The Cupola
Scholarship at Gettysburg College

Fall 2018

At the Edge of Monstrosity: Melville, Shelley, and Crane's Monsters in 19th-Century Literature

Jenna M. Seyer
Gettysburg College

Follow this and additional works at: https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student_scholarship

Part of the Literature in English, Anglophone outside British Isles and North America Commons, Literature in English, North America, Ethnic and Cultural Minority Commons, and the Other English Language and Literature Commons

Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.

At the Edge of Monstrosity: Melville, Shelley, and Crane's Monsters in 19th-Century Literature

Abstract

What is a monster? For contemporary readers, monsters conjure images of things from horror films. My capstone addresses the question of whether monsters, the monstrous, and monstrosity are inside the human or elsewhere. I argue that monsters, when compared side-by-side in literature, are fundamentally the same with some exceptions: evil behind a human body. Through close-reading and theoretical analyses of 19th-century texts, Herman Melville's Moby Dick, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, and Stephen Crane's The Monster, I examine how their authors create monsters as a response to societal anxieties and fears. My capstone expands on passages where human characters surrender to their internal monsters to prove an authorial need to mirror a monstrous society. By exploring themes of obsession and knowledge, I claim that textual monsters are mere manifestations of who we are in reality. I have divided my capstone into chapters that take turns surveying what it takes to become a monster. I conclude with a brief, but broader discussion of contemporary monsters to bridge 19th-century literature to its modern-day counterpart. In the end, I ultimately posit that we are no less monstrous than monsters on the page.

Keywords

American Literature, Herman Melville, Moby Dick, Gothic Literature, Monsters

Disciplines

English Language and Literature | Literature in English, Anglophone outside British Isles and North America | Literature in English, North America, Ethnic and Cultural Minority | Other English Language and Literature

Comments

Written for English 404 Seminar: American Literature

At the Edge of Monstrosity: Melville, Shelley, and Crane's Monsters in 19th-Century Literature

_____

A Capstone

Presented to

The Department of English

Gettysburg College

_____

In Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Bachelor of Arts

_____

By

Jenna M. Seyer

December 11, 2018

Table of Contents

Abstract

What is a monster? For contemporary readers, monsters conjure images of things from horror films. My capstone addresses the question of whether monsters, the monstrous, and monstrosity are inside the human or elsewhere. I argue that monsters, when compared side-by-side in literature, are fundamentally the same with some exceptions: evil behind a human body. Through close-reading and theoretical analyses of 19th-century texts, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and Stephen Crane's *The Monster*, I examine how their authors create monsters as a response to societal anxieties and fears. My capstone expands on passages where human characters surrender to their internal monsters to prove an authorial need to mirror a monstrous society. By exploring themes of obsession and knowledge, I claim that textual monsters are mere manifestations of who we are in reality. I have divided my capstone into chapters that take turns surveying what it takes to become a monster. I conclude with a brief, but broader discussion of contemporary monsters to bridge 19th-century literature to its modern-day counterpart. In the end, I ultimately posit that we are no less monstrous than monsters on the page.

Chapter I. Introduction

What is a monster? The word "monster" derives from Latin and French and has multiple meanings. A "monster" may refer to something or someone who is "malformed" or *monstre* in French. The word also derives from the Latin *monstrum*[1], the word for "omen." Its roots reveal that the word can represent something internal or external or both. A malformation can be bodily and physically seen. Yet it also suggests a psychological or social defect within ourselves, that a monster or the monstrous lives inside. An omen, too, implies a warning, a part of us or a part of society of which we should be afraid. Both its Latin and French definitions allow the word "monster" to embody the essence of monsters we read about in books. What does a monster look like? Where do monsters come from? Is there a certain criteria? Many of the monster tropes in literature include characters or figures who do not look fully human. They are beastly and grotesque, but retain a basic human form. They may have missing body parts or may be a composite of multiple people. Such characters may also be social deviants. They defy social codes and violate social decorum. They may murder or steal or rape for some personal motivation. Monsters in literature often appear like and border the human, but are possessed by evil.

Two of the most well-known works that explore connections of monstrosity and monsters from the 19th-century are Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus*. I also analyze Stephen Crane's novella, *The Monster*. From close-reading analysis, I find that the writing of monsters in literature has maintained the same themes and symbols: external and internal monstrosity. Fundamentally, Melville, Shelley, and Crane's characters reflect social and cultural anxieties about human beings. All three authors textualize

---

[1] See the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) for more information on the origins of "monster"

what happens when the human reaches his breaking point. Characters lose all sense of control.

As I will argue, the 19th-century Monster emerges from human or human-like characters as embodiments of loneliness, fear, and obsession. Such creations mirror our own concerns of becoming the monsters about which we read and hear. As a whole, I claim that we do. I claim that monsters in literature are based on their readers. Monsters come from ourselves.

Chapter II. Melville's Ahab: Humans as Monsters

The beginning of *Moby Dick* establishes the roles of several characters: Ishmael (the narrator), Queequeg (Ishmael's companion), Starbuck (First Mate), Stubb (Second Mate), Flask (Third Mate), and other harpooners and crewmen. What lurks in the background is a mysterious Captain Ahab. At first, we only hear about Ahab in stories:

> Step and growl; growl and go—that's the word with Captain Ahab. But nothing about that thing that happened to him off Cape Horn, long ago, when he lay like dead for three days and nights; nothing about that deadly scrimmage with the Spaniard afore the altar in Santa?—heard nothing about that, eh? Nothing about the silver calabash he spat into? And nothing about his losing his leg last voyage, according to the prophecy? (82)

Even when Ahab *is* mentioned, the language surrounding his character is purposely vague. Phrases such as "that thing that happened" do not provide any substantial information about Ahab or his whaling experiences. The language is elusive, shallow, and full of suspense. Melville's repetition of "nothing" is exactly what we learn about Ahab—nothing. Instead, Melville asks questions with very few answers. Such narrative gaps that surround Ahab make it harder for us to think about what he could be like as a character. Melville's questions of "nothing about this or that" take readers to the edge of their seats. They spark our curiosity by leaving who Ahab is unanswered, yet also make us afraid. We fear what we do not and cannot know or comprehend. We also fear what we cannot predict. In this way, Melville intentionally seeks to float readers along to elevate Ahab's character to legend. Melville makes Ahab unpredictable.

Like something we cannot fully understand, Ahab is intangible. We cannot grasp onto any details

about him or wrap our minds around who or what he is. Readers are, in a way, blinded, like we

are walking through mazes with no sense of direction. We cannot navigate the above passage

with the small amount of material we are given. The obscurity of Ahab, therefore, makes him a

monster. As the writers of *Introduction: Monster Studies* state, "monstrousness thwarts efforts to

capture, render, and utter it in discourses…it returns and escapes…it is a node within a network"

(Koenig-Woodyard, Nanayakkara, and Khatri 4). As Melville's language escapes, so does Ahab.

The Monster prowls within the diction itself. We are not truly certain whether Ahab is real or

simply a subject of ghost tales.

Throughout *Moby Dick*, Melville's characters constantly slip through our fingers.

Melville yearns for readers to question what they know and how they know it. Still, the

distribution of information in *Moby Dick* is gradual. The reader does not meet Ahab until one

hundred pages at sea. Melville's description of Ahab in Chapter 28 starts to unravel his

monstrosity veiled behind a distorted human body. Ishmael sees him,

> There seemed no sign of common bodily illness about him, nor of the recovery from any.
> He looked like a man cut away from the stake, when the fire has overrunningly wasted all
> the limbs without consuming them, or taking away one particle from their compacted
> aged robustness. His whole high, broad form, seemed made of solid bronze, and shaped
> in an unalterable mould, like Cellini's cast Perseus. (102-103)

The way Ahab is portrayed is frightening, as Ishmael admits that "foreboding shivers ran over

[him]" (102). His description is also paradoxical, which causes Ahab, as a character, to be

difficult to imagine. As Melville asks more questions than he provides answers, he still describes

Ahab in a way that makes him intangible and monstrous. Melville's contradictions of Ahab—

wasted, but not consumed—push his character into the in-between. Ahab is not one thing or

another, but both at the same time. He looks like "a man cut away from the stake," yet he is not

burned. His skin is not scarred by fire, but made into "solid bronze." He is "broad," "compact,"

"aged," and "robust." Melville's use of adjectives compares Ahab to "an unalterable mould, like

Cellini's cast Perseus" (103). Here, Ahab is permanent and unchangeable. He is static and fixed,

like his own monomania toward killing the whale. Melville, by mentioning Cellini, is referring to

Benvenuto Cellini, an Italian sculptor. According to Michael Cole in *Cellini's Blood*, Cellini

created his bronze sculpture, *Perseus Beheading the Medusa*, in the 16th century, one that

displays Perseus slitting Medusa's neck, her head held in Perseus' hand (1). Some of Cole's

article explores the distortion of Medusa's body and what happens, artistically and literally,

when life drains from the body and its limbs (4). Cole also analyzes Perseus' form and the rising

of Medusa's head in a way that monstrously, publicly boasts (3). Cole writes that, "Cellini

brought bronze to life" (8). In connection to *Moby Dick*, Melville compares Ahab to Cellini's

sculpture to not only describe Ahab as immutable, but to stress his monstrosity. Melville could

have chosen any other sculpture to depict Ahab's hardened exterior. Yet, Melville chose one that

shows a monster who beheads. Therefore, Ahab's characteristics physically make him

monstrous.

In other passages, too, that portray him as a monster, Ahab is not wholly human, but

rather somewhat artificial. He continues to represent the definitions of a monster through his

partiality, and external deformity, his leg "fashioned from the polished bone of the sperm

whale's jaw" (103). His ivory leg not only serves as a daily reminder of the violence he endured,

but also Gothically and supernaturally shapes Ahab into a character that is part-whale. In other

words, his leg comprises a deep hatred for the same creature he desires to kill. Ahab's

obsession—or *monomania*, as Melville terms—leads to his descend into monstrosity and

eventually his death. This cause-and-effect relationship, obsession to monstrosity, demonstrates

that everyone can become a monster. Ahab's soliloquy[2] in Chapter 37 exposes him as Monster through his personal admittance and association with demons, madness, and evil prophecy. Ahab declares,

> I'm demoniac; I am madness maddened! That wild madness that's only calm to comprehend itself! The prophecy was that I should be dismembered; and—Aye! I lost this leg. I now prophesy that I will dismember my dismemberer…Over unsounded gorges, through the rifled hearts of mountains, under torrents' beds, unerringly I rush! (136)

At this part of the novel, I think, Ahab falls further into monstrosity to the point where he nearly calls himself a monster. He defines the word "monster" on his own by calling himself "dismembered." What readers are already aware of, Ahab, too, now recognizes his madness "that's only calm to comprehend itself." As the above passages prove Ahab is a monster through unanswered questions and paradoxical descriptions, this passage also reflects Ahab's monstrosity because it lists something else we cannot understand—"that wild madness." Since we cannot understand Ahab in the first passage of questions and cannot understand him in the second, we still cannot fully grasp Ahab as a character in the third. The only one who can understand his madness is Ahab, which causes him, again, to slip through our fingers. The difference here is that the labeling of Monster (and roles that come close to being a monster) comes from Ahab himself. He is reduced to a symbol and the roles of Demon, Dismemberer, Prophet, and Monster. Ahab becomes the concept of madness, "maddened." He poses as a monstrous, God-like figure who fuels his prophecy with his vengeance to kill the White Whale. With the transformation of hunter (Ahab) to hunted (Whale), Ahab is blinded by his own regard, unable to see past his monstrousness and fixated mania—despite the fact that he identifies it. Therefore, monstrosity, though externally represented in Ahab's malformities, is also internally realized.

---

[2] Read Edward Stone's *Ahab Gets Girl, or Herman Melville Goes to the Movies* for a cinematic and theatrical analysis of *Moby Dick* on screen and stage.

Chapter III: Monstrous Politics

Ahab's monstrosity is not only bound to his person, but stems from inside himself and affects other characters. The political arena mobilized by Ahab on the *Pequod* is critical to examine his many-sided monster-complex to show that anyone can be a monster and to decide whether Ahab is Monster, God, or both at the same time. According to *Monster Studies*, "the beast's destructive…dimensions [and] dissonance and cacophony…match the social upheaval that it desires" (Koenig-Woodyard, Nanayakkara, and Khatri 9). In this way, Ahab, as a dictator, expresses his "social upheaval" through two options to men on board: get killed by the whale or kill it. By stripping men of their free will and using scare tactics, Ahab as Monster successfully "transgress[es] communally defined and maintained codes of legal and social behavior" (Koenig-Woodyard, Nanayakkara, and Khatri 10). With Ahab in charge, he constructs a social hierarchy to ensure an absence of individual equality. There is no democracy. There is no nautical Constitution or Bill of Rights. There are no rules at sea—only the laws that Ahab invents. Therefore, like monsters, Ahab diverges from social normativity to control his ship-society. Ahab is "athirst for [blood]" (146).

Ahab's deviance from society affects other characters, specifically Ishmael, to the extent that they also fall into monstrosity. We learn, early on, that Ishmael wants to set sail to be free of his own demons, the sea "his substitute for pistol and ball" (16). The first page immediately crafts an image of the ocean as Savior and an escape from reality. However, Ishmael's initial motives to be at sea change soon after Ahab's first appearance on board. Ishmael submits to Ahab's fanatical agenda:

> I, Ishmael, was one of that crew; my shouts had gone up with the rest; my oath had been welded with theirs; and stronger I shouted, and more did I hammer and clinch my oath, because of the dread in my soul. A wild, mystical, sympathetical feeling was in me; Ahab's quenchless feud seemed mine. With greedy ears I learned the history of that

murderous monster against whom I and all the others had taken our oaths of violence and revenge. (144)

Like some kind of contagion[3] or spell, Ishmael's affect is clearly dominated by Ahab's monstrous revenge. The adjectives Ishmael uses, especially "wild" and "mystical," cause a supernatural aspect to enter Chapter 41. He even says aloud that Ahab is a "murderous monster." It is as though Ishmael is savagely disembodied, that he experiences an out-of-body force that enchants him to darker sides of himself. Ishmael, too, I claim, declines into his inner Monster just as Ahab does. Ishmael's fall follows the same cause-and-effect relationship that applies to Ahab. As obsession leads to monstrosity for Ahab, Ahab's monstrosity leads to Ishmael's. Melville writes Ishmael, a good-hearted, benevolent character, in such a way to say that even moral individuals—both in *Moby Dick* and reality—are susceptible to monstrosity. According to Erica McCrystal in her *Hyde the Hero: Changing the Role of Modern-Day Monster*, such a fall to monstrosity signifies "horrific possibilities for human degeneration and retrogression to a primitive, bestial state" (235). Melville pursues this idea that society is afraid of people becoming monsters to demonstrate a repressed state of monstrosity inside of us all. Melville seeks to show what it looks like when humans reverse "to a savage, animalistic race" (236). In *Moby Dick*, Melville needs Ahab and Ishmael to show readers that such a reversal can happen to anyone. Anyone and everyone can be and become a monster. In terms of Melville's intentions as a writer, he is effective in baring what happens when human beings lose their humanity.

A rise of totalitarianism on the *Pequod* further supports my assertion that Ahab's fixation sparks a monstrous infection that feeds on other characters. As soon as Ahab spreads his own monomania to the rest of the crew, the social and political hierarchy on board becomes very

---

[3] For a theoretical analysis of Ahab and his powers to control, see Jeff Todd's *Ahab and the Glamour of Evil: A Burkean Reading of Ritual in* Moby Dick

clear. Ahab is at the helm. Totalitarianism, as a system of government, divides society into opposition (238). McCrystal quotes Sarah D. Harris in her essay: "monsters are simultaneously universal and particular: they emerge from universal societal needs, including the need to exteriorize fears and build an 'us' in contrast to a 'them'" (238). The *us versus them* framework isolates the individual and pushes her to the margins if she is without an oppositional group. It creates an Otherness that alienates the self from the collective. It also reveals an internal fear that the individual does not want to be left behind. In Ishmael's case, the *us versus them* contrast could also point to feelings of guilt, that if Ishmael does not follow the crew, then he is betraying the society on the *Pequod*. Either way, it is important to notice how monsters in literature—as concepts, behaviors, and states of being—"threaten the social fabric of humanity for fear of widespread degenerative morality" (238). Following the *us versus them* construction, Ahab forms a space where Ishmael and other men "surrender to…totalitarian impulse," in the words of critic James Duban (239). Here, Duban stresses the power of Ahab's monomania to persuade, manipulate, and poison the minds of others with a monstrosity that is no longer dormant inside them. Ahab awakens the Monster. Ishmael takes notice of Ahab that "in darting at the monster, knife in hand, he had but given loose to a sudden, passionate, corporeal animosity" (148). The short phrase "given loose" directly defends my argument that what is monstrous is already a part of ourselves. In *Moby Dick* (and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*), monsters are ultimately both external and internal and Melville, as a 19th-century author, makes us confront what we fear most: ourselves.

Chapter IV: Reanimating Monsters—Creator or Created?

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, like Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, illustrates external and internal monstrosity through several characters to reflect social fears of people becoming

monsters. *Frankenstein* is not about a Captain who obsesses over killing a whale, but about a Scientist who animates the prospect of a world without God and a Creature who suffers his consequences. Though different in plot, both novels are interested in monsters that live outside and inside ourselves. Shelley introduces Victor Frankenstein, a man who first appears as someone simply interested in science. We learn, in Chapter II of *Frankenstein*, that one of the motivators behind his fascination with science stems from the death of his mother. Victor shares,

> Before the day resolved upon could arrive, the first misfortune of my life occurred—an omen, as it were, of my future misery. [Mother] had caught the scarlet fever…On the third day my mother sickened…She died calmly…I need not describe the feelings of those whose dearest ties are rent by that most irreparable evil, the void that presents itself to the soul, and the despair that is exhibited on the countenance. (25-26)

We can all relate to the feeling of losing someone or something we love, the emptiness we feel afterward. Yet, we also all experience and cope with loss differently. We may quietly mourn or we may also be angry at the world. We may try to seek some sort of explanation instead of accepting that death is a natural part of life. Victor, I would argue, does not accept this reality. His language reminds us of definitions of the word "monster," specifically its Latin origins. Victor calls the "first misfortune of [his] life" an omen, something external of which we should be scared. Unlike Ahab's monstrosity that is external in the same way that it is bodily and seen, Victor's monstrosity, within the first twenty-five pages, is external through something he cannot control. While Melville writes Ahab as Monster in his deformities, Shelley does not create Victor as a character who is physically malformed, but instead affected by monsters around him. The death of his mother, therefore, not only acts as a trigger into monstrosity, but also serves to foreshadow things to come. Victor's omen—this external monster—predicts a monstrous path where Victor cannot turn back around.

Further, what begins for Victor as an innocent curiosity in natural philosophy, "the search

of the philosopher's stone and the elixir of life," quickly turns into a pursuit of restoring life from

death (23). Through writing, Shelley represents what happens when knowledge becomes

obsession. Like Ahab in *Moby Dick*, Victor, too, descends into his own monomania. Victor's

focus, rather than killing a whale, is bringing back the dead. What is later found are

psychological markers of a fixation that leads to monstrosity, the same causality that Ahab and

Ishmael endure. Readers witness a horrifying preparation:

> To examine the causes of life, we must first have recourse to death. I became acquainted
> with the science of anatomy: but this was not sufficient; I must also observe the natural
> decay and corruption of the human body…After days and nights of incredible labour and
> fatigue, I succeeded in discovering the cause of generations and life; nay, more, I became
> myself capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter. (32-33)

The above scene describes an investigation. Victor learns about anatomy, where life begins and

ends, but it is not enough to satisfy him. Like an addict, Victor is not content with any amount of

knowledge he gains. He wants more. He desires to find loopholes that stop the natural process of

life and death, to bring back what is already gone. Similar to what happens to Ahab, Victor's

pursuit becomes monomaniacal. In his search, Victor does not come across as someone

concerned with human life, but a stoic scientist. He does not care that he disrupts the peace of

graves; he does not care about ethical implications. He thinks that "life and death [are] ideal

bounds," that "a new species would bless [him] as its creator and source" (34). Victor is arrogant

and self-interested. He detaches himself from human society to hermit in his apartment, yet it is

there where he falls into monstrosity because of his obsession and toxic knowledge. Still, from

Shelley's writing, we infer that the one thing Victor *does* seek is to be celebrated by his Adam.

He desires to play God. What Victor ignores is whether his creation even wants to be recreated.

Victor strips his creation from autonomy, freedom, and will just as Ahab does to men on the

Pequod. Victor and Ahab do not give their company a choice. Victor's lack of empathy along with his God-like complex push him further away from his humanness and closer to monstrosity. While it is also true that these scenes question the role of Scientist as a position and Science as a discipline, they prove that Victor treats "so astonishing a secret" solely as an experiment (33). Victor thus becomes Monster the moment his humanity fades entirely.

Shelley's problematic representation of knowledge continues to be seen as a prominent theme and contributes to ways Victor submits to the monster inside him. Just before Creature wakes, Victor warns us,

> I will not lead you on, unguarded and ardent as I then was, to your destruction and infallible misery. Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge, and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow. (33)

The above passage relates to Melville's passage in my Chapter II during which Ahab verbalizes his own monstrousness—"I'm demoniac; I am madness maddened" (136). Here, Victor recognizes how much happier he would have been if he accepted the reality in which he lives, if he noticed that tampering with processes of life and death would bring "destruction and infallible misery" (33). Victor's life and the story of *Frankenstein* as a whole would have been entirely different if he had listened to external monsters: the omen. However, as Victor points out, he was "unguarded and ardent." Perhaps Shelley makes Victor "unguarded" to show that, while everyone can be and become a monster, monstrosity dominates us in moments when we least expect. Whatever her intentions as a 19th-century author, Shelley makes clear that monsters, the monstrous, and monstrosity are always lurking somewhere in the background. We can become monsters at whatever time. What is most scary is the fact that it can happen when we are not paying attention. As a whole, Victor's depiction of his own knowledge complicates our views of

its power to educate and expose us to a world outside of ignorance. What does Knowledge as

Evil suggest about the human? It changes how we view who we are, what we learn, and how

deeply we inform ourselves, and whether that choice is dangerous to ourselves and others. To

Shelley, monomaniacal knowledge infects. It is a symptom of becoming the Monster.

Knowledge begins a monstrous course that Victor cannot take back.

Chapter V: Meet Creature

While Victor enjoys the creation-process itself, something changes at the point of

conception. Victor does not have any consequences as a Creator until Creature is actually

created. He suddenly recognizes what he has done and what his monstrous obsession and

knowledge have produced. Though most of what we learn about Victor's Creature is in Volume

II, Victor is terrified from its birth. Victor breaks down:

> How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom
> with such infinite pains and care I had endeavored to form? 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…but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his
> watery eyes…breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. (37)

Ahab is deformed in *Moby Dick* with an artificial, ivory leg. Like Ahab, Creature matches the

same definitions of Monster that were provided in the Introduction: someone or something that is

externally malformed. Just as readers cannot entirely imagine Ahab, we fall short of picturing

Creature. He is "beautiful," "in proportion," yet of "more horrid contrast." Creature is physically

a composite of parts. He is an assemblage of many, a singular body that shares a multiplicity.

Creature's hybridization—that he is one of multiple—echoes what Melissa Bloom Bissonette

illustrates in her *Teaching the Monster:* Frankenstein *and Critical Thinking*. Bissonette explains

that "Shelley's monster *is* both monster and creature, both Natural Man and unnatural fiend"

(110). In other words, Creature is a paradox within himself just as Ahab is in his description in

my Chapter II—"he looked like a man cut away from the stake, when the fire has overrunningly wasted all the limbs without consuming them" (102). Creature is not one thing or another, but both at the same time. Similar to Ahab, Creature also borders the in-between as neither fully human nor fully beast. His between-state is exactly the reason why 19th-century and contemporary cultures would categorize him as Monster. Creature is something we cannot fully understand and our fear stems from that misunderstanding. Bissonette reveals different readings of Creature when she outlines his identities: "one [view] makes him a vulnerable human, not a monster, and the other makes him a stock figure of danger, a pure 'other,' the figure which he subsequently [becomes]" (108). To Bissonette, readers of *Frankenstein* create oppositional forces, as Ahab in Melville's *Moby Dick* does on the *Pequod*. Although she does not compare the two works, what she writes about directly parallels to *Moby Dick*. Readers of Shelley are either on Team Creature or Team Victor like readers of Melville are either Team Ahab or Team Whale. However, as Bissonette puts, this divided thinking "tend[s] to minimize Shelley's monster" (108). She insists that "a monster with multiple parents but no family, he is both human and inhuman, alive and dead" (111). Either way, Creature's physical appearance and bodily composition both make him Monster. His monstrousness, here, is external.

Analyzing Creature's life in Volume II is important to decide whether monstrosity lives inside him as it does in Victor, Ahab, and Ishmael. I argue that Creature is neither born a monster nor internally a monster until society makes him one. Creature undergoes the same cause-and-effect development of monstrosity that Ahab, Ishmael, and Victor do. In Creature's case, external monstrosity (society and Victor) leads to internal monstrosity. In this way, the first thing Creature experiences from Victor—one of the external monsters—is abandonment. While Shelley writes the Creature as a character of contradiction, she also allows readers to find

sympathy in his life. In Victor's words, "one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped, and rushed down stairs" (38). If we apply what happens here to real life, we can see Victor's abandonment of Creature as a father leaving a child. Beside the fact that maternity shifts to paternity—Man giving birth to Boy—Shelley lets us feel with Creature. We, too, feel alone when Victor forces us to fend for ourselves moments after coming back from death. As readers who sympathize with Creature, we do not condemn Creature as Monster here—at least I do not. Shelley's third chapter in Volume II narrates what Creature endures after Victor leaves him. Creature discloses,

> It was dark when I awoke; I felt cold also, and half-frightened as it were instinctively, finding myself so desolate. Before I had quitted your apartment, on a sensation of cold, I had covered myself with some clothes; but these were insufficient to secure me from the dews of night. I was a poor, helpless, miserable wretch; I knew, and could distinguish, nothing; but, feeling pain invade me on all sides, I sat down and wept. (75)

We sympathize with Creature in the sense that we feel his confusion, fear, anxiety, and pain. He has no understanding of where he is, why he is in an empty space, how he came into being, and how to navigate that space. He does not know how to process emotion. He cannot recognize his self. Like a newborn, Creature is in an infantile mental state. Though he represents monstrosity on the outside (and he is not physically child-like), I would not categorize him as Monster in this passage. His self-loathing only adds to our sympathetic response: "I was, besides, endowed with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome" (90). Hating himself, Creature is exposed to "the barbarity of man"—an external monster—from the start (79).

In relation to *Frankenstein*, Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* examines pity, compassion, and sympathy as natural parts of who we are and shows that such emotions compel us to make the pain of others our own. Smith, I think, would support my claim that

Shelley's Creature is not a monster on his own until society and other external monsters cause

him to become what everyone else already is: monsters in human form. Smith writes,

> We have of course no immediate experience of what other men feel; so the only way we
> can get an idea of what someone else is feeling is by thinking about what we would feel if
> we were in his situation…Our imagination comes into this, but only by representing to us
> the feelings we would have if etc. We see or think about a man being tortured on the
> rack; we think of ourselves enduring all the same torments, entering into his body (so to
> speak) and becoming in a way the same person as he is…'Sympathy', though its meaning
> may originally have been the same, can now fairly properly be used to denote our fellow-
> feeling with any passion whatever. (1-2)

Smith states that sympathy is a "fellow-feeling," a kind of stepping into and partially becoming

someone else to feel what they feel through our imagination. A common phrase that we all know

is "you never know what someone else is going through until you walk in their shoes." The same

mentality applies to Creature in the above passage. We yearn to step inside his skin so he can be

relieved of his pain. We want to reach out, hold his hand, and guide him through life. Even

though I claim that we can all be and become monsters, it is important to acknowledge that we

are still human until something happens. Such human-monster tensions both in literature and real

life are what Melville and Shelley are interested in. They create human characters that fall into

monstrosity, yes, but there is a reason why these authors decided to include human beings

instead of ogres, gremlins, or any other fictional figure. By using human characters, Melville and

Shelley make monstrosity more real. We believe them. If we see it happening to other humans in

literature, we start to believe that the same could happen to us, that "fellow-feeling." Sympathy,

at least for a period of time, prolongs a fall into monstrosity that, throughout my analysis of

Ahab, Ishmael, Victor, and now Creature, seems inevitable.

       In terms of further surveying human-monster tensions, Creature's gradual exposure to the

world in Volume II continues to express a causal effect of external, societal monstrosity

internalizing itself into Creature. He teaches himself through observation, but also identifies a

cruelty and evilness in people. Creature continues his story:

> I found that these people possessed a method of communicating their experience and
> feelings to one another by articulate sounds. I perceived that the words they spoke
> sometimes produced pleasure or pain, smiles or sadness, in the minds and countenances
> of the hearers. This was indeed a godlike science, and I ardently desired to become
> acquainted with it. (83)

In this passage, Creature sounds like Victor during his creation-process. Both stress a need for

knowledge. However, the knowledge portrayed in Creature is arguably different. It is not

obsessed or evil or arrogant. It is not monstrous. It is only self-interested in its search for growth,

progress, and individuality. Creature, like a child learning to speak, associates sounds with

expressions, bodily gestures with moods. Creature learns language without an adult-figure to

guide him. He eventually learns how to gather food and water, survive in the woods, and read:

"[the books] consisted of *Paradise Lost*, a volume of *Plutarch's Lives*, and the *Sorrows of

Werter*" (96). As we sympathize[4] with his story, Creature also sympathizes with characters in

books: "I inclined towards the opinions of the hero, whose extinction I wept" (97). Moved by

their struggles, he cries at the deaths of fictional heroes. He is more human than monster—his

humanity winning, so to speak, until society changes the game. Sympathy is often lost in Victor,

but present in Creature from Reader and Author. Also, *Frankenstein* acts, at least here, like a text

within a text. We are reading about a character who is also reading. Creature is, therefore, not

only one of many, but so is the novel and its textuality. Such doubling can be found throughout.

Still, Creature's interactions with the cottage-family take a turn for the worst on multiple

occasions.

---

[4] For a different critical analysis of sympathy within Frankenstein, read Jeanne M. Britton in *Novelistic
Sympathy in Mary Shelley's* Frankenstein

The most powerful scene is when Creature emulates heroes he has read about in books, but is rewarded with gunshot. In Chapter 8, he saves a little girl from drowning. Creature recounts,

> I rushed from my hiding place, and with extreme labour from the force of the current, saved her, and dragged her to shore…when I was suddenly interrupted by the approach of a rustic, who was probably the person from whom she had playfully fled…I hardly knew why; but when the man saw me draw near, he aimed a gun, which he carried, at my body, and fired. I sunk to the ground…this was then the reward of my benevolence? (108)

A short time later, Creature sees a young boy and innocently wants to befriend him. But when he hears that William is Victor's son, he kills him. William is his first kill. The mere utterance of the surname Frankenstein infuriates him. It triggers an internal monstrosity that was externally bred by society. Creature reaches his breaking point and the Monster now possesses him. Shelley transitions Creature from benevolent to evil to show that monstrosity, on the outside, eventually becomes a part of us. In works of horror[5] and reality, monsters are everywhere.

Chapter VI: There's a New Monster in Town

Stephen Crane's *The Monster* bridges to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* because it, too, tells us a story about a character who saves a child and then becomes a monster on the outside as a result of an external force, event, or group of people. In comparison to Shelley, Crane uses society, a Creator (Dr. Trescott), and fire as external monsters that cause internal monstrosity. Crane's *The Monster* is a novella that is overwhelmingly interested in how the world is seen. Crane cares deeply about how things look on the outside in a town full of gossip. In the first few pages, we meet characters who later become the most important: Henry Johnson, a black man employed by the town physician, Dr. Trescott, and Little Jim or Jimmie, the doctor's son. Jimmie and Henry, at least in the beginning, are friends. Jimmie runs to Henry each time he is scolded by

---

[5] For a deeper exploration of Gothic fiction, consider reading Chloe Alexandra Germaine Buckley's *How Monsters are Made: 'No Remorse, No Pity' in Shelley, Dickens, and Priestley's* <u>Mister Creecher</u>

Dr. Trescott, who is "the moon" (3). Crane's recurring metaphors of the moon place Dr. Trescott, like Ahab, at the helm, an early formation of hierarchy in *The Monster*. Crane puts the moon (Dr. Trescott) in charge not only because of its high position, but because of its sublimity. The moon makes us feel small, as Dr. Trescott has the same effect, especially on Jimmie. Though Henry is inferior, he is not portrayed in the normative language of slaves. He is "a very handsome negro, and he was known to be a light, a weight, and an eminence in the suburb of the town [Whilomville, New York]" (3). He wears lavender trousers, and is even described as "a priest arraying himself for some parade of the church" (4).

Such an emphasis on physical appearance isolates Henry from the start. He is not depicted as savage or wild, ugly or frankensteinian. He is well-bred and well-dressed, a man who is almost always the center of attention in Whilomville. Henry is not externally monstrous. At this point, he does not align with the etymology of "monster." Henry is not malformed or one of many like Shelley's Creature. He is also not scarred or part-whale like Melville's Ahab. We see no evidence of monomania or obsession. Overall, Henry is a good-natured man. Still, the amount of interest that surrounds Henry as a character, a black man, and a resident of the town is written so that Henry becomes a spectacle. Crane compares Whilomville to an aquarium: "the people without resembled the inhabitants of a great aquarium that here had a square pane in it. Presently into this frame swam the graceful form of Henry Johnson" (6). Like a fish in a tank, Henry is seen as a thing of entertainment, something to poke, prod, and dissect. Crane's description also plays with concepts of space. An aquarium is an enclosed space with creatures that have been taken out of their natural habitat. Crane may be suggesting that Whilomville, too, boxes people inside, especially Henry. The spatial comparison of the town supports my assertion that Henry is not only Slave to Dr. Trescott, but his surroundings and situation as well.

Whilomville is a town where everything seems picture-perfect until someone takes a closer look. For example, Henry *appears* "simply perfect" in a seemingly perfect town when Miss Bella Farragut runs away from him: "she dashed around the corner of the house, galloping like a horse" (7). Henry, in response, acts like "a guest when a waiter spills claret down his cuff" (7). Henry performs like a guest in his own home, maintaining a kind of performativity and mask as he walks around like there are eggshells on the floor. His façade is most prominent in the most racist scenes. Crane writes,

> Also young Sim came in and went to bed on his pallet in the corner. But to all these domesticities the three maintained an absolute dumbness. They bowed and smiled and ignored and imitated until a late hour, and if they had been the occupants of the most gorgeous salon in the world they could not have been more like three monkeys. (7)

Beside the apparent stereotype of African-Americans as apes, Henry and the other maids are imprisoned by multiple forms of slavery—the agent of monstrosity. Externally, Henry sustains a calm demeanor, but he is submissive to the point of numbness. Their actions are communicated like a "perfect" routine, like they are robots that are programmed to bow, smile, and imitate. In this way, Henry is arguably not human in his mechanical actions, but I still would not yet label him Monster, externally or internally, particularly to Creature or Ahab. I believe Crane uses Slavery as a monstrous institution to show how it forces characters like Henry into dead submission. As Victor reanimates the dead, Crane uses Slavery as a literary agent to make humans into the living dead. Slavery causes us to become only a shadow of ourselves. Thus, even though I claim that Henry does not fall into monstrosity until the fire, he remains affected by an exterior monstrosity (Slavery) that results in internal changes within himself.

Chapter VII: Crane's Perfect Monsters

Just as Crane is interested in making his Whilomville appear perfect, he is equally as concerned with making his characters, particularly Henry, perfect as well. So, is there such a

thing as perfect monsters? To Crane, they exist. Like in Shelley's *Frankenstein* (where external

monstrosity morphs into a monstrosity within Creature), Crane's *The Monster* is also concerned

with characters becoming monsters on the outside because of external forces—like fire and

slavery. Crane's external-external monster causality integrates a notion of perfection into the

work—"perfect slavery," "perfect monster," "perfectly horrible" (13, 21, 40). Crane may

consider there to be a certain criteria for monsters in literature, that Henry is *his* "perfect"

monster in *his* mind. Still, the word "perfect" appears more than once. I argue that Crane's

concept of perfection suggests that both Author and Reader believe that certain characteristics

make a monster just as Melville and Shelley both had respective visions of their monsters in

mind. Crane ticks off boxes of monster tropes in his novella and overlays Melville and Shelley's

monsters onto his own. His language of perfection is most noticeable during the fire, when

Henry externally becomes Monster and saves Jimmie. Crane narrates,

> Swinging about precariously on these reedy legs, he made his way back slowly, back
> along the upper hall. From the way of him then, he had given up almost all idea of
> escaping from the burning house, and with it the desire. He was submitting, submitting
> because of his fathers, bending his mind in a most perfect slavery to this conflagration.
> (13)

Thematically, it is difficult to pinpoint what exactly Crane meant when he wrote "perfect

slavery." It could mean many things. By the mention of "fathers," Crane may infer that African-

Americans, and Henry in *The Monster*, carry the burden of slavery on their backs from past

generations. He may be suggesting that slavery, a monstrosity, occurs across lineages and on a

continuum, either in overt or subtle forms like language. We see these subtle, racist[6] comments

in descriptions of setting: "across the cropped grass the avenue represented to her a kind of black

torrent" (10). Whilomville consistently has a dark quality that is associated with black bodies,

---

[6] For a discussion on race in *The Monster*, consider reading Jacqueline Wilson-Jordan's *Teaching a Dangerous Story: Darwinism and Race in Stephen Crane's* The Monster

black masculinity, and blackness. Diction such as "torrent" and "dark wave" stereotype black

males as violent, which consequently pigeonholes Henry, too, as someone to fear (10). From a

societal standpoint, Crane's Monster—Henry as Slave or Henry as Faceless Man—and Crane's

perfectionism are used as rhetorical devices to not only integrate 19th-century commentary on

slavery and African-Americans as kinds of monsters, but to continue the theme of Whilomville

as a superficially perfect town. Crane's language here, too, also narrows in on physical

appearance. Henry "swings" on "reedy legs" in a passage that takes advantage of repetition to

echo slavery as an agent of external monstrosity. Henry's description creates an image of him as

unstable, a skinny man who barely makes it out of the fire alive. Yet, like Shelley's Creature,

Henry is selfless and willing to risk his life to save a child. Also, phrases such as "back slowly,

back along" and "submitting, submitting because of his fathers" repeat Henry's decline into

slavery and into a monstrosity that does not let go.

Crane's "perfect" monster is also important because it shares a direct correlation to

Shelley's Creature and Melville's Ahab. Creature and Henry are both are constructed, made, and

physically-deformed monsters. After the fire, Henry's "face had simply been burned away" (20).

Like Melville's Ahab, as well, Henry is mutilated and malformed. Ahab's lightning scar and

ivory leg are to Henry's defacement as Shelley's multiple-bodied, created Creature is to Henry's

rise from the dead. Dr. Trescott and Judge Hagenthorpe talk about whether to keep Henry alive:

> …but I am induced to say that you are performing a questionable charity in preserving
> this negro's life. As near as I can understand, he will hereafter be a monster, a perfect
> monster and probably with an affected brain…Nature has very evidently given him up.
> He is dead. You are restoring him to life. You are making him, and he will be a monster,
> and with no mind. (21-22)

Like Victor made Creature from an assemblage of human parts, Trescott, too, is reanimating

Henry, a man with no face or mind. We can read this passage in the same racially-charged lens

as before, that Hagenthorpe considers it "questionable" to keep an African-American man alive. Through a different perspective, Hagenthorpe may also be speaking from sympathy, a detail that also connects to Shelley's *Frankenstein*. As Smith writes that we are naturally inclined to sympathize with characters who are in pain, it is logical to propose that Hagenthorpe might be coming from a similar place. Is it better to revive a man who will be feared by others for the rest of his life or is it more humane to let him die before he can fully become the Monster? We hold similar conversations in contemporary contexts. Families understandably want to hold onto their loved ones on life-support for as long as possible, yet also choose to let them go, so to speak, before the pain worsens. Dr. Trescott, like Victor and Ahab, plays God in the same way that he decides for a man who cannot decide for himself. Henry is bed-ridden and mindless. He has no physical ability during this passage to assert his human will. Still, Dr. Trescott chooses to reanimate Henry and place him into a home. Hereafter, Henry is Monster to everyone around him. Crane writes: "after a silence of deep reflection he continued: 'folks go round sayin' he ain't Hennery Johnson at all. They say he's er devil!'" (27). To society, Henry is unrecognizable. He is their perfect monster on the outside.

Though Dr. Trescott, unlike Victor, does not become some evil scientist and instead maintains a politeness toward Henry, he still has influence over him to the extent that caretakers or doctors have over patients. He feels a certain responsibility and also seems to sympathize with Henry like we do with Creature. Dr. Trescott tells everyone in the room that, "you don't know, my friend. Everybody is so afraid of him, they can't even give him good care. Nobody can attend to him as I do myself" (51). He says this after Twelve and others plot to "get Johnson a place somewhere off up the valley" (51). Crane, in this way, shows the gut reaction of people who are afraid. Twelve immediately wants to discard of Henry so they can return to the perfectness of

Whilomville and the way things were before Henry became a monster. Dr. Trescott still has the final word: "no, John Twelve, it can't be done" (51). He is the only character in *The Monster* who defends and looks after Henry until the very end. Still, Crane vocalizes opinions of other characters (like Twelve) to express a societal concern of monsters. As a whole, *The Monster*, like *Moby Dick* and *Frankenstein*, reflects anxieties about monsters, the monstrous, and monstrosity. Crane, too, is interested in what happens when we become what we most fear.

Chapter VIII: Conclusion

With a 19th-century readership as their audience, Melville, Shelley, and Crane all consciously made the decision to give their respective monsters physical and inner deformities. Why are we analyzing all three works together? I believe the authors sought to work out a tension and concern of the century. While these texts have nearly celebrated two-hundred years, they still find themselves in contemporary culture. Melville, Shelley, and Crane prove that all people have monsters inside. 21st-century literature and popular culture have carried the tradition that literary monsters are paper mirrors of who we are in real life. Young Adult series such as J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*, George R.R. Martin's *Game of Thrones*, and Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* continue to reflect our darkest nightmares through figures like Dementors, White Walkers, and vampires. In case readers are not familiar, Dementors are eyeless, skinless, ghost creatures dressed in black that feed on human souls. White Walkers are the walking dead made of ice. Vampires[7], as we know, consume the living. Those who are bitten become the undead.

Contemporary examples, therefore, linger with the possibility of monsters taking over human societies, bodies, minds, and souls. Exploring Melville, Shelley, and Crane's monsters establishes a foundation that such monsters have existed longer than we may have thought. Each

---

[7] For more information about vampires in literature, read Kandyli and Zontos' *The Old Monster in the New World: the Americanization of the Vampire*

monster in literature builds off of another. I chose to analyze Melville, Shelley, and Crane together because their works "perfectly" intersect, as Crane would say. Many texts as a part of the monster literature genre could have been selected: Washington Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and others. Nonetheless, monster narratives have two things in common: everyone is a monster and everyone can become a monster. Melville, Shelley, and Crane show 19th-century and contemporary readers their monster reflections on the page.

Honor Code

Bibliography

Bissonette, Melissa Bloom. "Teaching the Monster: Frankenstein and Critical Thinking."

    College Literature, vol. 37, no. 3, 2010, pp. 106-120. *EBSCOhost*,search.ebscohost.com/

    login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2011300268&scope=site.

Britton, Jeanne M. "Novelistic Sympathy in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*." *Studies in*

    Romanticism, vol. 48, no. 1, 2009, pp. 3-22. *EBSCOhost*,search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx

    ?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2009581547&scope=site.

Buckley, Chloe Alexandra Germaine. "How Monsters Are Made: 'No Remorse, No Pity' in

    Shelley, Dickens, and Priestley's Mister Creecher." *Horror Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2016,

    pp. 25-40. *EBSCOhost*,search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=

    2016308476&scope=site.

Cole, Michael. "Cellini's Blood." *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 81, no. 2, June, 1999, pp. 215-235.

    <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3050690?seq=8#metadata_info_tab_contents>.

Crane, Stephen. *The Monster and Other Stories*, edited by Mary Carolyn Waldrep. Dover Thrift

    Editions: 2015. Print.

Duban, James. "Narrative Self-Absolution and Political Tyranny in *Moby Dick* and *Darkness at*

    Noon." *Papers on Language and Literature: A Journal for Scholars and Critics of*

    Language and Literature, vol. 54, no. 3, 2018, pp. 237-260. *EBSCOhost*,search.ebsco

    host.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2018582853&scope=site.

Kandyli, Aspa, and Michail Zontos. "The Old Monster in the New World: The Americanization

    of the Vampire." *Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance*, vol. 10, no. 3, Dec.

    2017, pp. 227-247. *EBSCOhost*,search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&

    AN=2018441204&scope=site.

Koenig-Woodyard, Chris (ed.and introd…,et al.) "Monster Studies [Special Issue]." *University of Toronto Quarterly*, vol. 87, no. 1, 2018, pp. 1-280. *EBSCOhost*,search.ebscohost.com/ login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2018700717&scope=site.

Melville, Herman. *Moby Dick: Third Edition*, edited by Hershel Parker. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc: 2002. Print.

McCrystal, Erica. "Hyde the Hero: Changing the Role of the Modern-Day Monster." *University of Toronto Quarterly: A Canadian Journal of the Humanities*, vol. 87, no. 1, 2018, pp. 234-248. *EBSCOhost*,search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2018 700714&scope=site.

Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft. *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*. Pearson Education, A Longman Cultural Second Edition: 2007. Print.

Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Jonathan Bennett, 2017, pp. 1-181. <https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/smith1759.pdf>.

Todd, Jeff. "Ahab and the Glamour of Evil: A Burkean Reading of Ritual in *Moby Dick*." *Papers on Language and Literature: A Journal for Scholars and Critics of Language and Literature*, vol. 33, no. 1, 1997, pp. 3-12. *EBSCOhost*,search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx? direct=true&db=mzh&AN=1997065561&scope=site.

Wilson-Jordan, Jacqueline. "Teaching a Dangerous Story: Darwinism and Race in Stephen Crane's 'The Monster.'" *Eureka Studies in Teaching Short Fiction*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2007, pp. 48-61. *EBSCOhost*,search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN= 2007302818&scope=site.

Honor Code