driven through its heart, it will die. He suggests that a sacred bullet fired into the coffin would kill him, too (Stoker 290). When the group finally does catch up with Dracula, it is not a stake that is driven through his heart, however. As Stoker writes in Mina Harker's journal:

But, on that instant, came the sweep and flash of Jonathan's great knife. I shrieked as I saw it shear through the throat; whilst at the same moment Mr. Morris's bowie knife plunged into the heart.

"It was like a miracle; but before our very eyes, and almost in the drawing of a breath, the whole body crumbled into dust and passed from our sight. (Stoker 443)

This passage is troubling and forces the reader to question several points. First, Mina writes that she saw Jonathan's kukri "shear through the throat." It is unclear whether or not Dracula was decapitated or merely had his throat slit. Secondly, Van Helsing's execution plan called for a "stake" through the heart, while Quincey Morris penetrates the Count's heart with a bowie knife. Although Dracula crumbles into dust, and the group, as well as the reader, can feel that Dracula has been killed forever, there is a subtle suggestion that the execution was incorrectly performed. Dracula resurrected himself once with the black arts. Stoker writes that he has the highest development of science-knowledge of the time, with a "mighty brain, a learning beyond

compare, and a heart that knew no fear and no remorse” (Stoker 360). Perhaps Dracula can resurrect himself again, especially since his execution seems to be spoiled (Stoker 360).

Dracula’s contradiction, being immortal but killable, brings us to a final point from *Dracula* concerning the definition of monsters. Although it represents another contradiction, all monsters are immortal, even if killable. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s work focuses primarily on the discussion of cultural implications that can be understood through monstrosity, but he explains in his *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, that even in death, assuming the monster has actually died, the monster escapes, bound to return in a sequel (Cohen 5). This point applies well to a literary study in several ways. Dracula may be dead, but the fear he creates, like the anxieties he embodies, are aspects of the monster that live on after the physical representation has been vanquished. A monster’s physical body, like any other body, may be able to be killed, but it will never truly die because the fear it creates can live on in the minds of readers as well as those who it has terrorized within the story. This property belongs to the monster because it describes the durable quality that extends beyond a monster’s physical existence and tangible power. The monstrous has an inverse effect. The physical and aesthetic aspects of a monster have long-lasting effects on the mind in the same way that the inward psychological vision of the monstrous has an impact on aesthetics.

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*

Mary Shelley’s nameless golem from *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* is nearly as infamous as Count Dracula. Frankenstein’s monster embodies overarching themes like loneliness, isolation and abandonment. However, it more specifically functions as a way for Shelley to explore the development of the modern man during the Industrial Revolution. The novel appeared at a time when people were questioning the negative aspects of industrial

technology because they understood the danger and irreparable harm of their own inventions. These conditions led Shelley's husband, Percy Shelley, to protest "the abuse of all inventions of abridging and combining labour, to the exasperation of the inequality of mankind," so that "the discoveries which should have lightened, have added a weight to the curse imposed on Adam" (Ryan 161). Similarly, Mary Shelley saw technology like economic experiments or scientific inventions being used to establish a system that was increasing the physical and moral degradation of the working class even though the technology promised to improve the human lot (Ryan 161). If Shelley's novel was intended as a warning, it wasn't aimed against technology *per se* but against man's tendency to create technology that could not be harnessed or controlled, as she demonstrates metaphorically through Frankenstein's monster.

Frankenstein's monster was designed by Victor to be perfect. He explains, "His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful!—Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness" (Shelley 37). Victor spent nearly two years making the creation, but the beauty of his dream turned to breathless horror and disgust when he animated his handiwork. He says the creature's features "formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips" (Shelley 37). Aesthetically, Frankenstein's monster, which was made of human parts in the human image, is still far from human looking. He, like all monsters, can be immediately judged as vividly unnatural and discernibly inhuman by his appearance.

Monsters are agents of chaos because they embody "otherness." It is not a question of how much they are different, but whether or not they are perceived as unnatural. This otherness

realizes itself in a variety of ways, including a monster's intentions, motivations, and effects. However, as in Frankenstein's monster's case, otherness is primarily recognized by the way it is realized through appearance. Frankenstein's monster, constructed out of natural human parts, was created through an unnatural process that makes him immediately recognizable as a monster and keeps him from ever achieving normalcy. He is completely aware of his immense aesthetic difference, stating "all men hate the wretched; how then must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things," and "the human senses are insurmountable barriers to our union" (Shelley 73, 111). Characters do not have to get to know him to see the deep hatred he harbors for humankind as a consequence of his unnatural appearance and their judgment of it; they are immediately repulsed by his appearance alone, a definitive characteristic for identification as a monster.

Reactions from other characters, especially the cottagers the monster observes, further justify the power and importance of aesthetic judgments on monsters. The cottagers are a family of farmers comprised of an old man named De Lacey, his son Felix, his daughter Agatha, and his son's fiancée Safie. Although the monster lives near them and occasionally helps with chores, they are completely unaware that a monster dwells among them. When he has the chance to approach the old man, who is the head of the household, he is immediately befriended after explaining his loneliness. This is only because the old man is blind. Frankenstein's monster is only perceived as unnatural by appearance, like most monsters, so the man is completely unaware of his unnaturalness. Without this aesthetic judgment, even a monster as unnatural in appearance as Frankenstein is perceived as human. When the old man's son comes home, the monster grabs the blind man's hand, pleading "Now is the time!—save and protect me! You and your family are the friends whom I seek. Do not desert me in the hour of trial!" (Shelley 103). Of

course, when Felix, Safie and Agatha enter the cabin, none of whom are blind, their horror and repulsion is immeasurable. Agatha faints, Safie runs, and Felix grabs a stick and begins to beat the monster with incredible force.

The monster's powers, similar to Dracula's, include incredible strength, agility, and great intellect. Frankenstein's monster taught himself language, much like Count Dracula taught himself the black arts. There is no mention of how his body reacts to aging. Surely mortality would not have to be a limitation on a monster as unnatural as Frankenstein's. Dracula can be withstood with religious artifacts or garlic, but Frankenstein's monster does not have limitations that would be out of the ordinary. We know that he can be hurt emotionally and physically after we read of his loneliness and pain from being shot, but at no point in the novel does the monster show any sign of being in danger from a potentially life-threatening injury. Of course, the monster is not omnipotent, but his strength and intellect within the confines of the story seem to be vigorous. Consequently, like Dracula, the ambiguous ending of Mary Shelley's novel has us question whether or not Frankenstein is even physically dead, although we can be certain that his legend will live on.

Frankenstein's monster demonstrates that monsters cannot be controlled. Although Victor is the monster's creator, the monster disregards his wishes. The monster tries to convince Victor to obey him, instead. He says, "I am thy creature, and I will be even mild and docile to my natural lord and king, if thou wilt also perform thy part, the which thou owest me" (Shelley 73). The monster desires a bride, something which Victor refuses immediately, even though the monster says "I demand it of you as a right which you must not refuse" (Shelley 111). The monster goes on, threatening his creator: "I will work at your destruction, nor finish until I desolate your heart, so that you curse the hour of your birth" (Shelley 111). To this, Victor

consents to make the monster's bride. The progression from conditional obedience, to exaction, to threats provides a compact snapshot of the ways in which the mechanisms of perceived control over the monster evaporate. Victor demonstrates not only that the monster cannot be controlled, but that, at least in Frankenstein's monster's case, a monster *can* control a human.

Furthermore, all monsters have an unnatural and immoral drive. It can be something as simple as an unexplainable thirst for blood or desire to destroy, or something complicated like Dracula's plans for world domination and motives for self-preservation. Throughout *Frankenstein*, we see Frankenstein's monster desiring companionship and the approval of his creator. When he is denied these desires they quickly degenerate and his motivation becomes strictly revenge. After being fired upon for saving a young girl from a fast-flowing stream, he vows "eternal hatred and vengeance to all mankind" (Shelley 108). A monster's motivation is always constructed as a magnification of its inhumanity. Dracula's thirst for blood and Frankenstein's monster's desire for an unnatural bride are perfect examples. The distinctions between good and evil are difficult to accurately define in actual life, but in horror literature the monster is always clearly evil because it is a representation of immoral ideas or exaggerations of perceived evil authors wish to explore. Once the monster starts acting on its misanthropic impulses, its motivation becomes more prevalent. This escalation sharpens the moral picture for readers. It is from these effects, as Allen S. Weiss suggests, that we have always identified and judged monstrosity on a reader's level.

In this story, we also see Victor Frankenstein's monstrous obsession with creation. Although Victor has sometimes been regarded as the true *monster* of the story, he must be disqualified. Victor's overreaching is clearly *monstrous*, but he is an ordinary body in which intellectual monstrosity manifests itself. This body is arguably beginning to look monstrous

when Clerval finds Victor shortly after the monster's creation. Clerval remarks, "how very ill you appear; so thin and pale; you look as if you had been watching for several nights" (Shelley 40). However, since this appearance is a consequence of his monstrous overreaching—as Victor explains, "I have lately been so deeply engaged in one occupation, that I have not allowed myself sufficient rest... but I hope... that I am at length free"—it can be looked at as a side effect of his monstrous obsession (Shelley 40).

The behavior Victor exhibits that has been cited as justification for calling him a monster is not expressed as an aesthetic or sensory quantity. His monstrosity is not a physical manifestation. Victor doesn't have any extraordinary powers or an unwillingness to accept external controls, and we also know that he is not driven by an immoral motivation. He intends to conquer illness and age, as he explains, hoping that he might "renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption" (Shelley 34). This desire was likely inspired by the death of his mother, who he had lost before going to school. The ability to bestow life can have a menacing implications, but Victor does not plan on using his findings for immoral purposes. His overreaching does lead directly to horrible consequences, but he does not set out to achieve them; his intrinsic monstrosity depends on the extrinsic *effects* of his experiment, the ungovernable creation that embodies why desire must be governed. The monstrous, as distinguished from the monster in the discussion of monstrosity, must be read within this context. Victor is monstrous, yet his monstrosity, a psychological phenomenon, can only realize itself through a physical being.

Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*

The Haunting of Hill House by Shirley Jackson realizes monstrosity chiefly through a demonstration of the monstrous. The novel plays on a variety of archetypal fears, the most

noticeable being loss, demonstrated through the novel's main character, Eleanor Vance. Eleanor has grown past her prime and is unable to find happiness, especially romantically. Eleanor is thirty-two years old when she first comes to Hill House, and as implied by her favorite Shakespearean quote, "journeys end in lovers meeting," it is evident that she still has high hopes for her future, although the hopes are perhaps juvenile (Jackson 245). She is very insecure, and spends a great deal of time questioning why she is doing what she is doing and wondering if people are talking about her or laughing behind her back. She has never pursued her own desires. This disposition has created an empty life for her; she hates her family, is friendless, and does not have the apartment she dreams of. In her dreams, written as memories, she thinks about the things she would like to have had, like stone lions at the end of her imaginary driveway. She believes that people would have bowed to her on the streets of the town because everyone would have been very proud of her lions (Jackson 18). From thoughts like these, readers can gather that she is searching for acceptance. Eleanor's insecurity is a psychological vulnerability that makes the invasion of a monstrous pressure possible.

Theo, the other female character in the story, is the exact opposite. She is vibrant and full of life. Her imagination is equally as vivid as Eleanor's, but she chases all of her dreams, a path that has made her very eccentric. She does have a personality flaw, however: she must always be the center of attention. Eleanor and Theo become immediate friends, partly because Eleanor needs to latch onto someone and partly because the house frightens them and they are able to find comfort in one another (Jackson 53).

Hill House was built by Hugh Crain and is the primary source of monstrosity within the story. It is unclear whether the house became evil through the unfortunate incidents that happened within it, which may have left behind a residue of psychological malevolence, or if it

was immoral upon formation. Jackson writes, “it was a house without kindness, never meant to be lived in, not a fit place for people or for love or for hope” (Jackson 35). Jackson’s description implies that the house was built malicious, rather than becoming immoral through coincidence and bad luck. Hill House is the most interesting character of the novel, and the only conscious, physical presence fit to be called a monster. Although the reader never gets a solid description of any of the happenings within Hill House (except for the house’s ability to close its own doors), the building itself, aesthetically, appears unnatural, is uncontrollable, and functions cruelly because of the list of tragedies connected with it, including several deaths and suicides (Jackson 78). Jackson elaborates:

No human eye can isolate the unhappy coincidence of line and place which suggests evil in the face of a house, and yet somehow a maniac juxtaposition, a badly turned angle, some chance meeting of roof and sky, turned Hill House into a place of despair, more frightening because the face of Hill House seemed awake, with a watchfulness from the blank windows and a touch of glee in the eyebrow of a cornice... Exorcism cannot alter the countenance of a house; Hill House would stay as it was until it was destroyed. (Jackson 34-35)

Eleanor’s first impression of the house matches Jackson’s description. Eleanor thinks, “The house was vile. She shivered and thought, the words coming freely into her mind, Hill House is vile, it is diseased; get away from here at once” (Jackson 33). Dr. Montague, a man studying the supernatural effects of Hill House, explains that he believes the evil that has accumulated throughout the house’s history comes from within the house itself, since it has enchained and destroyed people’s lives by continuously harboring ill will (Jackson 82). We learn later in the story that Montague’s assumption that the house is corrupt is true, and that the house is a source

of monstrosity that has the power to perform monstrous actions by manifesting itself within characters' minds in order to alter their perceptions of reality or control them completely.

The characters that Hill House realizes its monstrosity through, specifically the psychologically vulnerable Eleanor, become temporarily monstrous. Inner evil, a psychological manifestation that may properly be called the monstrous, is more difficult to pin down than the tangible difference of a physical monster because it manifests itself in two main varieties. One way something monstrous can be demonstrated is via the penetration of an immoral presence that influences the senses of its victim so her perception is temporarily unnatural. This phenomenon is exemplified when the Hill House penetrates Eleanor and Theo's minds. Theo and Eleanor hear an incredibly loud banging, resembling the sound of crashing iron, on doors down the hallway. The banging moves from door to door until it settles on their bedroom, as if trying to find them. The air becomes very cold, and the door trembles on its hinges from the brute, unknown force as the banging continues. After trying the lock and laughing when Eleanor tells it that it cannot come in, the presence retreats and the girls hear Luke down the hallway. Although Luke's footsteps are within earshot, neither the doctor nor Luke were able to hear the door, which was being hit so hard Theo feared it would smash apart (Jackson 131-133). Two very important lines of reasoning can be pulled from this passage. First, we know that both Theo and Eleanor were able to experience the exact same happening. Second, neither Luke nor the doctor could hear it, even though they were within earshot. That suggests that the phenomenon must have all happened within Eleanor and Theo's minds, and that their minds must have been penetrated by the house because it would otherwise be impossible for them to spontaneously perceive the exact same thing. This cannot be judged as a case of one of the characters losing her mind, because something obviously happened. Throughout this period of misperception, Eleanor and Theo's

behavior is a direct response to the stimulus outside their door. This is a prototypical example of psychological penetration because it demonstrates an intrinsic mental alteration from an unnatural and invasive source that manifests itself only within certain characters. In this case Hill House is the invasive source of monstrosity that takes shape as an immoral presence within the minds of Eleanor and Theo. The victims of this perception have an unnatural receptivity and temporarily embody the unnatural, making them monstrous.

The second way that the monstrous can manifest is through projection. This occurrence often leads to a character being wrongly imagined a monster. However, this is not the case. Victor Frankenstein was a victim of projection. He was so caught up in his work that his obsession overtook him temporarily and was able to establish itself, through the creation of the monster, through Victor. Although Victor created the monster, we know from his benevolent intentions that purposeful monstrosity was not his ambition. Also, his subsequent reaction, his admiration of the monster as having hair of “lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness” to his recognition of its “shriveled complexion, and straight black lips,” demonstrates that Victor’s perceptual failure could only have been caused by a mania that clouded his senses and judgment (Shelley 37). In the cases of psychological phenomena, unnatural desires or thoughts have a separate existence as sources of monstrosity. These sources of monstrosity are unable to manifest themselves without a physical body. In horror literature this body is natural until the presence of monstrosity demonstrates itself through the victim. Whether they are intrusively extrinsic or self generated and therefore intrinsic, these desires are unnatural and demonstrate themselves to be sources of monstrosity identifiable by their effects. Victor, consequently, is monstrous because the psychological monstrosity clouds his

consciousness, creating a reality for Victor that has no basis in his natural perception of science and the consequences that could accompany his experiment.

The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde by Robert Louis Stevenson also presents an ideal look at the relationship between the monster and monstrous. Since in this novel Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde have separate identities, it is problematic to read them as the same character. Hyde meets all qualifications of being a monster. He is a physical being that is judged as unnatural by a sensory assessment. Mr. Enfield says,

there is something wrong with his appearance; something displeasing, something downright detestable. I never saw a man I so disliked, and yet I scarce know why. He must be deformed somewhere; he gives a strong feeling of deformity, although I couldn't specify the point. (Stevenson 11)

This description, paired with Mr. Utterson's, in which he remarks that Hyde seems "hardly human," illustrates that he unquestionably meets the qualification of being perceived as unnatural (Stevenson 58). Furthermore, we learn that he has the power to manifest himself against Jekyll's will, which demonstrates his inability to be controlled (Stevenson 58). Hyde is also motivated by an immoral drive. Jekyll explains that when he made the transformation, he felt "tenfold more wicked," and that pleasures Hyde sought were "monstrous... inherently malign and villainous; his every act and thought centered on itself; drinking pleasure with bestial avidity from any degree of torture to another" (Stevenson 53). Jekyll, just like other characters in the story, was able to establish that Hyde was immoral immediately, and the effects of Hyde's actions demonstrate his monstrosity.

Although Jekyll is conscious throughout Hyde's immoral hedonism, he feels that the situation is "apart from ordinary laws," which "relaxed the grasp of conscience." Jekyll explains

“it was Hyde, after all, and Hyde alone that was guilty” (Stevenson 53). The interpretation Jekyll offers is an authentic one, not a rationalization intended to absolve himself of blame, as we learn that Jekyll is unable to keep Hyde from manifesting later in the novel. If their identities are separate, it is Jekyll’s developed understanding of the primitive duality of man, the two natures of moral and immoral desire that contend in the field of his consciousness, that is the source of his monstrosity. Similar to Victor Frankenstein, Jekyll’s unnatural desire to create an immoral alter ego was perverted from his original intention, which was to relieve life of all that is unbearable by separating moral and immoral desires into separate identities (Stevenson 49). This unnatural desire can be judged as a monstrous trait that possesses him, blinding his consciousness and projecting through him to create a monster.

Monstrosity that manifests itself intrinsically within a victim through projection does so through a process similar to possession. Although the victims may be aware of their surroundings and behavior, the source of monstrosity is in control of their actions. Often, characters that are victims of projection are inappropriately read as monsters, but they are actually monstrous because they are recognizing, internalizing, and embodying monstrosity. It is important to note, however, that characters who are victims of projection are not innocent. They are monstrous because—although the effects of the monstrosity are not of their choosing—they give themselves up to the monstrosity, allowing its manifestation. Both Jekyll and Victor were victims because the outcome of their experiments was immoral and undesired, but since they gave into the temptation to begin the experiments, tantalized by the power to bestow life or separate moral and immoral natures, they made a conscious decision to set the monstrosity in motion.

The idea of projection comes up several times in *The Haunting of Hill House*. Since the house's actions are never seen by anyone able to record them in the novel, it is often unclear if the house, a monster, is perpetrating them. Who really soaks Theo's room in blood and writes Eleanor's name on the wall? It could be the house, or it could be that Eleanor, who is clearly susceptible to the house's influence, is allowing it to project through her while she is unconscious. Her behavior at the end of the novel, however, displays the projection of the house and its malevolence more explicitly. Even a reading that labels Eleanor as being insane requires certain qualifiers. Undoubtedly, her behavior to other characters within the story appears mad, but since her insanity is temporary and caused by a source of monstrosity, the house, which she recovers from in the last moments of her life, her behavior is more appropriately labeled as projection of the house.

Toward the end of the story, Eleanor does question her sanity. As the pounding noise ceases on another occasion, she thinks, "Now we are going to have a new noise... it is changing" (Jackson 202). The noise then changes and it sounds like a swift animal pacing back and forth with great impatience. "Am I doing it?" Eleanor wonders, "is that me?" (Jackson 202). She is not, but the house has penetrated her mind and can manipulate it if it pleases because of her psychological vulnerability. Eleanor hears laughter in her head, which swells to a shout, before she believes that the laughter is inside her head (Jackson 202). Eleanor stops the house's tantrum by giving herself to it, saying, "I will relinquish my possession of this self of mine, abdicate, give over willingly what I never wanted at all; whatever it wants of me it can have" (Jackson 204). Afterward, she cannot remember the event at all, but she can hear the other people around the house. She can hear them walking on faraway stairs. This, of course, is because the house has

now completely established itself in her mind, and since the house can tell where people are within it, she can, too.

Once Eleanor allows Hill House into her mind, it immediately begins projecting through her. Similar to the scientific overreaching that precipitated Victor and Jekyll's experiments, a source of monstrosity has taken over Eleanor. In this scenario, however, we are able to witness the events that take place during the projection. Hill House has her get up from bed and wander the house. It keeps her from being scared and even encourages her to run eagerly up the staircase into the library where she was deathly afraid to go before (Jackson 228). It has her go from door to door, pounding on any that has a human behind it. Theo notices Eleanor is gone and alerts the doctor. When the house hears this, Eleanor reacts strangely. She thinks, "I had forgotten Eleanor; now they will have to open their doors" (Jackson 229). We have to assume that this is the house thinking, not Eleanor, because she refers to herself in the third person. The house means that it forgot that if they noticed Eleanor's body missing, they would surely come looking for it. The house has Eleanor play with them for quite some time, running between rooms while they look for her. Eventually, it guides her up on the library's dangerous rooftop, where Luke, another participant in Montague's study, comes to the rescue.

After this excursion, Eleanor is kicked out of the house. As she leaves the house, she still knows that the house is waiting for her, and that nobody can satisfy it now. She tries to explain, "the house wants me to stay," but the doctor insists that it would be best for her to leave and never think about Hill House again. Eleanor, on the other hand, will not go. The others try to convince her, but Eleanor decides that Hill House is her new home (Jackson 245). The last projection from Hill House forces Eleanor to drive her car directly into a large oak tree, killing her. Right before she strikes the tree, she thinks, "Why am I doing this? Why don't they stop

me?" (Jackson 246). The sanity in this last moment shows that Eleanor was not making these decisions for herself, but that Hill House was projecting through her.

Conclusion

At its most basic level, the division between monsters and the monstrous is a division between sources of inner and outer unnaturalness. However, other identifying traits within each group are evident. Monsters are physical beings, identifiable as unnatural via the senses (usually in terms of aesthetics), uncontrollable, and always motivated by an immoral drive. Even though the exact shape or desire of a monster is limited only by an author's imagination, monsters will always exhibit these traits. The monstrous is much more difficult to classify, but it always reveals itself in one of two manifestations: through penetration, when an unnatural force influences and disillusions a character's perception, or through projection, when an unnatural force expresses itself through another character, leaving that character trapped in his subconscious.

This division, between monsters and the monstrous, is valuable because it allows us to approach horror literature in a more exacting way. This intervention suggests that monsters can demonstrate what it means to be physically and aesthetically human. Horror literature's exploration of unnatural appearance, ability, and behavior are valuable indicators of how man perceives himself and his limitations. Similarly, the monstrous reflects how man is always restricted by convention and perceptual agreement. Together, an analysis of monstrosity demonstrates that both groups illuminate humane ethics and make the restoration of disruption possible. By recognizing how monstrosity functions within horror stories, we are able to appreciate the most important aspect of the genre and understand its views regarding what it means to be human. If we identify the aforementioned qualifiers of these divisions, between the

monster and monstrous, they can be examined with modern literary methods and provide superior readings of the genre.

Since this is a study of literature, which ostensibly reflects the human experience, a proper evaluation of monstrosity, leading to a proper understanding of the horror genre, opens new perspectives on how life is perceived by a previously under acknowledged group of writers. Although horror literature is usually recognized primarily for its focus on producing specific emotions or sensations in readers, an evaluation of the genre by means of an approach that critiques authorial uses of monstrosity provides an innovative method of evaluating the genre as a whole. Perhaps once monstrosity is properly examined and understood as the defining characteristic of the genre, the genre itself can be reevaluated and properly understood.

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