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Monsters We Become: The Development of the Inhuman Narrative Voice

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MONSTERS WE BECOME:
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INHUMAN NARRATIVE VOICE

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the College of Graduate Studies

Lamar University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

by

C. Jefferson Lacy

May 2006

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ABSTRACT

Monsters We Become:

The Development of the Inhuman Narrative Voice

by

C. Jefferson Lacy

Monsters are usually unsympathetic and senseless, preying on humans without provocation or reason. They are completely Other to humanity. Monsters represent forces of nature or divine wrath—things to which humans are powerless to appeal. Defeating monsters is characteristic of heroes, those who surpass normal human limitations. In the traditional monstrous text, monsters are obstacles for the hero.

In contemporary texts, the tables are turned. Sympathetic yet still Other-ed monsters may represent repressed human desires or marginalized people oppressed by the culture of the “hero.” The key difference is that these monsters use language. They tell their side of the story and gain our sympathy. As this happens, we realize that they are not incarnations of evil but necessary extensions of ourselves.

Analysis of monster theory and three particular monsters—the Minotaur, Grendel, and Caliban—in their original and updated incarnations provides insight into the development of the inhuman voice.

DEDICATIONS

To my wife, Elizabeth, who spent many a precious evening and weekend in the first year of our marriage as a “thesis widow”—not the most desirable or romantic of situations for a new bride to find herself. I thank you for your sacrifice, your patience, and your encouragement. I love you.

To my father and mother, Ed and Sandra Lacy, without whose encouragement to pursue academics I might have found myself in a vastly less stimulating and less fulfilling career. I love you both.

To monsters, from the chain-dragging attic-dweller (cleverly named “Jeff”) whom I imagined in my childhood to the *différance*-dragging fiction-dwellers (named and nameless) imagined by authors everywhere and everywhen. I love you all, but keep your distance.

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“There’s another emotion associated with art, which is not of the beautiful but of the sublime. What we call monsters can be experienced as sublime. They represent powers too vast for the normal forms of life to contain them.”

– Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth* (278)

INTRODUCTION: MONSTERS IN LITERATURE

To say that monsters have been a part of literature since the beginning is not hyperbole. The ancient Sumerian epic poem *Gilgamesh*, the oldest story ever told—or, at least, the oldest recorded story still extant¹—is, in part, the story of a hero and a monster. The great king Gilgamesh seeks to test himself against the monster Humbaba who guards the Cedar Forest. Humbaba, along with other ancient monsters—such as the Minotaur from *The Library* of Apollodorus and Grendel from the Anglo-Saxon epic poem *Beowulf*—demonstrate that monsters are almost completely inhuman. They are unsympathetic and senseless to humans, cruelly preying on them without provocation or reason. Monsters are completely Other, and fear of them is akin to fear of the unknown. Traditionally, monsters tend to represent forces of nature or divine wrath—things to which humans are powerless to appeal. Defeating such monsters is characteristic of heroes, those people powerful enough to surpass normal human limitations. In the traditional monstrous text, then, monsters represent obstacles that the hero must overcome. Rarely are they given human-like voices, a deficit which prevents communication or understanding between the monster and humanity.

In many contemporary texts, however, the tables are turned. The sympathetic yet still Other-ed monster tends to represent any marginalized people—people oppressed by the cultural standards of the domineering “hero.” The key difference is that the newer

monsters use language. They tell their side of the story, justify their actions, and allow us to know them. The more we sympathize and empathize with them, the more we realize that they are not so much incarnations of unknowable evil, or even demonized barbaric Others, as they are extensions of ourselves. Indeed, that monsters in one guise or another continue to reappear in literature no matter how often they die at the hands of heroes speaks to how strongly we need or want to participate in the monstrous on some vicarious or voyeuristic level. As such, we owe it to ourselves to stop killing them with heroes and allow them to speak.

A few authors have done just that. For instance, the story “The House of Asterion” by Jorge Luis Borges provides a glimpse into the life and mind of the Minotaur of the Cretan labyrinth. Steven Sherill’s novel *The Minotaur Takes a Cigarette Break* continues the story of the Minotaur, who has left the labyrinth for the contemporary American South. John Gardner’s novel *Grendel* tells the story of the Anglo-Saxon epic poem *Beowulf* from the monster’s point of view. Tad Williams works a similar feat in his novel, *Caliban’s Hour*, where Caliban offers his point of view on the events of William Shakespeare’s play *The Tempest*. Also, Robert Browning’s “Caliban Upon Setebos” provides further insight into Caliban’s condition. These narratives are all significant in that they give voice and character to an inhuman monster from an older story.

Analysis of ancient monsters, their modern counterparts, as well as the criticism spawned by the use of monsters and the monstrous, provides insight into the human condition as well as to the very special relationship between monsters and language. Monsters, in fact, as Jeffrey Cohen observes, “are not to be thought of as having an existence outside of their social and literary contexts” and language underlies both these

contexts (“Use” 49). The evolution of how we developed the monster in literature and its inhuman voice speaks as much of us as of them.

CHAPTER 1: SURVEY OF MONSTER THEORY

A survey of the current scholarship available on the use of the monster will help trace the development of the inhuman narrative voice. Monsters and their use are the subject of protracted discourse. However, unlike the hero, who has cornerstone works such as Otto Rank's *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* and Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, the monster has no readily identifiable foundation for critical study (with the exception, perhaps, of literary applications of the Jungian shadow). The present discussion is based on the following select list of criticism and commentary:

Immortal Monster: The Mythological Evolution of the Fantastic Beast in Modern Fiction and Film by Joseph Andriano, essays from *Monsters and Monstrosity in Greek and Roman Culture* edited by Catherine Atherton, *Monsters of the Mind: The Face of Evil in Myth, Literature and Contemporary Life* by Frank Cawson, essays from *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* edited by Jeffrey Cohen, "Monstrous Image: Theory of Fantasy Antagonists" by R. E. Foust, "Monsters in Eden: Darwin and Derrida" by Colin Nazhne Milburn, and "Monsters and the Paradox of Horror" by Mark Vorobej. While far from exhaustive, these works represent the ideas of literary and film critics as well as scholars from such diverse fields as anthropology, classical studies, cultural studies, and psychology.

After Jeffrey Cohen's anthology, the present discussion collectively refers to this body of scholarship as *monster theory*, although the designation is not meant to imply any system, cohesion, or agreement among these works. The body of monster theory is often as ambiguous and diverse as the bodies of the monsters themselves. There is no "unified monster theory." Nevertheless, there are several common ideas, including the

fundamental idea that the monster is not easily defined. As classicist Ismene Lada-Richards states the case, “‘monstrosity’ is a semantic field extremely hard to circumscribe” (43). The etymology of the word *monster* reveals but one rather simple definition. According to Cohen, *monster* “derives from the Latin *monstrum*, a divine portent, usually of misfortune. Augustine [...] thought the Latin noun to stem from *monstrare*, ‘to show’; Isidore of Seville [...] glossed *monstrum* as *contra naturam* and connected it to *monere*, ‘to warn’” (“Use” 48). Classicist Catherine Atherton slightly expands on *monstrum*, noting that “one of the traditional rôles played by monsters—as the standard etymology of the Latin *monstrum* indicates—is to signal or presage event or advent, even more terrifying or violently destructive than the monster itself” (vii). Thus, the monster is that which demonstrates or warns that something has gone—or is going to go—awry. For the sake of brevity and convenience, this discussion will refer to this particular use of the monster, the monster-as-*monstrum*, as the *classic monster*.

An analysis of Humbaba in the epic of *Gilgamesh*, the oldest and thus “most classic” monster story, expands on the qualities of classic monster. First, the monster is a relatively minor character in the much larger story of Gilgamesh, a hero. The poet describes Gilgamesh in the opening lines:

Surpassing all kings, powerful and tall
beyond all others, violent, splendid,
a wild bull of a man, unvanquished leader. (Mitchell 71)

The monster, Humbaba, is the protector of the Cedar Forest, where people are forbidden to enter because the place is sacred to the god Enlil. Humbaba also prevents humans from

cutting down the cedars. Being a great hero, though, Gilgamesh does not accept limitations, even from a god. He says:

I must travel now to the Cedar Forest,
where the fierce monster Humbaba lives.
I will conquer him in the Cedar Forest,
I will cut down the tree, I will kill Humbaba,
the whole world will know how mighty I am.
I will make a lasting name for myself,
I will stamp my fame on men's minds forever. (Mitchell 94-5)

Thus, in a quest replayed in hundreds of variations through the centuries, the hero ventures forth to slay the monster.

“Like a letter on the page, the monster signifies something other than itself” (Cohen, “Theses” 4). Humbaba represents the frightening and savage frontier of the untouched wilderness, the outer limit of civilization. As a great king, Gilgamesh represents the pinnacle of human society, even of civilization itself, at that point in time. Even the savage Enkidu—a man just as strong as Gilgamesh, but so wild he can speak with animals—comes to respect Gilgamesh and the culture he represents.² In the poem, Gilgamesh claims to hunt Humbaba in a quest for fame. Symbolically, however, the story presents a cultural struggle in microcosm: Gilgamesh must overcome Humbaba to expand the reach of his own influence and, by extension, the reach of humanity and civilization. Like Humbaba, classic monsters usually either protect a boundary that must not be crossed or are physical manifestations indicating that such a boundary has been crossed. As critic Colin Nazhorne Milburn puts it, “Monsters, denizens of the borderland,

have always represented the extremities of transgression and the limits of the order of things” (603). Examples of this use are numerous: Grendel from the epic of *Beowulf* resides in the moors on the border of the lands settled by the Danes (a geographical boundary); the Minotaur from ancient Grecian myth—who resides in the liminal space of the Cretan labyrinth—is the product of bestiality (a biological boundary); Caliban from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*—who resides on a remote island—is the child of a witch (a moral boundary); Godzilla is stirred from his slumber beneath the Pacific Ocean by the testing of atomic weapons (a scientific boundary); and the monster from Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is the result of a human attempt to approximate the power of the divine (a theological boundary). In each case, the monster appears as a sign indicating horrific outcomes for acts of transgression.

Classic monsters are almost always grotesque in appearance in order to fulfill their role as *monstrum*, “to call horrid attention to the borders that cannot—*must* not—be crossed” (Cohen, “Theses” 13, original emphasis). Classic monsters often have some recognizably human traits, or are at least anthropomorphic in shape, but never are they completely human in appearance. Frank Cawson posits that the “form in which [the monster] appears is always backward looking in evolutionary terms. Its classic form is reptilian—the snake enlarged to the dragon—with the character of the predator, but it can also be a freak, a cross-species miscegenation” (2). Such forms imply “an escape into irresponsibility, aggression, sadistic sexuality or greed, an abandonment to the negative, the destructive, the murderous” (Cawson 2). The dragon from *Beowulf* and Godzilla are examples of the enlarged, reptilian monster; *Beowulf*’s Grendel, related to the giants of the Old Testament, is an instance of the “backward looking” monster; the bull-headed

Minotaur is a perfect example of the “freak,” as is the malformed monster of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Although Frankenstein’s monster is formed from mismatched human anatomy, the freak is more commonly rendered like the Minotaur—as hybrid of animal and human features. Freaks and hybrids physically embody transgression and their “externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration” (Cohen, “Theses” 6). Milburn also discusses how monsters defy categorization: “Monsters disrupt totalizing conceptions of nature and destroy taxonomic logics, at once defining and challenging the limits of the natural” (604). Furthermore, Lada-Richards uses *monstrous* as a term “primarily applying to creatures which do not fit neatly within their own culture’s taxonomic system” (48).

Like a cartoon character that is able to fly simply by virtue of not realizing that it should be falling, the classic monster meets its fate when the forces of order finally notice its transgressive nature. A creature that defies categorization, in effect, invalidates the categorical system. The task of the hero is to re-validate that system by destroying the monster, the symbol of transgression. As Cohen states the case, monsters sit “at the margins of the knowable, ready to test the characterizing essence of a hero by not partaking of that composition themselves, and finally [force] the heroic to assert itself against their Otherness and thereby define its own assumptions” (“Use” 52). In fact, the re-validation of the hero’s cultural values is really what is at stake in the classic monstrous narrative: “the encounter with the monster necessitates an assertion and evaluation of the textual (generic, chivalric, social) ideology” (Cohen, “Use” 53). Whenever a monster is created, it is inevitable that a hero appears to destroy it. As

classicist Ken Dowden explains, when “animal creatures (‘monsters’) exist, they generally exist in order to be defeated” (116).

To oversimplify the argument, the use of the classic monster-as-*monstrum* is basically as a whipping boy or a scapegoat. Furthermore, the classic monster is by no means just an ancient phenomenon; it persists in contemporary literature and film in the genres of fantasy, science fiction, and horror. Literary critic R. E. Foust notes that “the classic fantasy quest plot” and “all science fiction based upon the alien encounter theme” both “typically [take] the form of an epic conflict between a representative human culture hero and an adversary who seems hellishly compounded of both human and animal or vegetable nature” (452). Mark Vorobej’s discussion on modern monsters in the genre of horror is applicable here: “Horror monsters exist in large measure in order to be destroyed. [...] Horror narratives essentially recount the ritualistic purification of a polluted world” (238). The aliens from feature films such as Ridley Scott’s *Alien* and its sequels, Paul Verhoeven’s *Starship Troopers* (based on the Robert A. Heinlein book of the same title) and Roland Emmerich’s *Independence Day*, are excellent examples of the contemporary classic monster. The aliens in these films have strikingly similar characteristics: they all come from outer space (beyond the boundaries of earth), are insect-like with few or no recognizably human traits, and are so uncompromisingly violent towards humanity that they give the humans no other choice but to destroy them.

The classic monster tends to represent a boundary; it is inhuman in appearance; it is destroyed by a hero. These are a few fundamental traits of monsters with which scholars can (usually) agree. Cohen summarizes a few other recurrent (but not necessarily universal) traits of the classic monster:

monsters are usually associated with marginality (they dwell in a distant place with symbolic charge, on civilization's periphery), anteriority (the monster originates in some invented or re-invented history, rather than in the narrative present), excessive appetite, anarchic violence, and perverse or misdirected sexuality. 'Marginality' and 'anteriority' are traits resulting from the banishing of the monster from the *oikumene*, the fiction-producing center; the triple linking of violence and appetite with the destructive expression of libido suggests why this removal is necessary. The monstrous is thus intricately tied to that ambitious category in modern critical praxis, the Other. ("Use" 49)

Lada-Richards agrees with the monster's association with the Other:³ the monster's "prerogatives and its essence are powerfully interlocked with the perennial dialectic of 'Otherness' with respect to 'Norm'" (46). In the traditional use "from the evolutionary perspective," according to evolutionary psychiatrist Anthony Stevens, "the struggle between [hero and monster] represents the actual struggle between our homid ancestors and the dangerous predatory beasts with whom they were forced to compete for the earth's resources" (viii), a statement approximating the interpretation of *Gilgamesh* discussed earlier. To synthesize the observation of Stevens with that of Lada-Richards, the Norm in question to our ancestors was simply "human" and the Other was "inhuman."

Such is the generic role of the classic monster: dwelling on a border, indicative of transgression, inhuman, Other, and doomed to be killed by a hero. Furthermore—and this is a point mentioned but briefly or indirectly in much of monster theory—the classic

monster is almost always without speech or dialogue.⁴ Vorobej touches on this idea in his discussion on the horror monster, which “conveniently cannot (or chooses not to) talk, or communicate with us in any other fashion” (229). Other critics may take the silence of the classic monster as part and parcel of its animal nature, its inhumanity, its Otherness, but nevertheless the silence of the monster is a significant characteristic.

Criticism makes much of the monster, even in the humble role of monster-as-*monstrum*. As Joseph Andriano states:

These fantastic beasts were long thought to represent the monstrous Other we feared yet found fascinating. But at least since Freud’s time, we have come to know the monster is a projection of some repressed part of the Self. Whether repressed id, shadow, animus, anima, instinct, or impulse from the reptile brain; whether oppressed race or extirpated species, the uncanny monster is the familiar Self disguised as the alien Other. (xi)

Stevens, too, notes that “from the psychological perspective, the monster is the ‘monster within’” (viii). Foust agrees as well:

The monster mediates between the daylight society of a self-created Ego and the boggy night country of the inchoate and imperfectly repressed Id, which it imaginatively represents. Thus the antagonist is not something external to ourselves, merely a threat occasioning the intervention of the Hero (although this also occurs). It is our chthonic *doppelgänger*, our *semblable*, our ‘secret sharer.’ It seems to stare at us with mingled loathing and longing from some dark geography lying in a past we attempt repeatedly to forget. The adversary’s fate—its eternal malevolence, its

more-than-human pitifulness, its universal doom—constitutes a chapter in the spiritual autobiography of the human race. (452-453)

Such a wealth of significance from inhuman literary characters that do not even speak!

With this awareness that monsters are, in fact, extensions of humanity, the qualities usually considered monstrous begin to slide back and forth between the inhuman and the human. Catherine Atherton explains:

[The] very question of the definition of “monstrous” is both unsettled and unsettling. Mary Shelley’s “monster” attacks Frankenstein’s “monstrous” indifference to his creature’s justified and eloquently-argued case for a secure and loving ethical upbringing within human society; film versions of the book tend to portray Frankenstein instead as the “monstrous” scientist, playing God, familiar from any number of sci-fi scenarios. *The Elephant Man*, cherished and piously raised by his mother, speaks with a gentleness and sensitivity his voyeuristic exploiters and tormentors “monstrously” lack. Even King Kong, lacking language as well as family, falls in love, and, made vulnerable by this “human” emotion, falls to his death at the hands of “monstrous” human hunter-killers. (ix)

How did this happen? The foremost reason is the advancement of exploration and science. “Ancient and medieval man’s long-standing tendency to treat monsters as prodigies, signs of God’s wrath or heralds of misfortune jostles with the rationality of the emerging sciences before it ultimately gives way to the process of the monster’s ‘naturalisation’” (Lada-Richards 45). For ancient cultures, monsters populate the unexplored fringes of the known world. As exploration and science expands our

knowledge of the world, the fringe and the true wilderness dwindle. Leviathan becomes the Loch Ness Monster; Grendel becomes Bigfoot—both notably diminished and much less awesome. The new fringe areas lie beyond the Earth and the limitations of our own knowledge. Correspondingly, classic monsters now usually come from the depths of space (such as in the *Alien* movie franchise) or are made from our own science gone wrong (the monster of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is seminal in this regard). Other monsters, however, such as vampires and werewolves often appear human or can assume human form and walk among us. Perhaps most terrifyingly of all, sometimes the monsters *are* us, such as Mr. Hyde in Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Hannibal Lector in Thomas Harris's *The Silence of the Lambs*, and Patrick Bateman in Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*. All of this implies that the last unknowable frontier lies within our own cultures and psyches.

Indeed, Lada-Richards and Atherton both make the case that, since monstrosity is fundamentally about the opposition of Norm to Other, then the definition of monstrosity must therefore change as the Norm changes, with location, culture, and time. Likewise, rather than retaining a static role, the monster takes on new roles as we examine our cultural demarcations of Norm and Other. As Cawson states, "The monster is intrinsic while our awareness of the monster has evolved" (161).

Our demarcations of Norm and Other have certainly evolved. The Norm/Other dialectic (and therefore the hero/monster and human/inhuman dialectics which mirror it) is what poststructural theorist Jacques Derrida would term a binary opposition,⁵ whereby the Other's characteristics are *perceived to be* mutually exclusive of the Norm's characteristics. The Norm is the privileged and superior half of the binary opposition; the

monster is the devalued and inferior. The Norm/Other binary is of particular importance because it puts the Other/monster/inhuman—and all of the “lesser” values it represents, i.e. its evil to the hero’s good, its unholiness to the hero’s holiness, its injustice to the hero’s justice, its incongruity to the hero’s wholeness—at a distance to the Norm/hero/human of the originating culture. The culture, therefore, identifies with the virtues (read: potential for congruity) represented by the hero and fails to recognize in itself the shortcomings (read: potential for transgression) represented by the monster.

After Derrida and deconstruction, however, it is customary to recognize that the parts of a binary opposition are not mutually exclusive and any cultural privilege given to one is easily deconstructed and thus called into question. Since both the monster and hero find their roots in the language and imagination of the story-telling culture, the fundamental essence of both must originate in that same culture. Furthermore, rarely are the monster’s and hero’s characteristics so mutually exclusive. For instance, they both almost invariably use extreme violence and they are both often male. The breakdown of mutual exclusivity of Norm/Other, hero/monster, and human/inhuman allows for developments such as monsters with human qualities (such as Frankenstein’s monster and King Kong) and humans with monstrous qualities (such as Lector and Bateman).

The notion of cultural identification in relation to the hero/monster relationship is especially significant in postcolonial readings of monstrous texts. Postcolonial theory “explores and interrogates the situation of colonized peoples both during and after colonization,” and as such often discusses matters close to the discussion of monsters, such as marginality and the Other (*Bedford* 356). Postcolonial theory also builds arguments from deconstruction’s challenge of binary oppositions, embracing the

“concept of hybridity—which suggests a crossover or amalgamation that produces something unalterably new and independent,” already discussed here as trait often seen in monsters (*Bedford* 358). Under the scrutiny of postcolonial theory, monsters are seen as none-too-flattering depictions of demonized foreigners and the hero’s quest to slay the monster is read as a symbolic justification for the oppression of another (an Other) culture. More of Vorobej’s observations apply here:

Monsters are rarely talked to, listened to, negotiated with, offered food, shelter, or medical treatment, nurtured, loved, or even captured, tortured, experimented upon, incarcerated in zoos, museums, circuses, prisons, or insane asylums, encouraged to undergo psychotherapy, or granted citizenship. (238-9)

So, the monster is interpreted as many things, depending on the place and the time: from its classic role as *monstrum*, to the more modern roles as the externalized symbol of the dark regions of our psyche or caricatures of foreign and marginalized peoples. Yet, despite awareness of these interpretations, by and large, monsters are still habitually destroyed when they appear in texts. The destruction is understandable in the classic sense, where “[we] expect the unclean and unholy intruder to be excised from consciousness as well so that it and the particular threat it posed may be laid to rest forever” (Vorobej 238). However, destruction seems unnecessary and perhaps even immoral in the modern sense, where the monster represents a part of ourselves or another culture. Since “humankind is the creator of its own legend, lore, and myth, then it is humankind that re-creates itself in the image and likeness of these monsters” (Hallett 62). Why, then, do we need still the hero to kill the monster?

Why, indeed. Vorobej poses the same question: If “[battling] monsters is a thinly veiled odyssey of self-exploration” (239), then:

The most basic and most perplexing question [...] is why self-knowledge must be gained in horror through the employment of violence aimed at the destruction of the life or well-being of the monstrous antagonist. Why, that is, must we kill or mutilate in order to learn about ourselves? Or better: what is it about ourselves that we can discover only through the orgiastic spectacle of cataclysmic destruction? There is likely little hope of fully resolving the paradox of horror without carefully exploring the complicated and disquieting fascination we share with the annihilation of the alien, evil Other. (240).

Stevens addresses this question from a psychological perspective—that the monster represents a dark, repressed part of the human personality—and attests that the “hero’s victory over the monster has to be accomplished anew every generation, for this victory alone can guarantee the maintenance and historical survival of the group” (viii). That the monster, in a sense, allows us “to express in a safe, clearly delimited space fantasies of aggression, domination, and inversion” (Cohen, “Use” 54), Stevens implies that it is irresponsible to allow these fantasies to get out of hand. The hero must slay the monster again and again just as we must control our fantasies of aggression again and again. The voyeuristic pleasure and vicarious release we achieve from participating in the monstrous must end, and in the end the monster’s death symbolizes that we do not approve of the monster’s behavior as much as we want to witness it.

This is not a universal point of view in monster theory. Many see the ubiquity of the monster in literature and culture as a testament to how necessary it is. Cawson puts it the most succinctly: “The monster is not to be repressed, ignored or worshipped—acknowledged, he is the way into the healing process” (161). Andriano states the same basic idea in literary terms:

Underlying this study of monsters as tropes is the basic distinction between metaphor and metonymy. [...] When a monster is a metaphor, it is a representation of some human characteristic. When it is a metonym, the monster is represented in contiguity with the human, in juxtaposition. King Kong, for example, may be interpreted as an image of both the ape within us and the ape nearby (e.g., the gorilla). By viewing him as both, we are able to bridge the gap between Self and Other. Metaphor transforms animal into human (and vice versa); metonymy places them side by side: both therefore help us better understand who and what we are. (xiv)

Lada-Richards has a similarly positive interpretation of the monster’s incongruous body within the contexts of hybrid monsters used in ancient Greek and Roman rituals (and what is the repetitious creation and destruction of monsters throughout the ages if not a ritual?):

Rather than being loathed and shunned for deviating from the normal paths of nature and thus transgressively encroaching on other modes of existence, the ritual monster can be viewed in a much more reassuring light: through its fusion of categories which in most well-ordered societies

would have seemed mutually exclusive (e.g. male/female, human/bestial, etc.) the monster may come to represent all that is ‘universal, innate, whole, and unified.’ In this respect, the ‘monstrosity’ of an initiatory hybrid apparition can be transformed into a positive example: rather than encoding what the initiands must *not* become, the monster embraces a wider spectrum of experience that the initiands *must get thoroughly familiarised with* [...]. Seen in such a light, the boundary-crossing monster can even be conceived of as a ‘double’ or an ‘analogue’ to the initiand himself, whom many a time the rite seeks to fashion into a ‘totality’, by engendering in him or her characteristics of both sexes, attributes from both nature and culture, and so on. (57-8, original emphasis)

Cohen also praises the example and point of view of monsters:

They can be pushed to the farthest margins of geography and discourse, hidden away at the edges of the world and in the forbidden recesses of our mind, but they always return. And when they come back, they bring not just a fuller knowledge of our place in history and the history of knowing our place, but they bear self-knowledge, *human* knowledge—and a discourse all the more sacred as it arises from the Outside. (“Theses” 20)

The ideal monstrous text, then, would seem to be one where the monster not only plays more than an incidental role, but actually has the opportunity to speak. Even though “fictions that provide even minimal insight into the mental state of a monster are very much exceptions to the rule,” the few that exist are significant (Vorobej 230). Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is an obvious choice; it may very well be the most popular and

influential narrative featuring an inhuman voice. However, there is already wealth of criticism on *Frankenstein* and, furthermore, there are three other monsters in particular that better demonstrate the full development of the monster and the inhuman voice.

The first two monsters are examples of the classic, unvoiced, wholly Other, monster-as-*monstrum*: the Minotaur from ancient Greek myth and Grendel from the epic of *Beowulf*. The Minotaur has several modern incarnations, each illustrating a different step in the development of monsters as revealed in the previous discussion of monster theory. André Gide's novella *Theseus* (1946) turns the Minotaur into a psychological symbol, Jorge Luis Borges's short story "The House of Asterion" (1949) creates sympathy for the Minotaur by giving him voice and life of his own, and finally Steven Sherrill's novel *The Minotaur Takes a Cigarette Break* (2000) maintains the sympathy (via different means) but places the Minotaur in interesting predicaments regarding race and language. Grendel has been retextualized only once, but that text is significant. John Gardner's novel *Grendel* (1971), wherein Grendel tells the tale of *Beowulf* from his own point of view, turns Grendel into a philosopher and puts him in a position of actively (rather than symbolically) addressing the notions of the heroic and the monstrous in his own terms.

Finally, although he is not a strict example of a classic monster, Caliban from William Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* (first performed in 1611) is an interesting take on the monstrous. In Robert Browning's poem "Caliban upon Setebos" (first published in *Dramatis Personae*, 1864), Caliban speaks of his god Setebos and, like Grendel in Gardner's novel, gets to tell *The Tempest* from his point of view in Tad Williams's novel *Caliban's Hour* (1994).

CHAPTER 2—THE MINOTAUR

THE MINOTAUR IN *THE LIBRARY* OF APOLLODORUS

Asterius is the proper name of the Minotaur, who originates in ancient Greek myth as a character in the legends of the Cretan King Minos (whose wife gives birth to Asterius), and of the Athenian hero Theseus (who slays him). Asterius is part man and part bull—a hybrid creature in the tradition of other mythological monsters such as the centaur (part man, part horse), the harpy (part woman, part bird), and the satyr (part man, part goat). Some classical authors vary in the specifics of Asterius’s physical appearance, but most ancient and modern representations of the Minotaur conform to this description from Diodorus of Sicily: “the upper parts of the body as far as the shoulders being those of a bull and the remaining parts those of a man” (61). Even though Asterius is mentioned only briefly in the stories of Minos and Theseus, his recurring presence in visual art since the Archaic period makes him one of the most recognizable monsters from Greek mythology.⁶

As is the case with many ancient legends, no single text exists that relates the “accepted” or “authoritative” version of the story of Asterius. Even the earliest extant texts that mention Asterius (either by name or as “the Minotaur”) refer to earlier authors. For instance, Diodorus’s account written during the first century BCE is full of phrases such as, “according to the myth,” “the myths offer the following account,” “they say,” “the story goes,” *et cetera* (61). Several classical authors, including Catullus, Diodorus, Hyginus, Ovid, Pausanias, and Virgil, refer to the Minotaur—usually in their versions of the legends of Minos and Theseus—but Apollodorus’s *The Library* and Plutarch’s *Lives* contain the most developed accounts.

Generally attributed to Apollodorus the Grammarian of Athens writing *circa* 140 BCE,⁷ *The Library* is “a plain unvarnished summary of Greek myths and heroic legends” (xvii). Conversely, Plutarch, writing *circa* 100 CE, hopes that in *Lives* “Fable may [. . .] submit to the purifying processes of Reason as to take the character of exact history” (2). Thus, whereas Plutarch attempts to approach accurate historicity and digresses from storytelling to entertain reasonable conjectures such as “the labyrinth was only an ordinary prison” or to speculate that the Minotaur was, in reality, probably “a man of no merciful or gentle disposition” in Minos’s employ named or nicknamed Taurus (12),⁸ Apollodorus preserves the fabulous aspects of the myth. For the purpose of analyzing the Minotaur as a monster, then, *The Library* of Apollodorus serves best.

The most obvious quality Asterius has as a character in the legends of Minos and Theseus is his singular *lack* of character. He has no dialogue, no personality, and no dramatic arc. The narrator mentions his name only once. The lines of text in *The Library* that refer to him at all are easily cataloged:

1. “And [Pasiphae] gave birth to Asterius, who was called the Minotaur. He had the face of a bull, but the rest of him was human; and Minos, in compliance with certain oracles, shut him up and guarded him in the Labyrinth” (1: 305).
2. “The story of the Minotaur, and Androgeus, and Phaedra, and Ariadne, I will tell hereafter in my account of Theseus” (1: 307).
3. “And Minos ordered [the Athenians] to send seven youths and the same number of damsels without weapons to be fodder for the Minotaur. Now the Minotaur was confined in a labyrinth, in which he who entered could not find

his way out; for many a winding turn shut off the secret outward way” (2: 119, 121).

4. “And there Pasiphae having fallen in love with the bull of Poseidon, Daedalus acted as her accomplice by contriving a wooden cow, and he constructed the labyrinth, to which the Athenians every year sent seven youths and as many damsels to be fodder for the Minotaur” (2: 123).
5. “And [Theseus] was numbered among those who were to be sent as the third tribute to the Minotaur; or, as some affirm, he offered himself voluntarily” (2: 135).
6. “And having found the Minotaur in the last part of the labyrinth, [Theseus] killed him by smiting him with his fists; and drawing the clue after him made his way out again” (2: 135, 137).

Asterius’s involvement in *The Library* boils down to these six passages, some of which are redundant. He is born; he lives in the labyrinth; Minos feeds him Athenian children; Theseus kills him. In short, he is not so much a character as a plot device. Asterius’s *raison d’être* seems to be an ugly footnote in Minos’s story that sets him up as one of many villains dispatched on Theseus’s violent road to glory. Yet even existing only in these brief passages, Asterius is more than just a proverbial notch on Theseus’s hilt. Like Humbaba in the epic of *Gilgamesh*, Asterius is often interpreted as guarding a border. Instead of a physical border, however, Asterius guards a metaphysical and liminal border within the labyrinth.⁹ The labyrinth—with its easy and vague representation of life, choices, *et cetera*—provides a convenient basis for various allegorical interpretations of of Minos, Theseus, and the Minotaur.¹⁰ For instance, if one interprets the labyrinth as the

world of sin, Asterius falls into place as Satan and Theseus as Jesus (despite the numerous Christian characteristics he lacks). Interpret the labyrinth as life and its many choices, then Asterius becomes death or failure. When the labyrinth is the focus of interpretation, Asterius, Theseus, and Minos fall into generic roles that could be related to any monster, hero, or tyrant. To better apprehend Asterius as a character in the stories of Minos and Theseus, we must avoid the external allegorical contexts to which he has been applied and analyze his presence and significance in his narrative of origin.

Asterius means “starry one,”¹¹ which, unfortunately, does not provide much insight into the Minotaur’s character; in Apollodorus’s telling, there is no correlation between Asterius and the night sky. Furthermore, *Asterius* is not a unique name in *The Library*. Asterius is the name of one of Neleus’s many sons (and it may strike one as an odd coincidence that another of his sons happens to be named Taurus) (1: 85). In another possible, but tenuous, connection, Neleus is a son of Poseidon. This fact may be significant because Poseidon also figures heavily in the story of Minos, is Theseus’s father (or, at least, is one of Theseus’s fathers), and is effectively the Minotaur’s grandfather. Another Asterius serves alongside Theseus as one of Jason’s Argonauts (1: 99). The last Asterius (called here “the elder Asterius” for clarification) is a king of Crete, Minos’s stepfather, and possibly the Minotaur’s namesake.

Even though *minotaur* means “bull of Minos,” Asterius is no more Minos’s proper son than Minos is to the elder Asterius. Minos’s real father is Zeus, who abducts the Phoenician princess Europa while (interestingly enough) in the form of a bull, carries her from Phoenicia to Crete, and begets three children with her, Minos among them. The elder Asterius marries Europa after these births. When the elder Asterius dies with no

legitimate heirs (the only children Europa ever has are by Zeus), Minos claims reign over Crete, but is disputed. He prays to the god Poseidon, asks for a bull to emerge from the sea as a sign of his favor, and promises to sacrifice the bull in Poseidon's honor. Poseidon sends Minos a large, white bull out from the sea, but it is so magnificent that Minos sacrifices another bull instead. Poseidon, angry, turns the bull savage and makes Minos's wife Pasiphae fall in love with it. She has Daedalus (a clever Athenian who comes to Crete after being banished for murder) construct a wooden, leather-covered cow in which she hides to couple with Poseidon's bull. Pasiphae then "gave birth to Asterius, who was called the Minotaur" (1: 305).

In Apollodorus's text, it is not clear who, exactly, gives the Minotaur his name and despite the natural inclination to draw some sort of association between Asterius the Minotaur and the other characters named Asterius (especially Minos's stepfather), such an attempt does not prove productive. Perhaps, if Pasiphae has any motherly inclinations towards the Minotaur, she names him for Minos's step-father in hopes that Minos will remember the kindly king who raised him even though Minos himself is the son of a divine bull. Perhaps Poseidon influences Pasiphae to name the Minotaur after the last legitimate king as an insult implying that the Minotaur is more the rightful heir to Crete than Minos, or even as a subtle portent implying that Crete's fate is tied to that of the Minotaur. This last suggestion makes sense in two ways: the fact that Minos is killed soon after Theseus slays Asterius and also that Minos "guarded" Asterius in the labyrinth on the advice of the oracles (1: 305). *Guarded* implies the confinement is for Asterius's protection. Minos's original inclination might have been to kill Asterius, yet evidently something the oracles say must convince him otherwise.

The nomenclature *minotaur* makes this connection to Minos stronger. The passage that mentions Asterius's birth is the only textual reference to his name. In each other passage, he is "the Minotaur," a usage that, according to critic Maurice J. Bennett, "emphasizes the bestial and the terrifying rather than the human" (167). More significantly, however, if *minotaur* means "bull of Minos," and Asterius, technically, is not Minos's son, then how is Asterius the "bull of Minos"? Minos, while not Asterius's biological father, is still very much responsible for his coming to be. The Minotaur is often seen as a scarlet letter marking Pasiphae's bestiality (Brumble 223, Curley 196). However, Pasiphae's act is not of her own doing; typical of the meddling Grecian gods, Poseidon engenders her passion and she has little choice in the matter.¹² The Minotaur is undoubtedly Minos's punishment for failing to fulfill his pledge to Poseidon—the evidence is in his epithet. Asterius is "called the Minotaur," not the Pasiphotaur, or anything else. Asterius, as a classic monster in the traditional sense of *monstrum* or portent, is a message for Minos that he has transgressed.

Pasiphae's "transgression" becomes even more significant when one considers that it is, in fact, against her will. Her involuntary bestiality is as much a part of Poseidon's justice upon Minos as is the birth of Asterius. In many ways, Poseidon chastises transgression with transgression. Minos's outrage at being cuckolded by a bull reflects Poseidon's outrage at being betrayed by a mortal. Minos desires to keep Poseidon's bull, and when he sacrifices a common bull, he makes his covetous desire manifest. He turns his ignoble impulse into a blatant, intentional transgression. Minos's desire is reflected in Pasiphae's very different desire for the bull, and she, too, acts on her desire with purposeful premeditation. For another parallel, note that both Minos's and

Pasiphae's acts require counterfeits. Minos hopes to pass off a common bull as the divine bull and Pasiphae hopes to pass herself off as a cow. Minos is also guilty of breaking a pledge to a god, a transgression against dogma and against his station in the great chain of being. Furthermore, Minos must think incredibly highly of himself if he believes he can cheat a god. Pasiphae lowering herself to become a cow thus mocks Minos's attempt to raise himself to the level of a god. Her humiliation is the punitive corollary to his arrogance.

This particular brand of vengeance-*cum*-justice is common in Greek mythology. There are several more examples of this sense of justice in the stories of Minos and Theseus. For instance, Pasiphae curses Minos in such a way that any woman with whom he has an affair is killed by "wild beasts" discharged from his body (Apollodorus 2: 105). One woman, however, manages to avoid the curse. Procris lives through her *rendezvous* with Minos—who gives her a dart as a gift—but later dies when her husband hits her with a dart in a hunting accident (2: 105). When Theseus first visits Athens, he travels a road overrun with robbers, each with his own unique style of killing: Periphetes "the Clubman" kills with an iron club; Sinis "the Pine-bender" uses pine trees as catapults to fling his victims; Sciron kicks victims into the sea; Cercyon is a lethal wrestler; Damastes offers rest to passers-by in one of two beds, hammering out short people to fit in the bigger bed, sawing off the limbs of tall people to fit in the smaller bed. In an impressive run of vengeful one-upsmanship justice, the heroic Theseus kills them all by their own methods (2: 123-33). In these myths, then, justice is obviously defined as revisiting the wrongs upon the wrongdoer.

If the birth of the Minotaur is an example of this same kind of justice, then the Minotaur, as the result of Pasiphae's unnatural desire, should parallel the result of Minos's desire. Minos's desire causes him to leave his pledge unfulfilled, which, as a result leaves Poseidon's preternatural, perfect, beautiful bull—a fragment of divinity—running amok in the mortal realm waiting to be returned. The Minotaur, in contrast, is a preternatural, imperfect, grotesque reminder that Minos owes Poseidon his bull, that Minos no longer has Poseidon's favor, and reigns over Crete under a false claim of that favor. This is an apt interpretation, since both Asterius and Poseidon's bull visit more misfortune upon Minos as the story continues.

After Minos confines him in the labyrinth, Asterius is absent from *The Library* until Apollodorus tells the legend of Theseus. It is unclear how much time has elapsed—*The Library* is far from linear—but it is important to note that Poseidon's bull, sometimes called the Cretan bull,¹³ is now the bull of Marathon thanks to Hercules:

To attack this bull Hercules came to Crete, and when, in reply to his request for aid, Minos told him to fight and catch the bull for himself, he caught it and brought it to Eurystheus, and having shown it to him he let it afterwards go free. But the bull roamed to Sparta and all Arcadia, and traversing the Isthmus arrived at Marathon in Attica and harried the inhabitants. (Apollodorus 1: 199, 201)

Thus, Minos escapes the savage bull with no effort on his part, and the bull of Poseidon's wrath now punishes the undeserving. Perhaps, had Minos helped Hercules, they could have sacrificed it to Poseidon. Rather, as it turns out, the bull kills Minos's own son Androgeus in another instance of one-upsmanship justice when Aegeus, ruler of Athens,

sends Androgeus to kill the bull:¹⁴ “But [Aegeus] himself came to Athens and celebrated the games of the Panathenian festival, in which Androgeus, son of Minos, vanquished all comers. Him Aegeus sent against the bull of Marathon, by which he was destroyed” (2: 115).

To avenge the death of his son, Minos wages war against Athens and prays to Zeus, who plagues Athens with famine and pestilence. The oracles eventually advise the Athenians to “give Minos whatever satisfaction he might choose” to end the misery, in response to which “Minos ordered them to send seven youths and the same number of damsels without weapons to be fodder for the Minotaur” (2: 119). *Fodder*, in the sense of “food for domestic animals,” implies that Asterius eats the young people. Apollodorus does not mention that Asterius required human victims before Minos defeated Athens, so it is likely that Minos requires the sacrificial tribute as an act of spiteful vengeance rather than necessity. Killing fourteen youths a year to avenge Androgeus is Minos’s symbolic way of saying that Androgeus is worth several Athenians, which reinforces Androgeus’s victory in the Athenian games. So Asterius, once the bane of Minos, is now the bane of Athens, both in the name of justice. Minos’s need for justice, however, is unfounded since it is his own neglect of his duties which leads to the death of his son Androgeus. Minos thus unjustly transfers Poseidon’s punishment to cause others to suffer.

Enter Theseus. Theseus’s conception is foretold to his father Aegeus (the same Aegeus who sends Androgeus to his death) by an oracle at Pythia (2: 115). Also, both Aegeus and Poseidon “had connexion” with Theseus’s mother, Aethra, on the night of his conception (2: 115). The text does not imply patriarchal confusion, so the reader can assume that Theseus is the son of *both* Aegeus and Poseidon rather than one or the other.

So not only is Theseus the rightful heir of Athens, he is also partially divine—an apt combination for a hero and an appropriate foil for Minos who, while partially divine, is the illegitimate and dishonorable heir to Crete. By killing the aforementioned robbers on the road to Athens, Theseus demonstrates himself to be an able tool of ancient Grecian justice. Theseus continues to be a righter of wrongs, most notably (and very *apropos*, considering he is the son of Poseidon) Minos's wrongs.

First, Theseus returns Poseidon's bull to him. Upon reaching Athens, Aegeus (not recognizing him) sends him against the bull of Marathon. Where Androgeus fails, however, Theseus triumphs. In true heroic style, Theseus sets things aright through bloodshed. After killing the bull of Marathon, Theseus reveals himself to Aegeus and claims his place as prince. Soon after, the time comes for the third tribute to be sent to Crete. Theseus volunteers to be among the youths sent to Crete, intending to kill Asterius and put a halt to the tributes. Theseus could, instead, seek to kill Minos, who demands the tributes. After all, the Minotaur is not out harrying innocents like the bull of Marathon; Asterius would not be in a position to hurt anyone if Minos did not deliver victims to him; furthermore, Asterius would not even exist if it were not for Minos's treachery. But, in the traditional use, the hero targets the symbol of transgression, not necessarily the transgressor. Theseus acquires the assistance of Minos's love-smitten daughter Ariadne, who learns from Daedalus the secret of navigating the labyrinth.¹⁵ Asterius's death at the hands of Theseus is given no more detail than the robbers: "And having found the Minotaur in the last part of the labyrinth, [Theseus] killed him by smiting him with his fists" (2: 137). Theseus thus ends Minos's reign of terror over the Athenians.

Continuing the theme of justice, the story finally comes full circle back upon Minos. Since Daedalus helped Theseus kill Asterius, Minos imprisons Daedalus in the labyrinth. Daedalus escapes, however, and finds refuge in Camicus in the court of Cocalus. Minos pursues Daedalus, discovers him at Camicus, and demands that Cocalus surrender him. Even though Cocalus agrees, he orders his daughters to murder Minos by drowning him in boiling water. Therefore, ultimately, Poseidon gets back what is his by his own progeny, and Minos meets his end waiting for that which was promised back to him. It is interesting to note, too, that Minos dies by water, Poseidon's own element.¹⁶

In *The Library*, then, Asterius is a prime example of a classic monster. He is not an wholly insignificant foe, like the robbers Theseus kills; he is *monstrum*, with all the extra weight that term implies. His arrival signals doom for Minos. Since Asterius's presence parallels Minos's unfulfilled promise, once Poseidon's bull is returned to him, Asterius is not far behind, and Minos's undeserved tyranny ends shortly thereafter. Apollodorus's Asterius is not just called "the Minotaur," that is exactly what he is: as the bull of Minos he is a thorn in the side of one who angers a god and a target for the hero Theseus who sets things aright. Asterius is purely a function of the other characters; he has no personality, agenda, or voice of his own.

THE MINOTAUR IN ANDRÉ GIDE'S *THESEUS*

André Gide's *Theseus*¹⁷ offers a somewhat different version of Asterius, although the plot is fundamentally the same as Apollodorus's myth. *Theseus* is the life of Theseus told in the first person by Theseus himself for the benefit of his son. Theseus, now an older man writing well after the establishment of Athens, recounts his exploits with candor and humor. Much of the available criticism of *Theseus* is of a biographical bent

since at the time he composed *Theseus*, Gide as an author was very much in the same position as the narrating Theseus: an older man reviewing his accomplishments. Despite these authorial readings, however, *Theseus* stands well on its textual merits as an interesting revision of the classical myth of Theseus.

The overall tone of the piece is apologetic, as if Theseus is somewhat embarrassed by the popular myth of his life and wishes to lay misconceptions to rest. For instance, when Gide's Theseus speaks of killing the robbers on the road to Athens, he admits:

[I] made a slight mistake at that time, when Sciron was concerned, for he turned out afterwards to have been a very worthy man, good-natured and most helpful to passing travelers. But as I had just done away with him, it was soon agreed that he had been a rascal. (52-3)

Theseus also refutes the myth's report of how he pledged to marry Ariadne in return for her help: "I never gave a promise of any kind. Liberty above all things! My duty is to myself" (70). He even comments on some of the metaphorical qualities of the myth: "One story has it that, some time after we had abandoned [Ariadne], Dionysus went there to join her, and indeed married her; all of which may be a way of saying that she found consolation in drink" (95-6). In many ways, Gide's *Theseus* is a retelling of and a response to classical myths such as the one in *The Library* of Apollodorus. Gide's version makes the story of Theseus somewhat more credible.

Gide accomplishes this credibility by creating ambiguity and by revealing Theseus's humanity in a way that makes him seem less perfect but perhaps, ironically, more heroic for these imperfections. Theseus admits to his weakness for women and the fact that he is not as intelligent as other heroes. He describes how upon traveling to Crete

he is humbled by a revelation of his relatively uncultured upbringing. He recalls a scene where he was embarrassingly drunk. He describes how he finds Ariadne insufferable and how he is actually in love with Ariadne's much younger sister, Phædra. Furthermore, by his own admission, he hardly knows restraint: "it was not, and indeed it is never, a part of my character to allow myself to be stopped by scruples" (93). Thus, although the deeds of Theseus remain relatively unchanged, he is far from the virtuous champion of Grecian values that he appears to be in *The Library*.

The revisionist mentality suffuses the entire narrative, including those few parts connected with the Minotaur, who, incidentally, is never named in Gide's text. Especially in his treatment of the Minotaur and the labyrinth, Gide approaches a higher level of believability than Apollodorus by answering many questions Apollodorus's readers might have. For instance, why cannot the Minotaur escape the labyrinth? After all, it is just a maze with "many a winding turn," and he has had years of imprisonment to figure it out (Apollodorus 2:121). Gide provides the answer to this question through Daedalus, who informs Theseus that the labyrinth is, at Minos's request, "a building and a set of communicating gardens which, without precisely imprisoning the monster, would at least contain him and make it impossible for him to get loose" (75). Knowing that no prison can be foolproof, Daedalus devises the labyrinth so "that [the Minotaur] wouldn't want to get out" by "[assembling] in this one place the means to satisfy every kind of appetite. The Minotaur's tastes were neither many nor various; but we had to plan for everybody, whomsoever it might be, who would enter the labyrinth" (76). In addition, stoves continuously burn incense that "act on the will and put it to sleep" (76). Through this explanation, readers can more readily suspend their disbelief than they can with

Apollodorus's depiction of the labyrinth. Gide also addresses the question of why the Minotaur did not seem to require human victims before Minos demands them from Athens. The Minotaur is not anthropophagous at all, according to Daedalus, who comments, "They used to say that he lived on carrion; but since when has a bull eaten anything but grass?" (83).

Gide's revisions continue with Theseus's encounter with the Minotaur. The description of the Minotaur defies the traditional notions of the monstrous:

Facing me, and stretched at length upon a flowery bed of buttercups, pansies, jonquils, tulips, and carnations, lay the Minotaur. As luck would have it, he was asleep. I ought to have hurried forward and taken advantage of this, but something held me back, arrested my arm: the monster was beautiful. As happens with centaurs also, there was in his person a harmonious blending of man and beast. On top of this, he was young, and his youthfulness gave an indefinable bloom to his good looks; and I am more vulnerable to such things than to any show of strength. When faced with them, I needed to call upon all my reserves of energy. For one never fights better than with the doubled strength of hatred; and I could not hate the Minotaur. I even stood still for some time and just looked at him. But he opened one eye. I saw then that he was completely witless, and that it was time for me to set about my task. (86-7)

The Minotaur is youthful, beautiful, asleep, and witless, not at all the savage, man-eating beast frustratingly stalking the winding labyrinth implied by Apollodorus. Although Theseus does kill the Minotaur, he obviously does not consider the Minotaur to

be Other. Theseus finds the hybridization of the Minotaur beautiful and harmonious, not grotesque. He does not hate the hybrid the way a traditional hero should; he is not shocked by the categorical transgressions implied by the Minotaur's existence. The way Gide describes the scene, it seems a shame that Theseus must kill the Minotaur in order to put a stop to the Athenian sacrifices.

Theseus overcomes the allure of the Minotaur and the indulgences of the labyrinth, but not by willpower alone. As Daedalus advises, Theseus must "keep control of himself," but must also remember the thread (a "tangible symbol of duty") that ties him to Ariadne, who is standing just outside the labyrinth. Figuratively, the thread is also a "link with the past. [...] For nothing can begin from nothing, and it is from your past, and from what you are at this moment, that what you are going to be must spring" (77). Indeed, Theseus's control, sense of duty, and link to the past save him from the labyrinth's seductions, which have a strong effect on the other captives.

When Theseus encounters his fellow captives in the labyrinth, they are "busy gourmandizing, drinking heavily, making passes of love at one another, and braying like so many madmen or idiots" (87-8). The youths who enter the labyrinth give up a part of their humanity and descend to the level of brutes, letting their appetites take them where they may. As critic Thomas Cordle notes, "each captive [...] invents his own private labyrinth" (139). The youths degrade themselves under the labyrinth's influence; they act in unbecoming ways. The Minotaur, however, is more content with the excesses. He is, in this respect, indolence perfected and personified. The story thus implies that it is not ugliness and injustice that a hero must overcome (after all, Theseus has "nothing against monsters in themselves"), but rather indolence (Gide 65). This moral is reinforced by

Theseus's personal philosophy of achievement—a philosophy that disregards privilege, promotes personal merit, and is rather at odds with the excessive luxury of the upper class. This philosophy is further affirmed by Theseus's effectiveness as a leader: “as Athens' legendary founder Theseus is associated with its progress from barbarism to the Periclean age” (Ames 117).

In *Theseus*, Gide rewrites the myth of the Minotaur by way of Theseus and, to a certain extent, revises the traditional qualities of hero and monster. Gide's Theseus is not a paragon of justice and virtue, and his Minotaur is neither ugly nor violent, nor does he seem to threaten the taxonomy of his originating culture. However, he is still a symbol of something the hero must overcome. Gide actually allows for a psychological interpretation (as opposed to a cultural interpretation) of the monster, since, in this case, the Minotaur represents something Theseus must overcome within himself rather than an external obstacle. Unlike the completely Other monster, which has nothing at all in common with the hero, Gide implies that Theseus—just like his companions who started their decent into indolence—could become more like the Minotaur if he allows himself to succumb to the seductions of the labyrinth. Gide's Minotaur, then, is an externalized representation of something within the human characters that they dislike or repress. He represents indolence the way vampires represent sexuality, werewolves represent violence, or zombies represent fear of death. This role, while no longer monster in the sense of *monstrum*, remains however a function of the human characters. Like Apollodorus's Asterius, Gide's Minotaur has no personality, agenda, or voice of his own.

THE MINOTAUR IN JORGE LUIS BORGES'S "THE HOUSE OF ASTERION"

"The House of Asterion"¹⁸ by Jorge Luis Borges is largely a monologue from Asterion, the Spanish formation of the name Asterius. The piece includes an opening epigram quoting Apollodorus, an editorial footnote indicating that Asterion uses *fourteen* to mean *infinite*, and a brief coda told in the third person of an exchange between Theseus and Ariadne after he kills Asterion. The presence of the epigram, footnote, and coda implies that someone, such as an editor or a translator, has revised and added to Asterion's monologue. Borges affects the role of this editor/translator and then making his presence obvious and thus distances himself from the authorship of the monologue. This distance lends an air of authenticity that this piece, in fact, is from the mouth of Asterion. In the monologue, Asterion describes his house (i.e., the labyrinth), his knowledge of his unique nature, his pastimes, and his hope to meet his redeemer.

If Gide's *Theseus* responds to *The Library* of Apollodorus, "The House of Asterion" responds to both. The rewriting begins with the very title, which names the Minotaur and brings him to the forefront. The reader is implicitly informed that this story focuses on Asterion, whereas he is a minor character in Apollodorus and Gide. Furthermore, as the title implies, Asterion has a house.¹⁹ Upon first reading the title, the exact referent of *house* is unclear; *house* could refer to a dwelling place or a family lineage (or perhaps both). In either case, though, Asterius must be *somebody*—a *person*—in order to have a home or family.

The epigram at the beginning of the story further emphasizes Asterion's sense of individuality and personhood. Borges quotes a version of the line where Apollodorus names the Minotaur in *The Library*: "And the queen gave birth to a child who was called

Asterion” (138). The difference between Borges’s version and the version of Apollodorus previously mentioned is significant. Borges’s version of the line specifically calls the Minotaur “a child,” which recalls Gide’s Pasiphae who refers to him as “my son” (Gide 65). Compared to Apollodorus, who never uses such terms, both Gide’s and Borges’s texts are more sympathetic to the Minotaur. Furthermore, Borges’s version states that this child “was called Asterion,” not “called the Minotaur.” As previously discussed, the appellation *minotaur* emphasizes monstrosity (especially in the traditional sense of *monstrum* as portent) and makes the Minotaur an extension of Minos and Minos’s crimes rather than an independent entity. Stuart Davis, in his article “Rereading and Rewriting Traditions: The Case of Borges’s ‘La Casa de Asterión,’” makes a similar observation, noting that referring to Asterion by name hides “the pejorative meaning of Minotaur” and, furthermore, masks Asterion’s monstrosity from the uninformed reader (141). Until Theseus’s reference to “the Minotaur” in the story’s concluding coda (Borges 140), a reader unfamiliar with Apollodorus would have no indication that Asterion is anything but a human prince (Davis 141).

Like Gide’s *Theseus*, “The House of Asterion” is in the first person, except that Borges’s story is narrated by Asterion rather than Theseus. Davis reads “The House of Asterion” as a rewriting of Apollodorus, but the story is also a rebuttal to Gide’s *Theseus* in several specific details. Even if Borges was unfamiliar with Gide’s *Theseus* when he wrote “The House of Asterion,” there are some striking correlations where Asterion refutes several details from Gide’s version of the myth. In Gide, Daedalus says the labyrinth of Crete is “like the one I admired in Egypt, on the shore of Lake Moeris” (75). In Borges, Asterion claims his house is “like no other,” and goes on to say, “There are

those who declare there is a similar one in Egypt, but they lie” (138). In Gide, Daedalus says that the labyrinth “without precisely imprisoning the monster, would at least contain him and make it impossible for him to get loose” (75). In Borges, Asterion claims it is a “ridiculous falsehood” that he is a prisoner, explaining that “there are no locked doors” and that he can “step into the street” (138). In Gide, Theseus describes his fellow sacrificial victims as being “seated at a table” in the labyrinth (87). In Borges, Asterion emphasizes that “even my detractors admit there is not *one single piece of furniture* in the house” (138, original emphasis). So, rather than being a dumb brute confused by an intricate maze (like in Apollodorus) or a gentle giant subdued by narcotic fumes (like in Gide), Borges’s Asterion is not defeated by the labyrinth. He assumes ownership of it and deliberately chooses “never [to] leave my house” because the reactions he evokes from people in the street—which he misinterprets as the reaction of commoners to royalty, rather than the fear of his appearance—disturb him (138).

Asterion, however, is an unreliable narrator at best. As previously mentioned, a footnote mentions that he uses fourteen to mean infinite. One might assume this is because the tribute of seven youths and seven virgins (as related by Apollodorus) add to fourteen, which may be the largest number Asterion has encountered. However, Asterion claims the sacrifice and the victims come in nines; every “nine years nine men enter the house” (140). He does not mention any female victims. The footnote also mentions “the original” text (138), which implies Asterion wrote this monologue, yet Asterion claims that he “never retained the difference between one letter and another” (139). Furthermore, his declaration that “like the philosopher, I think that nothing is communicable by the art of writing” implies a familiarity with Socrates, yet Asterion further emphasizes his

illiteracy by saying “generous impatience has not permitted that I learn to read” (139). Since he invariably kills his visitors, it does not seem possible that someone transcribed the monologue for him. Why would Asterion write this piece if he finds writing useless? How could he write anything if he never learned to write? How could he be familiar with Socrates if he never learned to read? These absurdities and contradictions imply insanity, a reasonable conclusion considering that a condition as lonely and peculiar as his might certainly unbalance anyone. He is, by his own admission, “unique” and inclined to stay in a home with repetitious “courtyards with pools and dusty gray stone galleries” (139). After all, Asterion’s opening line is, “I know they accuse me of arrogance, and perhaps of misanthropy, and perhaps of madness” (138). Furthermore, it is unclear how he knows he is accused of madness, or who the “they” are that accuse him—quite possibly indicative of paranoia.

More disturbing than these inconsistencies, though, are Asterion’s “mindless and bestial” pastimes (Bennett 168). In his boredom, he runs through the labyrinth until he falls over dizzy; he lets himself fall from roofs “until I am bloody” (Borges 139). When the nine men enter every nine years, Asterion believes they come so that he may “deliver them from all evil”; he kills them within a few minutes of their arrival and uses their bodies to “distinguish one gallery from another” (140). According to Davis, since Asterion believes death delivers the humans from evil (i.e., he kills them for a good reason), Asterion thus “disavows his own monstrous nature and goes against the usual perception that the sacrifices are food for the Minotaur” (144). To the contrary, even though Asterion does not eat the men, Asterion has neither interaction with people nor the ability to read, and thus he would seem to have little to no evidence upon which to

base or rationalize his belief that he is doing a good thing. This belief, his behavior, and his admission that he is accused of madness, could all be indications of insanity. Borges's Asterion is quite a contrast to Gide's impotent and languorous Minotaur. If not insane, Asterion is at least brutish and callous.

Despite his monstrous behavior,²⁰ though, Asterion is lonely. His loneliness is implicit in his favorite game: "the one about the other Asterion," an imaginary friend with whom the real Asterion talks and laughs as they walk around the labyrinth (Borges 139). His "desire to see a double of himself underpins his awareness that he is lonely, excluded and different" (Davis 143). Asterion's loneliness is emphasized by his anticipatory reaction when a victim prophesizes that a redeemer will come for Asterion. Asterion says, "If my ear could capture all the sounds of the world, I should hear his steps" (Borges 140). In the brief concluding coda, Theseus—the redeemer—tells Ariadne, "The Minotaur barely defended himself," a comment that reveals how much Asterion wants release from his circumstances. Asterion offers his victims deliverance through death, and he evidently seeks the same from his own redeemer. Revising Asterion in this way falls directly in line with an observation by Cynthia Whitney Hallett:

Humanity seems uncomfortable with the concept that there truly exists a thing as pure evil, so, first of all, we happily find that all fiends are "actually" misunderstood, unhappy creatures who wish to be rescued from their horrid fates, then we rescue them by killing them. By owning the means of killing these monsters, humanity can control the evil these creatures represent. (64)

Borges's revisions do not alter the original story too much. The novel stroke of "The House of Asterion" is that the story is told from the point of view of the monster. Asterion is as egocentric here as Theseus is in Gide's *Theseus*. Asterion does not see himself as a monster, but as royalty: "Not for nothing was by mother a queen; I cannot be confused with the populace, though my modesty might so desire" (Borges 138). From Asterion's perspective, Theseus does not kill him because he is an obstacle for Theseus, but rather because Theseus is Asterion's redeemer (Davis 141). In fact, as Davis notes, "Theseus's mythic status is subverted by the Minotaur's willingness to die" (144). Asterion has all of the "stage time" in the monologue, and Theseus is reduced to the "walk on." The story's focus and concern are entirely on Asterion.

Asterion, like Copernicus, also de-centers the world. To Asterion, the labyrinth is not a liminal space on the fringe of the world, it is "the same size as the world; or rather, it is the world" (Borges 139). Asterion is so egocentric he even waxes a bit solipsistic: "Perhaps I have created the stars and the sun and this enormous house, but I no longer remember" (140). Even when Asterion thinks of his redeemer, he thinks in terms of himself and quickly "exhausts the ontological possibilities of the redeeming Other" (Bennett 169). Asterion muses, "Will he be a bull or a man? Will he perhaps be a bull with the face of a man? Or will he be like me?" (Borges 140). According to Davis, these passages reveal "the immaturity of the narrator grappling with existential issues" (144). All of these details let us know what life must have been like for the Minotaur and, even though Borges's Asterion is still monstrous, we can be somewhat more sympathetic to his condition. "That Borges even allows us to guess what a monster such as the Minotaur might be thinking demonstrates how far he attempts to humanize the normally unvoiced

Other that is the monster” (Davis 141). Furthermore, Asterion demonstrates that the monster does not have to simply be a function of a transgressor. The transgression that causes Asterion’s birth is not even mentioned, nor is Theseus’s quest. To the person and life of Asterion, these things are irrelevant and are not a part of who he is. A reader of “The House of Asterion” unfamiliar with the legends of Theseus and Minos would not recognize Asterion as *monstrum*.

By not identifying Asterion as inhuman at the beginning of the story, Borges tricks the reader into identifying with the narrator. This trick is primarily accomplished through the simple use of first-person narration. In most readers’ experience, language is a capacity limited to humans, so assuming a human is behind a first-person narration is almost a given. With this starting point, empathizing and sympathizing with the (assumedly human) narrator is unconscious and involuntary. From the reader’s perspective, Asterion’s behavior is inexplicable and possibly insane, but his “recognizably human loneliness” makes him sympathetic even after his monstrosity is revealed (Bennett 168).

THE MINOTAUR IN STEVEN SHERRILL’S *THE MINOTAUR TAKES A CIGARETTE BREAK*

Steven Sherrill’s *The Minotaur Takes a Cigarette Break* is not a retelling of the myth of the Minotaur, but a continuation. According to the free verse poem in the novel’s prologue, the Minotaur is still alive because “Theseus barter[s] for his life” upon facing the Minotaur in the labyrinth (Sherrill 1). It is unclear if “his life” is that of Theseus or of the Minotaur,²¹ but, either way, Theseus leads the Minotaur out of the labyrinth instead of killing him. The novel then jumps forward several millennia to 1990,²² where the

immortal Minotaur is a line cook at Grub's Rib in North Carolina.²³ Sherrill's version of the Minotaur, called M by the other characters in the novel, is very much diminished by time. M has lived long enough to learn the futility of anger, but he has not learned much else, except that the key to minimizing the pain in his life lies in being as inconspicuous and as self-reliant as he possibly can, fending off unceasing loneliness and hopelessness by staying busy. Indeed, nothing much happens in terms of plot or dramatic conflict in *The Minotaur Takes a Cigarette Break*; the novel is more of a slice-of-life look at M's existence, including the seemingly insurmountable obstacles he faces as he stumbles towards the very human goals of trying to fit in, having a productive life, and being happy. Sherrill's pitiable and somewhat hapless Minotaur, both out of time and out of place, spends most of his energy just trying to keep his embarrassment and indignities to a minimum.

While the characters in Sherrill's novel refer to the Minotaur as *M*, the third person narrator refers to him as *the Minotaur*. The continuous reference to the Minotaur descriptively rather than by a name—like in *The Library* of Apollodorus—emphasizes M's difference. Even calling him *M* is indicative of his Otherness. *M* is neither a proper name, nor even an appropriate initialized name; people who go by initials usually go by two, such as the M's neighbors D. W., J. C., and A. J. Crews. Furthermore, *M* is, after all, simply short-hand for *minotaur*, or perhaps *monster* or even *myth*. Textually, a proper name—even one as antiquated as *Asterius* or *Asterion*—might allow the reader momentarily to forget the Minotaur's Otherness, but continual references to “the Minotaur” force the reader to visualize a bull-headed man, even in simple declarative sentences such as, “Order and place are important to the Minotaur,” “The Minotaur

sleeps shirtless,” “The Minotaur loves onions, always has,” and “The Minotaur taught himself to sew” (Sherrill 11, 35, 38, 82). In contrast to Borges not referring to Asterion as “the Minotaur,” Sherrill’s consistent use of “the Minotaur” compels the reader to relate everything to M’s appearance and Otherness, just as if a novel set on a world populated with aliens and one earthling constantly referred to “the Human” and his behavior.

The reader should have no difficulties visualizing M, because Sherrill describes him in great detail, including his nose,²⁴ hands,²⁵ the skin between his human and bull parts,²⁶ his posture,²⁷ horns,²⁸ feet,²⁹ penis,³⁰ and tail.³¹ Rather than exploiting the Minotaur in one long description, the narrator builds M’s image over several passages in appropriate places throughout the book. The most important description is the passage explaining M’s problem with speech:

The mechanics of word making in his mouth do not differ so much from those of men. There are the larynx, the soft velum, the glottal structure. There are the folds of flesh that trap and manipulate wind passing through his throat. More important, the codes of language exist in the Minotaur’s mind. His thought, his subvocal speech, is complex. [...The] problems lie in articulation and enunciation. No matter how sweetly worded or wise the Minotaur’s ideas may be, when he puts them to tongue, terrible things happen. [...When] filtered through the deep resonating chamber of his nostrils, pushed up the cavernous expanse of his throat and across the thick bovine tongue, his words come out tortured and mutilated—deep, nasal, almost whining. The Minotaur is painfully self-conscious of how he

speaks. Over the years he's come to depend on contextual grunts, which suffice most of the time. (19-20)

M's usual silence endears him to some. His co-worker JoeJoe takes smoke breaks with M because JoeJoe prefers to hold a one-sided conversation, an "incessant monologue about girlfriends and getting high," rather than listen (9). Sweeny, M's landlord, takes advantage of M's silence "to tell bad jokes" (37). Beyond a few instances, however, M's lack of communication skills forces him to be an outsider to humanity. For instance, a waitress named Kelly suffers an epileptic fit at Grub's Rib and afterward, as the staff are talking about it, M tries to include himself:

"Unnhhh," the Minotaur says, just loud enough to be heard. He wants to be a part of the conversation. But when all of the waiters and waitresses stop talking to each other and look at him, he really doesn't know what to do next. More than anything he wants them to know that he saw what they saw, that he felt what they felt. [...] "Kelly," he says, shaking his heavy head from side to side, hoping that he won't have to say more, hoping the gesture will suffice. (32-3)

M is painfully aware of his verbal shortcomings. On the topic of his co-workers, M thinks, "If it weren't for my thick tongue, the bovine speech, if it weren't for my vision oblique as it is, I could be one of them" (24-5). M includes his vision as well as his speech because the set of his eyes causes difficulty with reading³² and watching television,³³ two activities without which he is even further out of touch with humanity. M's limited speech and overall lack of communication are more to blame for his failure to fit in than his inhuman appearance.

Indeed, M's appearance does not cause him as much trouble as one might expect. For the most part, very few characters seem to mind his appearance at all. Sweeny and Kelly, along with M's neighbors, boss, and fellow cooks, all treat him kindly. Cecie, another cook at Grub's Rib, even flirts with him, "telling him she's like to take him home one night, husband or no" (7). There are some who take exception to his appearance, though. For instance, when M visits a pool where a woman is swimming laps, she gets out of the pool, "grabs a towel hanging over the chain-link fence, drapes in around her neck, walks all the way around the pool to avoid passing the Minotaur. She walks, dripping, up the concrete path with palpable indignation" (53). When a police cruiser drives by M as he repairs his car's flooded engine in a parking lot, suspicion "hangs so heavily in the air that the stifling afternoon breeze has to work around and over it to clog the Minotaur's breath. [...] Guilt by association. Guilt by default" (239). Characters who seem offended by M's appearance—such as the swimmer and the police, but also insolent young men, prissy waitresses, and haughty restaurant patrons—are generally depicted as rude, irrational, or insensitive, as if judging M based on his appearance is akin to racism.

To be sure, race and other forms of Otherness are issues in *The Minotaur Takes a Cigarette Break*. At Grub's Rib, the cooks are all minorities: JoeJoe and Cecie are African American; Hernando is Hispanic. M has no problem cooperating and socializing with them. "Hernando, the Minotaur, Cecie, and JoeJoe function—no, the Minotaur likes to think, they *play*—like a winning team. The Minotaur feels a part of it" (30, original emphasis). Despite the fact that he has such successful and friendly relationships with the other cooks, M frequently attempts—and often fails—to socialize with the wait staff, which primarily consists of white college students (24). The few M manages to befriend

are all “different” in some way. The waitress Kelly, for instance, is epileptic; Eva, another waitress, described as “a woman of incongruities,” makes a spectacle of herself when she demonstrates that she can put her fist in her mouth (263); David, the host, is gay and is obsessed with Civil War re-enactment. Kelly, Eva, and David, are all “different” and, like M, receive ridicule from the “normal” (i.e., young, white, heterosexual) employees. This is especially true of Kelly, with whom M develops a romantic relationship. By way of explaining how she is open to such a thing, Kelly mentions that, “My step-daddy, he’s a ... He’s black,” again likening M’s monstrosity to race (210). Kelly’s affinity for Otherness is emphasized by her adoration of her goldfish, each with “individual deformities of shape and color” that “could just as easily fall on the other side of that tenuous aesthetic line and into the domain of the horrific” (244, 243). The narrator even explicitly states, “Maybe Kelly recognizes the freakish parts of her own self and is drawn to the Minotaur through that alliance” (280). Kelly and the others who recognize their freakish parts bridge the language gap and sympathize with M, who cannot easily communicate his need for compassion and friendship.

The Minotaur Takes a Cigarette Break emphasizes that M’s lack of effective speech is the fundamental aspect of his inhumanity. Besides his appearance, he is in no way monstrous or even threatening. So much time has passed since his confinement in the labyrinth, he does not remember the horrible things he did there, and he is, in fact, no longer capable of such acts. “By curse or by birthright the Minotaur came into the world with a capacity for evil unmatched. But erosion—erosion of spirit, mind and body—has taken its toll. [... He] is an exile, scarcely more than an invalid, detritus from the process of civilization” (301). At one point, the taunting of a teenage boy named Derek and his

girlfriend is enough to incite M to anger. M envisions himself exacting revenge in graphic terms:

Still furious beneath the outward calm returning to him, he envisions himself charging Derek, horns low, envisions the boy running at full gallop across the field behind the car wash and into the woods, envisions his own momentum carrying him into the driver's door of the Nova, the car heaving and rocking, his horn puncturing the thin sheet-metal door and ripping open the seat back, envisions the girl screaming and screaming and screaming. On one level he'd like to do just that. But he can't muster the energy these days. (294)

M's rage, once monstrous, is now no more dangerous than anyone's imaginative "why I oughtta" response to social rudeness. His sensitivity to such rudeness, and the fact that he controls his temper, places him outside of the typically monstrous and well within the sympathy of the reader. M controls his temper because, even though he lacks the will to do intentional harm, he nonetheless has the "potential for tiny rages" that cause accidental harm and, since he cannot adequately explain himself, force him to move (301). As a result, his life is cyclical:

The Minotaur moves from place to place and time to time. He settles in, tries to be as innocuous as possible for someone with the body of a man and the head of a bull. And for a while there is stasis. A decade. Two. Sometimes a half-century. He cooks, he takes care of his body, he minds his business and tries not to mind the business of others. But then things

go wrong. More often than not someone gets hurt, and the Minotaur has to move again. (136)

Due to the danger presented by his large, awkward, horned head, M's accidents are never pretty. In the course of the novel, he badly hurts himself and Hernando in accidents. However, in cases where people are unsympathetic or biased, his inability to explain himself quickly turns to assumed guilt: he is big; he is different; he is dangerous. Unlike the monster of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, who can speak intelligently but is outcast because of his appearance, M is accepted despite his appearance but is outcast because he is unable to speak. M also contrasts with Borges's Asterion, who gains our sympathy because of his voice even while his behavior is monstrous. In M's case, since the text correlates his physical difference with race, it is only his lack of voice that makes him Other. However, as a few of the novel's characters demonstrate, some level of sympathy—even friendship and love—is still possible. Only people firmly within the Norm cannot at least sympathize with M, and the text implies that a lack of sympathy is ignorant and short-sighted.

Indeed, there is a subtle turning of the tables in *The Minotaur Takes a Cigarette Break*. M is pitiable and sympathetic; he finds solace from his tiresome, cyclic existence through the love of Kelly. The story, like "The House of Asterion" is ultimately one of redemption for the monster. In contrast, elements of the heroic are linked to M's tormentors, especially a waiter named Shane, and are thus called into question. In a passage that could easily describe Theseus in the labyrinth, Shane cuts a heroic, defiant figure after tearing off his uniform in response to being fired from Grub's Rib: "Shane stands enraged and shirtless in the weak light of the candles and the sconces on the

dining-room walls” (206). Furthermore, Shane irrationally assumes the worst of M and abuses him at every opportunity: calling M “faggot” because he is friends with David and “circus freak” because of his appearance. Shane also reveals his heroic urge to purify and the ridiculous level of his intolerance when he says of M, “That bastard lives in my town, breathes my air” (303).

The Norm and Other still exist in *The Minotaur Takes a Cigarette Break*, but the boundaries between and privilege for them are not clearly defined. M obviously has very human characteristics and desires, and since his appearance is tolerated for the most part, only his lack of good speech defines him as Other. Furthermore, in Sherrill’s novel the Other is redefined as appealing since members of the Norm who are inclined toward (and sympathetic with) the Other are in themselves sympathetic, while the heroic, as depicted by members of the Norm, is ignorant and intolerant.

From Asterius in the role of *monstrum* in the most absolute sense to M in the role of sympathetic outsider, the character of the Minotaur has evolved quite a bit. The primary difference between the Minotaur in the classic and modern uses is the attribution of language to him. *The Library* of Apollodorus and Gide’s *Theseus*, where the Minotaur does not speak, both use the Minotaur as an extension of the human characters (of Minos and his transgression in *The Library*, of Theseus and his temptation in *Theseus*). Borges reveals the world according to the Minotaur in “The House of Asterion,” where Asterion’s first person monologue influences sympathy, reveals that his monstrosity may be situational rather than inbred, and, furthermore, allows the reader to understand he has a life and identity of his own beyond his trite use in the myth of Theseus. Asterion’s use of language and his obvious loneliness evoke sympathy from the reader despite his

apparent insanity and monstrous acts. Asterion reveals that language is key to breaking the barrier between the human and inhuman, and Sherrill's M—who speaks but a little and with great trouble—emphasizes this point by demonstrating that lack of language is, in fact, the fundamental barrier between the human and the inhuman.

CHAPTER 3: GRENDEL

GRENDEL IN *BEOWULF*

The monster Grendel first appears in the Anglo-Saxon epic poem *Beowulf* (composed anonymously sometime between 340 and 1025),³⁴ where he is one of three monsters defeated by the titular hero. *Beowulf* is divided into three parts, one for each monster: Grendel, Grendel's mother, and a dragon. In the first part of the poem, Beowulf, a Geat, comes to the aid of the Danes, whom Grendel antagonizes. For twelve years, Grendel has attacked Heorot, the mead-hall of Hrothgar, king of the Danes. Beowulf is, of course, successful in killing Grendel; after the hero tears off Grendel's arm, Grendel returns to his lair at the bottom of a mere to die. In part two, the day after Grendel's death, Grendel's mother³⁵ attacks the Danes to avenge her son. Beowulf follows Grendel's mother to her lair and kills her, too. In the third part, the poem jumps ahead fifty years to Geatland where Beowulf is now a king. Someone steals a flagon from the hoard of a dragon that has been asleep underground for three hundred years. The theft wakes and angers the dragon, so it attacks the Geats, killing many people and burning several buildings, including Beowulf's stronghold. Beowulf, with the help of a younger warrior named Wiglaf, attacks and kills the dragon, but Beowulf suffers a fatal wound and dies as well. The poem ends with Beowulf's funeral.

The *Beowulf* poet never describes Grendel's physical appearance in detail, mentioning only that he is a prodigy, "ill-shapen, an aspect of man [...] though superhuman in stature and strength" (lines 1194, 1196). Beyond his superhuman strength, Grendel is a formidable foe because he is magically impervious to weapons: "The spell was spun so strongly about him / that the finest iron of any on earth, / the sharpest sword-

edge left him unscathed” (717-9). Like the Minotaur’s labyrinth, Grendel’s immunity to weapons is a test for the hero—a little something extra, so to speak, that supposedly makes the monster a more challenging foe than another human would be. Like the Minotaur’s role in the story of Theseus, Grendel’s role in the story of Beowulf is relatively minor: Beowulf encounters Grendel but once and dispatches him with relative ease. Also, just as Apollodorus’s Minotaur makes victims of the Athenian youths and virgins, Grendel is a bane of the innocent. Furthermore, like the Minotaur, Grendel has no dialogue or real personality. “We see him only as a monster, joyless, tormented, damned, and without individualized traits” (Ellis and Ober 49). Grendel is simply evil, attacking the Danes out of pure spite and malice.

Grendel’s evil is attributed to his familial background. He is related to the “giants / whose wars with the Lord earned them exile” mentioned in the Old Testament and is descended from Cain, the first murderer in the Judeo-Christian tradition (*Beowulf* 100-1).³⁶ Grendel’s relation to the ancient giants make him, according to Cawson (see page 7), a backward looking monster in evolutionary terms rather than a hybrid like the Minotaur. Indeed, since Cain was human, the poem implies that “Grendel *devolved* from humanity” (Andriano 113, original emphasis). Grendel’s evil nature is reinforced by numerous epithets such as “evil dweller in darkness,” “a horror from hell,” “hell-fiend,” “hellish horror, hateful to God,” and “hater of humans, heaven’s enemy” (*Beowulf* 79, 92, 426, 704, 1485). Grendel’s evil counterpoints the virtue and faith of the Danes. In fact, the Danes’ faith is exactly what draws Grendel’s wrath: he begins his attacks the night he overhears the Danish scop sing of God’s creation of the world.

On the surface, then, *Beowulf* is about good versus evil. Grendel attacks the helpless Danes in Heorot for twelve years, long enough for the Danes to lose faith in God: “the elders swore before altars / of old war-idols” and “were lost to the Lord” (153-4, 157). Therefore, not only is Grendel evil, but he is also in effect a tester and tempter in that he causes the Danes to revert to heathenism. In the twelfth year of Grendel’s siege, however, Beowulf arrives at Heorot to assist the Danes. Beowulf is a practiced monster-killer, has a history of heroic deeds, and—to match Grendel’s ability to seize “thirty thanes” at a time (107)—has a “hand-grip [that] would match / the might and main of thirty strong men” (338-9). Indeed, Beowulf intends to “grapple with Grendel” since weapons are useless against the monster (387). Just as Grendel is associated with evil and hell, Beowulf is associated with good and God. Upon arriving on Hrothgar’s shores, Beowulf and the Geats “saluted the Lord for their smooth sailing” (198). Preparing for his battle with Grendel, Beowulf invokes God: “May God in His wisdom grant whom He wills / blessing in battle” (613-4). The poet explicitly states that in Beowulf, “the Lord lent [the Danes] / aid in their anguish” and foretells that Beowulf’s fight with Grendel will prove “who ruled the races of men, / then and forever: God, the Almighty” (623-4, 627-8). Furthermore, upon Beowulf’s victory over Grendel, Hrothgar notably first sends thanks “straight to heaven” rather than to the heathen idols and notes that “God often works wonders on wonders” (821, 823). Thus, Beowulf is depicted as God’s implement to rid the Danes of Grendel and to return them to faith.

There is more to *Beowulf* than good versus evil, however. Grendel, for instance, exhibits traits of the classic monster, such being Other in several respects. Grendel is Other-ed from humanity as a descendent of Cain, a member of a cursed race along with

the other “monsters and misfits, / elves and ill-spirits” that “sprang / from the first murderer” (99-100, 98-9). Grendel is also Other-ed from the heroic because “in all epic poetry, a patronymic is at least as necessary as a sword” and Grendel has neither (Irving *Reading* 16). Grendel also exists on the periphery of the Danish settlements; he is the “wrathful rover of borders and moors” (*Beowulf* 93). Within the moors is a mere where Grendel lives with his mother, “sea-dragons,” and “water-beasts” (1264, 1266). The mere and the land surrounding it are an “untraveled country” so foreboding that a “strong-antlered stag seeking a thicket / running for cover” from hounds would rather get caught than hide there (1200, 1212-3). Joseph Andriano describes the mere as “a water/land border where boundaries are unstable, where quagmires threaten to swallow us, and where monsters have lurked since humans had imaginations to conjure them” (111). Although not far from Heorot, Hrothgar and his thanes have not been to the mere. Before Grendel begins his attacks, they know of Grendel, his mother, and the mere only from the tales of “country-folk” (*Beowulf* 1190). Just as Humbaba guards in the forbidden Cedar Forest beyond Uruk, so Grendel lives on the dangerous outskirts of humanity in a virtually uninhabited wilderness.

Hrothgar and Heorot have deeper significance in the poem, as well. Hrothgar’s forefather Scyld Scefing united the Danes, paved roads,³⁷ and offered protection to those who followed him. Hrothgar, likewise, is a strong and honorable king:

[...] Hrothgar was granted
 swiftness for battle and staunchness in strife,
 so friends and kinfolk followed him freely.
 his band of young soldiers swelled to a swarm.

in his mind he mulled commanding a meadhall
 higher than humankind ever had heard of,
 and offering everyone, young and old,
 all he could give that God had granted,
 save common land and commoners' lives. (58-66)

Furthermore, the poet calls Hrothgar “he whose word held the land whole” and calls Heorot the “highest of houses” (71, 72). Heorot, additionally, is built by “craftsmen summoned / from many kingdoms,” evidence that it is a costly and great hall which required cooperation to build (67-8). Very much like Gilgamesh and Uruk in the epic of *Gilgamesh*, Hrothgar and Heorot represent the pinnacle of human civilization in *Beowulf*.

Although Hrothgar and Heorot are close analogues to Gilgamesh and Uruk, Grendel does not serve as a pure analogue to Humbaba. Grendel may live on the border of the Danes' civilization, but he does not seem to represent a dark frontier that the Danes must surpass. After all, in *Gilgamesh*, Humbaba protects the Cedar Forest; Grendel protects nothing, but rather leaves his dwelling on the border to terrorize Heorot. Therefore, if Grendel is symbolic in a way similar to Humbaba, he must represent that which threatens the just and good life represented by Heorot. The text offers fairly explicit clues: after Grendel's second attack, the poet states, “So wrath fought alone against rule and right; / one routed many; the mead-hall stood empty” (127-8). Grendel's wrath, then—evoked by the Danes' pious song of God's act of creation—threatens all that is good about the mead-hall: the shelter, fellowship, strength in numbers, and the generosity of the king. As Irving observes, “the hall itself remains the clearest explanation for the puzzling motivation of the Cain-monsters. [...] If they cannot live in

it, then they must render it unlivable for others” (*Rereading* 139). This passage also emphasizes how Grendel acts alone, which is significant considering that Grendel is not the only monster around—he shares his lair with his mother and other monsters, but they do not aid him in his raids. Grendel’s solitude in action is emphasized when the poet states that Grendel “craved no kinship with any” (*Beowulf* 135). Grendel’s deliberate solitude stands in sharp contrast to the Danes’ sense of community. That “the mead-hall stood empty” after his attacks demonstrates, along with the Danes reverting to heathenism, how successfully Grendel undermines their values (128).

The poet also notes that there is “wergeld owed” by Grendel for his murders (136). The laws concerning *wergeld*, or “man payment,” establish monetary compensation by a killer to the family of his victim. The wergeld, like the tributes taken by Hrothgar and Scyld Scefing before him, help keep the peace for the Danes in the poem; payment of wergeld prevents the endless cycle of murdering to avenge the murdered, just as payment of tributes prevents warfare. According to Irving, the wergeld demonstrates how “human feuds can be resolved and peace can be resorted, if the participants in feuds want peace” (*Reading* 20). Grendel, however, respects neither Danish law nor the peace it affords: “Grendel represents the cultural Other to whom conformity to societal dictates is an impossibility because those dictates are not comprehensible to him” (Cohen “Use” 66). In contrast, Beowulf comes to the aid of the Danes because Hrothgar once paid a wergeld owed by Beowulf’s father, Ecgtheow. Despite the similarities between Beowulf and Grendel—they are both exceedingly strong and capable of great violence, for instance, and Beowulf is even described as wrathful on occasion (*Beowulf* 1356, 1362)—the difference is that Beowulf respects what Jean-

Jacques Rousseau terms the social contract. Beowulf respects laws, traditions, and authority whereas Grendel seems to prefer the state of nature, the self-serving anarchy where might equals right. As Irving notes, Grendel “is most consistently and distinctly placed in opposition to the society that this poem honors and to its values: loyalty, community, and even something close to chivalry” (*Reading* 110). Indeed, the poet even calls Beowulf a “shielder of men” and Beowulf calls Grendel a “savage man” (*Beowulf* 707, 859). This contrast of law and anarchy is evident in their fight, as well. While Grendel screams and thrashes, Beowulf is calm and strategic. In this regard, Irving explains, “That Beowulf’s exertion of his physical strength is less emphasized than we might expect it to be increases our sense of its staggering moral power” (*Rereading* 145). Beowulf’s alignment with the law is reinforced in the third part of the poem, where, more than fifty years after his fights with Grendel and Grendel’s mother, Beowulf is himself a king—a “keeper of kinfolk” (*Beowulf* 1946)—who defends his people against a dragon, another backward looking monster.

Like the Minotaur from *The Library* of Apollodorus, Grendel is a prime example of a classic monster. He dwells on the edge of the human sphere, is inhuman in appearance, is almost completely Other, and neither desires nor respects the values the humans uphold. In other words, Grendel is completely inhuman and “his destruction is a public validation of the control and acceptance of structured society whose antithesis he represents” (Cohen, “Use” 68). He comes from outside Heorot, but Grendel also warns against the potential results for transgressions against tradition and authority that could destroy the Danish peace from the inside: “he is [...] a monsterized version of what a member of that very society can become when [...] dictates are rejected, when the

authority of leaders or custom disintegrates and the subordination of individual to hierarchy is lost” (Cohen, “Use” 66). Grendel has more substance than Apollodorus’s Asterius—Grendel, at least, has an evil lineage by way of motive for his acts against humanity, if not much else—but he still has no personality and no dialogue.

GRENDDEL IN JOHN GARDNER’S *GRENDDEL*

John Gardner’s novel *Grendel* corrects this deficiency in spades. Gardner’s version of Grendel, who narrates the novel, is by turns a detached observer of humanity, a philosophically tortured existential thinker, a mocking social critic, a self-deprecating humorist, and, of course, a violent killer of Danes. *Grendel* covers the monster’s life before and throughout his twelve-year war on Hrothgar’s mead-hall (which Gardner’s Grendel calls *Hart*, the English word for *Heorot*): Grendel describes his life before leaving his mother’s cave, his first encounters with humanity, his observations of the Danes as competing tribes as Hrothgar rises to power and unites them, his war with Hrothgar, and his death at the hands of an unnamed Geat.

Grendel is often read as a philosophical novel, which by all accounts is Gardner’s intention. That Grendel represents Jean-Paul Sartre and existentialism is well documented in criticism of *Grendel* as well as in interviews with Gardner. Kenneth C. Mason’s article “Of Monsters and Men: Sartrean Existentialism and John Gardner’s *Grendel*” is an excellent article that traces the existentialist themes throughout the novel. Furthermore, as Gregory L. Morris explains:

Among the other strains in the monster’s character and thought, that of Jean-Paul Sartre, Gardner’s philosophical bogey, is dominant. Gardner’s long-standing feud with Sartre is well documented; in his fiction, in his

criticism, and in his interview comments Gardner has consistently attacked the “whiny despair” of the existentialist position. *Grendel* as a critique of that position has been exhaustively studied by numerous previous critics, as has the novel’s relation with its ancient poetic source. There can be little doubt that one of Gardner’s main intellectual targets is this dominant philosophical school, a philosophy that runs counter to everything Gardner urges in his writing. (52)

Indeed, Gardner, much like Borges with “The House of Asterion,” evidently intended to create a glimpse into the mind of a monster, not to create an anti-hero. In an interview with Ed Christian, Gardner states, “I *wanted* to present him just as a monster, dark, wrong” (191, original emphasis). However, although many critics such as Morris argue that Gardner has no appreciation for Sartre whatsoever, Gardner himself states otherwise in an interview with Roni Natov and Geraldine DeLuca:

Sartre is a marvelous poet. He’s wrong as a philosopher but he’s a brilliant one. It’s funny to hero-worship someone you think is flat wrong. But he writes so beautifully, you almost don’t care. (106)

Thus, Gardner’s love/hate relationship with Sartre creates an ambiguous Grendel, as he indicates in an interview with Marshall L. Harvey: “What happened in *Grendel* was that I got the idea of presenting the Beowulf monster as Jean-Paul Sartre, [...] so that my love of Sartre kind of comes through as my love for the monster” (86). While Gardner certainly seems to criticize existentialism by attributing this “wrong” philosophy to a violent, murdering monster who winds up dead, the personality and eloquence written

into Grendel generates sympathy for the monster and, inadvertently, justifies his “wrong” point of view.

We obviously would not condone Grendel’s behavior—the way he murders and otherwise torments the Danes—but his first person narrative voice creates sympathy for him in very much the same way it does for Borges’s Asterion. Grendel’s likeability, however, comes from other factors, as well. In terms of reader identification and sympathy, Helen B. Ellis and Warren U. Ober observe that Grendel surpasses even Satan in John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*: “Gardner’s Grendel shares Satan’s keen intellect, flashing wit, and penchant for introspective soliloquizing, but added to these qualities is a profound self-awareness finally lacking in Milton’s arch-villain” (49). Indeed, just as William Blake claims that Milton is of the devil’s party without knowing it, so does Gardner imbue Grendel with qualities that make the monster sympathetic and, to some readers, even intellectually and morally superior: “the Grendel that Gardner creates is a thinker, a passionate metaphysician constantly exploring his place in the universe, a monster infinitely more capable of appreciating music, beauty, harmony and poetry than the men he devours” (Ellis and Ober 55).

Grendel generates sympathy from his loneliness. Grendel—again, very much like Borges’s Asterion—is so lonely he has imaginary friends³⁸ and is solipsistic.³⁹ There is an unbridgeable distance of difference between Grendel and everything around him. “His only sense of self is definition through difference; there is no other creature like him” (Andriano 114). This difference is not just between Grendel and the humans, but also between Grendel and the animals, “the strangers” that live in his cave, and even his mother (Gardner *Grendel* 17). Although Grendel’s mother is like him in some ways,

Grendel notes a significant difference between him and her: “She never speaks” (11).

Critic Jay Ruud puts Grendel’s loneliness specifically in terms of conversation: “he is alone—and he remains alone throughout the book, only occasionally communicating with another living being” (9). In fact, Grendel usually speaks aloud to himself:

“muttering darkly on shaded paths, holding conversation with the only friend and comfort this world affords, my shadow” (Gardner *Grendel* 8).

During his first brush with death—because he is the only one he knows who can speak, coupled with his observation of the predictably instinctive and repetitious behavior of animals (21)—Grendel quickly comes to the existential conclusion that the world is mechanistic and that only he exists:

I understood that the world was nothing: a mechanical chaos of casual, brute enmity on which we stupidly impose our hopes and fears. I understood that, finally and absolutely, I alone exist. All the rest, I saw, is merely what pushes me, or what I push against, blindly—as blindly as all that is not myself pushes back. I create the whole universe, blink by blink.
(21-2)

He seems to begin to change his mind, though, after he finally encounters humans (the Danes). He understands their speech—he says, “it was my own language, spoken in a strange way” (23)—but they do not understand him. They attack him and Grendel knows the humans are not like the animals, but are “thinking creatures, pattern makers” (27). As Robert D. Child observes, “Grendel’s new found philosophy—‘I alone exist’—has been destroyed through language. The ‘hairless one’ [...] has managed to instill a

thought, through the medium of language, in Grendel's mind. But ways of thinking die hard, and Grendel must live the rest of the novel in his period of transition" (115).

Naturally enough, since the Danes are the only other speakers in his world, Grendel is drawn to them and observes them from afar. He watches as they make war on each other, and he watches as Hrothgar conquers the other tribes, beings taking tributes, and establishes Hart. Grendel is listening when a scop, whom Grendel calls the Shaper, sings of Hrothgar's greatness and Danes' nobility. Grendel, who has seen the ignoble barbarism of the Danes and who understands that Hrothgar rules out of military power rather than kingly virtue, knows the Shaper's song to be a lie, but the beauty of it compels him to believe it: "The man had changed the world, had torn up the past by its thick, gnarled roots and had transmuted it, and they, who knew the truth, remember it his way—and so did I" (Gardner *Grendel* 43).

Grendel is very much affected by the song; he describes himself as a "ridiculous hairy creature torn apart by poetry—crawling, whimpering, streaming tears, across the world like a two-headed beast [...] I gnashed my teeth and clutched the sides of my head as if to heal the split, but I couldn't" (44). The split within Grendel's mind—the battle of cold existential reality versus the hopeful, artistic "projected possible" (49)—is the fundamental conflict of the novel. This problem is compounded when Grendel overhears the Shaper sing the story of the Book of Genesis, the same song that triggers Grendel's attacks in *Beowulf*. Grendel is so struck by the power of the Shaper's art that when the Shaper sings of the "terrible race god cursed," Grendel knows he is of that race even though he believes "that the brothers [i.e. Cain and Abel] had never lived, nor the god

who judged them” (51). Grendel then enters Hart to ask for mercy but, again, the Danes do not understand him and he flees from their assault.

The language of the Shaper and the sounds—“almost words” (41)—of the harp seem to dissuade Grendel from existentialism. As Mason notes, “Grendel desires that the world become meaningful” despite his earlier existential conclusions to the world’s meaninglessness (105). Grendel is near accepting the Shaper’s version of the world “even if it means [he] must be outcast, cursed by the rules of [the] hideous fable” when Grendel meets the dragon—the same dragon killed in part three of *Beowulf*—who confronts Grendel with even more language (Gardner *Grendel* 55). The dragon is a staunch materialist, “You want the word,” he tells Grendel, but advises him to instead, “seek out gold—but not *my* gold—and guard it” (62). The dragon undermines the Shaper’s art, calling it “an illusion of reality—[that] puts together all their facts with a gluey whine of connectedness” (65). “The dragon’s metaphysics supplants, in Grendel’s mind, the vision of the Shaper [...] renews Grendel’s existentialist understanding of reality” (Mason 106). Grendel again puts this in terms of language: upon leaving the dragon, he is “confused again, aswirl with words” and notes that part of “the dragon’s talk [...] became my aura” that makes him invulnerable to weapons (Gardner *Grendel* 72, 75). With his existentialism reinforced and his new found invulnerability, Grendel begins his war with the Danes and the Shaper, whose ideology now clashes with his own:

I no longer remember exactly what he sang. I know only that it had a strange effect on me: it no longer filled me with doubt and distress, loneliness, shame. It enraged me. It was their confidence, maybe—their

blissful, swinish ignorance, their bumptious self-satisfaction, and, worst of all, their *hope*. (77, original emphasis)

Grendel's decision between the philosophies of the Shaper and the dragon finally allows him to define himself: "I was Grendel, Ruiner of Meadhalls, Wrecker of Kings" (80). Thus, as Mason indicates, the dragon helps Grendel "regain authentic being, in existentialist terms" (106). Grendel, in effect, chooses to embody existentialism in an attempt to undermine the hope and vision of the Shaper. As Jay Ruud observes: "he identifies himself as the personification of the chaotic darkness from which men absurdly hew patterns, and he asserts his adopted role of 'monster' by gobbling up Hrothgar's thanes" (16). This achievement of authentic being and act of self-determination changes his language, too.

In each of Grendel's previous encounters with humans, they attack him when he speaks because they do not understand him and, furthermore, because Grendel's voice is terrible even when wordless. The terrible quality of his voice is demonstrated in the novel. For instance, at one point he "let out a howl so unspeakable that the water at [his] feet turns sudden ice" (Gardner, *Grendel* 5), and at another he is "terrified at the sound of [his] own huge voice in the darkness" (10). After his meeting with the dragon and his act of self-determination, his worded speech gains power, as well. Grendel enforces his existentialism by constantly speaking out loud: "Talking, talking. Spinning a web of words, pale walls of dreams, between myself and all I see" (8). Grendel maintains his detachment with a continuous one-sided argument and will not consider any other point of view. He no longer listens to the Shaper so he will not be persuaded to change his mind again. Even inanimate objects have voices. To Grendel, an underground river is

“whispering patterns of words [his] sanity resists” (9), the stars “tease, torment [his] wits toward meaningful patterns that do not exist” (11). He ignores these voices, just as he feels the world has ignored him.⁴⁰

Just as the Shaper, the river, and the stars attempt to impose their philosophies and patterns on Grendel, so does he impose his upon others. The Danes often feel paralyzed by fear or despair in Grendel’s presence, an effect he produces through speaking, as if his depressing take on existentialism is contagious: “Talking, talking, spinning a spell, pale skin of words that closes me in like a coffin. Not in a language that anyone any longer understands. Rushing, degenerate mutter of noises I send out before me wherever I creep, like a dragon burning his way through vines and fog” (15). The only Dane to resist Grendel’s spell is Unferth, who desperately wants to be a hero immortalized in song. Unferth, like Grendel, sees himself as an embodiment of his ideology and speaks aloud at length to reinforce and define himself:

For many moths, unsightly monster, you’ve murdered men as you pleased in Hrothgar’s hall. Unless you can murder me as you’ve murdered lesser men, I give you my word those days are done forever! The king has given me splendid gifts. He will see tonight that his gifts have not gone for nothing! Prepare to fall, foul thing! This one red hour makes your reputation or mine! (83)

Unferth’s vision of himself as hero, however, depends on Grendel acting like a proper monster, which he does not. Grendel adopts the role of bloodthirsty monster only when it suits him to undermine the Danes’ sense of hope. Thus, to undermine Unferth’s sense of heroism, Grendel must switch tactics. Grendel does not allow Unferth to play the hero:

Grendel first interrupts Unferth's speech with sarcastic remarks—"I've never seen a live hero before. I thought they were only in poetry" (84)—and then bloodies his nose with a thrown apple, completely removing the dignity from his adopted role. Interestingly, now that they represent opposing ideologies, Unferth can understand Grendel's speech, which is always mocking him. Through the power of language, Grendel creates weakness and doubt in Unferth just as the Shaper had done to Grendel before: Unferth "had put on the Shaper's idea of the hero like a merry mask, had seen it torn away, and was now reduced to what he was: a thinking animal stripped naked of former illusions, stubbornly living on, ashamed and meaningless" (104). Every time Unferth attacks Grendel, Grendel refuses to fight, mocking him instead. "So much for heroism. [...] So much, also, for the alternative visions of blind old poets and dragons" (90). Grendel believes his victory over Unferth signals his overall victory over the Danes.

It is an altogether different matter when Beowulf arrives during the twelfth year of Grendel's war. Grendel never names Beowulf, calling him "the stranger." Beowulf, like Grendel, has a powerful voice: "He smiled as he spoke, but it was as if the gentle voice, the childlike yet faintly ironic smile were holding smoothing back, some magician-power that could blast stone cliffs to ashes as lightning blasts trees" (154). Like Grendel, too, Beowulf is "an outsider not only among the Danes but everywhere" (154). Like Unferth, Beowulf embodies the heroic, but with more personal conviction. When Unferth questions his prowess, Beowulf tells unbelievable tales of his strength and "believed every word he said" even if the Danes are dubious (162). Beowulf ends his story by recalling Unferth's infamy as a brother-killer, a detail that explains the difference between Unferth's heroism and Beowulf's. Unferth, as a kinslayer, is inherently unheroic

no matter how much he talks about being a hero; Beowulf *is* heroic. Furthermore, just as Grendel is not the stereotypical monster Unferth wants him to be, Beowulf is not the stereotypical hero. As Child explains, Beowulf's "method is not always the same—he is not locked into one particular system," he has the "ability to step outside of a fixed system (evidenced by Beowulf's non-physical defeat of Unferth)" (119). Like Grendel, Beowulf does not fulfill the role as expected of him. Although Unferth and Beowulf both venerate the heroic, Beowulf does so with a depth of conviction more like Grendel's conviction in existentialism.

Not surprising, then, that Beowulf constantly talks aloud to himself like Grendel, and Beowulf's words effect Grendel the way Grendel's words effect the Danes. Grendel observes, "I found something peculiar happening to my mind. His mouth did not seem to move with his words" (163). Beowulf's words, even though he cannot hear them, begin to shake Grendel's philosophical foundations. He repeats the lessons of the dragon on his way to Hart, but also notes the "wind was shrill, full of patterns" (158). Of course, true to the poem *Beowulf*, Grendel attacks. As Child notes, though, after the battle begins, it is Beowulf's words that conquer Grendel (119). Grendel says, "He's whispering—spilling words like showers of sleet, his mouth three inches from my ear. I will not listen. I continue whispering. As long as I whisper myself I need not hear. His syllables lick at me, chilly fire" (Gardner *Grendel* 169-70). Just as Grendel first mocked Unferth's ideal, so does Beowulf mock Grendel's:

As you see it it is, while the seeing lasts, dark nightmare-history, time-as-coffin; but where the water was rigid there will be fish, and men will survive on their flesh till spring. It's coming, my brother. Believe it or not.

Though you murder the world, turn plains to stone, transmogrify life into I
and it, strong searching roots will crack your cave and rain will cleanse it:
The world will burn green, sperm build again. My promise. Time is the
mind, the hand that makes (fingers on harpstrings, hero-swords, the acts,
the eyes of queens). By that I kill you. (170)

By invoking the never-ending cycle of nature—the one inarguable, legitimate pattern that implies the existence of other legitimate patterns—Beowulf’s argument “is a statement of connectedness,” one that undermines the dragon’s claim that humans create connectedness from the illusion of language (Child 120). As the clincher to his argument, Beowulf slams Grendel’s head into the walls of Hart and demands that Grendel sings of walls by way of conceding the point that they are real. “It is ironic that Grendel, who saw the world only as ‘meaningless objectness,’ would be forced to face the implications of his philosophy, as he is battered against the hard wall or Hart” (Mason 109).

At this point, as Child notes, “the physical battle becomes irrelevant; it is displaced by the battle of language” (119). After Grendel sings of walls, he states he understands Beowulf’s “lunatic theory of matter and mind, the chilly intellect, the hot imagination, blocks and builder, reality as stress,” but claims Beowulf’s physical advantage over him is “by accident” (Gardner, *Grendel* 172). Nevertheless, no sooner than Grendel admits understanding the other point of view—an understanding he avoids ever since the dragon—Beowulf is able to tear Grendel’s arm from his shoulder. The physical battle mirrors the philosophical debate between Grendel and Beowulf. As Gardner notes in an interview with Digby Diehl, Grendel effectively “kills himself over a momentary failure of ideals” (3).

In the end, like Gardner intended, existentialism fails Grendel and is demonstrated to be a “wrong” philosophy. Beyond that, however, the ending is quite ambiguous. It is unclear if Grendel’s last minute conversion to Beowulf’s ideology is simply a trick by which Beowulf kills Grendel or if it is a redemptive act, like the death of Borges’s Asterion at the hands of Theseus. As he dies among the stupid, mechanistic animals of the forest he hated, Grendel’s last words are, “Poor Grendel’s had an accident [...] *So may you all*” (Gardner, *Grendel* 174, original emphasis). One may interpret this as a curse—more or less meaning, “May you die a stupid death”—or, as Mason concludes, a benediction: “Just as Grendel’s accident has taught him the truth about reality, so may it instruct his fellow creatures” (109).

Like Borges’s “The House of Asterion,” Gardner’s *Grendel* is an attempt to voice the monstrous. The use of the classic monster implies that physical malformation is indicative of a spiritual malformation, that monstrosity comes from within. Borges creates the sense that monstrosity is situational, that Asterion’s difference and isolation give rise to his monstrous behavior. So it is, too, with *Grendel*. Even though existentialism is obviously a human philosophy that Gardner decides to critique as a monstrous philosophy by giving it to a monster, Gardner does an excellent job of “hiding” this intentional attribution by demonstrating how Grendel’s situation would lead him to existential conclusions. In doing so, “Gardner has given the medieval Grendel’s outcast estate a systematic re-explanation, wholly unrelated to the moral crime of defying God’s will” (Mason 104). Thus, in yet another similarity to Borges’s “The House of Asterion,” *Grendel* puts its monster at a distance from the transgressive act that originally defined the monster as *monstrum*. Indeed, Grendel defines himself; since his early

attempts at communication fail, he *chooses* to be a monstrous embodiment of existential nihilism in his outrage at being excluded.

Furthermore, Grendel's outrage is justified and, although his existentialism turns out to be "wrong," not all of his conclusions are. Grendel observes that the Danes are often drunk and violent, that their warfare with each other is strange and wasteful, that the Shaper deliberately rewrites history in flattering terms for money and to have a comfortable place in Hart, that the Danes forgot their past all too easily, that the Danes' morality is arbitrary and self-serving, and that Unferth's notion of the heroic is ridiculous. All of these observations are correct. Grendel's penchant for thoughtful critique is one of his sympathetic qualities. "Indeed, it is this very self-mocking, intelligent, even cheerful debunking of traditional values in the person of the not unlikable monster that has attracted many readers to the novel" (Mason 101). As with *The Minotaur Takes a Cigarette Break*, once sympathy is established with the monster, the boundaries of the human and monstrous cease clearly to be defined. Humanity is not completely right nor is monstrosity completely wrong. "[The text] suggests a dialectic, rather than a dualism, between the all-seeing dragon's vision of blind mechanistic process in the universe and the blind Shaper's vision of willfully imposing meaning on the universe through art" (Andriano 118).

From the poem *Beowulf* to Gardner's novel *Grendel*, the monster Grendel undergoes a shocking transformation. Simply by revealing the story from Grendel's point of view, leaving the poem's plotline and characterization virtually unchanged while filling in the poem's gaps, Gardner allows the reader not only to sympathize with Grendel's loneliness and anger, but also to understand how his personal philosophy

develops to justify his actions against the Danes. Gardner's Grendel also challenges many themes from *Beowulf*, including the unquestioned good and nobility of humanity, the absolute evil of the monster, and the nature of heroism. Furthermore, Gardner's great emphasis on language—Grendel's narration, his seduction by the Shaper's words, his invulnerability as a result of the dragon's talk, his verbal combat with Unferth and Beowulf—demonstrates, as Sherrill's *The Minotaur Takes a Cigarette Break* does, the intimate relationship between monsters and language.

CHAPTER 4: CALIBAN

CALIBAN IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *THE TEMPEST*

The monster Caliban first appears in William Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*. Unlike the Minotaur and Grendel, Caliban is not an example of a classic monster. For instance, Caliban speaks and is not killed by a hero. He does dwell on a border (a remote, unpopulated island); however, he is inhuman in appearance and is a relatively minor character in regard to the plot. Caliban is a rather unique take on the monster. His monstrosity is largely assumed by the characters based on his appearance and speech rather than his actions. Although several characteristics connect Caliban to a monstrous archetype known as the Wild Man, several other characteristics imply connection with actual indigenous peoples. Caliban's peculiar situation in *The Tempest* makes him interesting to postcolonial theorists (as discussed in Chapter 1), and justify a re-interpretation of his monstrosity, which just may be an *a priori* conclusion based on his appearance.

The Tempest is the story of the sorcerer Prospero, the rightful but deposed Duke of Milan, and his daughter, Miranda, who have been exiled to an island in the Mediterranean that one can deduce is "somewhere between Tunis and Naples" (Draper 94). They have been on the island for twelve years. As the play opens, a storm forces a ship—with Prospero's brother Antonio (the current Duke of Milan and deviser of Prospero's exile), Alonso (the Prince of Naples and Antonio's fellow conspirator), and others aboard—ashore Prospero's island. Once the shipwreck survivors are on the island, Prospero uses his magic and his spiritual, fairy-like servant, Ariel, to separate, charm, and

otherwise manipulate them into a situation whereby he can reclaim his rule and return to Milan.

Shakespeare uses Caliban primarily as comic relief: Caliban is lazy, cowardly, vulgar, and unintelligent. Once the survivors arrive on the island, Caliban falls in with the jester Trinculo and the drunken butler Stefano, who get Caliban drunk. Caliban, who considers them gods for their gift of wine, conspires with them in a drunken, humorous, and unsuccessful attempt to kill Prospero and usurp control of the island. This misguided scheme by Caliban, Trinculo, and Stefano is a farcical reflection of the treachery of Antonio and Alonso's brother, Sebastian. Antonio and Sebastian intend to kill Alonso so Sebastian can rule Naples, a plot similar to Antonio's and Alonso's plot to depose Prospero for Antonio's benefit twelve years prior. If Caliban represents a transgressive act as *monstrum*, then, it is illegitimate usurpation. However, he seems to be a monster that ridicules rather than warns. Caliban—an inhuman monster in the company of a jester and a drunk—is the mocking parallel to conspirators such as Antonio and Sebastian, implying that such dealings are monstrous, low, and ignoble.

Caliban's comic role belies his background. According to Prospero, who repeats the facts told to him by Ariel, Caliban is the son of the "foul witch Sycorax" who was pregnant when she was banished from Algiers in northern Africa (Shakespeare line I.ii.257). Sycorax venerated a god named Setebos and was capable of "mischiefs manifold and sorceries terrible" (I.ii.264). She died, leaving Caliban alone on the island until Prospero and Miranda arrive. Despite this appropriately monstrous background and his figurative representation of usurpation, there is not much monstrous in Caliban's behavior during the action of the play. He has none of the powers attributed to Sycorax

and, on the whole, seems relatively harmless and rather stupid. Largely, Caliban's perceived monstrosity is physical, as indicated and emphasized in descriptions by other characters. Although Prospero acknowledges Caliban's "human shape" (I.ii.284), he and other characters call him names such as a "freckled whelp, hag-born" (I.ii.283), "Filth" (I.ii.346), "savage" (I.ii.355), member of a "vile race" (I.ii.358), "monster" (II.ii.30, *et al*), "moon-calf" (II.ii.106), "misshapen knave" (V.i.268), "demi-devil" (V.i.272), "bastard" (V.i.273), "thing of darkness" (V.i.275), and "strange thing" (V.i.290). These names depict Caliban as impure, primitive, and deformed. Furthermore, Prospero implies that Caliban is less than human when he uses "litter" to refer to Caliban's birth and states that he gave Caliban "human care" as if Caliban is actually unworthy of it (I.ii.282, 346). Nowhere in the play does Shakespeare completely describe Caliban's appearance. In his article "Monster Caliban," John W. Draper compiles this description from several minute textual clues:

Caliban's body is indeed an aggregation of odd parts, half man, half fish, with fins like arms with long, sharp fingernails for digging, perhaps with a receding forehead like a puppy or a cat and the earthbound appearance of a tortoise. His mental and moral shortcomings noted by most critics are mere matters of stupidity and vice attributable to many primitives [...].

(91)

As Kenneth MacLean notes, because of Caliban's "descriptively mixed species, his suggested original speechlessness, aphasia (including his stammer)" and other characteristics (4), critics often believe him to be a variation on a monstrous archetype called the Wild Man—usually manifest in a figure such as "demon or devil, faun, satyr,

werewolf, giant, wild herdsman, malevolent cannibal, or ‘Noble Savage’” (2). His appearance and language imply monstrosity, but, as with Borges’s Asterion, Caliban’s monstrous behavior may be situational.

Caliban’s personal circumstances are tragic. He is Prospero’s unwilling slave; he lived on the island before Prospero and Miranda arrived and does not appreciate how they now treat him like a servant. He only obeys Prospero because the sorcerer and Ariel magically torment him with “cramps” and “side-stitches” (I.ii.325, 326). As Draper notes, Caliban’s appearance is inhuman but his behavior is more primitive than monstrous. Most of Caliban’s “shortcomings” (i.e. that Caliban rebels against Prospero, curses him, and conspires to kill him) are understandable considering his situation as Prospero’s slave. Caliban says, “This island’s mine by Sycorax my mother, / Which thou tak’st from me” (I.ii.331-2). Indeed, Caliban by birthright would have inherited any claim Sycorax had on the island and, furthermore, as the only indigenous inhabitant of the island, he has right of primacy as well. Any logic that justifies Prospero’s indignation at being ousted from the ruling seat of Milan also justifies Caliban’s indignation at being usurped by Prospero. As such, Caliban is a favorite figure among postcolonial theorists for illustrating the position of indigenous cultures facing European expansion. By the tenets of postcolonial theory, Caliban represents a native culture unduly dominated and influenced by European colonialism: he and his land are exploited, and he is considered less than human. This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that Sycorax is from Africa and that her god, Setebos, is actually a legitimate Patagonian deity that Shakespeare evidently cribbed from Magellan’s travelogues (Draper 94).⁴¹ If Shakespeare intends Caliban to fall into the Wild Man archetype, he—knowingly or

not—undermines this monstrosity by imbuing him with qualities of actual foreign cultures rather than imaginary inhuman qualities.

The most interesting aspect of Caliban as a monster, then, is that he has a good personal history for a monster, is inhuman in appearance, is insulted and excluded, but does not really do anything monstrous.⁴² He is in a very human situation (enslavement) and he has a very human reaction (resentment and rebellion). Evidently, Prospero and Miranda do not think he is monstrous when they first arrived on the island. Caliban reminds them:

[...] When thou cam'st first,
 Thou strok'st me and made much of me, wouldst give me
 Water with berries in't, and teach me how
 To name the bigger light, and how the less,
 That burn by day and night; and then I lov'd thee
 And show'd thee all the qualities o' th' isle,
 The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile. (I.ii. 332-8)

So, Prospero, Miranda, and Caliban had a good relationship at one time, but it never has been a relationship of equals. Miranda states that her efforts to teach Caliban are founded on pity (I.ii.353), which further reinforces that she and Prospero see Caliban as lower than human. According to Prospero, the good relationship changes when Caliban “didst seek to violate / The honor of my child” (I.ii.347-8). This attempted violation may have been a monstrous act—Prospero certainly seems to think so. Given Prospero’s and Miranda’s strong dislike of Caliban, the audience assumes that Prospero uses the word *violate* because Caliban has been aggressive and Miranda unwilling. After all, one may

read from Caliban's inhuman appearance that his father (Sycorax's unidentified paramour)⁴³ was a supernatural being with a penchant for human women; Caliban might be similarly inclined. Such lust is within the usual parameters of the Wild Man (MacLean 4).

Since Prospero gives no details, though, the audience is left with their own prejudice to lead them: if Caliban's inhuman appearance implies the Wild Man type of monstrosity, then the audience may assume aggression on Caliban's part. Conversely, without this prejudice, they might wonder if Caliban could have approached Miranda out of genuine, if rough and uncouth, affection.⁴⁴ (As we shall see, Tad Williams's *Caliban's Hour* takes this stance, depicting Caliban as a Noble Savage à la Jean-Jacques Rousseau.) Even this scenario, though, might leave Miranda feeling threatened or frightened and, without a doubt, Prospero would still call this scenario an attempted violation because of Miranda's fear or simply because he is offended by what he would consider miscegenation.⁴⁵ The postcolonial perspective interprets Prospero's anger as indicative of a fear of inter-racial relationships. Even without the postcolonial interpretation, however, Prospero implies that all might have been well for Caliban had he recognized and properly "known his place," so to speak. Even as a privileged monster taught language, even as a monster who has done nothing wrong (up until the attempted "violation"), Caliban's only crime may have been considering himself an equal worthy of approaching Miranda.

While Caliban is not a typical example of a classic monster, the characters of *The Tempest* seem to take his inhuman appearance and ineloquence as evidence of monstrosity even though there is very little behavioral evidence to support this

conclusion. Caliban is kind and helpful to Prospero and Miranda when they arrive on the island. He also seems a capable learner, since he picks up language from Miranda's teaching. While there are hints of his transgressive nature, overall any threat Caliban represents is undermined by the tragic injustice of his own situation. Caliban only wants what would be his were he considered a person under human law, but Prospero obviously considers Caliban subhuman. Prospero has no qualms of appropriating Caliban's island home and enslaving him by right of conquest even though Prospero has been similarly conquered (or, rather, overthrown) and thinks it unjust. Due to Caliban's inhumanity, the few acts of kindness he knows result from pity, and the malice he receives is because he attempts to rise above his caste. As with Sherrill's M, Caliban's monstrosity is linked to race: his mother is African, his god Patagonian, and his circumstances are transparently colonial; Trinculo even calls him "an islander" and wants to exploit him for money like showing off "a dead Indian" (II.ii.36, 33). Furthermore, even though Caliban does not narrate *The Tempest*, he does inspire sympathy through his use of language. A mute Caliban would probably seem to be just a beast. In his anger, Caliban even denigrates the gift of language—"You taught me language, and my profit on't / Is, I know how to curse" (I.ii.363-4)—but, as MacLean notes (5), Shakespeare gives Caliban very moving lines that induce sympathy, such as when Caliban describes a dream: "The clouds methought would open, and show riches / Ready to drop upon me; that, when I wak'd, / I cried to dream again" (Shakespeare III.ii.139-41). Through the language taught to him out of pity, Caliban can explain the injustice of his situation and engender sympathy from the audience even if the other characters largely ignore his plight.

CALIBAN IN ROBERT BROWNING'S "CALIBAN UPON SETEBOS"

In his *Dramatis Personae*, Robert Browning uses Caliban's voice in the dramatic monologue "Caliban upon Setebos; or, Natural Theology in the Island." Setebos, as Prospero and Caliban both note in *The Tempest*, is the name of the deity venerated by the witch Sycorax, Caliban's mother. *Natural theology*, of course, is an attempt at theology based on reason and experience, which is exactly what occurs in the poem: Caliban explains his opinion on the nature of the god Setebos who created him and the Mediterranean island setting of *The Tempest*, and who has characteristics strikingly similar to Caliban's.

Browning begins the poem with an epigram from Psalm 50:21, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself." The epigram foreshadows Caliban's reasoning as he discusses Setebos, because Caliban does think that Setebos is like himself. Although the epigram "points out the folly and presumptuousness of attributing human motives to a deity," as William Butts explains, "remember, however, that this tendency is perfectly natural, and that Caliban is, above all, man in his most natural state" (26). Most of the body of the poem (lines 26-240) consists of Caliban describing his own observations of life on the island and concluding that these observations correspond to Setebos (Melchiori 100). For example, Caliban makes a "gourd-fruit into mash" (Browning line 68), drinks it "till maggots scamper through [his] brain" (72), and creates a figure out of clay upon which he alternatively bestows favor and injury. Caliban concludes this episode with, "so He" (97), referring to Setebos and indicating that Setebos is likewise drunk and capricious. Caliban claims he only "loves what does him good" and sees "[no] use at all i' the work, for work's sole sake" because all acts of pure

creation are impermanent (180, 198). Caliban again indicates, “so He” (199), meaning that Setebos is the same way, doing only what pleases him and not being creative for the sake of creation. However, although Setebos does not create for creation’s sake, Caliban believes that Setebos did create the island. Caliban reconciles this apparent contradiction by explaining that Setebos created the island “in spite” (56).

This spite arises from Setebos’s peculiar situation as a secondary god. Caliban describes how another god, called the “Quiet” created Setebos (137). The Quiet exists on a higher plane that Setebos envies the same way that fish that dwell in the cold fresh water of the island envy the warm water of the ocean in which they cannot live (33-43). Caliban concludes that Setebos is frustrated with this in-between state and, furthermore, “out of very spite / Makes this a bauble world [i.e. the island] to ape yon real” because “He could not, Himself, make a second self / to be His mate” and finds “solace making baubles, ay, and sport” (146-7, 57-8, 149). Furthermore, Setebos’s creations are “Weaker in most points, stronger in a few, / Worthy, and yet mere playthings all the while” (63-5). In Caliban’s description, Setebos is characterized by limitation, envy, frustration, and petty cruelty. As Caliban describes his pastimes—such as “making and marring” clay figures “at will” (97), imagining a self-aware bird whistle proud that it can “make a cry my maker cannot make” only to “smash it” for its presumptuousness (124, 126), pretending to be Prospero by capturing a “sea-beast” and penning “the drudge / In a hole o’ the rock and calls him Caliban” (163, 165)—it is obvious that Caliban, too, is characterized by limitation, envy, and frustration and finds solace and sport in a make-believe world of playthings. Caliban is limited in his role as slave, envies both Setebos (because of His power) and Prospero (because he thinks Setebos favors Prospero), and,

out of frustration, entertains himself “with make-believes” and arbitrarily showing favor or cruelty to the animals on the island lower than himself (169).

Since Caliban believes that Setebos would be as arbitrary and cruel with his life as he is with the animals, he superstitiously takes care not to attract Setebos’s attention. As Arnold Shapiro notes, “he is so afraid of being overheard that he refers to himself in the third person through most of the poem and keeps his ‘I’ well hidden” (59).⁴⁶ Near the end of the poem, after Caliban wonders if Setebos “may doze, doze, as good as die” (283), Caliban notices an ominous silence and sees what he fears is an agent of Setebos: “His raven that has told Him all” (286). Caliban attempts to make light of his blasphemy, saying, “It was fool’s play, this prattling! Ha!” (287). He then lists the punishments he will inflict upon himself to escape the wrath of Setebos.

Browning’s “Caliban upon Setebos” is especially revealing as a window into the mind of a monster. Set off in brackets, the opening segment (lines 1-23), in which Caliban describes himself loafing on the beach as Prospero and Miranda sleep, sets the tone of the poem. As Butts explains:

The intimate tone of whispering that the brackets suggest, the speech consisting of a string of vivid images, the grossly sensual pictures he describes contrasted with awkward attempts at abstraction—all these reflect closely, as if in capsulated form, the mind followed throughout the poem. The segment is a crash course in Caliban—it prepares the reader for accepting Caliban’s statements as those of a limited mind speaking from immediate experience only. When first seen, Caliban looks like a delighted pig wallowing in mud, more of an animal granted the ability to

speak than an early man. He clearly shows the unsteady emotions and simplistic reasoning of a child, reverting from unbounded joy to cruelty to pity to mischievousness. (27)

Like Borges's "The House of Asterion" and Gardner's *Grendel*, Browning's poem is a brilliant demonstration of "how one type of evil (subhuman, not completely human) mind operates" (Shapiro 62). However, as with Borges's Asterion and Gardner's Grendel, "Browning's Caliban demands our sympathy, even our admiration" (Harrison 25). Butts agrees, "We may feel amused at the advancement of his ideas, the crudeness of his logic, or the odd flights of imagination, but Caliban the person deserves our sympathy" (27). In his struggle to conceptualize divinity, Caliban is not so different from humanity. As Barbara Melchiori states, "Caliban upon Setebos" demonstrates "the thought processes by which a concept of God could, or would, come into being" (96). Many critics seem dismayed by Caliban's monstrous behavior and logic, but others take him to represent primitive man.

Although Setebos, for the most part, is a reflection of Caliban, there are indications that Setebos reflects Prospero as well. For example, when Caliban imagines Setebos's death, he imagines that Setebos "may doze, doze, as good as die" (283). Caliban associates freedom with a sleeping master because that is exactly his situation on the island: at the beginning of the poem, Caliban finds himself able to do as he likes because "Prosper and Miranda sleep" (20). Furthermore, Caliban proves his obedience to Setebos by punishing himself, just as Prospero punishes Caliban to coax his obedience in *The Tempest*. So, while Setebos reflects Caliban, who is "narrow, totally egocentric, and made cruel because of his fear, envy, and cowardice" (Shapiro 55), the relationship

between Caliban and Setebos—that of slave and master—reflects the relationship between Caliban and Prospero. Caliban’s god is as much a reflection of his own unrefined thought as it is a reflection of his situation as a slave. If Caliban cowers in terror at the power he believes Setebos wields over him, it is because that is what his relationship with Prospero has taught him.

As John Hunter Lammers discusses in his article “‘Caliban Upon Setebos’: Browning’s Divine Comedy,” while some critics read Browning’s poem “as a study of a primitive mind making progress toward religious truth” wherein Browning attempts to give voice to what must be Caliban’s perspective, “other critics have decided that the poem’s main purpose is religious satire” where Browning uses Caliban as a mouthpiece for the poet’s opinion (94). Butts echoes this critical divide, referring to it as an “unusual split” (24). Certainly, there is adequate evidence for both points of view. Like Gardner’s use of Grendel, Browning manages to use Caliban to voice a human opinion that, in Caliban’s predicament, very well could be the monster’s own. Obviously, Caliban’s feelings of helplessness, victimization, limitation, envy, and frustration that come through in Setebos result from his sad state as Prospero’s slave. As religious satire, the poem evokes disgust at Caliban’s egocentrism, selfishness, cruelty, cowardice, and his need to justify these attributes with a god-figure and demands that we take a closer look at our own theology to see if we might have done something similar. At the same time, however, an understanding of Caliban’s pitiful state also evokes sympathy.

Like Gardner’s Grendel, Browning’s Caliban is conscious of the power of language. Lammers explains, “‘Caliban’ is also finally and most basically Browning’s delightful attempt to call our attention to the serious and wonderful significance of words.

To suggest the importance of the topic, he lets Caliban be concerned constantly with ‘words,’ ‘speech,’ ‘talk,’ and ‘tongue[s]’ (Lammers 118; Browning 15, 17, 19, 23, 50, 52, 153, 209, 268, 270). Caliban makes much of speaking aloud, stating that “it is good to [...] gibe, / Letting the rank tongue blossom into speech” (Browning 21-2). Also, as already noted, Caliban deliberately uses the third person to distance himself from his own words, for he does not want Setebos to overhear him. Indeed, but who could hear him, anyway? As Shapiro explains, “unlike the speakers in most of Browning’s dramatic monologues, [Caliban] has no listener” (59). Caliban may be self-conscious of his language, but he uses it to no constructive purpose. Shapiro explains that Caliban’s language is “[totally] reflexive”: “He attempts to deceive Setebos. He slanders Prospero, Miranda, and Ariel. Planning punishments for innocent creatures that have not harmed him, he gives his mouth to evil” (58). Furthermore:

Prospero and Caliban are types of the artist. Caliban’s art, as Browning implies throughout the poem, is destructive and futile. A spiteful mimic, he “plays” at being Prospero, for example, in order to vent his rage. He creates a bird in order to pull of its legs. In his imagination, he conjures up a whistle that can outperform him. He smashes it. [...] By contrast, Prospero’s art, [...] works outward to help people. Through his magic and spells, Prospero creates situations in which evil people such as Antonio and Sebastian are forced to show their true colors. (Shapiro 60)

Very much like Gardner’s Grendel, who speaks aloud to build his destructive identity in opposition to the creative song of the Shaper, Browning’s Caliban uses language for self-absorbed, counter-productive imaginings. Yet, despite the monstrous quality of his

imagination and the primitive nature of his logic, Browning's Caliban elicits as much sympathy as Shakespeare's—like Borges's Asterion and Gardner's Grendel, the monstrosity of Browning's Caliban is largely situational. Furthermore, Caliban's case is not just a matter of exclusion, but of oppression.

CALIBAN IN TAD WILLIAM'S *CALIBAN'S HOUR*

Caliban's oppression is the fundamental theme of *Caliban's Hour* by Tad Williams, wherein Caliban details his life before and after *The Tempest*. Williams seems to take the postcolonial interpretation of *The Tempest* to heart, because his Caliban is hardly monstrous at all and much of the novel dwells on Caliban's hardships and mistreatment. Unlike the modern revisions of monsters discussed so far, *Caliban's Hour* alters some of the details of its source material and, in doing so, is a less elegant rebuttal to the original, but is no less powerful. Furthermore, Williams's Caliban provides explicit commentary on the power of language in the mouth of the monster.

Caliban's Hour, in part, revisits *The Tempest*, but Williams revises some of Shakespeare's details. For instance, Williams's Caliban does not physically resemble Shakespeare's Caliban. The third-person narrator of the first and last chapters describes Caliban thus: "a shaggy-haired head set low and tilted forward on a short neck and broad, muscle-knotted shoulders. His skin was tanned and leathery. Beneath his heavy, bony brows his eyes glinted as shockingly yellow as an owl's" (Williams 17). When Caliban compares himself to the shipwreck survivors, he observes that they "were tall, even the old, bent ones. None of them had my long arms, my low brow" (94). Williams's Caliban is thus more of primitive man or an ape than the "half man half fish" Caliban from *The Tempest* (Draper 91). The illustrations in *Caliban's Hour* depict a young Caliban

reminiscent of Mowgli from Disney's 1967 animated adaptation of Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*: skinny, long of limb, dusky skin, shaggy dark hair. Only the low brow gives any hint of animalistic or subhuman qualities.

The novel is framed by chapters set in Naples twenty years after the events of *The Tempest* in the castle where Miranda, her husband Prince Ferdinand of Naples (whom Miranda is due to wed at the end of *The Tempest*), and their family live. As the novel opens, Caliban, who has escaped the island and made his way to Naples, sneaks into the castle and into Miranda's bedchamber when she is alone. Foreshadowing the novel's emphasis on language, he tells her, "We must be careful with our words, after all—they are very important. In fact, they have brought me here. [...] I...have...*words*...for you." (Williams 19, original emphasis). He explains he left the island to avenge himself on Prospero, but found the sorcerer was already dead. He then made his way to Naples for the next best thing: Miranda. Caliban says he means to kill her, but first he wants to tell his life story so she will understand his need for revenge.

The bulk of the novel consists of Caliban narrating his past with a few breaks back into the "present" to speak face to face with the now adult Miranda. Williams's Caliban is much more eloquent and intelligent than Shakespeare's Caliban. For instance, although Shakespeare's Caliban has limited proficiency of English, Williams's Caliban demonstrates that he knows a bit of Latin when he nicknames Miranda's unconscious guard "Somnambulo" (60). Beyond altering Caliban's appearance and intelligence, Williams fills in and revises several details in Caliban's biography. *The Tempest* never explains, for example, why Sycorax did not teach Caliban to speak, but Williams's Caliban explains that Sycorax "spoke to me only in grunts" because the people of Algiers

“scorched out her tongue with a fire-heated iron” before her exile (31, 34). Caliban draws a correlation between Sycorax and Prospero, both exiled because people feared their use of magic. While he seems to find this similarity ironic, he does not see the further similarity between him and Miranda: that they are both the children of sorcerers and know only one parent. Beyond this correlation, however, Caliban and Miranda have completely different childhoods. When Sycorax dies, Caliban describes exactly how unique his situation is: “Not only had my sole companion but my only god had died. That is something no one but me can ever understand—the utter loneliness, the abandonment, the sudden and shatteringly fearful emptiness of my universe” (76). Like the monster of Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Caliban is both abandoned and isolated from humanity altogether: “I had less than nothing, for I could not conceive of there being anything else remotely like me. The island *was* my world, and I knew as no other person knows that the world was empty of human company” (79, original emphasis).

Although he was lonely, Caliban romanticizes this time of his life. He tells Miranda that in this time—the time before he knew language—he “lived in a world of certain, solid truths” (26). These truths contrast with Caliban’s world after he learns language, because “with language I learned lies” (25). Although his time alone on the island is frightening and lonely, Caliban prefers the island to cities: “With so many crushed together, and each one telling a thousand tiny lies in an hour, lying with every breath, every glance, can you tell me that my isolation and simplicity were worse?” (26). With his romanticized view of the state of nature, Williams’s Caliban is clearly more Noble Savage than Wild Man. This point of view, together with his lack of inhuman appearance, establishes the Caliban of *Caliban’s Hour* as more man than monster.

The island's emptiness is eventually filled by the arrival of Prospero and Miranda. Caliban describes how Prospero "considered me little more than an animal, and that is the way he lured me, with food and soft words" (81). Caliban describes his early friendship with Prospero and Miranda, learning language from them and even receiving gifts from them: "a pair of breeches" and "an axe" (109, 111). He says, "I looked down at my new breeches, then gazed at the beautiful, heavy thing lying in my hands. I was overwhelmed" (111). Honored by the civilized gifts of words, clothes, and tools, Caliban proves his worthiness by doing anything they ask, including building them a house. Caliban, "delighted by this additional gift of responsibility," is unaware of his exploitation at first (112). After the house is finished, though, Caliban is continuously sent on errands and Miranda alone receives Prospero's schooling. He sees an unwelcome pattern forming. He explains to Miranda:

At first Prospero asked me to do these things as a favor, a kindness from me that would allow him more time for gathering leaves and seeds or for teaching you your catechism. But when repetition and the passage of time had made those same deeds routine instead of extraordinary, he began to criticize any small error or dereliction. (126)

Caliban becomes more aware of his status in Prospero's eyes when he is not given a place in the house he built: "I was given my own small chamber—a shed, in plain words—at the house's far western side. [...It] was far from where your father slept, and it was farther still from you, Miranda" (129). Caliban suspects that Prospero's attitude towards him has changed: he is no longer given gifts, or taught, and Prospero begins slowly to

exclude and exploit him. “Less and less did Prospero even pretend to treat me as a man, much less as family” (141).

Much of *Caliban’s Hour* simply makes the postcolonial themes present in *The Tempest* more explicit. The key elements in *The Tempest* that establish Caliban’s monstrosity—and therefore Prospero’s excuse to use him so badly—are Caliban’s “Wild Man” lust and Prospero’s accusation of an attempted violation. To undermine Caliban’s lust, Williams again romanticizes the purity of Caliban’s natural state in a passage where Caliban describes how he accidentally one day comes upon Miranda bathing in a waterfall. Seeing her reaction to this part of the story, Caliban breaks narration to address her directly:

I see you flinch, see your lips curl to spit some epithet at me, but you do me an injustice. I was not spying, had no dream of anything but surprising my friend. And as for the thoughts that suddenly whirled in my head—the thoughts that now bring a blush to your cheek, a reddening I can see even by candlelight!—they were the thoughts of an innocent. As was my heart an innocent’s heart.

Can you doubt it? Can there have been any thinking creature on the earth more untouched by base lechery than I? In my years of life, I had never seen a flesh-and-blood woman unclothed. (136)

Williams’s depiction of Caliban as a romanticized, natural innocent sets the stage for the so-called attempted violation of Miranda. As Caliban recalls the event—and Miranda does not disagree—he decides one day to show her a special pine in the woods, one surrounded by a thicket of briars that no one but him has ever seen. There, Caliban admits

his love for Miranda and embraces her. Caliban breaks his narration to note to the listening Miranda, “You sounded a little surprised, but I heard no fear” (153). Just as their curious, confused, clumsy adolescent fumbblings turn to sensual caresses, the sprite Ariel speaks from the pine tree and frightens Miranda. Ariel—who unbeknownst to Caliban was imprisoned in the tree by Sycorax when she first came to the island—at just that moment gains enough magical control over a hive of bees to use it as his voice. Miranda is so confused, embarrassed, and frightened that she runs home and reports the whole scene to Prospero, who beats Caliban with his magical staff, “smashing at my head and limbs and ribs as I curled on the floor, ranting as he did so that I had tried to defile his daughter, that I was a vile, vile beast” (156). Despite Prospero’s words, however, Williams undermines every bit of physical and behavioral evidence that Caliban is a beast. Since Prospero considers Caliban subhuman while the text clearly emphasizes Caliban’s humanity, *Caliban’s Hour* is in line with postcolonial interpretations of *The Tempest*.

Ironically, it is Prospero’s treatment of Caliban that makes him monstrous. Prospero’s beating leaves Caliban bent and crooked, giving him the monstrous bearing seen in *The Tempest*. Furthermore, after Prospero binds Ariel to obedience, he uses Ariel’s magic to subjugate Caliban fully. Ariel remembers Sycorax and is all too happy to coerce Caliban through pain. Caliban describes these years of abuse and labor as his darkest days:

If ever I truly was an animal—and the spark within me shouts protest against the thought—it was in that time. Before you came to my island, I had been ignorant of speech, but I had known hope and joy and simple

pleasure in the fact of my life; now all those things were gone. I lost sight of everything but beastlike plodding, my spirit mired in sullen misery. I was truly the mud-man. (173).

Here Caliban also notes that speech is a part of his misery. According to Caliban, because of language he is able to comprehend fully the injustice of his situation by comparing his situation to Prospero, who “gagging on the injustices that had been done to him, taught me—along with the words that could describe such as alien thing in the first place—the cursed idea that there was such a thing as justice, as fairness, as right and wrong” (48). Caliban notes language’s capacity for lies. To Caliban, the words *justice* and *fairness* are lies because the concepts certainly never have applied to his life.

When Caliban narrates the events of *The Tempest* from his point of view, he does so in such a way that emphasizes Prospero’s deceit and selfishness (perhaps even monstrosity?):

Prospero held himself a good man who had been poorly used. Even should we set aside his vicious treatment of me, Miranda, does putting the terror of watery death into his enemies—achieved at what he felt was the petty cost of drowning a few dozen sailors—sound like the action of a good man? Does baiting with his daughter’s virtue a snare to recatch his dukedom sound like goodness? And the selling of that daughter to his old enemy to enable his own resumption of power? I am sure you thought your swift love of Ferdinand genuine, but it was the last thing needed for Prospero’s complete triumph: he must have known, even planned, that it would happen. How could you fail to love a tall, handsome young

stranger? What comparison did you have but crippled, muddy Caliban?

(174)

The many rhetorical questions lead the reader to Caliban's point of view, that Prospero's control over the events of *The Tempest* are far from noble. Furthermore, Caliban tells Miranda he never did act against Prospero: "He told you that those sailors and I plotted some murderous rebellion, that only his wits and Ariel's magics saved you and him from death. Lies, lies, lies!" (176). According to Caliban, he meets Trinculo and Stefano ("rough fellows, those two, but honest withal"), tells them about his situation and the island, and they attempt to inform the nobles from their ship that Prospero is near (176). But, as Caliban says, "We arrived at the house on the hillside at last to discover that the game was played, the story told, and we three but comic afterthoughts" (177). According to Caliban, then, Shakespeare's version of *The Tempest* is an untrue flattery of the human characters, just as Gardner's Grendel observes in the Shaper's songs.

As the events depicted in the play pass, all the humans and even Ariel leave the island. Caliban is again left alone, completely abandoned for the second time in his life. This time, however, is worse because he now has language:

[...] as the months turned into a year, and then years, the silence began to smother me.

You might think it odd to describe the island as a silent place, with its shrill monkey chatter and screech of birds, noises of wind and weather, the perpetual rumble of the sea. But I had become used to the sound of human speech, Miranda. There is no silence so frightening as that which rises up

when one's own voice stops and there is no one to listen or to care. (188-9)

Although they think they leave Caliban in the state of nature in which he was born, Caliban explains the difference to Miranda:

You stole my island, but not merely the physical fact of it. With your words, your names, your ideas, even your very presence, you took the place I had lived all my life and set it somewhere beyond my reach. During the two decades of miserable, solitary exile after you sailed away, the island never again felt like the home it had been. [...] Even the way I thought about my childhood home was irretrievably changed. [...] You took the only things I possessed—my island, my heart, my life—and sailed away.

And perhaps cruelest of all, you infected me with speech, then uncaringly left me to live out my life in empty, lonely silence. (189-90)

This silence is just one of the offenses for which Caliban desires revenge against Prospero. After twenty years, a ship comes close enough for Caliban to swim out and sneak aboard. By this time, though, Prospero is already dead, so Caliban decides to have his revenge on Miranda, who allowed Caliban to take the blame for their mutually initiated near-sexual encounter. He decides that she, too, must not consider him an equal if she has let him suffer so much to cover her shame.

Rather than kill Miranda, though, Caliban has another choice: Giulietta, one of Miranda's daughters, who has been hiding in a closet since Caliban's arrival and has overheard his entire story. She, like Caliban, does not appreciate civilization. She sees

that Prince Ferdinand virtually ignores Miranda, and she is not looking forward to her own arranged marriage. Drawn by Caliban's romanticized view of nature, she would prefer to live on the island with Caliban than marry someone she does not love. She also does not think Caliban is monstrous. Giulietta tells Caliban, "If you will spare my mother, I will be your companion. I have listened to you all the night long. I think you are no monster, but a man" (195). Since she has heard him speak before she sees him, Giulietta forms her opinion on his story, not his appearance. She is so moved by his story that she is willing to choose an uncertain and potentially dangerous future over the one she has been raised to honor. Caliban accepts her offer and they set off to return to the island. Giulietta's preference implies that Caliban, the island, and the romanticized state of nature they represent are preferable to civilization, which Caliban depicts as duplicitous and corrupt.

Williams is a bit liberal with artistic license in *Caliban's Hour*; his many obvious revisions to *The Tempest* make his support of the postcolonial interpretation of the play likewise obvious, and a bit heavy-handed. Gide, Borges, and Sherrill do not take such liberties with their source material on the Minotaur, nor does Gardner for Grendel. That their plots and monsters are relatively true to the originals helps create the image of the humane monster, the monster with human qualities, the monster with a voice. Rather than demonstrate that Caliban is a humane monster, perhaps Williams intends, as Giulietta concludes, to demonstrate that Caliban is "no monster, but a man." *Caliban's Hour* does more than simply justify the hatred Caliban exudes in *The Tempest*, it idealizes him as the opposite of monstrous: he is strong, intelligent, patient, enduring, and ultimately forgiving. He also promotes truth and despises lies. In the end, perhaps Caliban's

problem with language is not with language itself, but with those who speak it. In terms of semiotics, *langue* as a system cannot be all lies, but individual instances of *parole* can be, if the speaker intends. After all, his own act of language—the text of *Caliban's Hour*—is a truth that ultimately leads to reconciliation.

All three incarnations of Caliban speak, but none for truly monstrous purposes. Caliban of *The Tempest* is basically comic relief, mocking the play's true villains. However, Shakespeare gave him more human characteristics than we can ignore. His rude and vulgar Caliban may not be admirable, but by listening to his words, it is possible to understand the personal tragedy that justifies his discontent. The Caliban of "Caliban upon Setebos" magnifies this discontent through theology, unknowingly reversing the adage "as above, so below." Browning's Caliban believes that even his god is in a limited, in-between state, made capricious and unpredictable out of frustration. Browning may intend satire, that Caliban's primitive attempt to understand divinity mirrors our own, but, again, it is evident that Caliban's description of his god comes from his particular experience as Prospero's slave. The Caliban of *Caliban's Hour* is not monstrous at all, except perhaps for his desire for murder, which is ultimately absolved. With language more direct and lengthy than Shakespeare's or Browning's, Williams's Caliban reveals that he is a person who became a monster. He demonstrates that his monstrosity is not just situational, but that it is actually caused by humans. Although he is given enough language and tools to be useful, he is slowly excluded, oppressed, made into a scapegoat, and even made grotesque to fit the role of monster.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

Some arguments of monster theory lead to the conclusion that monsters should have a voice. “The House of Asterion” by Jorge Luis Borges, *The Minotaur Takes a Cigarette Break* by Steven Sherrill, *Grendel* by John Gardner, “Caliban upon Setebos” by Robert Browning, and *Caliban’s Hour* by Tad Williams all revise and give voice to previously unvoiced monsters. These stories reveal that monsters have a complex relationship with language and, furthermore, reveal the developing cultural relationship of Norm and Other as demonstrated in relationship of human and monster.⁴⁷

The Minotaur and Grendel are not able to speak in their original texts; Caliban is not very skilled in speech in *The Tempest*. All of the voiced monsters discussed in the previous chapters are first-person narrators, with the exception of Sherrill’s M. M has a problem with speaking, but the narrator of *The Minotaur Takes a Cigarette Break* is close enough to M to describe his thoughts and feelings. But why would M’s problems with speech matter if the story is written? As the other voiced monsters demonstrate, there is some connection between monstrous narrators and spoken language. Borges’s Asterion must speak his monologue aloud because he cannot read or write. Gardner’s Grendel, too, must be read as speaking his story aloud because he narrates up until his death; he never has time to write the story. Browning’s Caliban also speaks aloud, and Williams’s Caliban narrates his story to Miranda.

But, in terms of suspension of disbelief and layers of authorship, who *within the fictional world* could have written these stories down? Outside the fictional framework, of course, the authors write the text. But *in* the story, who is the audience or interlocutor? Borges’s Asterion kills everyone he encounters except for Theseus, who kills him. Who

is the audience of Asterion's monologue? Unless he relates the monologue to Theseus (which does not seem likely), there is no one in the labyrinth to overhear and record Asterion's words as he speaks the text of "The House of Asterion." The same is true for Gardner's Grendel and Browning's Caliban. No one in these fictional worlds "writes" these stories, and no one is present to witness the original telling, either. Yet, the texts read as if the monsters are talking to someone. Perhaps they are not, though. Maybe all monsters talk to themselves like Gardner's Grendel or to imaginary friends like Borges's Asterion. The question of writing is a problem even with Williams's Caliban, who tells his story directly to Miranda. It seems unlikely that she records his story since the third person narrator in the first chapters is aware of events Caliban does not relate to her. With most of these stories, the reader seems to be a fly on the wall near the monster at all times, reading what the fly would hear as the monster speaks to himself.⁴⁸

That monstrous narrators present such difficulties in their stories should be no surprise. Monsters, in general, seem to have difficulties with learning and using language. The monster of Shelley's *Frankenstein* demonstrates the difficulties monsters have in acquiring language. Exclusion from society does not provide ample opportunity to learn language. "The House of Asterion" is unclear as to how Asterion learns language while alone in the labyrinth; Gardner's Grendel cannot remember how he learned language; Caliban, in all of his texts, does not have language before Prospero teaches him.⁴⁹ Indeed, for any of these monsters to have enough mastery of language to narrate his story is phenomenal. In order to receive a monstrous narrative, then, the reader must allow for two very specific leaps in logic: first, the reader must concede the point that the monster somehow learns language, and second, the reader must take the text as dialogue and

“listen” to it, ignoring the fact that the monster could not have written it. Granted, these two concessions are common in the act of reading many texts, but with the monstrous narrator, these concessions become problematic if over-analyzed because they reveal the intercession of the certainly human writer between the inhuman speaker and the human reader/listener. Being aware of the human writer would seem to discredit the authenticity of inhuman voice except that, of course, the reader is aware that the author is human. That the author provides language to the monster is obvious. An inhuman, excluded Other simply should not have language at all—a point demonstrated by nearly every instance of the classic monster.

So, then, if we ultimately concede that a monster’s verbal skill is simply an implausible necessity in order to have it narrate a story—much like stories in outer space necessitate the use of similarly implausible technology such as faster-than-light spacecraft—the question then is, why do we need to make these imaginative leaps in order to hear a monster’s story? What does first person narration provide that third person would not? Peter Brooks answers this question in an analysis of Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. In his article, “What is a Monster? (According to *Frankenstein*),” Brooks notes the significance of a passage in *Frankenstein* where the monster places his hands over Frankenstein’s eyes before he speaks: “The Monster clearly understands that it is not visual relation that favours him—indeed, [...] his only favourable reception from a human being thus far has come from the blind de Lacey—but rather the auditory or interlocutionary, the relation of language” (83). Any textual representation of a monster effectively does the same thing; it hides the physical grotesqueness of the monster from the reader. Note that Sherrill’s M, constantly referred to as “the Minotaur” by the

narrator, does not offer this kind of textual blindfold. Brooks also explains the impact of speech from Shelley's monster: "This hideous and deformed creature, speaks and reasons with the highest elegance, logic, and persuasiveness" (83). This statement can only apply to Williams's Caliban; the other voiced monsters either lack elegance (Sherrill's M) or have a faulty, monstrous quality to their thought and logic (Borges's Asterion, Gardner's Grendel, Browning's Caliban). Brooks's clincher, however, applies to all of the monstrous narrators:

By persuading Frankenstein to give his creature a hearing, thus opening the innermost frame of the novel [wherein the Monster narrates], the Monster has adumbrated what Roland Barthes would call a 'narrative contract' between narrator and narratee. The narrative contract, like the psychoanalytic transference, is based on and implied the intersubjective, transindividual, cultural order of language. Language by its very nature transcends and pre-exists the individual locator; it implies, depends on, and necessitates that network of intersubjective relations from which the Monster protests he has been excluded. That is, in becoming the narrator of his story, the Monster both dramatizes his problem and provides a model for its solution, the solution implicit in the discursive interdependence of an 'I' and 'thou' in any interlocutionary situation.

(84)

In short, the act of hearing the monster speak forces Frankenstein to relate to it in several ways, consciously, unconsciously, and even culturally. The simple act of understanding the words and tropes of the language implies certain similarities in thought and

experience. Furthermore, to understand someone else's opinion or point of view (as Gardner's *Grendel* vividly demonstrates) is to internalize it—to believe it—on some level. In this respect, all narrating monsters are types after Shelley's monster. The use of first person narration forces the reader into a position of empathy, sympathy, and understanding. Borges's *Asterion*, Gardner's *Grendel*, and Browning's *Caliban* are all proof: they represent truly monstrous points of view—thoughts, feelings, and bent logic that arise from their peculiar situations—yet they evoke sympathy all the same.

First person narration is the most successful way to generate sympathy for an inhuman character. That is a logical rhetorical tactic for a monster writing his own story, but what compels a human author to create, to give voice to, and to evoke sympathy for an inhuman character in this way? The voiced monster is not completely Other, but is definitely still marginalized from the Norm. Beginning with sympathy for the monstrous point of view, the inhuman narrator also provides a unique perspective from which to offer critique on the human world. For instance, Sherrill's *M* is uncomfortable with several aspects of modernity, such as telephones and automatic doors. He also dislikes interstates and lives in deliberate frugality. Since the reader apprehends his fundamental humanity, and, furthermore, has a somewhat dubious take on the Norm for its harsh treatment of *M*, the implication is that *M* may not just be out of date, but that maybe we, too, should be bothered by the things that bother him. Gardner's *Grendel* quite correctly reveals the liberties we take with our own history and the limitations of existentialist philosophy. Browning's *Caliban*, revealing how he has unconsciously created a god that is very much like himself, implies that perhaps we, too, have done something similar.

Williams's Caliban praises the purity of his state of nature and illustrates the duplicity of language and the flaws of civilization.

In the terms of dialogic criticism, the utilization of an inhuman narrative voice allows authors to present a dominant but *countercultural* monologic discourse—one that subverts, rather than reinforces, the authoritative ideologies of their own cultures. That such discourse comes from a sympathetic yet marginalized voice seems to be particularly effective because the voice is familiar enough to be understood, but is outside and therefore objective. In the creation of inhuman narrators to represent sympathetic Others who challenge some aspect of the Norm, authors actively participate in the developing relationship between Norm and Other.

In the classic use, the monster is illogical and subversive, taking part of the animal and the human without belonging to either. The monstrous Other, in relation to the Norm, is that-which-challenges, that-which-threatens, that-which-undoes. The Norm, positively defined, consists of social contracts and agreements, cultural mores and traditions. Despite that the Norm is reevaluated through monster theory and post-colonial theory in a somewhat deconstructive turn—into conformity-as-oppression, the homogeny-that-excludes, the center-that-marginalizes—the Norm is a fundamental source of order in the human sphere. The monstrous Other, then, in its broadest implications must be entropy.

The original Minotaur, Grendel, and Caliban reinforce this conclusion. In their original texts, all of these monsters represent transgressions against higher order. The Minotaur represents a transgression of a covenant—he is the *monstrum* created when Minos brings misfortune and doom by crossing a very jealous and very wrathful god; Grendel represents a transgression of the bonds of fellowship—he is the wrath, murder,

and anarchy that threatens to undo the benefits of a lawful civilization; Caliban represents a transgression of law and honesty—he is selfishness and treachery. These monsters represent fundamental problems that threaten to undermine the value systems of the cultures that create them. Symbolizing these problems in monsters is useful in identifying them, but the literary victory of a hero over a monster does not equal a cultural victory over that particular problem. Rather, this symbolizing creates a trap: we embody the forces of entropy in the Other in an effort to purify ourselves and thus fail to recognize that these forces—the true target of our fear, the ultimate source of our undoing—lie within ourselves.

Monsters demonstrate this discrepancy when we give them voices. They reveal that, with language, they have a human aspect and we can understand them. Borges's Asterion tells us we have been unfair to him, that he would rather die than stay hidden away where he has no connection to anything except madness. Sherrill's M tells us that we have made him an inadequate freak and only recognition of our own freakishness can help him integrate. Gardner's Grendel tells us he has no choice but to embrace meaninglessness, that our prejudice and exclusion give him no other option. Browning's Caliban tells us the cruelty he sees in the cosmos at large is a reflection of the cruelty shown to him. They all seem to agree with Williams's Caliban, who adamantly tells us he is not a monster, but that out of some twisted, selfish need, we have turned him into one.

As Cawson, Andriano, and Cohen note, acknowledgement of the monster is a necessary step in human development because in all ways it is human. If nothing more, the monster allows us to view our entropic nature without condoning or encouraging the behavior—to create and analyze the Other that would undo our Norm. In pointing out

weakness, however, the Other challenges the Norm to evolve. Lada-Richards says the monster represents totality, a fusion of categories rather than a breaking of them. This totality resembles a theory of perennial philosopher Ken Wilber, who explains that evolution must always “transcend and include” (31). That is, nothing is left behind; all that is, continues to be on a more sophisticated level of order. Thus, a society must transcend the limitations of the past by discovering ways to include the unique until, ultimately, everything that is inherently human can be acknowledged and incorporated, including those aspects we often attribute to the monstrous in a misdirected attempt to exorcize ourselves of sin and imperfection. Monsters are the way to this transcendence.

In fact, this transcendence has already begun. The next step after monstrous narrators, in light of Lada-Richards comments on totality, would logically be characters who participate in humanity and monstrosity without privileging or criticizing either. There are at least two examples of this kind of transcendent character, Max of Maurice Sendak’s picture book *Where the Wild Things Are* and the titular character of Mike Mignola’s *Hellboy* cycle of comic books. Max is a human child who, after dressing in an animal-like costume and acting like a “wild thing,” is sent to bed without any supper. That night he visits “the place where the wild things are,” becomes their king, and participates in a “wild rumpus” with them—howling at the moon, hanging from trees, and cavorting in the forest—before returning to his room, his mother, his supper, and his humanity. *Where the Wild Things Are* implies that we can have it both ways: we can have civilization, and we can have a place where we dwell in the “wild” or monstrous. Conversely, Hellboy is born to be as evil as evil can get:⁵⁰ he is a demon from Hell summoned to Earth by Nazis to instigate the end of the world. Just a child when

summoned, Hellboy is taken in by the Allies and raised in America. In a complete contradiction to his inborn, nefarious purpose, Hellboy loves pancakes, cracking wise, and defeating other supernatural baddies as an occult investigator for the United States government's Bureau of Paranormal Research and Defense. Several times Hellboy faces the truth of his birth, told by some wizard or demon that his purpose is to bring destruction, but he always chooses to fight evil instead. Hellboy's lesson is that while the potential for entropy lies within us all, so does the potential for order.

Monstrous narrators best demonstrate their relationship with language, but in fact *all* monsters have a special relationship with language. As Brooks explains, the monster develops from and exists only in language: the monster "is an excess of signification, a strange byproduct or leftover of the process of making meaning. It is an imaginary being who comes to life in language and, once having done so, cannot be eliminated from language" (100). Monster theory advises that we utilize monsters as a way of realizing that the monstrous is a part of humanity and coping with it successfully. Since monsters are ultimately verbal constructions, it seems only fitting that we carry out our monstrous experiments in literature.

Notes

¹ For information regarding the age and origins of *Gilgamesh*, see Stephen Mitchell's introduction to his *Gilgamesh: A New English Version*.

² Although both Enkidu and Humbaba come from the wild, Gilgamesh seeks to civilize and befriend the human Enkidu whereas he seeks to kill the monstrous Humbaba. Enkidu is worthy of salvation simply because of his humanity. Furthermore, Enkidu, in essence, must betray his savage origins to help Gilgamesh kill Humbaba. The poem thus implies that humanity must civilize its internal savagery in order to conquer external savagery.

³ The Other:

[*The*] *Other* (or, sometimes, *an Other*) refers to any person or category of people defined as different from—and viewed as functioning outside the conventions of—the dominant social group. Virtually any ideology involves the identification of some group as the Other, whether by virtue of language, ethnicity, race, class, gender, or sexuality. (*Bedford* 320).

⁴ Humbaba is a notable exception; he speaks briefly to beg for his life and to warn that, should he die, so will Enkidu.

⁵ Binary opposition:

A concept borrowed from linguistics by poststructuralist theorist Jacques Derrida [...] to suggest that people in Western culture tend to think and express their thoughts in terms of contrary pairs. Something is white but not black, masculine and therefore not feminine, a cause rather than an effect. Other common and mutually exclusive pairs include beginning/end,

conscious/unconscious, and presence/absence. Derrida suggests that these dichotomies are not simply oppositions but also valuative hierarchies, containing one term that Western culture views as positive and superior and another considered negative or inferior, even if only slightly so.

(*Bedford* 39)

⁶ For a comparison of classical authors' depictions of the Minotaur and a history of the Minotaur in visual art, see Michael J. Curley's essay, "The Minotaur," in *Mythical and Fabulous Creatures*.

⁷ For a discussion on the authorship of *The Library*, see the "The Author and His Book" in the introduction to Frazier's 1956 translation.

⁸ The fable mentions that Minos gives Athenian victims to the Minotaur. According to Plutarch, since the Minotaur obviously did not actually exist as a bull-headed man and, furthermore, since *minotaur* means "bull of Minos," Minos must give the Athenians to a man named Taurus ("the bull").

⁹ For overviews of the established interpretations of Asterius, Theseus, Minos, and the labyrinth, see the entries for *labyrinth*, *Minos*, *Minotaur*, and *Theseus* in David Brumble's *Classical Myths and Legends in the Middle Ages* (197, 222-3, 223-4, 320-2); the entry for *Minotaur* Clute and Grant's *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*; and Curley.

¹⁰ Indeed, the labyrinth is so laden with allegorical potential that Thomas Cordle interprets André Gide's use of the labyrinth in *Theseus* as being symbolic of symbolism (139). Also, much of the criticism over Jorge Luis Borges's "The House of Asterion," a reworking of this myth, "is marked by existential and symbolic readings of the labyrinth"

(Davis 139). For example, Maurice J. Bennett says the labyrinth in Borges's story is "a symbol that unites the universe, time and space, and literature in a single trope" (168).

¹¹ "The name is simply the masculine form of Asteria, so means the same: 'starry.' One hardly thinks of the Minotaur as this, but propitious names simply wish for excellence or success of some kind, and do not actually provide it" (Room 67).

¹² In respect of her bestiality, Daedalus is more at fault for enabling her efforts to the degree that he does. She might not have been able to couple with the bull had he not built her a hollow cow. But who is an exiled murderer to question the queen of the land where he takes refuge?

¹³ Apollodorus notes two different traditions: that the Cretan bull could either be "the bull that ferried across Europa for Zeus" or "the bull that Poseidon sent up from the sea" to Minos. Since he later says that Zeus abducts Europa in the form of a bull, it makes more sense that the Cretan bull would be the one Poseidon sends to Minos and sires Asterius (1: 199).

¹⁴ Apollodorus notes a variation here that Androgeus could have been "waylaid and murdered by jealous competitors" (2: 115). In either case, Minos blames Athens for Androgeus' death. Death by the Marathonian bull, however, better reinforces the theme of vengeful justice.

¹⁵ Daedalus is intimately involved with all three stages of Asterius's existence: Daedalus assists in Asterius's conception, creates the labyrinth in which he lives, and assists Theseus in his murder. Furthermore, Daedalus is originally an Athenian, but is exiled for murder. It is interesting, then, that Daedalus is indirectly responsible for even

more murdered Athenians by building the labyrinth to contain the Minotaur and his sacrifices.

¹⁶ Two other significant deaths in the legend of Theseus are also by water: Aegeus (Theseus's father, the namesake of the Aegean Sea) and Icarus (Daedalus's son, the namesake of the Icarian Pelagos and the island of Ikaria).

¹⁷ Originally published in French as *Thésée*.

¹⁸ Originally published in Spanish as "La Casa de Asterión."

¹⁹ Identifying Asterion as a landowner also falls into line with several legal codes throughout history that have given privileged status to property owners.

²⁰ Like Stuart Davis, Maurice J. Bennett underestimates the impact of Asterion's behavior on the reader. Bennett claims that Asterion appears "more eccentric than monstrous" (167).

²¹ If Theseus barter for his own life, then Theseus does not think he can defeat the Minotaur. If Theseus barter for the Minotaur's life, Theseus must be the superior combatant but is merciful to the Minotaur for some reason. Either interpretation has interesting implications on the original myth, where Theseus kills the Minotaur simply and quickly.

²² The novel repeatedly indicates the Minotaur has been alive for five thousand years (Sherrill 53, 57, 99, 131, 283). The exact year of the novel's setting can be deduced from the description of the Minotaur's car: "It's a Vega hatchback, 1975 model. He drives a fifteen-year-old car precisely because he has to maintain it, taking a small subconscious pride in making it run year after year" (11).

²³ The Minotaur is not the only mythological being still around in the twentieth century: during the course of the novel, the Minotaur encounters Pan instigating a stampede of wild pigs in a salvage yard (Sherrill 116); he sees Hermaphroditus advertise a telephone escort agency on television (162); he hears the story of a paralyzed man who encountered Medusa at a circus side-show (224); he meets a dryad named Laurel working a night shift at a Stuckey's in Georgia (229).

²⁴ M's nose: "the bridge of his nose, a black bony expanse lying between wide-set eyes. It creates a blind spot for which the Minotaur compensates by cocking his head a little to one side or the other, depending on what he is looking at" (Sherrill 5).

²⁵ M's hands:

The Minotaur [...] has a dexterity to his hands despite limited extension in the fingers and knuckles, despite the thin and almost unnoticeable webs of flesh between the first joints of his index and middle and his ring and pinkie fingers, despite the thickish black-edged nails. (Sherrill 29)

²⁶ M's "transitional skin":

gray and flaky, where he goes from bull to man [...] is a scarlike place across his chest, a purplish score dipping beneath his sternum, underlining a man's pectorals from which black rubbery bull's nipples sprout. On the Minotaur's back the transition is less decisive, nothing more than a discoloration of the skin from deep black to gray to pale moon-white human skin. (Sherrill 36)

²⁷ M's posture:

At first appearance there is an incongruity to his body; the lumbering bulk of his bovine head, neck and shoulders is verily grafted onto an if not scrawny then simply adequate trunk and legs. He seems always about to topple. But [...] it's possible to detect a hard-won harmony: the wide stance, feet planted apart; the subtleties of balance; the mechanics of muscle, ligament and bone working synergistically to keep this unlikely being upright. (Sherrill 36-7)

²⁸ M's horns: "Like all horned ungulates the Minotaur needs his horns [...] for visual orientation. The wide-set tips loom like twin guideposts on the perimeter of his field of vision, framing his immediate world and keeping things in perspective" (Sherrill 85).

²⁹ M's feet: "his bare foot, [is] pale and bony, not at all hooflike" (Sherrill 132).

³⁰ M's penis: "The pizzle of a bull is an impressive thing, a tight fibro-elastic corkscrew of three-plus feet. [...] Alas, the Minotaur isn't so generously endowed. Five thousand years have rendered his very human penis merely adequate" (Sherrill 282-3).

³¹ M's tail: "Vestigial, little more than a remnant [...] the bony little whip that emerges from the base of the Minotaur's spine. [...] Thin and less than six inches long, the tail is easy to conceal tucked in the cleft between his buttocks" (Sherrill 283)"

³² "Most books seem ridiculously small, and the physical act of finding a comfortable sight line over his massive snout frustrates him. Nevertheless the Minotaur is haunted by the idea that books and reading might make those vast stretches of time that loom before him more bearable" (Sherrill 39).

³³ “Watching television [...] is physically challenging for the Minotaur” and furthermore, “He doesn’t understand much of what is broadcast. The sitcoms confuse him, both the reruns from twenty years ago and the newer ones” (Sherrill 160, 161).

³⁴ For an in-depth discussion of the composition of *Beowulf*, see Bjork and Obermeier’s “Date, Provenance, Author, Audiences” in *A Beowulf Handbook*.

³⁵ Incidentally, Grendel’s mother is not named and Grendel’s father is never identified.

³⁶ Although tangential to the present discussion, it would be remiss not to speak to the controversy surrounding the presence of Christianity in *Beowulf*. As Edward B. Irving, Jr. notes, it is rather obvious that “*Beowulf* deals with ancient Germanic stories and heroes clearly dating back to a time before Anglo-Saxons or their Continental cousins were converted to Christianity” (“Christian” 177). Indeed, early *Beowulf* scholars who examine the poem primarily as a historical document do not appreciate what seems to be a forced inclusion of monsters and Christianity in an otherwise fairly accurate depiction of Germanic society. According to J. R. R. Tolkien, whose influential essay “*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*” undermines the historical perspective and allows for the wider appreciation of the poem as literature:

Nearly all the censure, and most of the praise, that has been bestowed on *The Beowulf* [sic] has been due [...] to disappointment at the discovery that it was itself and not something that the scholar would have liked better—for example, a heathen heroic lay, a history of Sweden, a manual of Germanic antiquities, or a Nordic *Summa Theologica*. (4)

Due to this disappointment, early scholars attempt to read through the religious anachronism and often wish the poem featured human rather than inhuman adversaries for Beowulf to conquer. However, the elements that make *Beowulf* poor history are exactly what make it great literature. Tolkien states the case best:

It is just because the main foes in *Beowulf* are inhuman that the story is larger and more significant than this imaginary poem of a great king's fall [i.e., the life and death of St. Oswald]. It glimpses the cosmic and moves with the thought of all men concerning the fate of human life and efforts; it stands amid but above the petty wars of princes, and surpasses the dates and limits of historical periods, however important. At the beginning, and during its process, and most of all at the end, we look down as if from a visionary height upon the house of man in the valley of the world. (33)

The extremism runs both ways, however. Numerous critics after Tolkien attempt to read *Beowulf* as a Christian allegory and run the threat of “mistaking one of the world's great poems for a philosophical or theological treatise” (Ogilvy 177).

³⁷ Paved roads are a significant development for the Danish civilization as well as a potent symbol in the poem. As Norma L. Hutman states, “Roads concretize man's control over environment and the unity of the kingdom” (20). As Grendel himself observes in John Gardner's novel *Grendel*, roads create a safe passage for the wagons carrying tribute to Hrothgar and, conversely, the quick deployment of soldiers from Heorot to the outlying settlements (39).

³⁸ Grendel recalls “quick whispered plottings with invisible friends” (Gardner *Grendel* 15).

³⁹ Grendel perceives himself as the center of the universe, noting he senses “space hurtling coldly out from me in all directions” (Gardner *Grendel* 18). He also comes to a solipsistic conclusion—what Kenneth C. Mason calls his “nihilistic ephiphany” (103)—after his first brush with death:

I understood that the world was nothing: a mechanical chaos of casual, brute enmity on which we stupidly impose our hopes and fears. I understood that, finally and absolutely, I alone exist. All the rest, I saw, is merely what pushes me, or what I push against, blindly—as blindly as all that is not myself pushes back. I create the whole universe, blink by blink.
(Gardner *Grendel* 21-2)

⁴⁰ In terms of the classic monster, Grendel may not recognize patterns because part of his monstrous role is to challenge taxonomies (see page 8). Furthermore, his unwillingness to respond to patterns from nature reinforces his unnatural state.

⁴¹ For an overview of (and an interesting response to) the postcolonial perspective on Caliban in *The Tempest*, see Meredith Anne Skura’s “The Case of Colonialism in *The Tempest*.”

⁴² In stage productions that favor the postcolonial interpretation of *The Tempest*, Caliban is often costumed simply as a human wearing stereotypically “tribal” garb, such as a loincloth, bone jewelry, and face paint. Photographs of one such performance may be viewed online at <http://sets.renaissancetheatre.net/tempestpage.htm>. This performance was directed by Bob Baker for the Renaissance Theatre in Huntsville, Alabama, in October 2001.

⁴³ Prospero says Caliban was “got by the devil himself” upon Sycorax (Shakespeare I.ii.319), but he seems to speak this line as a frustrated insult, not as a statement of fact.

⁴⁴ If this scenario is true, Caliban’s infamous retort—usually interpreted as a crass statement of his lewd druthers—must get its spiteful tone from his sense of offense and resentment at Prospero’s accusation: “O ho, O ho, would’t had been done! / Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else / This isle with Calibans!” (Shakespeare I.ii.349-51).

⁴⁵ The cause for Prospero’s anger at the attempt on Miranda’s virginity could also arise from the fact that his plan to regain Milan necessitates that she remain a marriageable virgin.

⁴⁶ Browning’s Caliban shifts into first person a few times. For a discussion on the significance of these shifts, see E. K. Brown’s article “The First Person in ‘Caliban Upon Setebos.’” Gardner’s Grendel uses a similar shift in voice. Grendel uses the third person on occasion to demonstrate that he is detached from the scene and that he can observe that which observes.

⁴⁷ We can no longer say hero/monster because many modern monstrous texts have no heroes.

⁴⁸ As a result of all of these textual difficulties, *The Minotaur Takes a Cigarette Break* is the only text featuring a voiced monster that makes sense as a written narrative—the use of an omniscient third-person narrator removes the relevance of an “in story” writer. Furthermore, Sherrill’s M is an exception because he does not speak well aloud and would make a poor spokesman for himself.

⁴⁹ Interestingly, both Grendel and Caliban are raised by mute mothers.

⁵⁰ Hellboy's origins are reviewed in the short work "The Right Hand of Doom" in the collection *Hellboy: The Right Hand of Doom*. For the complete story of his birth and self-discovery, see the collections *Hellboy: Seed of Destruction*, *Hellboy: Wake the Devil*, and "The Chained Coffin" from *Hellboy: The Chained Coffin and Others*.

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Biographical Note

Charles Jefferson Lacy was born on December 27, 1973, in Selma, Alabama, to Edmund Pettus Lacy, III of Orrville, Alabama, and Sandra Shirley Lacy (née Sandra Lane Shirley) of Glenwood, Alabama. His family—including his older brother, Edmund Scott Lacy, and maternal grandmother, Marion Shirley—moved to Warner Robins, Georgia, in 1979. There, Jeff graduated from Northside High School in 1992. In 1996, he graduated *magna cum laude* with a bachelor's degree in English and a minor in Latin from Mercer University in Macon, Georgia. He received departmental honors for his thesis “Deconstruction: Criticism of Criticism,” the first undergraduate honors thesis written on literary theory at Mercer University.

After a few years in the Atlanta, Georgia, area working in bookstores, Jeff returned to school. In December 2000, he graduated with a master's degree in library and information studies from the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. He started his career as a librarian at the Mary and John Gray Library of Lamar University in February 2001 and began work on a master's degree in English later that year.

While completing this degree, Jeff wrote reviews for the *Review of Texas Books*, and had an article entitled “Negative Mystics of the Mechanistic Sublime: Walter Benjamin and Lovecraft's Cosmicism” (co-authored with Steven J. Zani) accepted by *Lovecraft Studies*. While working on this thesis, Jeff married Elizabeth Green (Master of Science in Deaf Education, Lamar University, 2004) of Buna, Texas. They met in the library. Also while working on this thesis, Jeff and his wife fled from the powerful Hurricane Rita and suffered the loss of his mother to lung cancer.