

MONSTERS STERS



Ball State University | *Digital Literature Review* | Issue 4, 2017



Artwork by Emily Dykstra of Ball State University, *Bingo Night*.

The Digital Literature Review

The *Digital Literature Review* is a journal showcasing undergraduate student work in literature and cultural studies. The journal is produced by undergraduate students at Ball State University who are involved in the *Digital Literature Review* immersive learning project. Our goal is to provide a forum where undergraduate students can showcase their research projects and disseminate their valuable contributions to ongoing academic conversations.

The *Digital Literature Review* is published annually in the spring. The deadline for submissions is in early January. We welcome original articles relating to each year's theme. Articles should range from 3000-5000 words: every article is reviewed by undergraduate students on the journal's editorial team. Notification of initial decision is in February. All authors receive constructive feedback concerning submissions.

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The *Digital Literature Review* gratefully acknowledges Ball State University's support for the publication of this journal.

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Introduction: Monsters


Throughout history, cultures have tried to understand monsters through creating legends, studying these tales, and, finally, watching them transform as society's fears evolve. Children grow up hearing of dragons in the mountains and monsters under their beds, and they come of age watching horror films and reading monstrous literature. While society might label any villain or outsider a monster, an academic study of these creatures strives to understand what exactly makes them monstrous. While we may perceive them as monsters based on something as simple as their physical appearance or their potential for violence, it is what these beings represent that we truly fear.

Before analyzing monsters, one must first engage with them in spaces that they occupy. Novels such as *Dracula*, by Bram Stoker, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, by Oscar Wilde, provide historical context regarding what monsters have signified throughout time. Likewise, the works of H. P. Lovecraft and Rudyard Kipling show us that monsters are diverse beings that resist easy categorization. Modern monsters, as exhibited through films like *The Babadook* (2014), reveal what we fear now and how we interpret these anxieties today. Together with the other creeping creatures and bloodcurdling beasts that make up the genre of monstrous literature, these texts embody various types of monsters in different time periods, allowing for a broader understanding of what makes a monster.

As we grapple with the challenge of defining the monstrous, scholars utilize critical theory that can help answer these questions. Standing at the forefront of monster theory is scholar Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, author of "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)." Within this article, Cohen attempts to explain what monsters are and why we fear them. Through engaging with his scholarship, we can better understand the role of monsters within society. Cohen argues that monsters reveal fears, desires, and undercurrents of their culture. As monsters disappear into the shadows and emerge in other times and places, the changes they undergo reflect the new social, cultural, and historical ideas of the time. This evolution makes monsters even harder to understand and enhances their potential to inflict terror. While a monster might overstep boundaries and binaries, it also acts as a projection of an alternate self, one that can indulge in fantasy and freedom, escaping the rigidity of society and culture. Finally, Cohen touches upon the baseline reason why we study monsters: they are inherently human creations.

While monsters captivate humanity because of their origin in societal fears, monsters become even more fascinating because we can not only study them as physical beings but also as lore and legend: Why did society create this monster? What does this figure say about the identity of humans and our society? We can find tools for answering these questions in psychological theories, such as the abject, the grotesque, the sublime, and the uncanny.

Abjection examines the limits and influences of a person's perceived identity and pays special attention to objects that blur the lines between the self and the other. For example, any substance that was a part of the body but leaves it becomes abject, such as urine, vomit, and feces. Monsters are often associated with some form of the abject in that they reflect certain human qualities while simultaneously possessing attributes that are completely alien. The grotesque, on the other hand, refers to liminal creatures that commonly cross accepted borders (i.e., human and animal). As the monster straddles the line between opposing groups, it simultaneously fits



into both and neither category; elements that are united in a grotesque creature are not blended together or reconciled in a pleasing way. Rather, the seemingly paradoxical contradiction that the creature embodies creates discomfort or fear within the onlooker.

Another internal paradox common in our encounters with the monstrous is the tension between marvel and displeasure, a concept encompassed in the sublime. Sublimity stems from sources such as the natural world, obscurity, fear, power, vast spaces, infinity, and more. Our respect for the unknown coalesces with uncertainty, bringing about internalized and repressed fears. Finally, the uncanny is rooted in the well-known, something that has always been familiar yet is now somehow different. The uncanny grows in that which is repressed and is increased when it is felt in real life, rather than in a fictional world; the uncanny also occurs when something that has been repressed returns in fictional form, as well as in real life. In the ways outlined within these theories, monsters force humanity to confront forces outside of our own control.

While composing an issue dedicated to the study of monsters and monster theory, we have attempted to understand the origins of monsters—dating back to fairy tales and mythic legends—along with modern ramifications, interpretations, and theories. The papers “The Sociocultural Feminist Implications of ‘Rumpelstilkskin,’” by Emily Barsic, Emma Hartman, and Alexis Lawhorn, and “The Cultural Significance of ‘Jack and the Beanstalk,’” by Aidan S. McBride, KJ Ross-Wilcox, and Madeline M. H. Grosh, both work to analyze the true monsters in fairy tales. Keeping with stories from legend, the papers “The Fate of a Materialistic Buddhist: A Cultural Edition of ‘Jikininki’ by Lafcadio Hearn,” by Natali Cavanagh, Sarah James, and Shannon Walter, and “Tradition vs. Innovation and the Creatures in *Spirited Away*,” by Emma Hartman, analyze myths and spirits from Japanese culture. However, while many monsters live in stories and legends, they also have the ability to invade modern culture, as exhibited through the paper “Toxicity in Themes of Control: An Analysis of the Anglo-Western Cancer Rhetoric in *A Monster Calls*,” by Natali Cavanagh.

Some of the articles featured in this issue take a look at the way we depict forms of monstrosity using contemporary social critiques. The papers “Villainy and Women: A Critical Edition of James Baldwin’s ‘The Quest of Medusa’s Head,’” by Cassandra Grosh, Noah Patterson, and Maggie Weeks-Foy, and “‘Who Killed the World?’: Monstrous Masculinity and *Mad Max*,” by Kathryn Hampshire, seek to analyze monsters through the lenses of monstrous masculinity and the dichotomy of maidens and villains, forming the ideals of womanhood.

Other papers continue a modern sense by analyzing onscreen monsters. Delving into film, the following papers analyze depictions of cinematic monsters throughout the last seventy years: “Monstrous Women: Exploring Historical Witchcraft and its Presence in *The Witch*,” by Noah Patterson, “The Cinematic Killer: Cameras and *Peeping Tom*,” by Madison Wilde, and “Africa Speaks?: Black Monsters and Revisionary History in Horror Films,” by Arlette Hernandez. These papers analyze murder, gender, and race relations within the context of what makes a monster in these various films. Monsters also appear in serialized form through television shows. “Zombies Say More Than ‘Uungh’: A Walker’s Social Commentary,” by Shannon Walter focuses on monsters within the popular television show *The Walking Dead* while “Predator vs. Prey: The Human Monstrosity in *Attack on Titan*,” by Emily Griffis, looks at monsters within a translated version of the anime *Attack on Titan*.

Within our fourth issue of the *Digital Literature Review*, we engage with monster texts and examine the cultures that brought these beings to life. From ancient myths to contemporary

texts, monsters find their way into human spaces and force us to question why we project our fears onto physical beings of our own creation. Through an analysis of monsters, we are engaging in conversations questioning past, present, and future societal issues. In some instances, the fears they represent are never resolved or the resolution comes at a price, but humanity can face these fears by ensnaring their monsters between the covers of a book, amidst the lines of a poem, or within the pixels on a screen. By studying these works of literature and the monstrous beings they contain, we can gain a better understanding of our own culture and context, allowing us to look critically toward the future and the monsters inevitably lurking just out of sight.



Artwork by Emily Dykstra of Ball State University, *Among the Living*.



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Villainy and Women: A Critical Edition of James Baldwin's "The Quest of Medusa's Head"

Cassandra Grosh, Noah Patterson, & Maggie Weeks-Foy, *Ball State University*


INTRODUCTION

The story of Medusa has traveled through centuries of mythology and folklore. Numerous versions have appeared over time, with origins in both Europe and North America. In 1895, American author James Baldwin wrote an anthology of short stories based upon famous Greek myths. Included in these stories was "The Quest of Medusa's Head," a tale recounting Perseus's supposedly heroic quest to slay Medusa and claim her head as a prize. Baldwin's recounting of Medusa's death is problematic in many ways. Perhaps the most notable problem with Baldwin's tale is his distinct separation of women into two types: the "ideal" or "good" woman, one who will marry well and become a devoted mother, and the "monstrous" or "bad" woman, one who is not respected in society and is exiled due to differences. Analyzing this dichotomy reveals the ways in which Medusa's story acts as a vessel for Baldwin to perpetuate society's sexist views, not only through defining specific types of women as monsters, but also through defining *some* women as good.

The most commonly remembered part of Medusa's story is the frightful appearance of Medusa: she is "awful to look upon" and has "hair that was full of living serpents" (Baldwin, "The Quest of Medusa's Head" 94). However, Baldwin's version, like many others, overlooks the sympathetic reading of her origin, in spite of the fact that various translations encompass the origin story of Medusa. These


ABSTRACT

Tales of Medusa typically end in her death, but, if all she does is die, why are the stories about her? Through analyzing Medusa's story with a feminist lens, readers can see that her life is dictated by the men around her—she is hideous because a man rapes her and is killed because a man desires her head. Medusa has become a comparative symbol for women who break from gender roles and defy the patriarchy. This edition analyzes restraints placed upon Medusa, and all women, with particular focus on literature from the nineteenth century.



versions note that Medusa was one of three sisters, but the only one who was mortal. Before she became the monstrous figure permeating Greek mythology and popular culture, Medusa was human. Her transformation into a monster actually stems from her rape at the hands of Poseidon. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Medusa is described as "being a beautiful maiden. Her eye caught the eye of Poseidon, who desired her and proceeded to ravage her in Athena's shrine" ("The Legend of Medusa and the Gorgons"). Athena, enraged by this, turned Medusa's hair into snakes and bestowed on her the infamous curse: anyone she looks upon will turn to stone. Through this reading, one that includes details of her rape, Medusa becomes a highly sympathetic character rather than a monstrous one. The circumstances leading up to her curse—being punished by Athena for being raped at her shrine—frame Medusa as a victim who was unjustly cursed for actions forced upon her ("The Legend of Medusa and the Gorgons"). This becomes even more striking when considering the fact that, in Baldwin's tale, Athena is one of the two gods who aid Perseus in his quest to defeat Medusa. Baldwin's neglect of this origin story only perpetuates the continued monsterization of Medusa historically, thereby contributing to a patriarchy that preserves harmful rape culture, reinforces gender roles, and silences victims.

In spite of Medusa's brutal origin, she has been demonized throughout history, and other powerful women have been demonized in her shadow. In her article, "The Original 'Nasty Woman,'" primarily about former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Elizabeth Johnston reminds her readers that depictions comparing women in power to Medusa can be traced back to Marie Antoinette, as well as the suffragette movement in the United States. Several textual examples are included in the article to illuminate this familiar trend of vilifying powerful women with Medusa's image. First, in "The Two Are But One (Les deux ne font qu'un)," an anonymously drawn political cartoon from the late eighteenth century, Marie Antoinette is depicted as bestial, having the body of a hyena and a head covered in serpents. Johnston also notes that, in 1868, around the same time women were gaining educational autonomy through the opening of the first women's colleges in the United States, "painter Elihu Vedder imagined Medusa as a self-absorbed woman who petrifies herself by looking into a mirror" (Johnston). Even more telling is the prevalence of Medusa during the women's suffrage movement, which held its first conference at Seneca Falls in 1848 ("Seneca Falls Convention begins"). With this movement in full swing, Baldwin, whose collection of stories were released in 1895, would have been well aware of the progressive shift. Postcards titled *The Feminine Jekyll and Hyde*, created by Udo J. Keppler in 1913, feature triumphant women holding flags brandishing the words "Women's Suffrage";



however, these images are disrupted by a Medusa-like monster in the center of the card (Keppler). With Baldwin reviving such an iconic creature in mythology just years before the creation of these postcards, could it also be possible that he encouraged the misogynistic tradition of portraying women as Medusa?

When considering the historical trend of portraying powerful women as Medusa, the ramifications of telling Medusa's story in a way that demonizes her becomes evident. In the preface to Baldwin's *Old Greek Stories*, he states that his intention in writing these stories was to bring joy to children. However, he also comments on how children should read these stories: "I have carefully avoided every suggestion of interpretation. Attempts at analysis and explanation will always prove fatal to a child's appreciation and enjoyment of such stories" (Baldwin, "Preface" 3). Through the stereotypical depiction of Medusa in these stories, Baldwin is continuing a harmful tradition that bestows traditional gender roles and ideals on children subliminally, a direct result of his neglect to analyze these texts and their implications. Baldwin makes it clear that children should not scrutinize these stories, but, in order to understand the meaning behind these stories, they must.

One illustration of the ways that these subliminal messages affect children can be found in the book *Woman Hating*, by Andrea Dworkin. Dworkin defines these fairy tales and stories as "the primary information of the culture. They delineate roles, interactions, and values which are available to us. They are our childhood models, and their fearful, dreadful content terrorizes [women] into submission – if [women] do not become good, then evil will destroy us" (34-35). Because these fairy tales act as our cultural guides, they also maintain harmful gender roles that permeate society; for example, in the context of Victorian America, when Baldwin's stories were published, there were strict cultural roles defined for men and women. For instance, this is portrayed in the etiquette guide, *The Bazar Book of Decorum*, written by Robert Tomes in 1870, in which ways of dress, beauty ideals, hygienic recommendations, poise, expressions, and more are meticulously detailed. Women are instructed on anything from how to act to how to maintain the cleanliness of their ears. The beginning of this guide states, "Universal cleanliness and good manners are essential to a democracy. This must be generally recognized and acted upon, or the refined will seek in other countries the exclusiveness which will secure for them that nicety of life essential to its enjoyment, and we shall be left alone to wallow in our brutality and foulness" (Tomes 13). When comparing these societal ideals to the behaviors of two prominent women in Baldwin's stories, Medusa and Atalanta—another powerful female character in Baldwin's stories who is forced to conform to societal




pressures—readers can see how these women, through their refusal to conform to the ideals of their society, are made wild, brutal, and foul.

Furthermore, Victorian England's views of single women as a social problem were echoed by the colonies in the United States. The phenomenon was noticed and described by William Rathbone Greg, who published the essay "Why Are Women Redundant?" in 1862. The author argues with genuine concern that, according to statistics, "There were, in England and Wales, in 1851, 1,248,00 women in the prime of their life, i.e. between the ages of twenty and forty years, who were unmarried, out [of] a total number of rather less than 3,000,000" (Greg 12). Greg anticipates a "miserable life of celibacy, struggle[,] and privation" to single women and, as a solution, suggests a shipment of thousands of women to the newly formed colonies, as the pickings were slim for the unmarried men across the Atlantic Ocean (Greg 17). Much like the women of 1851, Medusa, ostracised due to her recent transformation, lives far from society only to be forced back into the role of serving a man, suggesting that even spatial distance from patriarchal society is not always enough to escape its influence.

In order to portray the ways in which deadly patriarchy may affect women who live on the fringes, like Medusa, Dworkin discusses the concept of the female monster defining the prince, who is often the hero of the story. For Dworkin, the hero of the story oftentimes resembles someone

handsome and heroic. He is a prince, that is, he is powerful, noble, and good. He rides a horse. He travels far and wide. He has a mission, a purpose. Inevitably, he fulfills it. He is a person of worth and a worthwhile person. He is strong and true. Of course, he is not real, and men do suffer trying to become him. They suffer, and murder, and rape, and plunder. . . . What matters is that he is both powerful and good, and that his power is by definition good. What matters is that he matters, acts, succeeds. (Dworkin 43)

While the prince may embody these ideals and noble concepts, he is not defined until juxtaposed by a feminine evil. In fact, Dworkin states, "The truth of it is that [the prince] is powerful and good when contrasted with [the feminine villain]. The badder she is, the better he is. The deader she is, the better he is. That is one moral of the story, the reason for dual role definition, and the shabby reality of the man as hero" (Dworkin 44). Perseus encapsulates this hero Dworkin defines: he travels a long distance for the purpose of slaying Medusa, and he completes this task, but, in doing so, Perseus defiles the Gray Sisters—three haggish women who Perseus uses to advance in his quest—threatening to steal the only eye and tooth they share to "see what is going on in the busy world" and "feel young and handsome



again” unless they aid him in his task (Baldwin, “The Quest of Medusa’s Head” 98). What is supposed to be seen as Perseus being clever is actually more indicative of this “rape” and “plunder” Dworkin describes. When considering the origin story of Medusa, as well as her rape, Perseus becomes even more monstrous in his efforts to confront Medusa and defeat a woman who has been made a monster as a result of rape. Therefore, Perseus becomes a personification of patriarchal society, treating Medusa, a woman on the fringes, as “other” and in need of controlling.


Readers of “The Quest of Medusa’s Head” might be surprised by how little is said of Medusa. There is no fight scene, no explanation of Medusa’s origin, nor is there any stated reason why she is a monster worth killing besides her appearance. A reader could argue that Medusa is a monster simply for having a nontraditional female appearance. Similarly, the argument could also be made that, by this time, Medusa was already a widely recognized and vilified character in classical tradition. As mentioned previously, she is also a figure that has been historically linked to women in power. Furthermore, the women valued most within this story are beautiful, such as Danaë, Perseus’s mother, and Andromeda, Perseus’s wife. While Athena, the Gray Sisters, and the Maidens are all noted and respected, they are ultimately admired for their usefulness towards Perseus. This becomes even more troubling when examining the ways in which the prince or hero is often defined in fairy tales alongside women. The prince is more heroic when contrasted with the wickedness of the female figure he must vanquish. His successes are defined by the women he can use, marry, or rape along the way, with no regard for the women themselves. The existence of these women in the story is solely to further Perseus’s journey.

“THE QUEST OF MEDUSA’S HEAD” BY JAMES BALDWIN, 1895¹

I. THE WOODEN CHEST.

There was a king of Argos who had but one child, and that child was a girl. If he had had a son, he would have trained him up to be a brave man and great king; but he did not know what to do with this fair-haired daughter. When he saw her growing up to be tall and slender and wise, he wondered if, after all, he would have to die some time and leave his lands and his gold and his kingdom to her. So he sent to Delphi and asked the Pythia about it. The Pythia told him that he would not only have to die some time, but that the son of his daughter would cause his

¹ This story comes from a collection of Baldwin stories originally published in 1895, but this text comes from the *HathiTrust*. This text is also accessible through *Project Gutenberg*.



death.

This frightened the king very much, and he tried to think of some plan by which he could keep the Pythia's words from coming true. At last he made up his mind that he would build a prison for his daughter and keep her in it all her life. So he called his workmen and had them dig a deep round hole in the ground, and in this hole they built a house of brass which had but one room and no door at all, but only a small window at the top. When it was finished, the king put the maiden, whose name was Danaë, into it; and with her he put her nurse and her toys and her pretty dresses and everything that he thought she would need to make her happy.

"Now we shall see that the Pythia does not always tell the truth," he said.


So Danaë was kept shut up in the prison of brass. She had no one to talk to but her old nurse; and she never saw the land or the sea, but only the blue sky above the open window and now and then a white cloud sailing across. Day after day she sat under the window and wondered why her father kept her in that lonely place, and whether he would ever come and take her out. I do not know how many years passed by, but Danaë grew fairer every day, and by and by she was no longer a child, but a tall and beautiful woman; and Jupiter amid the clouds looked down and saw her and loved her.

One day it seemed to her that the sky opened and a shower of gold fell through the window into the room; and when the blinding shower had ceased, a noble young man stood smiling before her. She did not know—nor do I—that it was mighty Jupiter who had thus come down in the rain; but she thought that he was a brave prince who had come from over the sea to take her out of her prison-house.

After that he came often, but always as a tall and handsome youth; and by and by they were married, with only the nurse at the wedding feast, and Danaë was so happy that she was no longer lonesome even when he was away. But one day when he climbed out through the narrow window there was a great flash of light, and she never saw him again.

Not long afterwards a babe was born to Danaë, a smiling boy whom she named Perseus. For four years she and the nurse kept him hidden, and not even the women who brought their food to the window knew about him. But one day the king chanced to be passing by and heard the child's prattle. When he learned the truth, he was very much alarmed, for he thought that now, in spite of all that he had done, the words of the Pythia might come true.

The only sure way to save himself would be to put the child to death before he was old enough to do any harm. But when he had taken the little Perseus and his mother out of the prison and had seen how helpless the child was, he could



not bear the thought of having him killed outright. For the king, although a great coward, was really a kind-hearted man and did not like to see anything suffer pain. Yet something must be done.

So he bade his servants make a wooden chest that was roomy and watertight and strong; and when it was done, he put Danaë and the child into it and had it taken far out to sea and left there to be tossed about by the waves. He thought that in this way he would rid himself of both daughter and grandson without seeing them die; for surely the chest would sink after a while, or else the winds would cause it to drift to some strange shore so far away that they could never come back to Argos again.

All day and all night and then another day, fair Danaë and her child drifted over the sea. The waves rippled and played before and around the floating chest, the west wind whistled cheerily, and the sea birds circled in the air above; and the child was not afraid, but dipped his hands in the curling waves and laughed at the merry breeze and shouted back at the screaming birds.


But on the second night all was changed. A storm arose, the sky was black, the billows were mountain high, the winds roared fearfully; yet through it all the child slept soundly in his mother's arms. And Danaë sang over him this song:

“Sleep, sleep, dear child, and take your rest
Upon your troubled mother's breast;
For you can lie without one fear
Of dreadful danger lurking near.

Wrapped in soft robes and warmly sleeping,
You do not hear your mother weeping;
You do not see the mad waves leaping,
Nor heed the winds their vigils keeping.

The stars are hid, the night is drear,
The waves beat high, the storm is here;
But you can sleep, my darling child,
And know naught of the uproar wild.”

At last the morning of the third day came, and the chest was tossed upon the sandy shore of a strange island where there were green fields and, beyond them, a little town. A man who happened to be walking near the shore saw it and dragged it far up on the beach. Then he looked inside, and there he saw the beautiful lady



and the little boy. He helped them out and led them just as they were to his own house, where he cared for them very kindly. And when Danaë had told him her story, he bade her feel no more fear; for they might have a home with him as long as they should choose to stay, and he would be a true friend to them both.

II. THE MAGIC SLIPPERS.

So Danaë and her son stayed in the house of the kind man who had saved them from the sea. Years passed by, and Perseus grew up to be a tall young man, handsome, and brave, and strong. The king of the island, when he saw Danaë, was so pleased with her beauty that he wanted her to become his wife. But he was a dark, cruel man, and she did not like him at all; so she told him that she would not marry him. The king thought that Perseus was to blame for this, and that if he could find some excuse to send the young man on a far journey, he might force Danaë to have him whether she wished or not.²

One day he called all the young men of his country together and told them that he was soon to be wedded to the queen of a certain land beyond the sea. Would not each of them bring him a present to be given to her father? For in those times it was the rule, that when any man was about to be married, he must offer costly gifts to the father of the bride.

“What kind of presents do you want?” said the young men.

“Horses,” he answered; for he knew that Perseus had no horse.

“Why don’t you ask for something worth the having?” said Perseus; for he was vexed at the way in which the king was treating him. “Why don’t you ask for Medusa’s head, for example?”


“Medusa’s head it shall be!” cried the king. “These young men may give me horses, but you shall bring Medusa’s³ head.”

“I will bring it,” said Perseus; and he went away in anger, while his young friends laughed at him because of his foolish words.

What was this Medusa’s head which he had so rashly promised to bring? His mother had often told him about Medusa. Far, far away, on the very edge of the world, there lived three strange monsters, sisters, called Gorgons. They had

² The king does not respect Danaë as an equal, so he cannot accept her refusal of him. The king’s denial of Danaë’s basic human right to say “no” foreshadows his later attempted kidnapping and potential rape of her. To him, she is simply a beautiful woman, a prize, and a challenge to conquer.

³ It is important to note this is Medusa’s first mention in a story about her. The male hero has been the main focus thus far. When Medusa is finally mentioned, it is to frame her as a prize worthy only of one who can conquer her.



the bodies and faces of women, but they had wings of gold, and terrible claws of brass, and hair that was full of living serpents.⁴ They were so awful to look upon, that no man could bear the sight of them, but whoever saw their faces was turned to stone. Two of these monsters had charmed lives, and no weapon could ever do them harm; but the youngest, whose name was Medusa⁵, might be killed, if indeed anybody could find her and could give the fatal stroke.

When Perseus went away from the king's palace, he began to feel sorry that he had spoken so rashly. For how should he ever make good his promise and do the king's bidding? He did not know which way to go to find the Gorgons, and he had no weapon with which to slay the terrible Medusa. But at any rate he would never show his face to the king again, unless he could bring the head of terror with him. He went down to the shore and stood looking out over the sea towards Argos, his native land; and while he looked, the sun went down, and the moon arose, and a soft wind came blowing from the west. Then, all at once, two persons, a man and a woman, stood before him. Both were tall and noble. The man looked like a prince; and there were wings on his cap and on his feet, and he carried a winged staff, around which two golden serpents were twined.

He asked Perseus what was the matter; and the young man told him how the king had treated him, and all about the rash words which he had spoken. Then the lady spoke to him very kindly; and he noticed that, although she was not beautiful, she had most wonderful gray eyes, and a stern but lovable face and a queenly form. And she told him not to fear, but to go out boldly in quest of the Gorgons; for she would help him obtain the terrible head of Medusa.

“But I have no ship, and how shall I go?” said Perseus.


“You shall don my winged slippers,” said the strange prince, “and they will bear you over sea and land.”

“Shall I go north, or south, or east, or west?” asked Perseus.

“I will tell you,” said the tall lady. “You must go first to the three Gray Sisters, who live beyond the frozen sea in the far, far north. They have a secret which nobody knows, and you must force them to tell it to you. Ask them where you shall find the three Maidens who guard the golden apples of the West; and when they shall have told you, turn about and go straight thither. The Maidens will give you

⁴ Readers should note Medusa is the first woman mentioned besides Danaë and the nursemaid. Danaë is a woman in need of protection from the corruption of man, but, as is evident from her physical description, Medusa is clearly not in need of protection from the typical man. She instantly serves as a monster because of her non-traditional feminine form and the power she holds over men.

⁵ Here, Medusa is described as grotesque and far from human, and she is the perfect monster for Perseus to slay. In order to save his royal and pure mother, he must destroy this abomination of a creature.



three things, without which you can never obtain the terrible head; and they will show you how to wing your way across the western ocean to the edge of the world where lies the home of the Gorgons.”

Then the man took off his winged slippers, and put them on the feet of Perseus; and the woman whispered to him to be off at once, and to fear nothing, but be bold and true. And Perseus knew that she was none other than Athena⁶, the queen of the air, and that her companion was Mercury, the lord of the summer clouds. But before he could thank them for their kindness⁷, they had vanished in the dusky twilight.

Then he leaped into the air to try the Magic Slippers.

III. THE GRAY SISTERS.⁸

Swifter than an eagle, Perseus flew up towards the sky. Then he turned, and the Magic Slippers bore him over the sea straight towards the north. On and on he went, and soon the sea was passed; and he came to a famous land, where there were cities and towns and many people. And then he flew over a range of snowy mountains, beyond which were mighty forests and a vast plain where many rivers wandered, seeking for the sea. And farther on was another range of mountains; and then there were frozen marshes and a wilderness of snow, and after all the sea again,--but a sea of ice. On and on he winged his way, among toppling icebergs and over frozen billows and through air which the sun never warmed, and at last he came to the cavern where the three Gray Sisters dwelt.

These three creatures were so old that they had forgotten their own age, and nobody could count the years which they had lived. The long hair which covered their heads had been gray since they were born; and they had among them only a single eye and a single tooth which they passed back and forth from one to another.

⁶ It is important to note that, while Athena is a goddess, her attributes are not feminine. She is described here as “not beautiful” and “stern.” Unlike many women, she is not noticed because of her beauty, a feminine characteristic, but rather because of her wits and intelligence, characteristics that are typically considered more masculine. It is because of these masculine characteristics that Athena can be so easily respected and trusted.

⁷ Perseus acknowledges Athena’s “kindness” toward him, but it is important to understand Athena is not necessarily a kind goddess. As noted in the introduction, she cursed Medusa, along with the woman’s sisters, to appear as hideous Gorgons. This curse was placed because Medusa was raped by Poseidon (“The Legend of Medusa and the Gorgons”). Knowing this context allows readers to realize Athena is not necessarily a benevolent goddess. Instead, she is seeking further revenge on Medusa, implying that cursing a beautiful woman to become a monster is not enough of a punishment after a woman suffers from sexual assault.

⁸ These women are also referred to as the Graeae and are sisters to the Gorgons (“Graeae,” “Perseus”).



Perseus heard them mumbling and crooning in their dreary home, and he stood very still and listened.

“We know a secret which even the Great Folk who live on the mountain top can never learn; don’t we, sisters?” said one.

“Ha! ha! That we do, that we do!” chattered the others.

“Give me the tooth, sister, that I may feel young and handsome again,” said the one nearest to Perseus.

“And give me the eye that I may look out and see what is going on in the busy world,” said the sister who sat next to her.

“Ah, yes, yes, yes, yes!” mumbled the third, as she took the tooth and the eye and reached them blindly towards the others.

Then, quick as thought, Perseus leaped forward and snatched both of the precious things from her hand.

“Where is the tooth? Where is the eye?” screamed the two, reaching out their long arms and groping here and there. “Have you dropped them, sister? Have you lost them?”

Perseus laughed as he stood in the door of their cavern and saw their distress and terror.

“I have your tooth and your eye,” he said, “and you shall never touch them again until you tell me your secret. Where are the Maidens who keep the golden apples of the Western Land? Which way shall I go to find them?”

“You are young, and we are old,” said the Gray Sisters; “pray, do not deal so cruelly with us. Pity us, and give us our eye.”

Then they wept and pleaded and coaxed and threatened. But Perseus stood a little way off and taunted them; and they moaned and mumbled and shrieked, as they found that their words did not move him.

“Sisters, we must tell him,” at last said one.

“Ah, yes, we must tell him,” said the others. “We must part with the secret to save our eye.”

And then they told him how he should go to reach the Western Land, and what road he should follow to find the Maidens who kept the golden apples. When they had made everything plain to him Perseus gave them back their eye and their tooth.

“Ha! ha!” they laughed; “now the golden days of youth have come again!” And, from that day to this, no man has ever seen the three Gray Sisters, nor does any one [sic] know what became of them. But the winds still whistle through their cheerless cave, and the cold waves murmur on the shore of the wintry sea, and the ice mountains topple and crash, and no sound of living creature is heard in all that desolate land.

IV. THE WESTERN MAIDENS⁹.

As for Perseus, he leaped again into the air, and the Magic Slippers bore him southward with the speed of the wind. Very soon he left the frozen sea behind him and came to a sunny land, where there were green forests and flowery meadows and hills and valleys, and at last a pleasant garden where were all kinds of blossoms and fruits. He knew that this was the famous Western Land, for the Gray Sisters had told him what he should see there. So he alighted and walked among the trees until he came to the center of the garden. There he saw the three Maidens of the West dancing around a tree which was full of golden apples, and singing as they danced. For the wonderful tree with its precious fruit belonged to Juno, the queen of earth and sky; it had been given to her as a wedding gift, and it was the duty of the Maidens to care for it and see that no one touched the golden apples.


Perseus stopped and listened to their song:

“We sing of the old, we sing of the new,--
Our joys are many, our sorrows are few;
Singing, dancing,
All hearts entrancing,
We wait to welcome the good and the true.

The daylight is waning, the evening is here,
The sun will soon set, the stars will appear.
Singing, dancing,
All hearts entrancing,
We wait for the dawn of a glad new year.

The tree shall wither, the apples shall fall,
Sorrow shall come, and death shall call,
Alarming, grieving,
All hearts deceiving,--
But hope shall abide to comfort us all.

⁹ While a description of the Maidens' appearance is not provided, readers are led to assume these women must be beautiful. Maidenhood was greatly valued in both classical times, when this story is set, and in the nineteenth century, when this version of the story was written. By naming these women simply as “Maidens,” they have no identity other than their purity. These women exist as things unattainable, much like the golden apples they protect.



Soon the tale shall be told, the song shall be sung,
The bow shall be broken, the harp unstrung,
Alarming, grieving,
All hearts deceiving,
Till every joy to the winds shall be flung.

But a new tree shall spring from the roots of the old,
And many a blossom its leaves shall unfold,
Cheering, gladdening,
With joy maddening,--
For its boughs shall be laden with apples of gold.”

Then Perseus went forward and spoke to the Maidens. They stopped singing, and stood still as if in alarm. But when they saw the Magic Slippers on his feet, they ran to him, and welcomed him to the Western Land and to their garden.

“We knew that you were coming,” they said, “for the winds told us. But why do you come?”

Perseus told them of all that had happened to him since he was a child, and of his quest of Medusa’s head; and he said that he had come to ask them to give him three things to help him in his fight with the Gorgons.


The Maidens answered that they would give him not three things, but four. Then one of them gave him a sharp sword¹⁰, which was crooked like a sickle, and which she fastened to the belt at his waist; and another gave him a shield, which was brighter than any looking-glass you ever saw; and the third gave him a magic pouch, which she hung by a long strap over his shoulder.

“These are three things which you must have in order to obtain Medusa’s head; and now here is a fourth, for without it your quest must be in vain.” And they gave him a magic cap, the Cap of Darkness¹¹; and when they had put it upon his head, there was no creature on the earth or in the sky--no, not even the Maidens themselves--that could see him.

When at last he was arrayed to their liking, they told him where he would find the Gorgons, and what he should do to obtain the terrible head and escape alive. Then they kissed him and wished him good luck, and bade him hasten to do the dangerous deed. And Perseus donned the Cap of Darkness, and sped away and

¹⁰ Some sources claim the sword belonged to the god Hephaestus (“The Legend of Medusa and the Gorgons”): the god of blacksmiths, crafts, and volcanoes (“Hephaestus”).

¹¹ This cap is typically referred to as a helmet. The helmet of invisibility belongs to Hades (“Perseus”).



away towards the farthest edge of the earth; and the three Maidens went back to their tree to sing and to dance and to guard the golden apples until the old world should become young again.

V. THE DREADFUL GORGONS.


With the sharp sword at his side and the bright shield upon his arm, Perseus flew bravely onward in search of the dreadful Gorgons; but he had the Cap of Darkness upon his head, and you could no more have seen him than you can see the wind. He flew so swiftly that it was not long until he had crossed the mighty ocean which encircles the earth, and had come to the sunless land which lies beyond; and then he knew, from what the Maidens had told him, that the lair of the Gorgons could not be far away.

He heard a sound as of some one [sic] breathing heavily, and he looked around sharply to see where it came from. Among the foul weeds which grew close to the bank of a muddy river there was something which glittered in the pale light. He flew a little nearer; but he did not dare to look straight forward, lest he should all at once meet the gaze of a Gorgon, and be changed into stone. So he turned around, and held the shining shield before him in such a way that by looking into it he could see objects behind him as in a mirror.

Ah, what a dreadful sight it was! Half hidden among the weeds lay the three monsters, fast asleep, with their golden wings folded about them. Their brazen claws were stretched out as though ready to seize their prey; and their shoulders were covered with sleeping snakes. The two largest of the Gorgons lay with their heads tucked under their wings as birds hide their heads when they go to sleep. But the third, who lay between them, slept with her face turned up towards the sky; and Perseus knew that she was Medusa.

Very stealthily he went nearer and nearer, always with his back towards the monsters and always looking into his bright shield to see where to go. Then he drew his sharp sword and, dashing quickly downward, struck a back blow, so sure, so swift, that the head of Medusa was cut from her shoulders and the black blood gushed like a river from her neck. Quick as thought he thrust the terrible head into his magic pouch and leaped again into the air, and flew away with the speed of the wind.

Then the two older Gorgons awoke, and rose with dreadful screams, and spread their great wings, and dashed after him. They could not see him, for the Cap of Darkness hid him from even their eyes; but they scented the blood of the head which he carried in the pouch, and like hounds in the chase, they followed him,



sniffing the air. And as he flew through the clouds he could hear their dreadful cries and the clatter of their golden wings and the snapping of their horrible jaws. But the Magic Slippers were faster than any wings, and in a little while the monsters were left far behind, and their cries were heard no more; and Perseus flew on alone.

VI. THE GREAT SEA BEAST.


Perseus soon crossed the ocean and came again to the Land of the West. Far below him he could see the three Maidens dancing around the golden tree; but he did not stop, for, now that he had the head of Medusa safe in the pouch at his side, he must hasten home. Straight east he flew over the great sea, and after a time he came to a country where there were palm trees and pyramids and a great river flowing from the south. Here, as he looked down, a strange sight met his eyes: he saw a beautiful girl chained to a rock by the seashore, and far away a huge sea beast swimming towards her to devour her. Quick as thought, he flew down and spoke to her; but, as she could not see him for the Cap of Darkness which he wore, his voice only frightened her.

Then Perseus took off his cap, and stood upon the rock; and when the girl saw him with his long hair and wonderful eyes and laughing face, she thought him the handsomest young man in the world.

“Oh, save me! save me!” she cried as she reached out her arms towards him.

Perseus drew his sharp sword and cut the chain which held her, and then lifted her high up upon the rock. But by this time the sea monster was close at hand, lashing the water with his tail and opening his wide jaws as though he would swallow not only Perseus and the young girl, but even the rock on which they were standing. He was a terrible fellow, and yet not half so terrible as the Gorgon. As he came roaring towards the shore, Perseus lifted the head of Medusa from his pouch and held it up; and when the beast saw the dreadful face he stopped short and was turned into stone; and men say that the stone beast may be seen in that selfsame spot to this day.

Then Perseus slipped the Gorgon's head back into the pouch and hastened to speak with the young girl whom he had saved. She told him that her name was Andromeda, and that she was the daughter of the king of that land. She said that her mother, the queen, was very beautiful and very proud of her beauty; and every day she went down to the seashore to look at her face as it was pictured in the quiet water; and she had boasted that not even the nymphs who live in the sea were as handsome as she. When the sea nymphs heard about this, they were very angry and asked great Neptune, the king of the sea, to punish the queen for her pride. So



Neptune sent a sea monster to crush the king's ships and kill the cattle along the shore and break down all the fishermen's huts¹². The people were so much distressed that they sent at last to ask the Pythia what they should do; and the Pythia said that there was only one way to save the land from destruction,--that they must give the king's daughter, Andromeda, to the monster to be devoured.

The king and the queen loved their daughter very dearly, for she was their only child; and for a long time they refused to do as the Pythia had told them. But day after day the monster laid waste the land, and threatened to destroy not only the farms, but the towns; and so they were forced in the end to give up Andromeda to save their country. This, then, was why she had been chained to the rock by the shore and left there to perish in the jaws of the beast.

While Perseus was yet talking with Andromeda, the king and the queen and a great company of people came down the shore, weeping and tearing their hair; for they were sure that by this time the monster had devoured his prey. But when they saw her alive and well, and learned that she had been saved by the handsome young man who stood beside her, they could hardly hold themselves for joy. And Perseus was so delighted with Andromeda's beauty that he almost forgot his quest which was not yet finished; and when the king asked him what he should give him as a reward for saving Andromeda's life, he said:

"Give her to me for my wife."¹³

This pleased the king very much; and so, on the seventh day, Perseus and Andromeda were married, and there was a great feast in the king's palace, and everybody was merry and glad. And the two young people lived happily for some time in the land of palms and pyramids; and, from the sea to the mountains, nothing was talked about but the courage of Perseus and the beauty of Andromeda.¹⁴


VII. THE TIMELY RESCUE.

But Perseus had not forgotten his mother; and so, one fine summer day, he and Andromeda sailed in a beautiful ship to his own home; for the Magic Slippers could not carry both him and his bride through the air. The ship came to land at

¹² Hubris, excessive pride that often led mortals to claim they were as good as or better than the gods, was a common cause of conflict in Greek tragedy ("hubris, n.").

¹³ It is important to note that nothing is told of Andromeda besides her beauty. Perseus, after only knowing her for a few short minutes, requests to wed her because of her physical appearance.

¹⁴ Perseus now has two prizes from his quest: a beautiful wife and the head of Medusa. He has now proven himself a brave hero and becomes the husband to a beautiful princess.



the very spot where the wooden chest had been cast so many years before; and Perseus and his bride walked through the fields towards the town.

Now, the wicked king of that land had never ceased trying to persuade Danaë to become his wife; but she would not listen to him, and the more he pleaded and threatened, the more she disliked him. At last when he found that she could not be made to have him, he declared that he would kill her; and on this very morning he had started out, sword in hand, to take her life.

So, as Perseus and Andromeda came into the town, whom should they meet but his mother fleeing to the altar of Jupiter, and the king following after, intent on killing her? Danaë was so frightened that she did not see Perseus, but ran right on towards the only place of safety. For it was a law of that land that not even the king should be allowed to harm any one who took refuge on the altar of Jupiter.¹⁵

When Perseus saw the king rushing like a madman after his mother, he threw himself before him and bade him stop. But the king struck at him furiously with his sword. Perseus caught the blow on his shield, and at the same moment took the head of Medusa¹⁶ from his magic pouch.

“I promised to bring you a present, and here it is!” he cried.

The king saw it, and was turned into stone¹⁷, just as he stood, with his sword uplifted and that terrible look of anger and passion in his face.


The people of the island were glad when they learned what had happened, for no one loved the wicked king. They were glad, too, because Perseus had come home again, and had brought with him his beautiful wife, Andromeda. So, after they had talked the matter over among themselves, they went to him and asked him to be their king. But he thanked them, and said that he would rule over them for one day only, and that then he would give the kingdom to another, so that he might take his mother back to her home and her kindred in distant Argos.

On the morrow therefore, he gave the kingdom to the kind man who had

¹⁵ Danaë is continuously shown as the damsel in distress. First, she is held captive by her father; next, she is rescued from the chest by a kind man who takes her in; and, now, she is being chased by the king. While she is a strong woman for raising a son alone, she is shown as a fragile, beautiful woman who must be saved and protected, much like Andromeda, the woman her son chose to marry.

¹⁶ This is the last mention of Medusa within the story. After Perseus's quest, he gives Medusa's head to Athena. The goddess chooses to place the head on her shield, aegis ("Medusa").

¹⁷ Turning the king into stone makes Perseus the true monster of the story. Medusa lived far from civilization in a land no one could find without divine help, so she was not hurting or killing anyone. Since Perseus slayed Medusa, he turns both the sea monster and the king to stone. In addition to these two events, Perseus also turns the Titan, Atlas (the man cursed to hold the world on his shoulders), into a stone mountain with the aid of Medusa's head. This occurs on Perseus's journey home when Atlas refuses the young man a place to rest ("The Legend of Medusa and the Gorgons"). While on his noble quest, Perseus ends four lives, but these stories do not tell of Medusa willingly turning any to stone while she was alive. She is a monster because she is a hideous, powerful woman who partook (albeit unwillingly) in sex before marriage.



saved his mother and himself from the sea; and then he went on board his ship, with Andromeda and Danaë, and sailed away across the sea towards Argos.

VIII. THE DEADLY QUOIT.

When Danaë's old father, the king of Argos, heard that a strange ship was coming over the sea with his daughter and her son on board, he was in great distress; for he remembered what the Pythia had foretold about his death. So, without waiting to see the vessel, he left his palace in great haste and fled out of the country.

"My daughter's son cannot kill me if I will keep out of his way," he said.

But Perseus had no wish to harm him; and he was very sad when he learned that his poor grandfather had gone away in fear and without telling any one where he was going. The people of Argos welcomed Danaë to her old home; and they were very proud of her handsome son, and begged that he would stay in their city, so that he might some time become their king.


It happened soon afterwards that the king of a certain country not far away was holding games and giving prizes to the best runners and leapers and quoit throwers. And Perseus went thither to try his strength with the other young men of the land; for if he should be able to gain a prize, his name would become known all over the world. No one in that country knew who he was, but all wondered at his noble stature and his strength and skill; and it was easy enough for him to win all the prizes.

One day, as he was showing what he could do, he threw a heavy quoit a great deal farther than any had been thrown before. It fell in the crowd of lookers-on, and struck a stranger who was standing there. The stranger threw up his hands and sank upon the ground; and when Perseus ran to help him, he saw that he was dead. Now this man was none other than Danaë's father, the old king of Argos. He had fled from his kingdom to save his life, and in doing so had only met his death.

Perseus was overcome with grief, and tried in every way to pay honor to the memory of the unhappy king. The kingdom of Argos was now rightfully his own, but he could not bear to take it after having killed his grandfather. So he was glad to exchange with another king who ruled over two rich cities, not far away, called Mycenae and Tiryns. And he and Andromeda lived happily in Mycenae for many years.

JAMES BALDWIN'S "THE STORY OF ATALANTA" CONTEXTUALIZED¹⁸

Baldwin's collection, *Old Greek Stories*, has little focus on strong, independent




women. Despite this lack of focus, the story of Atalanta, a young woman who is left in the woods for dead as an infant and is then raised by a mother bear, made its way into the collection. Atalanta proves herself a brave warrior and is unparalleled in skill by any man. Despite her strength and independence, the idea of marriage still looms over her. As a woman, it is Atalanta's role in society to become a wife and mother. While this perception existed during the height of Greek civilization, it is well-known that this concept fueled society during the Victorian era, the time period in which Baldwin published his collection. According to an article by Gertrude Himmelfarb in *The Victorian Studies Reader*, "Women who were unmarried had failed to fulfill their destiny, both biologically and psychologically" (214). In other words, Atalanta, while remaining unmarried, is an incomplete woman. However, Atalanta's flippancy towards marriage only makes her courtiers want her more, and she goes on to make a game of being husbandless. While she, being an atypical woman due to her independence, might not be devoted to the idea of marriage and motherhood, she finds her own way to attempt conquering the issue:

After the death of Meleager, Atalanta went back to her old home among the mountains of Arcadia. She was still the swift-footed huntress, and she was never so happy as when in the green woods wandering among the trees or chasing the wild deer. All the world had heard about her, however; and the young heroes in the lands nearest to Arcadia did nothing else but talk about her beauty and her grace and her swiftness of foot and her courage. Of course every one of these young fellows wanted her to become his wife; and she might have been a queen any day if she had only said the word, for the richest king in Greece would have been glad to marry her. But she cared nothing for any of the young men, and she liked the freedom of the green woods better than all the fine things she might have had in a palace.

The young men would not take "No!" for an answer, however. They could not believe that she really meant it, and so they kept coming and staying until the woods of Arcadia were full of them, and there was no getting along with them at all. So, when she could think of no other way to get rid of them, Atalanta called them together and said:

¹⁸ This story was published in the same James Baldwin book, *Old Greek Stories*, as "The Quest of Medusa's Head." The original publication date is 1895, but this text comes from the Kindle eBook release of 2004. This text is accessible through *Project Gutenberg*.



“You want to marry me, do you? Well, if any one [sic] of you would like to run a race with me from this mountain to the bank of the river over there, he may do so; and I will be the wife of the one who outruns me.”

“Agreed! agreed!” cried all the young fellows.

“But, listen!” she said. “Whoever tries this race must also agree that if I outrun him, he must lose his life.”

Ah, what long faces they all had then! About half of them drew away and went home.

“But won’t you give us the start of you a little?” asked the others.

“Oh, yes,” she answered. “I will give you the start by a hundred paces. But remember, if I overtake any one before he reaches the river, he shall lose his head that very day.”


Several others now found that they were in ill health or that business called them home; and when they were next looked for, they were not to be found. But a good many who had had some practice in sprinting across the country stayed and made up their minds to try their luck. Could a mere girl outrun such fine fellows as they? Nonsense!

And so it happened that a race was run almost every day. And almost every day some poor fellow lost his head; for the fleetest-footed sprinter in all Greece was overtaken by Atalanta long before he could reach the river bank. But other young men kept coming and coming, and no sooner had one been put out of the way than [sic] another took his place.

This passage makes it appear as though Atalanta has avoided marriage while still opening the gates for potential courtship. By inviting young men to race her in order to win her hand in marriage, Atalanta is engaging in a ritual of courtship: she is narrowing the pool of candidates without completely disregarding the idea of marriage as a whole. However, it is still apparent from this seemingly impossible race that Atalanta is not interested in marrying any of the men: she is simply humoring them in their quest for her. The continuing strife of these men for Atalanta shows they do not respect her decisions or her desire to remain free of marriage. At the end of her tale, despite her efforts to remain an independent woman, Atalanta is tricked into marrying one of the suitors:

One day there came from a distant town a handsome, tall young man named Meilanion.

“You’d better not run with me,” said Atalanta, “for I shall be sure



to overtake you, and that will be the end of you.”

“We’ll see about that,” said Meilanion.

Now Meilanion, before coming to try his chance, had talked with Venus, the queen of love, who lived with Jupiter among the clouds on the mountain top. And he was so handsome and gentle and wise that Venus took pity on him, and gave him three golden apples and told him what to do.

Well, when all was ready for the race, Atalanta tried again to persuade Meilanion not to run, for she also took pity on him.

“I’ll be sure to overtake you,” she said.


“All right!” said Meilanion, and away he sped; but he had the three golden applies [sic] in his pocket.

Atalanta gave him a good start, and then she followed after, as swift as an arrow shot from the bow. Meilanion was not a very fast runner, and it would not be hard for her to overtake him. She thought that she would let him get almost to the goal, for she really pitied him. He heard her coming close behind him; he heard her quick breath as she gained on him very fast. Then he threw one of the golden apples over his shoulder.

Now, if there was anything in the world that Atalanta admired, it was a bright stone or a pretty piece of yellow gold. As the apple fell to the ground she saw how beautiful it was, and she stopped to pick it up; and while she was doing this, Meilanion gained a good many paces. But what of that? In a minute she was as close behind him as ever. And yet, she really did pity him.

Just then Meilanion threw the second apple over his shoulder. It was handsomer and larger than the first, and Atalanta could not bear the thought of allowing some one [sic] else to get it. So she stopped to pick it up from among the long grass, where it had fallen. It took somewhat longer to find it than she had expected, and when she looked up again Meilanion was a hundred feet ahead of her. But that was no matter. She could easily overtake him. And yet, how she did pity the foolish young man!

Meilanion heard her speeding like the wind behind him. He took the third apple and threw it over to one side of the path where the ground sloped towards the river. Atalanta’s quick eye saw that it was far more beautiful than either of the others. If it were not picked up at once it would roll down into the deep water and be lost, and that



would never do. She turned aside from her course and ran after it. It was easy enough to overtake the apple, but while she was doing so Meilanion gained upon her again. He was almost to the goal. How she strained every muscle now to overtake him! But, after all, she felt that she did not care very much. He was the handsomest young man that she had ever seen, and he had given her three golden apples. It would be a great pity if he should have to die. And so she let him reach the goal first.

After that, of course, Atalanta became Meilanion's wife. And he took her with him to his distant home, and there they lived happily together for many, many years.


Meilanion's victory is problematic because he distracts Atalanta from fully exerting herself in the race. While "she let him reach the goal first," Meilanion still has to have the aid of a goddess before he can stand a chance against Atalanta. Atalanta concedes to him, but she does not do so out of respect. She considers him "the handsomest young man," and this artificial description of him shapes her decision to become his bride. Even in the conclusion of her own story, Atalanta, a strong warrior who seems unconcerned with the trivialities of common life, can only find happiness through marriage. In the end, she is conquered by Meilanion and domesticated.

ELIZA LESLIE'S *THE LADIES' GUIDE TO TRUE POLITENESS AND PERFECT MANNERS* CONTEXTUALIZED¹⁹

Over a hundred years after the end of the Victorian Era, many find the societal expectations outrageous. During the Victorian Era, women's suffrage was gaining momentum, America was facing Reconstruction after the Civil War, and industrialism was influencing the Western world. Immigration into America and Western European countries was also shaping the way culture and class were viewed. All of these events were fashioning the world, but society was not becoming more accepting. As is exhibited in the following excerpt from *The Ladies' Guide to True Politeness and Perfect Manners*, an American guide published in 1864 by T.B. Peterson & Brothers, rigid structure was still emphasized:

When you hear a gentleman speak in praise of a lady whom you do not think deserving of his commendations, you will gain nothing by attempting to undeceive him; particularly if she is handsome. Your

¹⁹ The original publication date for this guide is 1864, but this text comes from the Kindle eBook release of 2011. This text is accessible through *Project Gutenberg*.




dissenting from his opinion he will, in all probability, impute to envy, or ill-nature; and therefore the only impression you can make will be against yourself.

Even if you have reason to dislike the lady, recollect that few are without some good points both of person and character. And it will be much better for you to pass over her faults in silence, and agree with him in commending what is really commendable about her. What he would, perhaps, believe implicitly if told to him by a man, he would attribute entirely to jealousy, or to a love of detraction if related by a woman. Above all, if a gentleman descants on the beauty of a lady, and in your own mind you do not coincide with his opinion, refrain, on your part, from criticizing invidiously her face and figure, and do not say that “though her complexion may be fine, her features are not regular;” that “her nose is too small,” or “her eyes too large,” or “her mouth too wide.” Still less disclose to him the secret of her wearing false hair, artificial teeth, or tinging her cheeks with rouge. If she is a bold, forward woman, he will find that out as soon as yourself, and sooner too,— and you may be sure that though he may amuse himself by talking and flirting with her, he in reality regards her as she deserves.

This excerpt shows that women were expected to behave in specific ways, especially in ways that flattered their sex as a whole. This guide lists behaviors for seemingly every situation: when at dinner, when with female company, when with male company, when at a hotel, when with children, when at church, etc. *The Ladies' Guide* exists to “educate” women on how to behave; it acts as a literary charm school. Contemporary readers of “The Quest of Medusa’s Head” can benefit from *The Ladies' Guide* excerpt because it sheds light on what was expected of women during the Victorian time period when Baldwin published his collection of stories.

Perhaps the most important thing that can be derived from this excerpt is how women were expected to behave while in the company of men. All thoughts and opinions should be silenced if they disagree with the man’s opinion, especially differing opinions involving women the man admires. If voiced, these opinions will only make the criticized woman discussed a point of disagreement. Furthermore, by saying “he would attribute [this opinion] entirely to jealousy,” *The Ladies' Guide* blatantly accuses men of sexism. Instead of finding this sexism problematic, the sexism is being pointed out solely to remind women to mind their opinions and comments in order to avoid confrontation with men.

This excerpt emphasizes how important it was for women to be liked by



the men with which they keep company, even if the men admired these women for solely physical reasons. However, in addition to implying that men only kept the company of women because of the women's supposed beauty, this excerpt accuses women of being beautiful due to artificial applications such as false teeth, wigs, and makeup. This snide comment attacks women who have the attention of men. Essentially, women can do nothing right in regards to associating with men. If these women have opinions, they can be accused of jealousy; if the women dress to impress, the women will be accused of deceiving those around them.

J. ROGER REES'S "WOMAN—A MAN'S IDEAL" CONTEXTUALIZED²⁰


A major issue within "The Quest of Medusa's Head" is the demonization of Medusa and the elevation of the devoted, feminine mother/wife figures. This view is appropriate for the time in which the story was published: 1895. During this time, women were expected to marry, raise children, care for the home, and devote themselves to their husbands. Today, these expectations are considered sexist, but, during this time period, men based their interests upon whether or not a woman adhered to these ideas. This is best exemplified within the following passage from English author J. Roger Rees's article, "Woman—A Man's Ideal":

Nothing more truly reveals a man's character than the picture he forms of the maiden he would find and win. . . .O maidens! fair to behold, tender and true, see to it then that you maintain yourselves ever worth of this worship we men hunger and thirst to pay you—this devotion of our best thoughts, our choicest imaginings, our highest achievements. By you own priceless truth and purity—your womanhood, in short—continue to hold power over us, as the moon o'er the mighty waters of the deep.

This passage reveals the expectations and pressures placed upon women in order for them to embody the ideal of "the perfect woman." As is evident from the language of this passage, one of the requirements of this ideal is maidenhood and purity, qualifications Danaë and Andromeda both exemplify. Both women are helpless on their own, evidence of their innocence and need for a man such as Perseus to care for them.

However, it is not enough just for these women to be pure and maidenlike: they must also "maintain" themselves and ensure that they are "ever worth of this worship." The author of this passage, J. Rogers Rees, places an unrealistic amount of pressure on women, essentially likening them to the virgin goddesses, such

²⁰ The original publication date for this article is 1890. It could be originally found in *The Girl's Own Paper*.



as Athena. By idealizing and placing these women on a pedestal reserved nearly exclusively for goddesses, Rees explains why Perseus is attracted to Andromeda and idealizes women like his mother, Danaë: these two women are pure, beautiful, helpless, and worthy of worship. Their beauty becomes a siren's song, requiring men to "worship" them, and ultimately, to rescue them. This is yet another narrative trope that feminist theorist Andrea Dworkin illustrates. Andromeda and Danaë represent one of "two definitions of women. There is the good woman. She is a victim." Dworkin continues, saying, "The good woman must be possessed [by men]" (Dworkin 48). Both women need Perseus to survive and will worship him for his bravery, but the worship will forever remind him of his debt to Athena for aiding him on his quest, essentially guiding him to Andromeda and saving his mother's life. Meanwhile, as women rely on men, men find a spiritual purpose in worship too, albeit through the dehumanization and objectification of women. Men devote themselves to women not for the woman's personhood but for her beauty and her need to rely on men to survive within the patriarchy. This begins to foster male ego and pride while simultaneously disenfranchising women in society. Similarly, a woman's dependence on a man prevents her from acting on her own and taking charge of her identity or destiny. Therefore, Andromeda and Danaë foil Athena: they embody the purity and beauty the goddess has, but they also highlight Athena's wits and ability to accomplish anything without the aid of man. While Athena is untouchable because she is a virgin goddess, she is also untouchable because she will never need to be saved by a man like Perseus; she can never stroke and promote his ego like mortal women.

To Rees, Medusa would also become the foil of Andromeda and Danaë because she lives independently with her sisters. She also would not be worthy of devotion due to her appearance. As the antithesis of a "fair maiden" or a goddess, Medusa becomes what Dworkin considers "the bad woman. She must be destroyed The bad woman must be killed, or punished" (Dworkin 48). Medusa, as someone living on the fringes of society and monsterized for her appearance, would not be presenting the notion of Rees's ideal womanhood. Baldwin portrays Perseus as doing his part by murdering Medusa, ridding the world of a creature that creates a perverse vision of what it means to be a woman. In contrast, Andromeda, the "good woman," is "rewarded" through her marriage with Perseus, a mighty hero and king. Through the murder of Medusa, Perseus "rights the wrong" of Medusa's existence, proving Dworkin's analysis of literary tropes surrounding feminine monsters.



CONCLUSION

“The Quest for Medusa’s Head” misleads readers into believing the story is about Medusa herself. Instead, the story focuses on defining Perseus as a hero and worthy king. Rather than providing an origin story about Medusa, the story defines her as a villain and provides Andromeda and Danaë as Medusa’s polar opposites. Medusa is portrayed as a villain despite no obvious wrongdoing, while Andromeda and Danaë are beautiful, good women. Andromeda and Danaë comply with the standards of perfect women that are described in Rees’s article and Leslie’s *The Lady’s Guide*.

Through contextualizing Rees and Leslie, readers of Baldwin’s stories can better understand the problematic sexism that plays a key role in how these women are described. Andromeda and Danaë are good women because they are beautiful and helpless. Atalanta, while she is not fully portrayed as a villain like Medusa, is neither praised nor admired. A key part of her story is her reckless and unfeminine behavior. It is not until Atalanta is tricked into marriage that she becomes an admirable, female figure. With this dichotomy between good and bad women supported through the historical contextualization of Rees’s article, the sexism of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century is evident. Through the examination of “The Story of Atalanta” and the reading of “The Quest for Medusa’s Head” provided here, it becomes clear that, although Baldwin attempted to present a children’s book of Greek tales that avoids interpretation, Baldwin has actually compiled a collection of stories that reinforce gender stereotypes, perpetuate rape culture, and contribute to the vilification of women in power.

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The Sociocultural Feminist Implications of “Rumpelstiltskin” by the Brothers Grimm

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Fairytales are considered a source of joy and inspiration for their audiences, but they can also portray the monsters that lurk within a culture. Rumpelstiltskin seems like an unlikely choice for a monster, but, like all literary monsters, he embodies the fears of the time when he was created. While this story was traditionally orally told, we will be using the version by the Brothers Grimm, based on European folklore and published in 1812. This edition is based on the first English translation by Edgar Taylor and Marian Edwardes in 1823. Our edition of “Rumpelstiltskin” will focus on fears relating to women’s roles in the early nineteenth century, particularly women’s roles in marriage and industry. We will discuss the repercussions and benefits of how “Rumpelstiltskin” has evolved to fit into the modern era in the form of television and children’s books.

ABSTRACT

For years, the well-known Brothers Grimm fairy tale “Rumpelstiltskin” was analyzed through the lens of historical context. However, in this paper the fairy tale is analyzed through a sociocultural and feminist lens, regarding topics such as weaving, the Industrial Revolution, and modern adaptations of the tale. Most can agree that Rumpelstiltskin is a detestable creature as he attempts to trick a woman into giving him her baby. However, this paper shows how Rumpelstiltskin is additionally monstrous because of his desire to wield power over others, which is illustrated through varying portrayals of his character, as well as his character acting as a warning for men invading the domestic sphere during the Industrial Revolution.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS AT THE TIME OF “RUMPELSTILTSKIN”

This tale has served throughout the decades as a tale of caution for women, in which they are told to behave and to conform to their place in society. However, “Rumpelstiltskin” is still shared in the modern era both as a warning and as an



example of the progression of women's rights. According to the article, "Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges" by Gerda Lerner, most women within the early nineteenth century were not even perceived to be involved in the important events of history: "The resulting history of 'notable women' does not tell us much about those activities in which most women engaged, nor does it tell us about the significance of women's activities to society as a whole" (5). Women's activities and accomplishments were overshadowed by men's and deemed irrelevant to history. This was due to the fact that women's roles were restricted to the domestic sphere. In 1838 Sarah Stickney Ellis stated the gendered expectations for women quite plainly in her work, "The Women of England: Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits." In the following quote, Ellis describes how a domesticated nineteenth-century woman influences her husband:


When the snares of the world were around him, and temptations from within and without have bribed over the witness in his own bosom, he has thought of the humble mistress who sat at alone, guarding the fireside comforts of his distant home; and the remembrance of her character, clothed in moral beauty, has scattered the clouds before his mental vision, and sent him back to that beloved home, a wiser and a better man. (1525)

According to Ellis, it is the woman's duty to lead her husband back to moral ground, so that even the mere thought of her—as she sits fireside "clothed in moral beauty"—may encourage him to return to his home, in order to become "a wiser and a better man." The Victorian woman is supposed to "guard the hearth" and not exit the domestic sphere. This ensures that she stays pure in order to purify her husband after he returns from his duties within the public sphere, from the "temptations of greed and pride" (Ellis 1526).

FEMALE MARRIAGE ROLES DURING THE TIME OF "RUMPELSTILTSKIN"

Many fairy tales from the nineteenth century concluded with a woman being married, and this remains true for the protagonist in "Rumpelstiltskin." However, in the nineteenth century, men and women held quite different views on marriage than they do today. During this time, many in society believed women should not try too hard to attain a husband, as they thought it was improper to express what was viewed as inappropriate sexual appetite. In fact, such people thought marriage was solely a means for a woman to become a mother and not a way to fulfill her desires. However, it must be noted that not all held this view. Mary Wollstonecraft defines marriage in "Vindication of the Rights of Women." She says:

To speak disrespectfully of love is, I know, high treason against



sentiment and fine feelings; but I wish to speak the simple language of truth, and rather to address the head than the heart. To endeavour to reason love out of the world, would be to out Quixote Cervantes, and equally offend against common sense; but an endeavour to restrain this tumultuous passion, and to prove that it should not be allowed to dethrone superior powers, or to usurp the sceptre which the understanding should very coolly wield, appears less wild. (299)

Clearly, not all thought that love was an unnecessary part of the marriage contract.

Sex, however, was another matter. One who held that women did not experience sexual feeling was the doctor, William Acton. He states, “The majority of women (happily for them) are not very much troubled with sexual feeling of any kind” (Hume 177). Acton and those he influenced did not even believe that women had a sexual drive to begin with. However, not all those considering female sexuality at the time were convinced that women did not have a sexual appetite. Elizabeth Blackwell, the first licensed female doctor in Britain, said,


Those who deny sexual feeling to women, or consider it so light a thing as hardly to be taken into account in social arrangements, confound appetite and passion; they quite lose sight of this immense spiritual force of attraction, which is distinctly human sexual power, and which exists in so very large a proportion in the womanly nature. (Hume 179)

Blackwell is saying here that women in fact experience sexual feeling, but it is not so much a mere appetite; it is in fact tied to passion and attraction.

Auguste Debay, who published a marriage manual which was best-selling in France during the nineteenth century, admitted that women have sexual desire (Hume 176). However, he felt that a woman should regulate her husband’s overzealous appetite, while allowing him to “exercise his rights two to four times a week” at the age of twenty to thirty years, with other intervals suggested at different ages (Debay qtd. in Hume 177).

During this time, women were also not allowed to talk to men unless a married female escort was present (Hume 177). The Grimms’ story “Rumpelstiltskin” exemplifies a woman stepping outside the bounds of acceptability when she commits the taboo act of speaking to Rumpelstiltskin, a male stranger, on her own. The story also reflects the way a woman’s sexuality is repressed when the miller and the king strike a deal and exchange the daughter as if she is a piece of property, which she quite literally is. Whether the girl would prefer to marry the king, and later conceive a child, is never taken into consideration by the men in “Rumpelstiltskin.”

Before the Married Property Act was passed in 1882 in Britain, a woman’s wealth was transferred to her husband. This meant that wives were commodified



and value was placed on them based on their personal wealth and possessions. In addition, women were to be under the care of a man at all times, and this duty transferred from father to husband at the point of marriage. A father had to give permission for a man to marry his daughter, and this choice often depended upon whether he thought the man could financially support his daughter. If women were to have a job after they were married, all of their earnings would belong to their husbands, but the husbands were expected to be the sole provider in the household.

In “Rumpelstiltskin” women are controlled by men; the maid is controlled by the king - her future husband - and Rumpelstiltskin. This feature of control was modeled after events during the time period. Chauncey Savage discussed the Married Women’s Act of 1870 and how it impacted individuals in his article, “Some Points of Comparison between English and American Legislation, as to the Married Women’s Property”:

This act gave a married woman her earnings and the right to trade; allowed her ‘to deposit in banks, and to hold and transfer stocks, loans and so forth, as if sole; suffered her to hold to her separate use any property descending to her from an intestate, and money coming to her by deed and will, not exceeding in amount 2001.;¹ [sic] and empowered her to sue or be sued alone in matters relating to her separate property. (4)


Essentially, women were separate financial entities from their husbands. This would have allowed major progress for women’s rights, if the act had not been repealed.

Similar notions are represented within “Rumpelstiltskin,” as the maid is forced to create large sums of gold for the king, while she retains no autonomy or financial separation. Savage states that, in reference to England’s legislation:

A clause in the Matrimonial and Divorce Causes Act of 1857, gave to a woman deserted by or judicially separated from her husband, power to act as a feme sole, obtaining in the former case from a court or magistrate a so-called protection order against her husband’s creditors. A curious statute in 1878 allowed the same privilege in cases of aggravated assault upon her by her husband. (763)

This also allowed a woman safety against her husband’s financial status, as she would then be considered financially independent and no longer tied to the consequences of her divorced husband’s fiscal decisions. The later statute detailed that the woman would obtain the same freedoms in a case of abuse from her husband. As women were considered men’s property, these statutes were quite

¹ The punctuation acts as a monetary value, which would be equal to two pounds in 2017.




progressive in affording women autonomy. Rumpelstiltskin embodies a woman's fear of being unable to retain her rightfully-owned possessions. He does this by striking up deals in exchange for the miller's daughter's jewelry and even her baby. The daughter must comply because her life is under threat by another man, the king. This situation reflects how, during this time, a woman could not be wholly autonomous and perhaps feared losing what little autonomy she already possessed.

HISTORY OF WOMEN IN THE SPINNING INDUSTRY

At the time of the Industrial Revolution, literature evolved alongside various forms of industry. One way in which this can be studied is through analyzing the shifts in culture by recognizing shifts in literature. The story of "Rumpelstiltskin" is a perfect example of literary transformation because the story evolved to show how the practice of spinning underwent a transformation not only in industry but also in culture, due to industrialization. Though "Rumpelstiltskin" has been analyzed by various scholars, few have analyzed it with the intent of viewing the story in a sociocultural lens. However, scholar Jack Zipes analyzes "Rumpelstiltskin" in relation to the history of spinning and argues that this story told of the underlying shift from female productivity to the industrial male takeover of the spinning industry. By viewing this story through that lens, readers learn about how the male characters in "Rumpelstiltskin" resemble the monstrous way men took over the primarily female-run spinning industry during the Industrial Revolution.

Gerbug Treush-Dieter, professor of sociology at the Free University of Berlin, relays important background information on the history of spinning when she says, "It is a historical fact that the spindle remained in the hands of women until the invention of the spinning machine. Spinning can be considered as the paradigm of female productivity" (qtd. in Zipes 50). Although the spinning industry was run by women and was the foundation for female productivity, the spinning industry became a double-edged sword for women. On one edge of the sword, women could take their own agency when they worked through spinning. On the other edge, spinning enabled men to participate in monstrous conduct as the spinning industry "enabled men to profit from the surplus production of women that lead to primitive accumulation and also enabled men to deny their dependence on women's productivity by moving it out of their sight" (Zipes 52). The industry of spinning became even more of a tool against women when James Hargreaves' spinning machine was created in 1764. With the rise of this invention, the spinning industry began to be taken over by men. Life was not better for those women who were able to work as "in those cases where women remained on the job, the management was predominantly in the hands of men" (Zipes 54-




55). Over time, as the spinning industry gradually was given over into the hands of men, ramifications showed up in various ways throughout society for women who worked as spinners. One way in which this happened was through the way men changed the definition of spinners, originally known as women who spun, to spinsters, now synonymous with the stereotypes of old maids (“Spinsters and Spinners”).

Therefore, readers can see that the character of Rumpelstiltskin functions as a monster throughout the story as he is a symbol of the men who took over the primarily female-run industry of spinning at this particular time in history. Rumpelstiltskin is a male character who ends up doing the miller’s daughter’s job, similar to how men ended up taking over the spinning industry and taking away female agency, for the monster is “an embodiment of a certain cultural moment” and its body “incorporates fear . . . [and] anxiety” (Cohen 4). By viewing Rumpelstiltskin through this monster theory lens, readers are able to make connections across the text and history, realizing that Rumpelstiltskin embodies the cultural moment of the Industrial Revolution. The way he is portrayed by storytellers also reflects the anxiety and fear that female spinners experienced during this time. Therefore, the character of Rumpelstiltskin reflects female spinners’ anxiety and fears regarding the male takeover of the spinning industry in the Industrial Revolution.

ADAPTATIONS OF “RUMPELSTILTSKIN” RELATING TO WOMEN’S ROLES—DIANE STANLEY’S *RUMPELSTILTSKIN’S DAUGHTER* AND THE TELEVISION SERIES *ONCE UPON A TIME*

Although “Rumpelstiltskin” is a well-known and old story, it contains motifs that have evolved over time and are still represented within modern culture, the main motif being that men are superior to women in society and wherever power is paramount. One instance of “Rumpelstiltskin” being retold in the modern era is Diane Stanley’s children’s picture book *Rumpelstiltskin’s Daughter*. Stanley’s children’s story is heralded as a feminist retelling, utilized to teach and to inspire her audience. Within the story, the gold-spinning maid does not marry the king, for he is of unreputable character. Instead, she marries Rumpelstiltskin, who is portrayed as a reliable, attractive guy - a departure from the original tale that makes it more relatable to a modern audience, who would want to see her choose her husband. The maid and Rumpelstiltskin conceive a daughter who stumbles into her mother’s footsteps. The young girl is captured by a greedy king and is commanded to spin straw into gold. However, the young damsel outwits the king and utilizes the gold to aid poor families, proving that abysmal situations can become beneficial. Afterwards, the maiden convinces the king to share his wealth with the farmers



who then grow golden crops (Stanley). But, despite the fact that Rumpelstiltskin metamorphosed into the proverbial knight in shining armor, he still controls the maiden through his rescuing of her, which is similar to the original Rumpelstiltskin, who forced the maiden into a deal where she had little autonomy. Albeit, the daughter frees herself from capture and peril through manipulation, much as her father would. Despite maintaining some of the characterization from the traditional tale, the children's book teaches young girls to take back the power that men wield over them. The daughter is empowered through her cleverness and does not allow men to rule over her. This, however, is only one modern version of "Rumpelstiltskin," and not all such stories portray Rumpelstiltskin as the hero.


In the television series *Once Upon a Time*, Rumpelstiltskin is the beast to Belle's beauty. However, when he is transformed into a being known as the Dark One, despite his love for Belle, he perpetually abuses her — mainly emotionally, but at times physically as well. The relationship between Rumpelstiltskin and Belle further illustrates that Rumpelstiltskin is a representation of men having control over women. However, as Rumpelstiltskin chose to reject his role as the Dark One and become a hero for Belle's safety, there was a belief among the other characters that Rumpelstiltskin could represent transformation and hope. This was disproved when he chose to become the Dark One again, as, ultimately, for him, power is paramount to everything else. Much like the characterization of Rumpelstiltskin from the Brothers Grimm tale, this Rumpelstiltskin is focused on maintaining control over others through deception and trickery for his own gain. Although the two modern adaptations illustrate different messages, both adaptations are utilized to address gender issues: Stanley's book in order to educate a younger audience about self-empowerment regardless of gender, and *Once Upon A Time* in order to discuss issues of power and abuse within patriarchal society.

"Rumpelstiltskin" by Brothers Grimm²

By the side of a wood, in a country a long way off, ran a fine stream of water; and upon the stream there stood a mill. The miller's house was close by, and the miller, you must know, had a very beautiful daughter. She was, moreover, very shrewd and clever; and the miller was so proud of her, that he one day told the king

² The Brothers Grimm version of "Rumpelstiltskin" is an example of a story that was most likely told by female spinners during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which served simultaneously as a form of entertainment and a warning for female spinners (Zipes 43).

³ The king's action reflects the commodification of women before the Married Property Act was passed. This means that, after marriage, all of the spun gold would become the king's.



of the land, who used to come and hunt in the wood, that his daughter could spin gold out of straw. Now this king was very fond of money; and when he heard the miller's boast his greediness was raised, and he sent for the girl to be brought before him.³ Then he led her to a chamber in his palace where there was a great heap of straw, and gave her a spinning-wheel, and said, 'All this must be spun into gold before morning, as you love your life.'⁴ It was in vain that the poor maiden said that it was only a silly boast of her father, for that she could do no such thing as spin straw into gold: the chamber door was locked, and she was left alone.

She sat down in one corner of the room, and began to bewail her hard fate; when on a sudden the door opened, and a droll-looking little man hobbled in, and said, 'Good morrow to you, my good lass; what are you weeping for?' 'Alas!' said she, 'I must spin this straw into gold, and I know not how.' 'What will you give me,' said the hobgoblin⁵, 'to do it for you?' 'My necklace,' replied the maiden. He took her at her word, and sat himself down to the wheel, and whistled and sang:

*'Round about, round about,
Lo and behold!
Reel away, reel away,
Straw into gold!'*

And round about the wheel went merrily; the work was quickly done, and the straw was all spun into gold.

When the king came and saw this, he was greatly astonished and pleased; but his heart grew still more greedy of gain, and he shut up the poor miller's daughter again with a fresh task. Then she knew not what to do, and sat down once more to weep; but the dwarf soon opened the door, and said, 'What will you give me to do your task?'⁶ 'The ring on my finger,' said she. So her little friend took the ring, and began to work at the wheel again, and whistled and sang:

*'Round about, round about,
Lo and behold!
Reel away, reel away,
Straw into gold!'*


till, long before morning, all was done again.

The king was greatly delighted to see all this glittering treasure; but still he

⁴ When realizing that the spinning industry was being taken over by males when this story was created, readers can see that the King character represents a male-run industry that employed women but that was managed by males and their greed.

⁵ A hobgoblin is a "mischievous imp or sprite" and a "fearsome mythological creature" ("Hobgoblin").

⁶ Almost all of the versions of "Rumpelstiltskin" portray him as making deals that he thinks will benefit him. These characteristics are taken from the Brothers Grimm "Rumpelstiltskin."



had not enough: so he took the miller's daughter to a yet larger heap, and said, 'All this must be spun tonight; and if it is, you shall be my queen.' As soon as she was alone that dwarf came in, and said, 'What will you give me to spin gold for you this third time?' 'I have nothing left,' said she. 'Then say you will give me,' said the little man, 'the first little child that you may have when you are queen.' 'That may never be,' thought the miller's daughter: and as she knew no other way to get her task done, she said she would do what he asked. Round went the wheel again to the old song, and the manikin once more spun the heap into gold. The king came in the morning, and, finding all he wanted, was forced to keep his word; so he married the miller's daughter, and she really became queen.

At the birth of her first little child she was very glad, and forgot the dwarf, and what she had said. But one day he came into her room, where she was sitting playing with her baby, and put her in mind of it. Then she grieved sorely at her misfortune, and said she would give him all the wealth of the kingdom if he would let her off, but in vain; till at last her tears softened him, and he said, 'I will give you three days' grace, and if during that time you tell me my name, you shall keep your child.'


Now the queen lay awake all night, thinking of all the odd names that she had ever heard; and she sent messengers all over the land to find out new ones. The next day the little man came, and she began with TIMOTHY, ICHABOD, BENJAMIN, JEREMIAH, and all the names she could remember; but to all and each of them he said, 'Madam, that is not my name.'

The second day she began with all the comical names she could hear of, BANDY-LEGS, HUNCHBACK, CROOK-SHANKS, and so on; but the little gentleman still said to every one of them, 'Madam, that is not my name.'

The third day one of the messengers came back, and said, 'I have travelled two days without hearing of any other names; but yesterday, as I was climbing a high hill, among the trees of the forest where the fox and the hare bid each other good night, I saw a little hut; and before the hut burnt a fire; and round about the fire a funny little dwarf was dancing upon one leg, and singing:

*"Merrily the feast I'll make.
Today I'll brew, tomorrow bake;
Merrily I'll dance and sing,
For next day will a stranger bring.
Little does my lady dream
Rumpelstiltskin is my name!"*

When the queen heard this she jumped for joy, and as soon as her little friend came she sat down upon her throne, and called all her court round to



enjoy the fun; and the nurse stood by her side with the baby in her arms, as if it was quite ready to be given up. Then the little man began to chuckle at the thought of having the poor child, to take home with him to his hut in the woods; and he cried out, 'Now, lady, what is my name?' 'Is it JOHN?' asked she. 'No, madam!' 'Is it TOM?' 'No, madam!' 'Is it JEMMY?' 'It is not.' 'Can your name be RUMPELSTILTSKIN?' said the lady slyly. 'Some witch told you that!—some witch told you that!' cried the little man, and dashed his right foot in a rage so deep into the floor, that he was forced to lay hold of it with both hands to pull it out.

Then he made the best of his way off, while the nurse laughed and the baby cowered; and all the court jeered at him for having had so much trouble for nothing, and said, 'We wish you a very good morning, and a merry feast, Mr RUMPLESTILTSKIN!'

EXCERPT FROM "A VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN"

Published in 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft's "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" argues that, in order to be a man's equal, a "woman must be educated in order to spread knowledge, virtue, and truth" (210). Wollstonecraft's work is, arguably, some of the first feminist writing in England. As such, Wollstonecraft's beliefs regarding the education of women are reflected in the following statement:

Women are told from their infancy, and taught by the example of their mothers, that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, outward obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection of a man; and should they be beautiful, every thing else is needless, for, at least, twenty years of their lives. (295)

This indication of the ideology of women's behavior is well represented within "Rumpelstiltskin," as the miller's daughter seeks only to obtain the protection of a husband through obedience, thus spinning gold. However, the maid displays only outward obedience towards Rumpelstiltskin as she cunningly discovers his name, allowing her to save her firstborn child. The maid is defying gender norms, as she tricks Rumpelstiltskin with her cunning and intellect, and thus does not wholly obey his word. However, the miller's daughter still abides by the rules of Rumpelstiltskin's deal and still marries the man who manipulated her into creating wealth for his use; thus she is still conforming to society's ideals. Wollstonecraft argues against this type of behavior. While "Rumpelstiltskin" is an example of how monstrous gender norms can be, "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" sought to free women from those constricting bonds by spreading education of feminist ideals.

EXCERPT FROM: "THE WEAVER AND THE FACTORY MAID"

Before the Brothers Grimm published "Rumpelstiltskin" in 1812, various versions of the story were told orally. Songs were another traditional method of oral storytelling. "The Weaver and the Factory Maid" is a broadside by Preston Harkness. A broadside is "a descriptive or narrative verse or song, commonly in a simple ballad form, on a popular theme, and sung or recited in public places or printed on broadsides for sale in the streets" ("Broadside Ballad"). These broadsides were paid for and passed on orally, similar to the process by which "Rumpelstiltskin" was told and evolved.


Although the lyrics in the broadside below refer to weaving as opposed to spinning seen in "Rumpelstiltskin," both art forms can be analyzed as industries that historically employed women until the Industrial Revolution. Since the Industrial Revolution influenced the creation of machine looms at the end of the eighteenth century, many female weavers and spinners were put out of business and replaced by machine loom operators, who were either male or female (Gullickson 195). However, females who operated machine looms were seen as monstrous for not fitting into society's gender roles of domesticity at that time. Furthermore, skilled workers were being replaced by unskilled machine workers for lower pay, while rich men still controlled the factories. Along with this, since textile work was leaving the domestic sphere in general, women who wanted to engage in those careers now had to work solely for men.

In "The Weaver and the Factory Maid" by Preston Harkness, readers also see how the narrator is treated based on cultural expectations when he reveals his love of a factory maid while he still has a rare job as a hand weaver:

I am a hand weaver to my trade,
I fell in love with a factory maid;
And if I could but her favour win,
I'd stand beside her and weave by steam.

My father to me scornful said,
'How could you fancy a factory maid,
When you could have girls fine and gay,
And dressed like to the Queen of May?'

'As for your fine girls, I do not care;
And could I but enjoy my dear,
I'd stand in the factory all the day,
And she and I'd keep our shuttles in play.' (1-12)




When the narrator admits he is a hand weaver, readers learn that he is a skilled weaver. He states that “he fell in love with a factory maid,” which is another name for a girl who operates a steam loom in a factory. To say that he “would stand beside her and weave by steam” at the same factory is an abomination to the weaver’s family and other hand weavers, as skilled hand weavers were being replaced by machinery, i.e. steam looms, operated mainly by male workers and other cheap labor. The father in these lyrics represents the revolting working class as those in the working class and other hand weavers would likely ask:

‘How could you fancy a factory maid,
When you could have girls fine and gay,
And dressed like to the Queen of May?’ (Harkness 6-8)

These lyrics also reveal how the working class viewed the women who worked at steam loom factories as monstrous. As men were traditionally the prime operators of machinery, women were monsterized for not being domestic and submissive. Along with this, the skilled male hand weaver in the poem above has been displaced by the cheap labor of the female steam weaver and his father does not approve of him joining her in the factory to work side by side. Although not a direct parallel, readers can see how the character of Rumpelstiltskin relates to the struggles of the working class in this poem as Rumpelstiltskin is a skilled hand weaver who has been displaced by the cheap labor of the maiden. Subsequently, readers learn that, although the working class see these factory maids as monstrous, the true monstrosity lies with those like the father who represent the working class as he does not consent for his son, nor his son’s lover, to cross the boundaries of social propriety.

EXCERPT FROM: “TOM TIT TOT”

Published in 1898, “Tom Tit Tot,” an English variant of the Brothers Grimm “Rumpelstiltskin,” showcases foundational aspects of the plot and culture that both stories, and other versions of “Rumpelstiltskin,” are built upon. For example, in both “Tom Tit Tot” and “Rumpelstiltskin,” there are male characters who take advantage of female spinners. One of these characters is the king figure. In “Rumpelstiltskin,” the king’s greed compels the king to have the maiden spin straw into gold not once, but three times, with a larger amount of straw being spun each time. As a reward, he tells the maiden that, if she can spin all of the straw in an even larger heap into gold, he will marry her, and she will become queen. Here, readers see the similarities between the king in “Rumpelstiltskin” mentioned above and the king in “Tom Tit Tot” below:



Then he said: "Look you here, I want a wife, and I'll marry your darter. But look you here,' says he, "leven months out o'the year she shall have all the vittles she likes to eat, and all the gownds she likes to git, and all the cumpny she likes to hev; but the last month o' the year she'll ha' to spin five skeins iv'ry day, an' if she doon't, I shall kill her.' (Clodd 11)

In both versions of the story, the king offers to marry the maiden if she will spin for him. It is important to note that, even though each version has different requirements ordered by the king figure, the concept and symbolism behind each king's desire is the same. Both king characters imply that, during this time, spinning was an industry that employed women but was managed by males and their greed. Therefore, this greed makes the king characters seem monstrous to readers in both stories, as the king in "Rumpelstiltskin" tells her to spin all the gold before morning "as you love your life," (The Brothers Grimm) and the king in "Tom Tit Tot" will kill the maiden if she does not reach the quota of five skeins, or lengths of gold thread, every day for a month (Clodd 11).

Another concept in both "Rumpelstiltskin" and "Tom Tit Tot" is that a male creature helps the maiden spin. Along with this, in both stories, the maiden has to figure out the creature's name so that she will not lose vital aspects of her life. In "Rumpelstiltskin" the creature is defined as a hobgoblin who gives the maiden three chances to figure out his name. Below, readers see how the creature who helps the maiden is portrayed in "Tom Tit Tot":

Well, she were that frightened. She'd allus been such a gatless mawther, the she didn't se much as know how to spin, an' what were she to dew tomorrer, with no one to come nigh her to help her. She sat down on a stool in the kitchen, and lork! How she did cry!

Howsivir, all on a sudden she hard a sort of a knockin' low down on the door. She upped and oped it, an' what should she see but a small little black thing with a long tail. That looked up at her right kewrious, an' that she said-

'What are yew a crin' for?'


'Wha's that to yew?' says she.

'Niver yew mind,' that said, 'but tell me what you're a cryin' for.'

'That oon't dew me noo good if I dew,' says she.

'Yew doon't know that,' that said an' twirled that's tail round.

'Well,' says she, 'that oon't dew no harm, if that doon't dew no good,' and she upped and told about the pies an' the skeins an' everything.



‘This is what I’ll dew,’ says the little black thing: ‘I’ll come to yar winder iv’ry mornin’ an’ take the flax an’ bring it spun at night.’

‘What’s your pay?’ says she.

That looked out o’ the corners o’ that’s eyes an’ that said: ‘I’ll give you three guesses every night to guess my name, an’ if you hain’t guessed it afore the month’s up, yew shall be mine.’ (Clodd 11-12)

Just as readers saw how the king characters in both stories were different in how they satisfied their greed but similar in their symbolic meaning, the creatures’ physical attributes in both stories are different, though both have the same symbolism. The symbolism of the creatures is defined below:


As the old legends show, and as is also manifest in the ‘Tom Tit Tot’ group of stories, he [the creature who assists the maiden in spinning] is the transformed giant or wizard with the superadded features of the fiend whose aim it is to induce the unwary to agree to sell themselves to him at the price of some fleeting advantage. (Clodd 48)

In this case, although the creature in “Tom Tit Tot” is described as “a black thing” and the creature in “Rumpelstiltskin” is described as a “hobgoblin,” both characters symbolize those who take advantage of and manipulate others; as the creatures’ aims are to “induce the unwary to agree to sell themselves to him at the price of some fleeting advantage” (Clodd 48). When keeping in mind the historical lenses through which the reader can analyze these stories, readers see that these creatures symbolize men who took over the spinning industry, as the maiden has to rely on the male creatures’ seemingly magical power of spinning when she can either not spin enough or her spinning is not of a high enough quality.

EXCERPTS FROM: “THE PHILOSOPHY OF RUMPELSTILT-SKIN”

A.W.T. and Edward Clodd’s “Philosophy” consists of detailed summaries of each of the fourteen versions of “Rumpelstiltskin,” which were told in various regions of Europe and other places. This piece was originally read before the Folklore Society on February 26th, 1889. Looking at different versions of the same story is helpful in identifying common themes which present themselves across the variants. Those themes, which are common to variants of “Rumpelstiltskin,” are about the events of marriage as well as the discovery of the name of the stranger who helps the female protagonist. The general plotline remains the same as well, with a favor offered on the terms of a specified condition, which is foiled only if the woman can discover the name of the helper.

After the summary of each story and their respective plotlines, A.W.T. and Clodd provide three points from which to view the stories and to explain what is




to be gained from their comparison. The first point explains the sacred nature of names in most world religions, including the Abrahamic religions: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. This first point also mentions a similar phenomenon which is apparent in the beliefs of indigenous peoples, who are, in this piece, referred to as “savages,” an outdated term more commonly used during the time it was written. It reads:

If we incline to accept the testimony of spiritualists we may find like correspondences between barbarian and civilized in the belief that to name the spirits is to invoke their appearance, an idea surviving in the saying, “Talk of the devil and you’ll see his horns,” and illustrated by the legend of the Norse witches who tied up wind and foul matter in a bag, and then, undoing the knots, shouted “Wind in the devil’s name,” when the hurricane is swept over land or sea.... We may not therefore feign surprise when we hear that in Borneo, when a child is ill, its name is changed so as to confuse or deceive the bad spirits, to whom all diseases and death, which last is rarely regarded as a natural event by the savage, are ascribed. Among some South American tribes, when a man dies, his friends and kinsmen change their names so as to elude death if he comes after them, or to prevent the departed spirits being attracted back to earth by hearing the old name. (A.W.T. and Clodd 156)

This pattern is relevant to the Brother Grimm’s “Rumpelstiltskin” because of the power that Rumpelstiltskin’s name had to free the protagonist from having to give up her first born child. The inspiration for the manner in which the woman is freed must have come from one of the folk beliefs which associate names with power. Though where the inspiration originated cannot be confirmed, A.W.T. and Clodd provide relevant examples from around the world. The second point illustrated by “The Philosophy of Rumpelstilt-Skin” explains how the reluctance to utter names elevates with the status of the particular person in question. Many examples are provided from various cultures at the time. It reads:

we find that the Australian has a strong reluctance to tell his real name to strangers. So has the Kaffir, and among this race no woman may pronounce the names of any of her husband’s male relations in the ascending line, nor even any word in which the principal syllable of the name of her father-in-law occurs. The Amazulu woman, when addressing or speaking of her husband, calls him “Father of So-and-so,” mentioning one of his children, and in like manner a Hindoo wife speaks of her husband as “He,” “Swamy,” or “the Master,” avoiding the




mention of his name. Dorman says that the New Mexican tribes never made known their own names or those of friends to a stranger, lest these should be used in sorcery. Among the Ojibways husbands and wives never told each others' names, and the children were warned that if they repeated their own names they would stop growing. (A.W.T. and Clodd 159)

These various examples illustrate how important and mystical names were in the folklore of the time, and they also show how names were believed to be innately tied to the human to which they were ascribed. The third and final point serves as a conclusion to the article and comments on the piece as a whole:

We have scampered across wide areas in our search after ideas common to those which lie at the heart of "Tom Tit Tot," and we find its variants, and the barbaric notions cognate to those ideas, contributing their evidence to that of the great cloud of witnesses testifying to the like attitude of the mind before like phenomena which frightened and bewildered it, until Science created sympathy between man and the objects of his undisciplined fears. (A.W.T. and Clodd 161)

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The Cultural Significance of “Jack and the Beanstalk”

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INTRODUCTION

For the majority of humanity’s existence, oral history has been the only way of preserving events and passing stories on to future generations. Long before reading and writing became forms of human communication, oral history was the only way to make events survive beyond oneself. From these oral histories come many of the most popular stories, whose existences have long outlived their medium. These stories, or folktales, have spawned archetypes that stretch throughout cultures and through time. One notable example of this is the trickster story. As explained by the *Encyclopedia of African-American Writing*, “[i]n all cases, trickster

characters are wily, charming, and mischievous, and they almost invariably come into conflict with characters who are physically larger and more powerful than they are, so they must use their craftiness to trick these more powerful adversaries” (“Trickster Tales”). Examples of this type of character date back thousands of years. Some of the most well-known are David from his Biblical battle against Goliath, Br’er Rabbit from African-American slave stories, Loki from Norse mythology, and of course, Jack from “Jack and the Beanstalk,” which has continued to be a popular story even to this day. However, the version examined here comes from a 1907 publication of the 1890 *Red Fairy Book* by Andrew Lang. At the time of the publication of Lang’s

ABSTRACT

“Jack and the Beanstalk” is a widely known fairy tale with a longstanding tradition of rewrites to fit the cultural norm. Andrew Lang’s version from 1890 is just another such version of the classic story. However, his version has distinct influence from the culture around him at the time, namely those of Marxism and British imperialism mindsets, which were wildly influential at the time. It is within these cultural ideologies that Lang’s Jack exists, as Jack the oppressor and Jack the oppressed. Along with other artifacts of the time, this paper seeks to position Lang’s version against the Marxist and British imperialist influences to paint a full picture of the cultural significance of “Jack and the Beanstalk.”




edition of “Jack and the Beanstalk”, two of the primary rhetorical lenses through which society was viewed were class distinctions (famously analyzed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in their work *The Communist Manifesto*), and the British Imperialist mindset. The duality between these two mindsets creates the framework through which one can understand the cultural implications of the story. It is within this cultural duality that Jack exists, both as Jack the oppressor and Jack the oppressed.

While the story has been around in many forms across many centuries, the story and its themes became widely popular around the early nineteenth to early twentieth centuries (“Jack Tales”). Our version, from 1907, fits perfectly within this timeframe. In this time, issues of class and wealth disparity were very much in the focus of society. Marx and Engels’s *The Communist Manifesto* both perfectly summarizes and embodies this shift in the understanding of social differences. The document, originally published in 1842, was relatively obscure to an English-speaking audience because it was not translated into English until the 1880s. However, in the 1870s, the pamphlet rose to become one of the most important political documents of its time (“Marxism”).

What was most striking about *The Communist Manifesto* was Marx and Engels’s observations on class systems. Marx and Engels argue that classes, groups of people loosely connected by their access to the means of production, have always existed as a form of oppression. Specifically addressing issues of the mid-to-late nineteenth century, Marx and Engels say, “The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, and new forms of struggle in place of the old ones” (485). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines bourgeois as “a person who upholds the interests of capitalism, or who is considered to be an exploiter of the proletariat, typically through ownership of the means of production” (“bourgeois”). These words about class disparity and the antagonism between social groups have had a profound impact on the world and have influenced every aspect of society, going all the way down to the stories told to children before bed.

At the same time as Marx and Engels’s *The Communist Manifesto*, the ideas of Manifest Destiny and British imperialism were at their strongest. The concept of social classes may well have resurfaced in the minds of many people throughout societies at the time, but ideas of imperialism were almost subconscious at that point. For clarification, imperialism “is widely used as an emotive—and more rarely as a theoretical—term to denote specific forms of aggressive behavior on the part of certain states against others” (“Imperialism”). Imperialism is also about the power



of an empire, specifically the act of exerting said power over another group in the interest of strengthening the empire's control and influence around the world. In this time period, imperialism was not seen as bad thing. In fact, quite the opposite was true: it was seen as a necessary procedure to allow Westernized societies to elevate other, "lesser" societies to their level. This idea that it was the white man's burden to lift other cultures up from their supposed barbarism is expressed in a Rudyard Kipling poem of the same name and is best illustrated by Victor Gillam in the political cartoon appropriately titled *The White Man's Burden (Apologies to Rudyard Kipling)*. This illustration will be further discussed later in this paper, but what matters for now is to understand that it represents the view that it was seen as the responsibility of the British and Americans to raise other cultures to what they considered a civilized standard at that time.

The part of this duality which is most emphasized in Lang's version itself is Jack as the oppressed. Trickster tales, such as this one, are almost universally used to craft a narrative around the small character fighting against the larger, usually oppressive, character. In this regard, it makes perfect sense to look at Jack's trickster story in the context of monster scholar Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)" to understand the cultural implications of what Jack's monster, the Giant, means. As Cohen states in his first thesis, "[t]he monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place" (4). This is to say that to understand the monster's purpose, we must understand what it is doing and why Jack is afraid of it.

To that end, we must understand what makes the Giant a monster, both in the general sense and in regards to Jack specifically. It is first relevant to understand what a giant is, in terms of the history of folklore. According to *Archetypes and Motifs in Folklore and Literature*, "[i]n world mythologies, however, giants are generally colossal figures of evil disposition, enemies of gods and mortals, and frequently exhibiting an unusual trait such as breathing fire, having multiple heads, or engaging in cannibalism" (Nagar 32). While this specific retelling of the Jack story leaves out such absurd qualities, it certainly has its own unique characteristics, which are best understood through the grotesque. As described by Kelly Hurley, who references M. M. Bakhtin — a Russian literary critic whose work has been widely influential to the field of literary theory — the grotesque deals with "the human body in all its coarse, clumsy earthiness and changeful mortality, focusing on the material thingness of the human subject rather than intellect or spirit" (138). This is to say that the grotesque breaks humanity down to an excess of earthly body, lacking in spirituality, and this is something which is seen with the Giant. Specifically, this Giant's unique characteristics are an excess

of size and weight and an uncanny gluttony to match. The Giant is described as eating elephant steaks in this version, which is particularly monstrous when one considers that the townspeople are all starving below his castle (Lang 138). This emphasis on weight also falls in line with a long-running association between upper-class people and weight. Throughout history, until the twentieth century, the wealthy were often portrayed as massive beings, thus creating a direct comparison between the disparity in weight and the disparity of class (“Fat Bias”). Put simply, the aristocratic class is viewed as both physically big and economically oppressive in relation to the lower classes. As can be seen below in Joseph Keppler’s “The Bosses of the Senate,” the rich trust members who are portrayed as running everything (in a negative way) are physically very similar to the Giant: large, overweight, and certainly gigantic.

Importantly, the story is told from the perspective of a young man who is not only poor but also is without a father and in drastic need of food. With this in mind, it makes sense for Jack to be contrasted with the Giant. As Cohen says, what we fear in monsters is really what we desire: “The same creatures who terrify and interdict can evoke potent



escapist fantasies; the linking of monstrosity with the forbidden makes the monster even more appealing as a temporary egress from constraint” (17). For instance, the Giant is alone with a motherly figure, his wife, and is also shown to not be very intelligent, as his wife easily convinces him that Jack is not there. However, what is important is the contrast between the two: Jack is small and poor while the Giant is gluttonous and wealthy, his size a literal reflection of his status. The things that make him monstrous— his size, his imposing nature, and his excessive greed— are all things that Jack openly envies.

More telling of the time is the ending, in which, after the Giant is slain (unintentional as the death may have been), the people of the local village rally behind Jack, charge the castle to overthrow the Giantess, and take back the land for Jack and the people (Lang 145-146). This ending is oozing with a Marxist aura, both with the rallying of the lower class to overthrow the upper class and with the peasants arguing that it is their duty to fight for their land. All of these Marxist undertones relate to portraying Jack as a trickster because he must use charisma

and wit to take down the oppressive, threatening creature attacking him in order to make it out alive.


However, what can be revealed upon closer inspection is the fact that this piece reinforces the narrative of the white man's burden, completely absolving Jack of any wrongdoing and, in this version, even rewarding him and outright stating that his invasion of the Giant's home and his robbery of the Giant's possessions is a birthright. Something important to note is that this piece does not humanize the Giant. Both the Giant and the Giantess are only referred to as that: Giant and Giantess. The audience does not even know their names; the giants are only referred to by their species, something very telling of the times.

Additionally, Lang's version of "Jack and the Beanstalk" goes out of its way to show the audience that Jack did nothing wrong. In fact, the story makes Jack a hero for his actions. This may seem strange to a contemporary audience, but, at the time, the attitude that some groups of people were inferior to others made perfect sense. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the ideas of Manifest Destiny and imperialism were very prominent in the minds of the people. In the cartoon shown here, John Gast's *American Progress*, one can see this mindset represented.

What this image shows is a woman, representing Western culture, leading a group of citizens onward into the "uncivilized" land, towards the natives and the animals. Ahead of them, the land is dark, and the woman is bringing forth a holy light with her to illuminate the lives of the natives. This represents the mindset that Western cultures were justified and morally obligated to elevate the cultures of the rest of the world. While this specific painting is about America's idea of Manifest Destiny, it also very much portrays the British mindset. Through the perspective of this picture, one can see why Jack's questionable actions are shown in a positive light in the story: he is acting out this idea of imperialism on the Giant.

The Giant himself makes it clear that he is of a different species than Jack. He makes the distinction by saying that he can smell that Jack's breath is that of an Englishman, implying that the Giant himself is not (Lang 139). Something to keep in mind is that Lang's version is unique because it portrays Jack's family as the original rulers of the castle until the Giant stole Jack's father's land, murdered his





siblings, and cast him and his mother out. More importantly, Jack has a birthright to steal the hen which lays golden eggs, and ultimately the castle itself, because of who he is; i.e., a representative of Manifest Destiny. The Giant invades Jack's lands and takes the belongings of Jack's ancestors. Thus it becomes Jack's duty to take everything back.

The Giant represents a fear of imperialism inverted, as portrayed by Patrick Brantlinger, a professor of English at Indiana University, in *Rule of Darkness*. Brantlinger says, "Imperial Gothic expresses anxieties about the waning of religious orthodoxy, but even more clearly it expresses anxieties about the ease with which civilization can revert to barbarism or savagery and thus about the weakening of Britain's imperial hegemony" (229). This fear that another culture might one day take over the empire and revert it to barbarism was an idea that was prolific throughout the late nineteenth century. Jack, through this lens, stands to reassure the readers. Even if another culture has people of unfathomable size and strength, it is the duty of the crafty British boy to win the day. Because he is doing what is perceived as right, he will always win, thus reaffirming his place at the top of the cultural ladder.

It is between these two influential ideologies of the late nineteenth century that Lang's version of "Jack and the Beanstalk" rests. Jack is at once an oppressor and the oppressed. The reading of the text must then reflect this notion, viewing Jack as neither exclusively the hero Lang intended, nor the conquering imperialist that the subtext reveals, but rather a combination of both of these ideologies, fused into one cultural entity.


JACK AND THE BEANSTALK

Jack Sells the Cow

Once upon a time there was a poor widow who lived in a little cottage with her only son Jack¹. Jack was a giddy, thoughtless boy, but very kind-hearted and affectionate. There had been a hard winter, and after it the poor woman had suffered from fever and ague. Jack did no work as yet, and by degrees they grew dreadfully poor. The widow saw that there was no means of keeping Jack and herself from starvation but by selling her cow; so one morning she said to her son,

`I am too weak to go myself, Jack, so you must take the cow to market for

¹ This is an example of some of the oppression that Jack faces. For this time, one would have to be poor to face the living conditions Jack and his mother do, making them members of the proletariat. The proletariat is defined as "[w]age earners collectively, esp. those who have no capital and who depend for subsistence on their daily labour; the working classes. The lowest class in society; the poor, the masses" ("proletariat").



me, and sell her.'

Jack liked going to market to sell the cow very much; but as he was on the way, he met a butcher who had some beautiful beans in his hand. Jack stopped to look at them, and the butcher told the boy that they were of great value, and persuaded the silly lad to sell the cow for these beans². When he brought them home to his mother instead of the money she expected for her nice cow, she was very vexed and shed many tears, scolding Jack for his folly. He was very sorry, and mother and son went to bed very sadly that night; their last hope seemed gone. At daybreak Jack rose and went out into the garden.

'At least,' he thought, 'I will sow the wonderful beans. Mother says that they are just common scarlet-runners, and nothing else; but I may as well sow them.'

So he took a piece of stick, and made some holes in the ground, and put in the beans. That day they had very little dinner, and went sadly to bed, knowing that for the next day there would be none and Jack, unable to sleep from grief and vexation, got up at day-dawn and went out into the garden. What was his amazement to find that the beans had grown up in the night, and climbed up and up till they covered the high cliff that sheltered the cottage, and disappeared above it! The stalks had twined and twisted themselves together till they formed quite a ladder.

'It would be easy to climb it,' thought Jack. And, having thought of the experiment, he at once resolved to carry it out, for Jack was a good climber. However, after his late mistake about the cow, he thought he had better consult his mother first.


Wonderful Growth of The Beanstalk

So Jack called his mother, and they both gazed in silent wonder at the Beanstalk, which was not only of great height, but was thick enough to bear Jack's weight.

'I wonder where it ends,' said Jack to his mother; 'I think I will climb up and see.'

His mother wished him not to venture up this strange ladder, but Jack coaxed her to give her consent to the attempt, for he was certain there must be something wonderful in the Beanstalk; so at last she yielded to his wishes. Jack instantly began to climb, and went up and up on the ladder-like bean till everything he had left behind him--the cottage, the village, and even the tall church tower--

² This could be perceived as a way of controlling the working classes by pitting them against one another. Jack is trusting that the butcher will not cheat him in a deal, but, instead of giving Jack (who is an impressionable child) money, he gives him "magical beans." It does not appear to be a fair deal, and it seems that the older, smarter, working man is taking advantage of a poor child within his same social standing in order to get ahead.



-looked quite little, and still he could not see the top of the Beanstalk. Jack felt a little tired, and thought for a moment that he would go back again; but he was a very persevering boy, and he knew that the way to succeed in anything is not to give up. So after resting for a moment he went on. After climbing higher and higher, till he grew afraid to look down for fear he should be giddy, Jack at last reached the top of the Beanstalk, and found himself in a beautiful country, finely wooded, with beautiful meadows covered with sheep. A crystal stream ran through the pastures; not far from the place where he had got off the Beanstalk stood a fine, strong castle. Jack wondered very much that he had never heard of or seen this castle before; but when he reflected on the subject, he saw that it was as much separated from the village by the perpendicular rock on which it stood as if it were in another land. While Jack was standing looking at the castle, a very strange-looking woman came out of the wood, and advanced towards him. She wore a pointed cap of quilted red satin turned up with ermine, her hair streamed loose over her shoulders, and she walked with a staff. Jack took off his cap and made her a bow.


‘If you please, ma’am,’ said he, ‘is this your house?’

‘No,’ said the old lady. ‘Listen, and I will tell you the story of that castle.’

‘Once upon a time there was a noble knight, who lived in this castle, which is on the borders of Fairyland. He had a fair and beloved wife and several lovely children: and as his neighbours, the little people, were very friendly towards him, they bestowed on him many excellent and precious gifts. Rumour whispered of these treasures; and a monstrous giant, who lived at no great distance, and who was a very wicked being, resolved to obtain possession of them.’

‘So he bribed a false servant to let him inside the castle, when the knight was in bed and asleep, and he killed him as he lay. Then he went to the part of the castle which was the nursery, and also killed all the poor little ones he found there. Happily for her, the lady was not to be found. She had gone with her infant son, who was only two or three months old, to visit her old nurse, who lived in the valley; and she had been detained all night there by a storm.’

‘The next morning, as soon as it was light, one of the servants at the castle, who had managed to escape, came to tell the poor lady of the sad fate of her husband and her pretty babes. She could scarcely believe him at first, and was eager at once to go back and share the fate of her dear ones; but the old nurse, with many tears, besought her to remember that she had still a child, and that it was her duty to preserve her life for the sake of the poor innocent. The lady yielded to this reasoning, and consented to remain at her nurse’s house as the best place of concealment; for the servant told her that the giant had vowed, if he could find her, he would kill both her and her baby. Years rolled on. The old nurse died, leaving her cottage and the few articles of furniture it contained to her poor lady, who dwelt in



it, working as a peasant for her daily bread. Her spinning-wheel and the milk of a cow, which she had purchased with the little money she had with her, sufficed for the scanty subsistence of herself and her little son. There was a nice little garden attached to the cottage, in which they cultivated peas, beans, and cabbages, and the lady was not ashamed to go out at harvest time, and glean in the fields to supply her little son's wants.

`Jack, that poor lady is your mother. This castle was once your father's, and must again be yours³.'

Jack uttered a cry of surprise.

`My mother! oh, madam, what ought I to do? My poor father! My dear mother!'

`Your duty requires you to win it back for your mother. But the task is a very difficult one, and full of peril, Jack. Have you courage to undertake it?'

`I fear nothing when I am doing right,' said Jack⁴.

`Then,' said the lady in the red cap, 'you are one of those who slay giants. You must get into the castle, and if possible possess yourself of a hen that lays golden eggs, and a harp that talks. Remember, all the giant possesses is really yours⁵.' As she ceased speaking, the lady of the red hat suddenly disappeared, and of course Jack knew she was a fairy.


Jack determined at once to attempt the adventure; so he advanced, and blew the horn which hung at the castle portal. The door was opened in a minute or two by a frightful giantess, with one great eye in the middle of her forehead. As soon as Jack saw her he turned to run away, but she caught him, and dragged him into the castle.

`Ho, ho!' she laughed terribly. `You didn't expect to see me here, that is clear! No, I shan't let you go again. I am weary of my life. I am so overworked, and I don't see why I should not have a page as well as other ladies. And you shall be my boy. You shall clean the knives, and black the boots, and make the fires, and help me generally when the giant is out. When he is at home I must hide you, for he has eaten up all my pages hitherto, and you would be a dainty morsel, my little

³ On one hand the giant is the oppressor, but this is also reminiscent of the stories and mindsets settlers had when it came to the natives—Settlers felt that it was their destiny to discover new worlds and that they were entitled to the land. They justified this behavior by making the natives seem evil and savage (Kipling).

⁴ This is an example of the mindset the settlers had (that the settlers were saving the natives from themselves)—the settlers believe it to be their moral obligation to civilize who and what they perceive as "uncivil." This can be seen in "The White Man's Burden," as the settlers saw it as their duty to make "civilized men" out of "savages" (Kipling).

⁵ This is the mindset of entitlement the settlers possessed as they entered new lands. It also reflects the entitlement of the bourgeoisie, defined as "the capitalist class who own most of society's wealth and means of production, typically with reference to its perceived materialistic values or conventional attitudes" ("bourgeois").



lad.' While she spoke she dragged Jack right into the castle. The poor boy was very much frightened, as I am sure you and I would have been in his place. But he remembered that fear disgraces a man; so he struggled to be brave and make the best of things.

'I am quite ready to help you, and do all I can to serve you, madam,' he said, 'only I beg you will be good enough to hide me from your husband, for I should not like to be eaten at all.'

'That's a good boy,' said the Giantess, nodding her head; 'it is lucky for you that you did not scream out when you saw me, as the other boys who have been here did, for if you had done so my husband would have awakened and have eaten you, as he did them, for breakfast. Come here, child; go into my wardrobe: he never ventures to open THAT; you will be safe there.'

And she opened a huge wardrobe which stood in the great hall, and shut him into it. But the keyhole was so large that it admitted plenty of air, and he could see everything that took place through it. By-and-by he heard a heavy tramp on the stairs, like the lumbering along of a great cannon, and then a voice like thunder cried out;

'Fe, fa, fi-fo-fum, I smell the breath of an Englishman. Let him be alive or let him be dead, I'll grind his bones to make my bread⁶.'


'Wife,' cried the Giant, 'there is a man in the castle. Let me have him for breakfast.'

'You are grown old and stupid,' cried the lady in her loud tones. 'It is only a nice fresh steak off an elephant, that I have cooked for you, which you smell. There, sit down and make a good breakfast.' And she placed a huge dish before him of savoury steaming meat, which greatly pleased him, and made him forget his idea of an Englishman being in the castle. When he had breakfasted he went out for a walk; and then the Giantess opened the door, and made Jack come out to help her. He helped her all day. She fed him well, and when evening came put him back in the wardrobe.

The Hen That Lays Golden Eggs.

The Giant came in to supper. Jack watched him through the keyhole, and

⁶ This is an example of the assumed savagery of the native, demonstrated by their inability to speak English. The use of "Englishman" could be perceived as reflecting how the settlers felt attacked by the "uncivilized" natives that they invaded, which we see when the Giant is searching for the intruding Jack. On the other hand, from a more satirical standpoint, as shown in the political cartoon "The Bosses of the Senate" (in the Introduction), the Giant is the bourgeois oppressor instead of the oppressed.



was amazed to see him pick a wolf's bone, and put half a fowl at a time into his capacious mouth. When the supper was ended he bade his wife bring him his hen that laid the golden eggs.

'It lays as well as it did when it belonged to that paltry knight,' he said; 'indeed I think the eggs are heavier than ever.' The Giantess went away, and soon returned with a little brown hen, which she placed on the table before her husband.

'And now, my dear,' she said, 'I am going for a walk, if you don't want me any longer.'

'Go,' said the Giant; 'I shall be glad to have a nap by-and-by.' Then he took up the brown hen and said to her: 'Lay!' And she instantly laid a golden egg. 'Lay!' said the Giant again. And she laid another. 'Lay!' he repeated the third time. And again a golden egg lay on the table. Now Jack was sure this hen was that of which the fairy had spoken. By-and-by the Giant put the hen down on the floor, and soon after went fast asleep, snoring so loud that it sounded like thunder.

Directly Jack perceived that the Giant was fast asleep, he pushed open the door of the wardrobe and crept out; very softly he stole across the room, and, picking up the hen, made haste to quit the apartment⁷. He knew the way to the kitchen, the door of which he found was left ajar; he opened it, shut and locked it after him, and flew back to the Beanstalk, which he descended as fast as his feet would move. When his mother saw him enter the house she wept for joy, for she had feared that the fairies had carried him away, or that the Giant had found him. But Jack put the brown hen down before her, and told her how he had been in the Giant's castle, and all his adventures. She was very glad to see the hen, which would make them rich once more.

The Money Bags.

Jack made another journey up the Beanstalk to the Giant's castle one day while his mother had gone to market; but first he dyed his hair and disguised himself. The old woman did not know him again, and dragged him in as she had done before, to help her to do the work; but she heard her husband coming, and hid him in the wardrobe, not thinking that it was the same boy who had stolen the hen. She bade him stay quite still there, or the Giant would eat him.

Then the Giant came in saying: 'Fe, fa, fi-fo-fum, I smell the breath of an Englishman. Let him be alive or let him be dead, I'll grind his bones to make my

⁷ This is another example of Jack stealing what he believes to be his and what he believes he has a right to. This is what keeps Jack in this dual category of how settlers saw the natives and their land, as well as how the bourgeoisie treated the proletariat.

bread.’

‘Nonsense!’ said the wife, ‘it is only a roasted bullock⁸ that I thought would be a tit-bit for your supper; sit down and I will bring it up at once.’ The Giant sat down, and soon his wife brought up a roasted bullock on a large dish, and they began their supper. Jack was amazed to see them pick the bones of the bullock as if it had been a lark.

As soon as they had finished their meal, the Giantess rose and said: ‘Now, my dear, with your leave I am going up to my room to finish the story I am reading. If you want me call for me.’

‘First,’ answered the Giant, ‘bring me my money bags, that I may count my golden pieces before I sleep⁹.’ The Giantess obeyed. She went and soon returned with two large bags over her shoulders, which she put down by her husband.

‘There,’ she said; ‘that is all that is left of the knight’s money. When you have spent it you must go and take another baron’s castle.’

‘That he shan’t, if I can help it,’ thought Jack. The Giant, when his wife was gone, took out heaps and heaps of golden pieces, and counted them, and put them in piles, till he was tired of the amusement. Then he swept them all back into their bags, and leaning back in his chair fell fast asleep, snoring so loud that no other sound was audible. Jack stole softly out of the wardrobe, and taking up the bags of money (which were his very own, because the Giant had stolen them from his father¹⁰), he ran off, and with great difficulty descending the Beanstalk, laid the bags of gold on his mother’s table. She had just returned from town, and was crying at not finding Jack.

‘There, mother, I have brought you the gold that my father lost.’

‘Oh, Jack! you are a very good boy, but I wish you would not risk your precious life in the Giant’s castle. Tell me how you came to go there again.’ And Jack told her all about it. Jack’s mother was very glad to get the money, but she did not like him to run any risk for her. But after a time Jack made up his mind to go again to the Giant’s castle.

⁸ Bullock is an term for steer (“bullock”).

⁹ In lore, Giants also have a history of being perceived as either rich or stealing riches from others and claiming it as their own. This is the entitlement the settlers had and how the bourgeoisie was also perceived. Andrew Teverson discusses this perception in his essay “Giants Have Trampled the Earth’: Colonialism and the English Tale in Samuel Selvon’s *Turn Again Tiger*.”

¹⁰ This, once again, is an example of Jack taking what he believes is his. He thinks and believes, just like the settlers, that it is his birthright to take these things. This is also an example of Jack being a trickster, described further in “Jack Tales.”

The Talking Harp

So he climbed the Beanstalk once more, and blew the horn at the Giant's gate. The Giantess soon opened the door; she was very stupid, and did not know him again, but she stopped a minute before she took him in. She feared another robbery; but Jack's fresh face looked so innocent that she could not resist him, and so she bade him come in, and again hid him away in the wardrobe.

By-and-by the Giant came home, and as soon as he had crossed the threshold he roared out: 'Fe, fa, fi-fo-fum, I smell the breath of an Englishman. Let him be alive or let him be dead, I'll grind his bones to make my bread.'

'You stupid old Giant,' said his wife, 'you only smell a nice sheep, which I have grilled for your dinner.' And the Giant sat down, and his wife brought up a whole sheep for his dinner.

When he had eaten it all up, he said: 'Now bring me my harp, and I will have a little music while you take your walk.' The Giantess obeyed, and returned with a beautiful harp. The framework was all sparkling with diamonds and rubies, and the strings were all of gold.

'This is one of the nicest things I took from the knight,' said the Giant. 'I am very fond of music, and my harp is a faithful servant.'

So he drew the harp towards him, and said: 'Play!' And the harp played a very soft, sad air.

'Play something merrier!' said the Giant. And the harp played a merry tune.


'Now play me a lullaby,' roared the Giant; and the harp played a sweet lullaby, to the sound of which its master fell asleep.

Then Jack stole softly out of the wardrobe, and went into the huge kitchen to see if the Giantess had gone out; he found no one there, so he went to the door and opened it softly, for he thought he could not do so with the harp in his hand.

Then he entered the Giant's room and seized the harp and ran away with it; but as he jumped over the threshold the harp called out: 'MASTER! MASTER!'

And the Giant woke up. With a tremendous roar he sprang from his seat, and in two strides had reached the door. But Jack was very nimble. He fled like lightning with the harp, talking to it as he went (for he saw it was a fairy), and telling it he was the son of its old master, the knight. Still the Giant came on so fast that he was quite close to poor Jack, and had stretched out his great hand to catch him. But, luckily, just at that moment he stepped upon a loose stone, stumbled, and fell flat on the ground, where he lay at his full length. This accident gave Jack time to get on the Beanstalk and hasten down it; but just as he reached their own garden he beheld the Giant descending after him.

'Mother I mother!' cried Jack, 'make haste and give me the axe.' His mother



ran to him with a hatchet in her hand, and Jack with one tremendous blow cut through all the Beanstalks except one.

‘Now, mother, stand out of the way!’ said he.

The Giant Breaks His Neck.

Jack’s mother shrank back, and it was well she did so, for just as the Giant took hold of the last branch of the Beanstalk, Jack cut the stem quite through and darted from the spot. Down came the Giant with a terrible crash, and as he fell on his head, he broke his neck, and lay dead¹¹ at the feet of the woman he had so much injured. Before Jack and his mother had recovered from their alarm and agitation, a beautiful lady stood before them.

‘Jack,’ said she, ‘you have acted like a brave knight’s son, and deserve to have your inheritance restored to you. Dig a grave and bury the Giant, and then go and kill the Giantess.’

‘But,’ said Jack, ‘I could not kill anyone unless I were fighting with him; and I could not draw my sword upon a woman. Moreover, the Giantess was very kind to me.’ The Fairy smiled on Jack.


‘I am very much pleased with your generous feeling,’ she said. ‘Nevertheless, return to the castle, and act as you will find needful.’ Jack asked the Fairy if she would show him the way to the castle, as the Beanstalk was now down. She told him that she would drive him there in her chariot, which was drawn by two peacocks. Jack thanked her, and sat down in the chariot with her.

The Fairy drove him a long distance round, till they reached a village which lay at the bottom of the hill. Here they found a number of miserable-looking men assembled.

The Fairy stopped her carriage and addressed them: ‘My friends,’ said she, ‘the cruel giant who oppressed you and ate up all your flocks and herds is dead, and this young gentleman was the means of your being delivered from him, and is the son of your kind old master, the knight.’

The men gave a loud cheer at these words, and pressed forward to say that they would serve Jack as faithfully as they had served his father. The Fairy bade

¹¹ With the giant dead, the question at hand is, “Did Jack slay those he oppressed or did he conquer his oppressors?” The Giant’s death can be seen as the oppressed finally defeating their oppressors (bourgeoisie being taken down by the proletariat), but it is also a metaphor for the settlers killing, robbing, and conquering the native people. With the two narratives being simultaneously told in this story, on one hand Jack is the poor, proletariat boy who has taken back what was rightfully his, defeated his oppressor, and appears to be the moral hero; on the other, Jack is a young settler who comes to a foreign land, stealing riches he believes to be his birthright as he kills the native who he views a savage. This is also an example of the trickster winning in the end after he has outsmarted the giant and taken back what is “rightfully” his.



them follow her to the castle, and they marched thither in a body, and Jack blew the horn and demanded admittance. The old Giantess saw them coming from the turret loop-hole. She was very much frightened, for she guessed that something had happened to her husband; and as she came downstairs very fast she caught her foot in her dress, and fell from the top to the bottom and broke her neck. When the people outside found that the door was not opened to them, they took crowbars and forced the portal. Nobody was to be seen, but on leaving the hall they found the body of the Giantess at the foot of the stairs.


Thus Jack took possession of the castle. The Fairy went and brought his mother to him, with the hen and the harp. He had the Giantess buried, and endeavoured as much as lay in his power to do right to those whom the Giant had robbed. Before her departure for fairyland, the Fairy explained to Jack that she had sent the butcher to meet him with the beans, in order to try what sort of lad he was. 'If you had looked at the gigantic Beanstalk and only stupidly wondered about it,' she said, 'I should have left you where misfortune had placed you, only restoring her cow to your mother. But you showed an inquiring mind, and great courage and enterprise, therefore you deserve to rise; and when you mounted the Beanstalk you climbed the Ladder of Fortune.' She then took her leave of Jack and his mother.

INTRODUCTION TO "TOBIT AND JACK THE GIANT-KILLER"

The name "Jack" was used in many trickster stories. This larger narrative makes the character of Jack in "Jack and the Beanstalk" both a unique character and a common example of this genre of "folk lore" ("Jack Tales"). In "Tobit and Jack the Giant-Killer," a short story published in 1898, Jack is a cunning warrior who has become renowned for his agility and swiftness as a giant slayer. After being captured for his actions, Jack serves as a loyal servant at the hands of the prince, who has earned Jack's services after showing a grand gesture of generosity. These services occur prior to Jack's death at the hands of the law.

The prince's life is endangered multiple times throughout this tale, and, each time, Jack uses his trickery, special gifts, and warrior's will to save the prince from death's clutches. The prince is in love with a fair maiden and desires her hand in marriage. She will accept if he completes two (impossible) tasks given to him. With Jack's cunning and swiftness, Jack helps the prince to complete these tasks. At the end, readers find out the devil has bewitched the maiden. By completing these tasks, Jack and the prince finally trick Lucifer and successfully cut off his head. This act releases the maiden from his power and allows the maiden to be with the prince.

This story gives the reader a sense of why Jack's trickery is thought to be



acceptable. Jack uses his skills and cunning behavior to keep the prince alive, and it is in the same way that Jack is able to steal from the Giant and eventually slay the him. Another connection that can be made is Jack's ability to slay another person yet be perceived as a hero. This is only possible if the being he slayed was a monster of a sort. Similar to the Giant, Lucifer is also seen as a grotesque and evil monster, who Jack must kill to ensure the safety of the people he cares about. The murder seems justified because the threat is personal to Jack. Also, because Lucifer is perceived as the monster in this story, his actions are perceived as immoral. Overall, this story reinforces the idea that anyone can become great—even a young peasant boy. "Tobit and Jack the Giant-Killer" simply gives a greater sense as to why Jack is considered a hero: Jack illustrates to the reader through his actions that one is able to succeed in any act with enough mental ability, will power, and strength.


"TOBIT AND JACK THE GIANT-KILLER" EXCERPT¹²

Now it happened in these days that King Arthur's only son asked his father to give him a large sum of money in order that he might go and seek his fortune in Wales, where lived a beautiful lady possessed with seven evil spirits. The king did his best to dissuade his son, but in vain, so at last gave way; and the prince set out off with two horses, one loaded with money, the other for himself to ride upon. Now, after several days' travel, he came to a market-town in Wales where he beheld a vast crowd of people gathered together. The prince asked the reason of it, and was told that they had arrested a corpse for several large sums of money which the deceased owed when he died. The prince replied that it was a pity creditors should be so cruel, and said: 'Go, bury the dead, and let his creditors come to my lodging, and there their debts shall be paid.'

They came in such great numbers that before night he had only twopence left for himself. Now Jack the Giant-Killer, coming that way, was so taken with the generosity of the prince that he desired to be his servant. This being agreed upon, the next morning they set forward on their journey together, when, as they were riding out of the town, an old woman called after the prince, saying: 'He has owed me twopence these seven years; pray, pay me as well as the rest.'

Putting his hand to his pocket the prince gave the woman all he had left, so that after their day's food, which cost what small spell Jack had by him, they were without a penny between them [T]hey quickly arrived at the house of the lady the prince sought, who, finding the prince to be a suitor, prepared a splendid banquet for him. After the repast was concluded she told him she had a task for

¹² (Groome 226-244)



him. She wiped his mouth with a handkerchief, saying: 'You must show me that handkerchief to-morrow morning or else you will lose your head.' With that she put it in her bosom.

The prince went to bed in great sorrow, but Jack's cap of knowledge informed him how it was to be obtained. In the middle of the night she called upon her familiar spirit to carry her to Lucifer. But Jack put on his coat of darkness and his shoes of swiftness, and was there as soon as she was. When she entered the place of the Old One she gave the handkerchief to old Lucifer, who laid it upon a shelf, whence Jack took it and brought it to his master, who showed it to the lady next day, and so saved his life. On that day she gave the prince a kiss, and told him he must show her the lips to-morrow morning that she kissed last night or lose his head.

'Oh!' he replied, 'if you kiss none but mine, I will.'

'That is neither here nor there,' said she. 'If you do not, death's your portion.'


At midnight she went as before, and was angry with old Lucifer for letting the handkerchief go. 'But now,' quoth she, 'I will be too hard for the king's son, for I will kiss thee, and he is to show me thy lips.'

Which she did, and Jack, when she was not standing by, cut off Lucifer's head, and brought it under his invisible coat to his master, who the next morning pulled it out by the horns before the lady. This broke the enchantment, and the evil spirit left her, and she appeared in all her beauty. They were married the next morning.

INTRODUCTION TO "MOTHER GOOSE AND THE GOLDEN EGG"

"Mother Goose and the Golden Egg," published circa 1850, is a children's poem many grew up hearing and reading. In this poem, Jack tries to sell a golden egg that came from his goose, but a "rogue Jew"— an ethnic stereotype — tries to take advantage of him and refuses to pay the price Jack has asked for the golden egg. When Jack comes to the realization that the Jew is trying to swindle him, Jack goes for help. The Jew then comes back and surprises Jack, stealing from Jack once again.

This Jack story echoes the two themes from "Jack and the Beanstalk." First, it pits poor Jack against a rich man who cheats him, just as the wealthy Giant had robbed the peasants in "Jack and the Beanstalk." Second, whereas the Giant symbolized another race, in this case, Jack's opponent is an actual member of an ethnic minority, who is portrayed in a stereotypical and stigmatizing manner as greedy and untrustworthy. According to *Learning about the Holocaust: A Student's Guide*, in Europe between 1870 and 1944, Jews often served as "scapegoat[s]"




("Antisemitism"). Thus, while this story tries to teach a lesson through the way Jack deals with the upper-class gentleman who attempts to cheat him in a deal, Jack still oppresses the minority, the Jew.

"MOTHER GOOSE AND THE GOLDEN EGG" EXCERPT¹³

Mother Goose had a house,
'Twas built in a wood,
Where an owl at the door,
For sentinel stood.
This is her son Jack,
A plain looking lad,
He is not very good,
Nor yet very bad.
She sent him to market,
A live goose he bought,
Here, mother, says he,
It will not go for naught.
Jack's goose and her gander,
Grew very fond,
They'd both eat together,
Or swim in one pond.
Jack found one morning,
As I have been told,
His goose had laid him,
An egg of pure gold.
Jack rode to his mother,
The news for to tell,
She called him a good boy,
And said it was well.
Jack sold his gold egg,
To a rogue of a Jew,
Who cheated him out of
The half of his due.
Then Jack went a courting,
A lady so gay,
As fair as the filly,

¹³ ("Mother Goose" 2-8)



And sweet as the May,
The Jew and the Squire,
Came behind his back,
And began to belabour,
The sides of Poor Jack.
Then Old Mother Goose,
That instant came in,
And turned her son Jack,
Into fam'd Harlequin.
The Jew got the goose,
Which he vow'd he would kill,
Resolving at once, His pockets to fill.
Jack's mother came in,
And caught the goose soon,
And mounted it's back,
Flew up to the moon.

INTRODUCTION TO *THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO*

The Communist Manifesto had a profound impact on the culture of the mid-to-late nineteenth century in Britain and the United States. This is because the fears to which *The Communist Manifesto* appeals were common throughout society and ones which Marx and Engels were simply putting to words. With this in mind, while one cannot say that Lang's "Jack and the Beanstalk" was specifically influenced by Marx and Engels's piece, it is clear that both works are reacting in different ways to similar fears of class oppression. Specifically, Jack and his mother and their abhorrent living conditions could represent the proletariat and their oppression by the bourgeoisie. The Giant, of course, could then be the bourgeoisie, hoarding all the communal wealth for himself.

Most tellingly, the ending of Lang's edition of "Jack and the Beanstalk" has an almost uncanny similarity to the revolutions that would take place in Russia in the early twentieth century. This depiction has Jack rallying the common people, reflective of the proletariat masses of which Marx and Engels speak, to rise against the oppressive Giant, or the bourgeoisie, so that they can take back the wealth that is rightfully theirs. In other words, Jack is motivating the people by saying that they have nothing to lose but their chains of oppression and have everything to win, which is what Marx and Engels argue as a form of motivation and justification for communism.

THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO EXCERPT¹⁴

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

In the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank. In ancient Rome we have patricians, knights, plebeians, slaves; in the Middle Ages, feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs; in almost all of these classes, again, subordinate gradations.

The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones.

Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinct feature: it has simplified class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other — Bourgeoisie and Proletariat. From the serfs of the Middle Ages sprang the chartered burghers of the earliest towns. From these burgesses the first elements of the bourgeoisie were developed.

The discovery of America, the rounding of the Cape, opened up fresh ground for the rising bourgeoisie. The East-Indian and Chinese markets, the colonisation of America, trade with the colonies, the increase in the means of exchange and in commodities generally, gave to commerce, to navigation, to industry, an impulse never before known, and thereby, to the revolutionary element in the tottering feudal society, a rapid development.

The feudal system of industry, in which industrial production was monopolised by closed guilds, now no longer sufficed for the growing wants of the new markets. The manufacturing system took its place. The guild-masters were pushed on one side by the manufacturing middle class; division of labour between the different corporate guilds vanished in the face of division of labour in each single workshop.

¹⁴ (Engels and Marx 482-485)

INTRODUCTION TO “THE WHITE MAN’S BURDEN (APOLOGIES TO RUDYARD KIPLING)”

“The White Man’s Burden (Apologies to Rudyard Kipling)” is an illustration, based on a poem by Rudyard Kipling, depicting British John Bull and American Uncle Sam carrying offensive caricatures of those ostracized by the dominant, white European culture. Both carry the burdens of those whom they are bringing up and into the light of “civilization.” This is reflected in “Jack and the Beanstalk” because the Giant is a foreigner, and Jack’s family are nobles.

Jack’s father is burdened with elevating the Giant, a foreigner, to the point where it ultimately leads to the destruction of his family and personal wealth. After gaining the father’s trust, the Giant eats Jack’s siblings and his father, leaving only Jack and his mother to fend for themselves. Jack’s father is ultimately the reason for this cruel finale of the family, as well.

In this sense, the reader perceives that Jack is completely justified when he begins to steal from the Giant, as the Giant’s possessions are all truly Jack’s. By killing the Giant, Jack is alleviating himself and his mother of the burden of not living up to the father’s desires, one which has been laying upon their shoulders for so long. Therefore, when viewed through the social environment of the time, Jack’s murders and thefts are simply his successes in freeing himself of the white man’s burden.


THE WHITE MAN’S BURDEN (APOLOGIES TO RUDYARD KIPLING)



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The Fate of a Materialistic Buddhist: A Cultural Edition of “Jikininki” by Lafcadio Hearn

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A traditional Japanese folktale, “Jikininki” tells the story of Muso, a traveling Buddhist monk, and the horrors he discovers in the mountains of Japan. In the story, he comes across a small, rural village where a citizen has recently died. Muso is told by one of the townsfolk that after every funeral the bodies mysteriously disappear. That night, he discovers that the bodies are being devoured by a corpse-eating ghost, called the Jikininki, cursed to consume the recently dead. In Japanese Buddhist mythology, Jikininkis are usually the spirits of greedy people, unable to enter the afterlife because of their earthly appetites (Roberts 62).

Little is known about the exact origin of the story, but much can be assumed from what is known about Japanese culture, specifically Zen Buddhism, one of the primary religions of Japan, and customs of rural Japanese communities. When studying “Jikininki,” it is clear that the teachings of Zen Buddhism and the cultures of rural communities are reflected in the fears and horrors surrounding the Jikininki, specifically in the monstrification of materialism and the denouncement of rural folk traditions. The corpse-devouring monster depicted in “Jikininki” is the intersection of two prominent cultural forces in rural Japan (the selfless transcendence from human nature depicted in Zen Buddhism and ancient folk-religions, such as Shintoism, built upon spirits of nature and ancestral worship) and, in addition, appears to represent the fear of losing both the global Zen Buddhist

ABSTRACT

Lafcadio Hearn has written and adapted many Japanese folktales that explore religious and cultural traditions of the civilization. “Jikininki” tells the tale of a Buddhist priest who encounters a cursed, corpse-eating ghost. The authors examine the depiction of this corpse-devouring monster, its relation to the cultural forces in rural Japan, and the representation of a fear of losing both the global Zen Buddhist and rural traditions through selfish mistreatment and material desires.




traditions and the rural traditions through selfish mistreatment and material desires.

“Jikininki” was originally published in a collection of Japanese folktales, *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things*, written by author and journalist Lafcadio Hearn. This collection is said to be loosely based on various excerpts of Japanese Buddhist mythology. From sections in his journal, it is apparent that Hearn had been fascinated with evil, demonic creatures from a young age (Bisland 26-28). Hearn was born in Greece and spent the majority of his childhood and young adult life in Ireland and America, but he found his home in Japan, spending fourteen years in various parts of the country. By day, he worked as an English literature professor, but he spent his free time carefully observing, learning, and recording the folklore of the ancient Japanese culture. *Kwaidan* is a culmination of what he learned and is considered to be his most successful work (Lewis).

Throughout history and around the world, it is clear that religion and philosophy drastically shape the societies they are cultivated in, and this idea is no different for Japanese culture. Zen Buddhism is one of the predominant religions that has influenced the Japanese way of life — their hopes and beliefs, but also what they fear. Buddhism was originally founded in India during the fifth and sixth centuries B.C.E. by Siddhartha Gautama, or the Buddha, and arrived in Japan by the sixth century C.E. (Roberts XV). While there are many variations of Buddhism (in China, Korea, etc.), Zen Buddhism is specific to Japan, and each sect has different ideas about how a person reaches enlightenment.

According to Paul Carus’s article “The Mythology of Buddhism,” Zen Buddhism is driven by four specific truths (or the Four Noble Truths) that comment on the origin of pain (Carus 415). Specifically, the underlying belief in these truths is that “to be human means to suffer” (Roberts XV) and that the root of suffering comes from our resistance to change and our attachment to the physical world; Carus writes, “The second noble truth states that the origin of suffering is the craving or clinging that clamors for the gratification of desire; it is the pursuit of pleasure . . . the lust of the senses, and the infatuation of all selfish conceits” (415). Buddhism contends that humans are fooled by the illusion of physical pleasure; the tangible, material world we reside in may satisfy a person in the moment, but, because the physical world cannot last forever, it will never truly fulfill a person’s nature or soul. Thus, we cannot be at peace simply by consuming the physical world.


Shunryu Suzuki, a modern Zen Buddhist master, also notes, “According to the traditional Buddhist understanding, our human nature is without ego. When we have no idea of ego, we have Buddha’s view of life. Our egoistic ideas are



delusion, covering our Buddha nature” (88). Buddhists believe suffering comes from the desire and pursuit of earthly pleasures in physical, bodily desire and material objects. This desire is not even real, but merely an illusion, preventing us from ever knowing the true nature of the world or reaching enlightenment. And, according to the Buddhists, because this desire goes against our nature, one must overcome desire before reaching enlightenment. In order to overcome suffering, one must overcome selfishness. These ideas of overcoming selfishness are condensed into the Eightfold Path of righteousness, a guide to the right mindset, right actions, and right understanding one must have in order to achieve enlightenment (Roberts XV).

The focus on selfishness as the root of all evil is emphasized again in Buddhists’ personification of evil in Mara, the Buddhist Devil (Carus 417). He is depicted as a creature that feeds on bodily desires, sensual delight, and wicked selfishness — essentially the opposite of what the Buddha and the Eightfold Path embody. Interestingly, the monstrous Jikininki seems to also portray the wicked selfishness that is demonized in Buddhist mythology: a Buddhist priest who “thought only of the food and the clothes that my sacred profession enabled me to gain” is cursed to return to earth as a haunted spirit, forced to eat the bodies of the recently dead (Hearn 4). Monster scholar Jeffrey Jerome Cohen notes in “Monster Culture (Seven Theses)” that “[t]he monster is continually linked to forbidden practices in order to normalize and enforce The same creatures who terrify and interdict can evoke potent escapist fantasies; the linking of monstrosity with the forbidden makes the monster all the more appealing as a temporary egress from constraint” (16-17). In this sense, the Jikininki seems to be a representation of the priest’s selfishness; the indulgence of the priest’s desire is what creates the monster. The priest is punished for straying from his own teachings but is also punished for his desires for material goods instead of enlightenment. He is punished for giving in to selfishness, for ignoring his true Buddha nature. And, therefore, his suffering continues after his death.

For the rural areas of Japan, society is not only shaped by major religions, but also by the traditions and structures of small communities. Scholar and author Ichiro Hori claims, “The essence of Japanese folk-beliefs lies in the interaction between two belief systems: a little tradition . . . and a great tradition” (405). Little traditions are the native religions of rural Japan, whereas great traditions are the influences of major philosophies, such as Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. “Jikininki” is an excellent example of how these two traditions intersect; Muso Kokushi, a Zen Buddhist priest, represents the great tradition of major philosophy, while the Jikininki represents the little tradition of ancestor worship and respect for



the dead in rural Japanese folk traditions.


This theme of an outside major philosophical force entering a local community is a common theme among Japanese folktales; Hori states, “One of the major problems of Japanese religious history is to grasp the importance of the role played by such migratory missionaries in forming folk-beliefs in Japan” (406). The role of missionaries from larger, global religions, such as Muso Kokushi in “Jikininki,” was to introduce new concepts to rural communities, opening the door for greater knowledge and understanding. The culmination of these two forces, the global religion and the local religion, is echoed throughout “Jikininki” and is represented by the monster itself.

The selfishness of the Buddhist priest who becomes the Jikininki stems from both his desire for the worldly possessions given to him because of his religious position and from his apathy towards the treatment of the dead in the village he resides in. Japanese folk religion places a significant importance on its treatment of the dead, with ancestral worship and the sanctity of mountains being core attributes to their traditions (Hori 416).

Although Zen Buddhism is popular in Japan, individual nature-oriented deities still exist in rural Japanese folklore. Most common of these are the spirits of the mountains. For example, many Japanese farming villages believe “the god of the rice-fields comes down from the mountain or hill at the beginning of spring before seeding to guard his worshippers’ fields” (Hori 415). In the mountainous area of Mino, where “Jikininki” takes place, the landscape itself would have been an important part of the village’s folk religions.

Mountains are seen as sacred in many cultures, providing landmarks as a source of identity or signifying being closer to god. In Japan, mountains play a large part in the treatment of the dead, acting as burial sites or places of meditation. They are also seen as sites of spirits, both in relation to folk-religion and the dead. Hori claims, “Another important folk-belief is that a particular mountain . . . is associated with the spirit of the dead at the time of funerals” (416). Mountains were viewed as a path to the afterlife, and many Japanese legends, including “Jikininki,” involve “Buddhist monks, [and] Shinto priests . . . [meeting] ghosts in such mountains” (Hori 417).

In the story, the former Zen Buddhist priest says that “the bodies of the mountain-folk who died used to be brought here — sometimes from great distances — in order that I might repeat over them the holy service. But I repeated the service and performed the rites only as a matter of business” (Hearn 4). By disrespecting the importance of the treatment of the dead in a rural Japanese village, he is forced to spend his afterlife as a monster. The only way to relieve



himself of his monstrous existence is to have a devout priest honor the dead and treat his body with the same respect seen across rural Japan. Cohen states, “The monster awakens one to the pleasures of the body to the simple and fleeting joys of being frightened, or frightening — to the experience of mortality and corporeality” (17). The pleasures of this world are what caused the curse upon the priest, and he exists as both a frightened and frightening creature, forced to eat the corpses of deceased villagers as punishment for his decisions.

The Jikininki is forced to exist as a monster due to his selfishness and desire for worldly possessions, as well as apathy towards the treatment of the dead in Japanese mountain villages. He remains in his afterlife to plague the citizens of a mountainous Japanese village, their fear reflective of their shared beliefs; the loss of their values, represented in the Jikininki himself, invokes fear in the community. The culmination of the mistreatment of both community traditions and global religion leads to the birth of this monster.

“JIKININKI” BY LAFCADIO HEARN

Once, when Muso Kokushi, a priest of the Zen sect¹, was journeying alone through the province of Mino², he lost his way in a mountain-district where there was nobody to direct him. For a long time he wandered about helplessly; and he was beginning to despair of finding shelter for the night, when he perceived, on the top of a hill lighted by the last rays of the sun, one of those little hermitages, called *anjitsu*³, which are built for solitary priests. It seemed to be in ruinous condition; but he hastened to it eagerly, and found that it was inhabited by an aged priest, from whom he begged the favor of a night’s lodging. This the old man harshly refused; but he directed Muso to a certain hamlet⁴, in the valley adjoining, where lodging and food could be obtained.


Muso found his way to the hamlet, which consisted of less than a dozen farm-cottages; and he was kindly received at the dwelling of the headman. Forty or fifty persons were assembled in the principal apartment, at the moment of Muso’s arrival; but he was shown into a small separate room, where he was promptly supplied with food and bedding. Being very tired, he lay down to rest at an early hour; but a little before midnight he was roused from sleep by a sound of loud

¹ Zen Buddhism originated in China during the Tang dynasty. It emphasizes rigorous self-control, meditation-practice, insight into Buddha-nature and the personal expression of this insight in daily life, especially for the benefit of others (D. Suzuki 104).

² Mino is one of the old provinces of Japan. It lies in the southern part of modern-day Gifu Prefecture (“Mino Area”).

³ An *anjitsu* is defined as a hermit’s cell, or a retreat (“*anshitsu*”).

⁴ A small settlement, generally one smaller than a village (“hamlet”).



weeping in the next apartment. Presently the sliding-screens were gently pushed apart; and a young man, carrying a lighted lantern, entered the room, respectfully saluted him, and said:

“Reverend Sir, it is my painful duty to tell you that I am now the responsible head of this house. Yesterday I was only the eldest son. But when you came here, tired as you were, we did not wish that you should feel embarrassed in any way: therefore we did not tell you that father had died only a few hours before. The people whom you saw in the next room are the inhabitants of this village: they all assembled here to pay their last respects to the dead; and now they are going to another village, about three miles off, — for, by our custom, no one of us may remain in this village during the night after a death has taken place. We make the proper offerings and prayers; then we go away, leaving the corpse alone. Strange things always happen in the house where a corpse has thus been left: so we think that it will be better for you to come away with us. We can find you good lodging in the other village. But perhaps, as you are a priest, you have no fear of demons or evil spirits; and, if you are not afraid of being left alone with the body, you will be very welcome to the use of this poor house. However, I must tell you that nobody, except a priest, would dare to remain here tonight.”

Muso made answer:

“For your kind intention and your generous hospitality I am deeply grateful. But I am sorry that you did not tell me of your father’s death when I came; for, though I was a little tired, I certainly was not so tired that I should have found difficulty in doing my duty as a priest. Had you told me, I could have performed the service before your departure. As it is, I shall perform the service⁵ after you have gone away; and I shall stay by the body until morning. I do not know what you mean by your words about the danger of staying here alone; but I am not afraid of ghosts or demons: therefore please do not have any anxiety on my account.”

The young man appeared to be rejoiced by these assurances, and expressed his gratitude in fitting words. Then the other members of the family, and the folk assembled in the adjoining room, having been told of the priest’s kind promises, came to thank him — after which the master of the house said:

“Now, reverend Sir, much as we regret to leave you alone, we must bid you farewell. By the rule of our village, none of us can stay here after midnight. We beg, kind Sir, that you will take every care of your honorable body, while we are unable to attend upon you. And if you happen to hear or see anything strange during our

⁵ Upon death, Monks prepare the body by chanting comforting words while preparing the body for the funeral fire. They also accompany the family to the funeral to provide comfort and guidance for those left behind (Bodiford 153).



absence, please tell us of the matter when we return in the morning.”

All then left the house, except the priest, who went to the room where the dead body was lying. The usual offerings had been set before the corpse; and a small Buddhist lamp — tomyo⁶— was burning. The priest recited the service, and performed the funeral ceremonies — after which he entered into meditation. So meditating he remained through several silent hours; and there was no sound in the deserted village. But, when the hush of the night was at its deepest, there noiselessly entered a Shape, vague and vast; and in the same moment Muso found himself without power to move or speak. He saw that Shape lift the corpse, as with hands, devour it, more quickly than a cat devours a rat — beginning at the head, and eating everything: the hair and the bones and even the shroud. And the monstrous Thing, having thus consumed the body, turned to the offerings, and ate them also. Then it went away, as mysteriously as it had come.

When the villagers returned next morning, they found the priest awaiting them at the door of the headman’s dwelling. All in turn saluted him; and when they had entered, and looked about the room, no one expressed any surprise at the disappearance of the dead body and the offerings. But the master of the house said to Muso:

“Reverend Sir, you have probably seen unpleasant things during the night: all of us were anxious about you. But now we are very happy to find you alive and unharmed. Gladly we would have stayed with you, if it had been possible. But the law of our village, as I told you last evening, obliges us to quit our houses after a death has taken place, and to leave the corpse alone. Whenever this law has been broken, heretofore, some great misfortune has followed. Whenever it is obeyed, we find that the corpse and the offerings disappear during our absence. Perhaps you have seen the cause.”

Then Muso told of the dim and awful Shape that had entered the death-chamber to devour the body and the offerings. No person seemed to be surprised by his narration; and the master of the house observed:

“What you have told us, reverend Sir, agrees with what has been said about this matter from ancient time.”

Muso then inquired:

“Does not the priest on the hill sometimes perform the funeral-service for your dead?”

“What priest?” the young man asked.

⁶ The gift of light and the accompanying prayers help bring less suffering and greater happiness in times of death, according to Zen Buddhism (“Lamp Offerings”).

“The priest who yesterday evening directed me to this village,” answered Muso. “I called at his *anjitsu* on the hill yonder. He refused me lodging, but told me the way here.”

The listeners looked at each other, as in astonishment; and, after a moment of silence, the master of the house said:

“Reverend Sir, there is no priest and there is no *anjitsu* on the hill. For the time of many generations there has not been any resident-priest in this neighborhood.”

Muso said nothing more on the subject; for it was evident that his kind hosts supposed him to have been deluded by some goblin. But after having bidden them farewell, and obtained all necessary information as to his road, he determined to look again for the hermitage on the hill, and so to ascertain whether he had really been deceived. He found the *anjitsu* without any difficulty; and, this time, its aged occupant invited him to enter. When he had done so, the hermit humbly bowed down before him, exclaiming: — “Ah! I am ashamed! — I am very much ashamed! — I am exceedingly ashamed!”


“You need not be ashamed for having refused me shelter,” said Muso. “You directed me to the village yonder, where I was very kindly treated; and I thank you for that favor.”

“I can give no man shelter,” the recluse made answer; “and it is not for the refusal that I am ashamed. I am ashamed only that you should have seen me in my real shape, — for it was I who devoured the corpse and the offerings last night before your eyes. . . . Know, reverend Sir, that I am a *jikininki*⁷, — an eater of human flesh. Have pity upon me, and suffer me to confess the secret fault by which I became reduced to this condition.

“A long, long time ago, I was a priest in this desolate region. There was no other priest for many leagues around. So, in that time, the bodies of the mountain-folk who died used to be brought here, — sometimes from great distances, — in order that I might repeat over them the holy service. But I repeated the service and performed the rites only as a matter of business — I thought only of the food and the clothes that my sacred profession enabled me to gain. And because of this selfish impiety I was reborn, immediately after my death, into the state of a *jikininki*. Since then I have been obliged to feed upon the corpses of the people who die in this district: every one of them I must devour in the way that you saw last night. . . . Now, reverend Sir, let me beseech you to perform a Segaki-service⁸

⁷ “Corpse-eating devils in Japanese Buddhist myth. Many *jikininki* are the spirits of greedy people whose appetites for worldly goods kept them from entering the spirit world” (Roberts 62).

⁸ “The name ‘Segaki’ means ‘feeding the hungry ghosts,’ and the rituals and practices done for this festival contain a great deal of teaching about training in Buddhism” (Carlson).



for me: help me by your prayers, I entreat you, so that I may be soon able to escape from this horrible state of existence” . . .

No sooner had the hermit uttered this petition than he disappeared; and the hermitage also disappeared at the same instant. And Muso Kokushi found himself kneeling alone in the high grass, beside an ancient and moss-grown tomb of the form called *go-rin-ishi*⁹, which seemed to be the tomb of a priest.

⁹ Also referred to as a “Five Circle Stone,” a *go-rin-ishi* is a Buddhist tomb. This idea is further explored in our primary sources (“Gorintou”).



ELIZABETH BISLAND, LAFCADIO HEARN, AND BRUCE ROGERS'S "BOYHOOD" (1906)

To the devils indeed — because I supposed them stronger than the rest — I had often prayed for help and friendship; very humbly at first, and in great fear of being too grimly answered — but afterwards with words of reproach on finding that my condensations had been ignored. But in spite of their indifference, my sympathy of the enemies of Cousin Jane's God steadily strengthened; and my interest in all the spirits that the Church History called evil, especially the heathen gods, continued to grow. (26-27)

This letter was written by Lafcadio Hearn in regards to his thoughts on the influence his childhood had on his views of religion. This section of his letter is of particular interest because it denotes his fascination with "evil" and the dark side of religion. He finishes the section of the letter regarding "idolatry" and religion by stating, "[a]nd even to-day, in spite of larger knowledge, the words 'heathen' and 'pagan' — however ignorantly used in scorn — revive within me old sensations of light and beauty, of freedom and joy" (28). The conclusion to his letter illustrates his positive associations with a side of religion that is not typically advocated.

Through reading this excerpt from Hearn's personal letter, readers are able to get an idea of Hearn's point of view as is related to his upbringing. By reading about his childhood and his reflections on his childhood fascinations and religious ideals, the reader is clued into where Hearn was coming from when he wrote this short story. At the time, it was common for society to lump non-Christian religions, such as Buddhism, together with the Christian ideals of evil. As it is said that Hearn's book of Japanese tales is loosely based upon snippets of Japanese Buddhist mythology, it begins to make sense as to why Lafcadio Hearn is so interested in writing stories, like "Jikininki," that investigate the dark side of the Buddhist religion, when excerpts such as this one so clearly delineate Hearn's interest, or borderline obsession, with evil and heathen gods.

LAFCADIO HEARN'S "THE LITERATURE OF THE DEAD" (1898)

As I write these lines a full moon looks into my study over the trees of the temple-garden, and brings me the recollection of a little Buddhist poem:

From the foot of the mountain, many are the paths ascending in the shadow; but from the cloudless summit all who climb behold the self-same Moon.

The reader who knows the truth shrined in this little verse will not regret an hour passed with me among the tombs of Kobudera. (147)

The Buddhist faith puts a strong focus on reflection and meditation. This primary source is a collection of Hearn's Buddhist writings and illustrates his deep connection with the Buddhist faith. Much of the background on the author depicts him as a world traveler, never staying in one place for an extended period of time, but all sources state that he spent most of his time in Japan, becoming absorbed in the Buddhist faith. While this excerpt does not specifically relate to "Jikininki," it illustrates Hearn's deep meditations and reflections in regards to Buddhism. As "Jikininki" revolves around Zen Buddhism, these deeply religious writings from Hearn provide an excellent example of the reason he chose to focus on Zen Buddhism in this short story as well as others he has written. In addition, while small, there is a connection in the setting of Hearn's excerpt and the mountainous setting of "Jikininki." Mountains can be viewed as quiet, removed places for reflection. As reflection is an important part of Zen Buddhism, the correlation between Hearn's reflections in the mountains and Muso's moments of reflection and prayer in the rural village in the mountains illustrates the importance of reflection in removed, quiet, and natural settings.

Additionally, this source gives the audience a strong, well-rounded background of the author and where he is coming from when writing "Jikininki." This conclusion to one chapter of his Buddhist writings illustrates the importance of Buddhism to Lafcadio Hearn. This provides an additional layer of connection when reading "Jikininki," knowing that the author is a devout Zen Buddhist who believes and takes part in the religious cultures and traditions depicted throughout the short story.

BHIKSHU SUBHADRA'S A BUDDHIST CATECHISM: AN OUTLINE OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE BUDDHA GOTAMA IN THE FORM OF QUESTION AND ANSWER (1920)

It is addressed to those for whom material progress and augmented means of luxury do not constitute the goal of life, and to whom the prevalent cruel strife for the possession of worldly goods and grandeur, which the general selfishness makes each day more pitiless. (6)

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “catechism” as “[a]n elementary treatise for instruction in the principles of the Christian religion, in the form of question and answer; such a book accepted and issued by a church as an authoritative exposition of its teaching” (“catechism”). While generally thought of as a part of the Christian religion, this Buddhist catechism serves the same purpose as defined above. Through question and answer, the guidelines are laid out to those who practice Buddhism. Very specific questions are posed, such as: “Who is Buddha?” “Is Buddha a proper name?” and “When was Prince Siddhartha born?” This catechism, *Doctrine of the Buddha Gotama in the Form of Question and Answer*, provides a detailed layout of what it means to be Buddhist, the history of Buddhism, and how to practice Buddhism.

Through this Buddhist catechism, and mainly through the quote that has been pulled from the source, readers become more acquainted with what it means to practice Buddhism, especially as it pertains to the idea of materialism in the Buddhist faith. With the quote spelling out who the catechism is addressing, readers are given reference to the implications of the negativity of materialism in “Jikininki.” The Jikininki in the story states that he was cursed for his materialistic nature as a Buddhist priest, implying that this is an important aspect of the Buddhist culture. In addition, Cohen makes the statement that “escapist delight gives way to horror only when the monster threatens to overstep these boundaries, to destroy or deconstruct the thin walls of category and culture” (17). This quotation is an illustration of one of Cohen’s seven monster theses: “fear of the monster is really a kind of desire” (17). In “Jikininki,” this specific desire is materialism, and, as we see from the catechism, the desire for material goods is explicitly warned against, which as Cohen states, only makes it that much more desirable. Throughout the story, we see that the Jikininki itself is punished for this monstrous desire for worldly goods and gives way to a horrific ending of living eternally as a flesh-eating monster after overstepping the Buddhist boundaries throughout his life as a human being.

BURTON HOLMES'S "A GO-RIN-ISHI OR 'FIVE CIRCLE STONE,' THE TOMB OF MATSUDAIRA, IN MATSUE" (1922)

This photograph provides visual representation for the tomb mentioned at the end of "Jikininki." In the story, it is stated, "Musō Kokushi found himself kneeling alone in the high grass, beside an ancient and moss-grown tomb of the form called go-rin-ishi, which seemed to be the tomb of a priest" (Hearn 33). As stated in the title of the photograph, this tomb, or go-rin-ishi, is made of five stones. Each stone is said to represent each of the five elements of Buddhism. The bottom, square-like rock corresponds to the earth, the spherical stone represents water, the triangular stone represents fire, the "reclining half-moon" stone represents the wind, and the final stone on top represents space ("Gorintō"). The importance of nature in the Buddhist religion shines through in the description and explanation of this specific tomb for a Buddhist priest.

This visual representation provides context to readers as to what the tomb of a Buddhist priest looks like, as well as why it looks this way. With this concrete example of the tomb of a priest, readers are able to visualize what Musō is seeing at the end of this short story, which adds a level of understanding and connection. A second level of understanding is added when readers are provided with the context of what each stone means on the go-rin-ishi. The subtle focus on nature in the Buddhist religion and, specifically, in the short story, are illustrated well through this photograph and the explanation of the importance of each stone. Through better understanding the meaning of this Buddhist tomb, the audience is given a more well-rounded knowledge of the uses of nature throughout the short story. For example, "Jikininki" takes place in a rural Japanese village; this setting makes more sense when taking into consideration the importance of nature in the Buddhist culture. By understanding that each of the five stones that make up this tomb represent the most important elements of nature, the relation between the natural setting of the short story and the natural focus of Zen Buddhism creates a stronger understanding and focus for the audience.



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Africa Speaks?: Black Monsters and Revisionary History in Horror Films


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In the Western eye, Africa is more an idea than a physical location. Discussion about the continent is riddled with historically mediated tropes, stereotypes, and misrepresentations. Cultural products, like fashion trends and literature, perpetuate the imagination of an Africa that does not truly exist. In Western culture of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, film plays a crucial role in shaping people's understanding of Africa. This paper analyzes three films set apart by at least a decade: *The Night of the Sorcerers* (1973), *Panga* (1991), and *Dominion: Prequel to the Exorcist* (2005). Each film includes motifs

of possession, curses, magic, and monsters. Moreover, each film is shaped by colonialism, for the terror stems from historical fears associated with expansion and an entrance into African spaces. My analysis follows a multi-layered structure. I begin with a discussion of the tropes that dominate the narratives and how each one is influenced by a colonial history. Afterward, I examine how the tropes interact with the genre of horror to create an essentialist "African" entity that is equated with ideas of darkness and monstrosity. Ultimately, this paper argues that the threat in these films is not the mere existence of darkness, but rather the possibility of *contracting* darkness. By virtue of engaging with the horror genre, these films other black bodies to the extremes of monstrosity. Accordingly, the films center

ABSTRACT


This paper analyzes three films, *The Night of the Sorcerers* (1973), *Panga* (1991), and *Dominion: Prequel to the Exorcist* (2005), within the context of postcolonial theory. I examine how the films interweave themes of possession, magic, and monsters with a legacy of colonialism, constructing terror interactions with raced bodies. This paper argues that the threat in these films is not the mere existence of blackness, but rather the possibility of contracting blackness. Moreover, these narratives affect a new reality, practicing a form of revisionary history that provides the other with a form (or at least the opportunity) of agency.



on the idea of transformations, specifically the mutation of *white human* into *black monster*. This article ends with an analysis of African-based horror as a genre, asserting that, while such narratives are influenced by a particular history, they also affect a new reality. These films act as a battleground between the European and African voice, embodied by hero and monster respectively. Inevitably, the narratives practice a revisionary history that provides Africans with a form of (or at least the opportunity for) agency.

To provide a very brief background, the Spanish horror film *The Night of the Sorcerers* begins with the 1910 murder of a female missionary worker by voodoo sorcerers in the (fake) West African country of Bumbasa. Subsequent female explorers are lured to the site of the original murder. Here, the voodoo sorcerers return as African zombies and transform the women into half-leopard, bikini-clad, lesbian vampires, who murder their male explorer counterparts. *Panga* unfolds the fate of a woman who interrupts a sacrificial ceremony near her home in South Africa to save the life of a goat. Her actions incur the wrath of the Nyonga “witchdoctor,” who summons “the vengeful spirit that lives in the sea” (*Panga*), *Umoya Omube*. While the malevolent forces in *The Night of the Sorcerers* and *Panga* are the Africans themselves, the religious overtones of *Dominion* make the African connection slightly subtler. The film follows a Catholic priest, who lost his faith during World War II after a traumatic incident of Nazi brutality. While on sabbatical in British East Africa, Father Merrin performs an archaeological dig and unleashes an ancient demon that he must exorcise by the end of the film.

The two most prevalent tropes in these films are those of a savage and a primitive Africa. Africa as savage implies wildness, an existence where one is not restricted by social standards of morality and normality. Moreover, it is linked to ideas of primitivism and underdevelopment. Historically, this image has been constructed through a process of differentiation whereby the Westerner contrasts his own life and practices with those of African peoples. Such perceptions developed from the juxtaposition of vast natural landscapes and condensed urban settings or collectivistic social groups and individualistic societies. In other words, Western socio-political structures provided a framework for understanding what was “correct,” thereby privileging certain structures or behaviors and relegating to the margins those that did not correspond. In the nineteenth century, difference became immutable as science sought to explain such disparities. This mission resulted in evolutionist rhetoric, and figures like Lewis Henry Morgan “developed a widely used model [that] described three categories of peoples: savage, barbarian, and civilized,” using qualities of social development like “living in cities, using handwriting, and having organized states” as criteria (Keim 53). Evolutionism also




featured a racial undertone that fused together skin color, hierarchy, and culture. Scientific discourse perpetuated the notion that “superior races produced superior cultures, and naturally, the white race and white culture were superior” (Keim 54). Consequently, because of social structures and racial markers of difference, Africans were considered inferior, or “less evolved” (Keim 52), that is to say, primitive.

Colonial discourse is the product of a process. Eurocentric viewpoints and systematic comparison construct and shape the idea of a savage and underdeveloped Africa. Such notions are then perpetuated, often through a dissemination of visual, auditory, and textual materials. In their examination of Victorian travel literature, anthropologists Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow examine the different misperceptions of Africa. They analyze a variety of sources from the colonial period which portray the author’s journey into the African continent, but the texts they cite often focus on ideas of “darkness” and how it consumes the continent (Hammond and Jablow 54). Europeans saw Africa as “hideous and grotesque,” as “a great beast,” or monster (60). Such monstrosity pervades every corner and upon entering the continent, “the traveller might [expect] a corpse to be hidden behind every bush” (60). Authors describe the continent’s inhabitants as the “lower breeds of mankind” (63), products of “a land teeming with horrors and guarded by the foul monsters of disease, of darkness and savagery” (61). Yet, while the African is “a barbarous man,” he also resembles “a child” (64).

All three horror films echo these misperceptions and deviant depictions. The Africans in *The Night of the Sorcerers* practice voodoo and cannibalism, two customs the West considers primitive and savage. *Panga* and *Dominion* feature scenes in which Africans participate in animal sacrifices, another “primitive” custom. In *Dominion*, Chuma, one of the few English-speaking African characters, asks Father Francis, a missionary working alongside Merrin, if he thinks the Turkana are savages because of the sacrifice. Francis replies by saying, “I think you are good people, lost in confusion” (*Dominion*), as if the people are enveloped by darkness that clouds their vision. Moreover, the African characters in these films are dressed in clothing the West considers “traditional,” also feeding into images of a savage and backwards Africa. Lastly, each film recycles Victorian constructs of dangerous landscapes and monstrous men. Whether it is through cannibalism, blood sacrifice, or demonic possession, the films depict African characters as others, as non-humans capable of an evil unfamiliar and contradictory to the Western body.

Africa is often trapped in the fetishizing gaze of the West, effectively sexualizing the continent. The trope of “sexy Africa,” in the already gendered genre of horror, catches the eye. A portion of the trope comes from “a more racist era when black Africans were considered more animalistic and sensual” (Keim 74).




Race was seen as a biological feature, and, at the time, it was thought that people “were different sexually because of their biology” (74). Yet, the trope is about more than sex appeal; it also makes assumptions about sexual behavior and orientation. In his book about gender and sexuality in Africa, historian Marc Epprecht argues that there exists a “hypothetical singular African sexuality, [which] includes. . . purported tendencies toward heterosexual promiscuity” (2). The rhetoric of promiscuous African sexuality is linked to a colonial understanding of Africans as backward and primitive, with Western opinion “oscillat[ing] between notions of the exotic, the noble, and the depraved savage” (Arnfred 7).

The trope of sexualized Africa is most glaring in *The Night of the Sorcerers*, where the women engage in what the West would deem deviant sexual behavior. African women are depicted as primitive sexual figures with uncovered breasts and a hunger for human flesh. They participate in cannibalism, an act of sexualized violence whereby two bodies are integrated, one entering—penetrating, if you will—the other. The white women are dressed conservatively until a whip exposes their breasts. Then, they undergo a ritual that Africanizes them, turning them into half-naked, leopard-human hybrid beasts, ravenous for the (sexual) consumption of other females. This scene accomplishes two things. It aligns blackness with a particular kind of aberrant sexuality. Moreover, the scene posits blackness as the root of monstrosity. The film’s black characters corrupt the white explorers, provoking their transformation into lesbian vampires, into monsters.

Sexuality is subtler in *Panga* and *Dominion*, where Africa does not necessarily turn the white characters into sexual deviants, but rather provides them with a safe space where they can express their sexuality. The wife in *Panga* uses Africa to construct a love story that adds sensuality to her marriage. She tells her husband that she will always love him, even when “Africa becomes the Dark Continent” because she’s always “been a sucker for the sinister and mysterious” (*Panga*). Meanwhile, Father Merrin, who retreats to British East Africa during a crisis of faith, is given freedom on the continent to explore his sexuality, kissing a woman after years of celibacy. Nevertheless, in both of these instances, Africa is antagonized. For the wife in *Panga*, Africa is the big bad wolf her husband must fight, while in *Dominion*, Africa is the source of carnal temptation.


During the nineteenth century, all three of these tropes were implemented in creating “the myth of the Dark Continent” (Keim 45). By this time, ideas about savagery and aberrant sexuality, as well as “racist and evolutionary doctrines in the social sciences . . . combined to give the [colonial] public a widely shared view of Africa that demanded imperialization on moral, religious, and scientific grounds” (Brantlinger 167-168). This framework of darkness and imperialism dominates the



narratives of our African-based horror narratives. In each film, the West justifies its presence in Africa through the pretext of help. The explorers in *Night of the Sorcerers* wish to spread awareness about the endangered species of West Africa, the family in *Panga* wants to bring prosperity to barren African territories, and the British in *Dominion* attempt to help Africa through medicine and political organization. Yet engagement with the rhetoric of aid assumes that (1) there is a problem and (2) it *must* and *can* be fixed. In both a literal and metaphorical sense, Africa contains a darkness that must be illuminated through Western light, or rather, Western superiority.

The Dark Continent myth is the immediate visualization of Africa possessed by a spectator, effectively establishing a pessimistic and one-dimensional identity. Darkness as identity operates in several ways. Firstly, it operates as an essence similar to Toni Morrison's "Africanist presence," a term that illustrates "the denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify" (6). Morrison uses the term blackness both racially and metaphorically. Blackness is a literal marker used by the West to differentiate themselves from Africans (i.e. through skin color), but also as a signified, or a concept, with blackness evoking the notions of inferiority and negativity that underlie Western thought and association. As an Africanist presence, darkness shrouds the continent in blackness. That is, the continent is both a space occupied by black bodies but also a space ruled by degradation. Thus, to be African is to be intimately connected to the dark. In addition, within the structure of these genre films, darkness also acts as a malevolent force, or character, that drives the plot—a nemesis figure. Screenwriting professors Marc Blake and Sara Bailey put it best when they wrote, "At the heart of every horror movie is the monster" (57). For these three films, the black body, but more broadly, Africa and the Africanist presence, is the monster. As postcolonial scholar Achille Mbembe asserts, Africa is "deployed in the framework . . . of a meta-text about the animal—to be exact, about the *beast*" (1, emphasis original).

All three films simultaneously use Africa as a space and a character. Each is set in an African country but also represents the continent through essentialist characters that resonate with pre-existing tropes and misperceptions. Furthermore, the characters act as impaired bodies that personify the sinister and attack the West, striking "responses of fear and disgust in [its] viewers" (Smith 25). In *Night of the Sorcerers*, the voodoo zombies and the lesbian vampires embody darkness. They are presented as monsters that evoke fear in the Western characters. Similarly, the witchdoctor in *Panga* is a representation of darkness, but the most menacing presence is that of the vengeful spirit, *Umoya Omube*. Darkness in *Dominion* is not as distinctly African, for the main embodiment is an unknown demon




buried underground and constantly referred to as Satan. Still, through its physical immersion in an African landscape and its possession of an African vessel, the character of the demon can be read as a symbol of the continent and its darkness.

In reading horror films through a lens of postcolonial theory, a dominant theme is that of contagion. Several horror narratives deal with a fear of contamination, for “the idea that an infected person will contaminate us is universal” (Blake and Bailey 53). In addition, during the colonial period, “Africa was seen as the worst of the world’s pathogenic spaces, a plague-ridden climate that prevented its people from rising above nature and developing a culture equivalent to that of Europe” (Bewell 194). These two ideas interact in the films, darkness and monstrosity striking unease in the viewer. Nevertheless, the real fear stems from the possibility of exposure to that presence. History and horror interact as darkness is turned into a disease, colonial fear reverberating throughout the films. Just as nineteenth century colonists feared they would acquire diseases from Africa, the Western characters in the films fear that they will be soiled by darkness. They fear contamination because infection spawns an altered state of being, whereby the West is victimized and then made monster.

When set on the African continent, popular Western-produced narratives of often employ the archetype of the white savior, a figure who redeems or rescues the othered. Yet, horror films subvert this role of the white savior. *The Night of the Sorcerers* presents Professor Jonathan Grant and his safari team as innocent explorers present only to conduct research in hopes of rescuing Africa’s animals. However, once the dark presence is provoked, the Westerners are hunted like prey—women seduced and men killed. *Panga* depicts its central characters as innocent. Elizabeth is an expecting mother, and her sister and brother-in-law are unknowing visitors of the continent. Still, in trying to uphold Eurocentric moral values, they rouse the vengeance of a dark Africanist presence, resulting in their murders. Innocence in *Dominion* is more complex because of the religious element. The monster is not purely African and harms both the Turkana and the British. Nevertheless, Father Merrin, an ex-priest traumatized by Nazi cruelty, respects the indigenous people and seeks nothing more than archaeological discoveries. However, in the process of doing good, he releases an African demon that inflicts harm on the Westerners. He and his peer Father Francis are the two main targets of Satan’s attacks. In each case, the white savior trope gives way to the white victim.

To summarize what we have discussed up until this point, let us consider the structure of the horror film. Marc Blake and Sara Bailey identify the five main components of horror films as “unease, dread, terror, horror, and disgust” (45). The unease in these three films is built by historically mediated tropes that posit Africa




as aberrant. Dread then peaks at the discovery of a malevolent Africanist darkness. Horror is the depiction of death and massacre, while disgust comes from the realization of voyeurism. However, the climax of the story, the terror, comes from the idea of a white victim and, accordingly, the subversion of hegemonic order. As literature professor Kyle Bishop posits in an article about the cultural relevance of zombies, terror stems from “the prospect of a westerner becoming dominated, subjugated, and effectively ‘colonized’” (141).

The Africans who are preserved as voodoo zombies in *The Night of the Sorcerers* threaten the Europeans because they represent the possibility of a “sub-subaltern class . . . [that] are literally silent, enslaved, and unable to connect with the dominant culture through any liminal space of discourse” (Bishop 141). By subaltern, I mean what famous literary theorist Gayatri Spivak defines as “everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism . . . — a space of difference” (qtd. in de Kock 45). The subaltern is not just the oppressed, but the culturally deprived and segregated. Yet, while the zombies in *The Night of the Sorcerers* induce terror because of their position as sub-subaltern, I would argue that the figure of the lesbian vampire is most frightening, for it is a Westerner who has been fully infected by the Africanist presence and reduced to the same subaltern status as the African. They are figures that have truly “gone native.” Though not in the same way, the sea spirit in *Panga* also threatens Western domination. Through murder and death, the creature possesses the power to completely eliminate hierarchy and overthrow the oppressor. Despite being subaltern, *Umoya Omube*, an entity with African origins, possesses uncontainable power, and this reality frightens the Western presence. The threat of possession in *Dominion* imperils Western ideas of godliness, security, and sanitation. The demon can insert itself into any human vessel, consequently polluting it with a darkness that is seen as inherent to the continent. Moreover, Satan possesses the ability to kill and extinguish hierarchy in the same way as *Umoya Omube*.

Horror films grapple with the idea of conflict, often pitting the marginalized against the dominant. In her first book, entitled *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, film professor Carol Clover reads this conflict as a central element of occult theory and horror, terming it the struggle between “White Science and Black Magic” (66). The plots of these three films usually involve some variation of a Western body entering the larger African space and attempting to impose its white science, but inevitably facing opposition from the other’s black magic. The rest of the film then serves as a battleground where one agent tries to control the narrative by directing the spotlight, or rather the camera lens, over to their embodied voice.


In the beginning, the camera emphasizes the European presence, privileging



Western language and dialogue. As the plot unfolds, the Africanist presence enters and attempts to speak, but they are quickly silenced. *The Night of the Sorcerers* is unique in that it begins with Africans. However, their presence is contingent on their relationship to the white female missionary who they convert. Moreover, the ritual is interrupted by a group of armed soldiers that invade and kill the Africans. After that first scene, the film focuses exclusively on the Westerners, dedicating ten minutes of screen time to an arrival that depicts actions inessential to the storyline. Screen time begins to shift between the Europeans and Africans, the alternations demonstrating a tug-of-war for voice and power. Each entity wants to be heard, but the Africans are never permitted to speak. The figures of the dominating civilization use their status as oppressors to fight and stay superior. In *Panga* and *Dominion*, Africans are allowed to speak, but only under certain conditions. There may only be one African character who speaks English, and those that speak the indigenous language are never given subtitles. Though both entities are fighting to be heard, the Africanist presence always falls behind.

Tired of being silenced when pursuing traditional methods of communication, the subaltern turn toward other approaches. Violence and horror are subsequently militarized, converted into tools for garnering attention. The zombified Africans and Africanized white vampires engage in strategic essentialism, a concept promoted by Gayatri Spivak, which means “acting ‘as if’ identities were stable for specific political reasons. For example, one might temporarily accept the category of ‘woman’ as a stable unity for the purpose of mobilizing women for political action” (Spivak qtd. in Ray 110). The African characters in *The Night of the Sorcerers* use their status as monsters to terrorize the West. Similarly, *Umoya Omube* is never given a voice. Instead, he is systematically erased and silenced, causing the vengeful spirit to adopt murder as a mouthpiece. Satan, in *Dominion*, is perhaps the chattiest of the Africanist presences, but all doubt his existence at the beginning of the film. As a result, he beats and murders characters, using violence to be heard and reify his existence. In militarizing violence and practicing strategic essentialism, the subaltern transform from invisible entities to grotesque representations that demand consideration.


Deeply connected to this question of voice is the issue of agency, and in channeling voice, Africans gain a form of agency. Though produced by Europeans, African-based horror films allow for the practice of revisionary history. *The Night of the Sorcerers*, *Dominion*, and *Panga*, while filled with factual inaccuracies and misrepresentations, ultimately allow for a re-writing of the colonial narrative. In the traditional colonial narrative, Westerners enter African spaces, make claims of ownership, and set up systems of hierarchy that oppress the colonized. All too



often, the subaltern are erased and shown as passive recipients of such inferior positions. Yet, in these films, Africans are not completely dominated by the European presence. While they face conflict with and erasure by the West, they are also given the opportunity to fight back against invasion and make themselves known. Thus, the nemesis figure becomes crucial as monsters are mobilized by the Africanist presence to drive out the Western hegemony. The voodoo zombies take revenge against the Europeans that originally extinguished them, invading their sense of security in the same manner their own was once violated. *Umoya Omube* is summoned by the Nyonga witchdoctor to punish the Europeans who disrespected indigenous practice and culture. Satan wreaks havoc on all the characters regardless of their culture, but the British are more keenly affected. The symbolic and topographical origins of his character transform him into a figure that defends the land from European corruption.

Respect plays an important role in the revisionary histories of these films. In traditional colonial narratives, indigenous cultures are frequently disrespected and wiped away. Yet, because they fear African darkness and the possibility of attack at the hands of the Africanist presence, these films also advocate for a toleration of African societies. The voodoo culture in *The Night of the Sorcerers* is not fragmented or deteriorated, but rather kept whole—so much so that it evokes fear. After Elizabeth interrupts the Nyonga sacrificial ceremony, her husband scolds her, telling her she cannot “trample over thousands of years of tradition” (*Panga*). *Dominion*’s Father Merrin treats the Turkana with respect and highlights the hypocrisy of other Western characters. When Father Francis points out there are bloodstains (likely from a sacrifice) in the altar to Satan, Merrin replies by saying, “Yes, it’s almost like a scene out of the inquisition” (*Dominion*), rejecting any conclusion Francis may be drawing about a “savage Africa.” The director, Paul Schrader, also avoids glorifying the British. He parallels the scene of arbitrary Nazi massacre in Holland to the pointless murder of a Turkana woman in British East Africa, indicating that monstrous behavior is not confined to any singular historical moment or culture. In constructing a revised history and subverted colonial narrative, these films reject the image of the passive African. Africans are portrayed as the offenders rather than the offended. Pessimistically, they are presented as monsters. Yet, as the monsters of horror films, Africans also reshape the role of oppressed people through bodies that actively *reject* hegemonic order.


Pop culture artifacts, such as films, are often subject to inaccuracies because, in their efforts to entertain, they often flatten reality into a more easily digestible form. Yet nothing is as simply and wholly problematic as it seems. Are horror films the best generic medium through which to portray Africa? No. Are they



deeply problematic in the perpetuation of African unrealities? Yes. Do these facts completely devalue such films? No, of course not. Like any other cultural artifact, African-based horror films have their own strengths and drawbacks. They construct black bodies as monsters, perpetuating a legacy of Africa as the Dark Continent while also depicting it as an entity that should be feared. However, these same films also provide Africans with the opportunity to rewrite history and exert a form of agency, as violent as it may be. The key is not to find the perfect technique for portraying Africa. Rather, the point is to become deeply reflective about the items that surround us, those items that may appear innocent but, at their cores, are just as sinister if not more so than the monsters that litter bookstore shelves and Netflix queues.

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Tradition vs. Innovation and the Creatures in *Spirited Away*

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Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* is the highest grossing film in the history of Japanese cinema (Rekidai Rankingu). It depicts the experience of a young girl, Chihiro, when she discovers a spirit world and begins to work at a bathhouse where the spirits, or kami, go to relax. There are many different kami that visit and work at the bathhouse in addition to Chihiro, who appears to be the only human. Certain creatures in the film possess monstrous qualities such as grotesque features, supernatural abilities, and potentially threatening agendas. From a Western perspective, and without an understanding of Japanese tradition, the kami appear to simply be monsters, secluded from society, who operate and patronize a bathhouse. Within the context of Japanese mythology and theology, however, the spirits are much more complex. In truth, most of the creatures in *Spirited Away* are not actual kami found within Japanese religion. However, it is evident that Miyazaki was inspired by real kami when he created these creatures. The kami that Miyazaki created for *Spirited Away* help to illuminate the tension between tradition and innovation within modern Japanese society. When Miyazaki created these creatures, he enabled traditions not only to be preserved through film, but to also be made relevant for Japanese youth, who are often perceived to be slipping away from Japanese tradition.

ABSTRACT


Japan is perhaps best known for creating the world-famous film style: anime. Popular with adults and children alike, anime boasts unfamiliar creatures that are sometimes considered strange or disturbing to the Western world. Hayao Miyazaki, perhaps the most well-known anime director, screenwriter, and animator, presents such fantastical creatures in *Spirited Away*. The creatures viewers encounter resemble kami, or spirits, from Japanese folklore. This paper explores how these spirits illuminate the tension between tradition and innovation within modern Japanese society. Traditions are not only preserved through *Spirited Away*, but are made relevant for Japanese youth, who are often perceived to be slipping away from Japanese tradition.

KAMI OVERVIEW

The kami in *Spirited Away* typically embody an element of the natural world—such as a radish, spider, or river—and this manner of depicting natural spirits ties directly to traditional folk beliefs and one of the major Japanese religions—Shinto. In Shinto, different parts of the natural world are thought to possess spirits, which exist in a separate plane but can interact with humans. In the film, the kami also exist in a world separate from humans, but this world is not completely removed, as humans are prone to sometimes discover the secret bathhouse and its inhabitants. Traditionally, as they are divine creatures, some kami can be prayed to for a better harvest, a more plentiful fishing trip, and so forth. Some, however, solely intend destruction, and in these we can see the manifestations of more monstrous qualities. Miyazaki has taken the propensity for destruction in Shinto gods and has applied it to creatures in *Spirited Away*, such as No Face, who consumes people and spirits alike, and the paper spirits, or shikigami, who attack others with their sharp edges.

The intentions of the kami in *Spirited Away* at first appear ambiguous, as we do not hear the sentiments of most of the patrons of the business. However, most of the kami are hostile to Chihiro, who has invaded their realm. Some kami, such as a frog Chihiro encounters, even mention a wish to eat her. The kami are not pleased to have Chihiro in the bathhouse at first because, to kami, humans are the monsters. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, a monster scholar, states in “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” “The monster is difference made flesh, come to dwell among us” (Cohen 7). Ironically, Chihiro and the kami can both be related to this description of the other as a monster, as both parties are unsettled by the distinct differences between each other in terms of manners, appearance, and other traits. Similarly, tradition and innovation provide a stark, observable contrast when they coexist within a culture. As Cohen states, “the monstrous body is pure culture” (4). This implies that monsters represent the attitudes of the culture that created them—in particular, its fears. Kami may function as an embodiment of fear, but they also embody a complex web of traditions and mythology, with which viewers may be unfamiliar. When Chihiro invades the bathhouse, which is filled with creatures based upon Japanese tradition, she represents a dynamic cultural force and insists that those who already live there accept her. Chihiro’s invasion of an established society and the kami’s adverse response to her parallel how innovations can challenge the way things operate, which may also incite society’s fear and discomfort.

The various creatures Chihiro meets in the bathhouse seem to be influenced by characters from traditional folk tales, and *Spirited Away* is “[an] exploration of a




contemporary Japan that is searching for what might be termed cultural recovery, or perhaps cultural rehabilitation” (Napier 289). This cultural recovery includes an emphasis on reestablishing historically important Japanese ideals within the contemporary world (289). Such ideals, according to Susan Napier, include moderation versus gluttony, natural versus artificial, and tranquil versus bustling, among others. However, many of the kami who are supposedly “traditional” defy such idealistic categories, favoring excessive consumption and boisterous mannerisms. In addition, their very existence is artificial, as most of the creatures are not actually found in Japanese mythology but were adapted by Miyazaki’s modern imagination. In this way, *Spirited Away* does not completely warn against modern conduct, but it concedes that Japanese society is much too complex to be categorized.

CHIIHIRO’S PARENTS AS MONSTERS

The first monstrous act in *Spirited Away* is when Chihiro’s parents, upon reaching the spirit world, behave gluttonously and are punished by the kami who live there. Chihiro accidentally stumbles upon this spirit world when her family gets lost as they are moving to a new home. In this fantastical world, the spirits take a corporeal form and can interact with and speak to Chihiro, which was not possible in the “real” world in which she had grown up. In this unfamiliar world, Chihiro’s parents are enticed by delicious foods and are turned into pigs as punishment for their gluttony. One of the modern expectations in Japan is to enjoy things in moderation because resources, especially space, are limited on an island nation. When Chihiro’s parents are turned into unclean, gluttonous animals after indulging in the tempting buffet which they stumbled upon, the movie highlights and emphasizes current acceptable social norms in Japan.

Chihiro’s parents function as monsters in this instance, as they cross an unstated cultural boundary and steal from those of an established and elevated society. In “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” Cohen states, “the monster of prohibition polices the borders of the possible, interdicting through its grotesque body some behaviors and actions, envaluing others” (13). Yubaba, the witch who runs the bathhouse, states later in the film that the food laid out had been made for the gods to consume. When Chihiro’s parents transform into pigs after eating the food, it is an obvious warning against selfishness and gluttony, in addition to a lack of respect of those of a higher status. The kami view Chihiro’s parents as monsters and treat them as such when the kami turn them into pigs, as they have done to countless other humans who defied them. After her parents are transformed, Chihiro’s goal becomes to save her parents and to return them to their original




human state. Chihiro must redeem her parents' breaking of tradition by ironically further challenging the established norms at the bathhouse. To save her parents, Chihiro must interact with and challenge a variety of kami, the first of whom is Yubaba.

YUBABA

Yubaba is a commanding witch who evokes fear due to her cannibalistic tendencies and imposing manner. She is prone to take advantage of those who enter her bathhouse, and she expresses mercy only when she believes a person might be of use to her. The first time Chihiro sees Yubaba, the witch is flying around the sky with the body of a bird attached to her normal human head. Later, she possesses a giant human body, not unlike the giant baby that she uncharacteristically nurtures in her living quarters. Dr. Noriko T. Reider, a distinguished Japanese professor at Miami University, states in her article "*Spirited Away*: Film of the Fantastic and Evolving Japanese Folk Symbols," that Yubaba is often compared to Lewis Carroll's Queen of Hearts (11). Yubaba is elderly and rather grotesquely drawn, and she rules her bathhouse employees using magic. Yubaba also lives at the top of the bathhouse. As she is the most powerful and important figure at the bathhouse, her physical situation at the top reflects this superiority, which is important to distinguish within traditional as well as modern Japanese society.

These characteristics, along with others, prompt Reider to also observe a similarity between Yubaba and the Japanese mountain witch, yamauba (11). She states, "to many contemporary Japanese, a yamauba conjures up the image of a mountain-dwelling hag who devours unsuspecting humans who happen upon her path Yamauba are almost always endowed with supernatural powers" (11). In the film *Spirited Away*, Yubaba transforms humans into animals (such as when she turned Chihiro's parents into pigs), and then she devours them, an act that resembles the yamauba's cannibalism. In this way, Yubaba is a modern reimagination of a traditional folk creature and aids in Miyazaki's task of making such folk creatures relevant to a young audience.

Yubaba's existence also questions a traditional norm in Japanese society— unquestioned obedience to those of a higher social or political status. Yubaba utilizes magic to control her employees by causing them to forget their names, and this is also how she is able to keep Chihiro within her possession. As long as a guest or employee does not recall his or her name, they must remain in the spirit world, under Yubaba's control. This motif of the power of names is not unique to Japanese culture, and it actually spans the globe through various indigenous cultures as well as within almost every ethnic group and belief system (A.W.T. and Clodd




156). Cohen states, “monsters must be examined within the intricate matrix of relations (social, cultural, and literary-historical) that generate them” (5). Yubaba emerges from a combination of Japanese witch folklore, common literary motifs, and the Japanese hierarchical system, among many other aspects. She is prone to bursting into rage, making sly deals, and manipulating those around her, and thus she also represents the danger of unquestioned authority.

KAMAJI

Another creature which Chihiro encounters at the bathhouse is Kamaji, a human-spider hybrid. He is most likely the spirit of a spider, as illustrated in his eight total appendages. Kamaji is elderly, just like Yubaba, and he works under her command in the boiler room with the help of animated soot creatures called *susuwatari*. Reider suggests the similarity of Kamaji to *tsuchigumo*, or earth spiders. She states that “*tsuchigumo* refers to less-cultivated indigenous people who had lived before the Heavenly descendents [emperors] claimed [their] authority. Specifically termed an earth spider, *tsuchigumo* is an appellation used derogatorily in ancient Japanese literature for those who defied imperial (central) authority” (15, emphasis original). Kamaji assumes the lowest status in the bathhouse, and thus he works on the lowest floor: the boiler room. Kamaji’s low social status in relation to his low position in the bathhouse reflects the strict Japanese hierarchy. This hierarchical aspect of *Spirited Away* was most likely not a conscious decision, but a product of the culture from whence it was born. It is an aspect of the culture which has not changed extensively in modern times.

HAKU

Through Chihiro’s main companion, Haku, Miyazaki highlights the tension between nature and civic advancement. When Chihiro first meets him, Haku appears to be human, although he can perform spells and enchantments. However, it is revealed at the conclusion of the film that Haku is indeed the spirit of a certain river which Chihiro crossed on her way to the bathhouse. Haku alludes to this when he tells Chihiro that he already knows her name because they met once a long time ago. Unfortunately, Haku is not able to return to the river to which his spirit belongs once his true form is restored because, after the passage of time, the river is no longer there. Reider states, “that Haku’s river has been reclaimed and he does not have a home to return to leads to Miyazaki’s familiar environmental theme: Modern technology continues to encroach upon nature, destroying natural habitats” (17). This occurrence reflects a concern within modern Japan—that as industry, technology, and population advance, nature tends to diminish. As



Shinto beliefs express a reverence for the Earth, the trend towards greater cities and advancement sometimes conflicts with the spiritual reverence and respect for the natural landscape. As Haku aids the protagonist, Chihiro, the film seems to naturally admonish his adversary, which is the tendency for humans to destroy nature.

In addition to symbolizing the struggle between advancement and environmental preservation, Haku resembles a heavenly deity, Nigihayahi, in ancient Japanese tales (Reider 16). Nigihayahi betrayed the one to whom he was supposed to have allegiance in the same way Haku betrayed Yubaba when he helped Chihiro. Perhaps by tying various characters to traditional Japanese folk tales, Miyazaki might have been invoking an element of familiarity within his otherwise abnormal creatures. In “The Uncanny,” Sigmund Freud says, “the uncanny is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar” (124). But, as the German literary scholar Wolfgang Kayser explains in *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*, the uncanny occurs when “apparently meaningful things are shown to have no meaning, and familiar objects begin to look strange” (qtd. in Hurley 141). This effect plays a large role in the uncanny nature of *Spirited Away*, as these traditional folk characters are warped into completely new characters. When the kami are reimagined, they create an eerie feeling within a Japanese viewer as they are reminiscent of potentially familiar kami but are not anything the viewer could have encountered before in a film or within Japanese mythology. Without any cultural context, the kami still create an uncanny effect. The creatures each have features which remind the viewer of where they originate. For instance, the radish kami vaguely looks like a radish, but it is quite distorted and is combined with human features, such as eyes, arms, and legs. In this way, the kami are reminiscent of familiar objects but begin to look strange as their appearance is warped, and they do not behave in the way which we would expect.

When Miyazaki ties his creatures to Japanese folk tales, he presents them in a fresh way, which keeps viewers interested in traditional Japanese culture. Professors of anthropology, Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin, state in their piece, “Tradition, Genuine or Spurious,” “tradition refers to an interpretive process that embodies both continuity and discontinuity tradition fails when those who use it are unable to detach it from the implications of Western common sense, which presumes that an unchanging core of ideas and customs is always handed down to us from the past” (14). This means that tradition is not something static and unchanging but, instead, is interpreted through the time period in which it is viewed and is thus dynamic. Miyazaki’s creatures embody continuity and discontinuity because they stem from unchanging belief, but they are unique creatures in their own right.


NO FACE

Another creature that combines new and old, and is perhaps the most famous of all in *Spirited Away*'s collection of spirits, is No Face. He is described as a creature who, "like Chihiro, came to the world of the bathhouse from a different realm": "He is a pathetic creature who does not have self, and he can only communicate through the voice of someone he has swallowed" (qtd. in Reider 19). The audience is led to, at first, pity this slightly fearful creature, but after he eats his first spirit, feelings become more complicated. No Face appears generous as he gives Chihiro many special bath tags and offers a frog gold, but he appeals to the greed of his victims by luring them with gifts before he consumes them. Chihiro is able to refuse his gifts, and this is why she never is eaten. With the rise of the "salary-man," culture, Japan is shifting from valuing moderation, which is a traditional Japanese virtue, to encouraging consumerism (Gordon 8). No Face provides an obvious message here that it is commendable to resist greediness in favor of a more noble goal, which for Chihiro is saving her parents.

Unlike other creatures in *Spirited Away*, No Face does not specifically represent any figure in Japanese tradition or folk tales. However, his appearance was inspired by the Noh mask. Noh is a form of musical theatre in which the main character wears a mask depicting one unchangeable expression (Rath 25). No Face likewise shows little expression within the film, but Miyazaki allowed him slight facial expression, so he seems almost human, but not quite. The mask No Face wears evokes in viewers an uncanny effect, in which they "doubt as to whether . . . a lifeless object might perhaps be animate" (Jentsch qtd. in Freud 135). It is later revealed in the film that No Face's mouth is not where it appears to be—on the mask. In fact, it is lower, larger, and full of sharp teeth. No Face is the only creature described in the film as a monster, and he frightens the kami in the bathhouse. As a monster, No Face represents the fear of succumbing to a modern capitalist mindset, like that ascribed to the salary-man. Chihiro, however, remains unafraid of him and, eventually, helps him leave the bathhouse, in which his monstrous qualities were able to manifest. Because Chihiro is able to resist the greed that others experienced when in the presence of No Face, Chihiro promotes adherence to the Japanese tradition of favoring family over finances.

CHIHIRO AS A MONSTER


An unexpected monster in *Spirited Away* is Chihiro herself. In order for her to gain entry into the bathhouse, Haku casts a spell upon Chihiro to make her invisible. After she infiltrates the property, her smell pollutes the air, and the kami can recognize her presence without any visual confirmation of her whereabouts.



Napier theorizes, “Chihiro herself is initially signified as a polluting alien marked by her human stench, but gradually she becomes incorporated into the bathhouse collectivity where she grows in agency and maturity” (290). Before Chihiro becomes a part of the collectivity, she forces Yubaba to give her a job by repeating her request until Yubaba can no longer refuse. Mere curiosity leads Chihiro and her family to the mystical bathhouse, and curiosity causes the family to become trapped in the liminal town, as they do not leave before sunset. Napier explains that the world “may be seen as metaphoric of modern Japan, a society that, with its fading grip on historic tradition and an ambivalent attitude toward the future, seems to emblemize Victor Turner’s definition of the liminal as being ‘betwixt and between’” (291). While Napier concludes that *Spirited Away* attempts to reinforce local culture in resistance to globalization, I propose that the film attempts to bridge the divide between tradition and innovation through the liminal spirit world it portrays.

Not only is the town in *Spirited Away* liminal, or between two realities, but so are children (including Chihiro), according to the Japanese author, Yoshiharu Iijima. In his article, “Folk Culture and the Liminality of Children,” he explains that, in the past, children were thought to be closer to the gods and the spirit world and that they “played the part of intermediary between man and gods” (Iijima 41). Children are liminal, perhaps because they exist in the space between adult and baby, but, more specifically, they were not believed to be earthly beings until the age of seven. Therefore, children existed in the plane between the spirit world and the mortal world, just as the world Chihiro discovers exists between the same two planes.

We can see Chihiro taking on this liminal role in *Spirited Away* when she must save her parents in the spirit world, who are not able to survive there for more than perhaps an hour. Iijima continues, “[children] were regarded as incomplete persons. While considered sacred beings different in nature from adults, they were at the same time looked down upon” (41). This cultural attitude is evidenced by the often condescending way Chihiro is treated in the bathhouse, but also in the way that she is able to overcome the challenges of the Spirit World. Iijima also states that children’s very existence is “freakish” (41). Children, according to Iijima’s philosophy, appear to be monsters in their own right. While, at the beginning of the film, Chihiro may be a monster to the inhabitants of the bathhouse, at the end, the kami cheer when Chihiro correctly guesses which pigs are her parents, and she is able to return home. Chihiro, while remaining a modern Japanese girl, represents the ideal blend between respect for traditional kami, the environment, and family. Religion scholar S. Brent Plate states, “Films do not merely appear on a



screen; rather, they only exist in any real sense as far as they are watched, becoming part of the fabric of our lives. Film viewing is thus a social activity that alters our interactions in the world” (qtd in Thomas 78). Chihiro embodies a role model to whom young viewers can aspire, and thus she fulfills Miyazaki’s goal to potentially alter the interactions of young people in the world so that they are more aware of Japanese traditions.


IZANAGI AND IZANAMI

When Chihiro first enters the spirit world, she begins to disappear, and she must eat some food from that world in order to remain there. Luckily, Haku comes to her aid, and provides her with a berry to eat to prevent her from vanishing. Reider states, “The motif of consuming food from the other world in order to stay alive in that realm may remind the audience of a famous Japanese mythological story of Izanagi and Izanami” (5). These two deities are thought to have created Japan and all of the gods who influence it. In their story, Izanami passes away from giving birth to a fire deity, and Izanagi goes to the realm she is in to try and retrieve her. Unfortunately, Izanami has already consumed the food there, so she cannot be taken out of that world.

The magic that food possesses, which can hold a person in a certain realm, bridges the gap between the spirit and the temporal world. In order to remain temporal in a separate realm, Chihiro had to invite a part of that world to physically join with her body (through the act of eating). While in this instance Chihiro does not encounter a creature from the new world she has discovered, the act she must perform in order to stay a part of it brings to mind the mythological tale of these two important deities. By using this food motif, Miyazaki subtly, perhaps unintentionally, acknowledges the Japanese creation story and implements a familiar element into the unfamiliar world Chihiro has discovered. When Chihiro begins to disappear, it also brings to mind a quote by Miyazaki which reads, “in this borderless age . . . a man without history or a people that forgot its past will have no choice but to disappear like a shimmer of light” (qtd in Napier 292). Chihiro disappears in this very same way at the beginning of the movie. However, after she encounters kami and develops a sense of self founded upon an understanding of the workings of the spirit world, she is able to ensure that she will not fade away, as Miyazaki suggests.

SPIRITED AWAY AND GLOBALIZATION

Miyazaki explains that, within *Spirited Away*, he hopes to preserve some of the Japanese traditions in a world filled with modern technology and materialism



(Reider 8). Miyazaki states, “it is a poor idea to push all the traditional things into a small folk-culture world. Surrounded by high technology and its flimsy devices, children are more and more losing their roots” (qtd. in Reider 8). With this statement, it is evident that Miyazaki crafted the film with the intention of reestablishing roots amongst young children. Napier suggests that this may be in opposition to globalization. She states that “one of the casualties of globalization . . . is the nature of ‘authenticity,’ producing what [Arjun] Appadurai [a social-cultural anthropologist] calls the possibility of ‘nostalgia without memory’ in which ‘the past becomes a synchronic warehouse of cultural scenarios’” (289). *Spirited Away* perhaps encounters this problem when it references various “authentic” stories, spirits, and creatures from folklore, which children may have never encountered. Perhaps the children recognize the reference but see the tales as irrelevant to current Japanese culture. Napier adds that “more recently, however, an alternative view of globalization has begun to take form in which local culture is seen as reconstructing and reaffirming itself in the face of globalization” (289). With this perspective, *Spirited Away* may be functioning to reaffirm traditional Japanese culture, and it may be instilling a sense of nationalism or community within the Japanese children who view it. Napier concludes that *Spirited Away* fails at reconstructing a sense of tradition, but I propose that through a creative, modern interpretation of Japanese mythology, Miyazaki succeeds at connecting viewers with the traditions which make Japan so unique.

For the purpose of comparing tradition with modern Japanese society, it was necessary to establish a dichotomy. However, Handler and Linnekin point out that “designating any part of culture as old or new, traditional or modern, has two problematic implications. First, this approach encourages us to see culture and tradition naturalistically Second, in this atomistic paradigm we treat culture and its constituents as entities having an essence apart from our interpretation of them” (14). This means that, in fact, culture is not static, and traditions are not simply artifacts which are passed down between generations. When we engage with a tradition or story from the past, we are interpreting it with a modern lens. Miyazaki was very aware of this fact in *Spirited Away*, and he used this to his advantage to interpret traditional stories in a new and inventive way. By doing so, Miyazaki combines modernity with tradition and blurs the very lines of the dichotomy between new and old.




CONCLUSION

Handler and Linnekin state, “We would argue that tradition resembles less an artifactual assemblage than a process of thought—an ongoing interpretation of the past” (15). Miyazaki is doing just this within *Spirited Away* when he reimagines classic folktales to engage modern audiences. The creatures in *Spirited Away* perform this work in a way that no other element of the movie can because each creature embodies a different element of Japanese culture or is inspired by a classic folk tale. In his attempt to connect young people with Japanese traditions, Miyazaki creates a new Japanese cornerstone, which is arguably the most famous Japanese movie in history: *Spirited Away*.

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Toxicity in Themes of Control: An Analysis of the Anglo-Western Cancer Rhetoric in *A Monster Calls*

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In Anglo-Western literature, most monsters are portrayed as conscious, tangible beings. Whether one believes that werewolves, cyborgs, and murderous serial killers could be even considered human, or that vampires and zombies count as being alive, usually the monsters audiences encounter are seen as cognizant, thinking, physical beings, meant to match the human (or human-like) heroes in wit, strength, and will. Still, we often confront monsters that are not considered cognizant or thinking that are just as complex and dangerous; while one might not immediately consider a disease to be a monster, how we respond to disease is similar to how we portray cognizant monsters. We see disease as an invader of the body, and it evokes terror and panic; for example, it is rare to find someone in modern Anglo-Western society who does not have some reaction to the word “cancer.” Many attend and host charity events and marathons fighting to find a cure, and several write books, create art, and film movies about how the disease affects lives. Rarely, though, do we think about how and why we monstrify cancer in pop culture. But Patrick Ness’s 2011 young adult novel, *A Monster Calls*, attempts to address these questions through its reflection of Anglo-Western cultural values of control in various characters; it seems that *A Monster Calls* is not merely a story of coping and grief, but also of how the Anglo-Western obsession with control and frequent refusal to accept complexity turns toxic, how it influences our lives, and how we can

ABSTRACT

While infection has always haunted civilizations around the world, there are very few diseases that have had as much of an impact on Western culture as cancer has. The abundance of bereavement literature about characters with cancer begs the question; why cancer? This paper discusses ways in which cancer narratives reinforce Western obsession with control, through the lens of rhetoric and narrative structure. The author will specifically discuss how Patrick Ness’ 2011 novel, *A Monster Calls*, combats modern illness and cancer narratives and challenges themes of control threaded into Western culture.




learn to overcome it.

Using the lens of *A Monster Calls*, we can learn and understand more about Anglo-Western culture and how it is reflected in our rhetoric of cancer. First, this paper will analyze the rhetoric of cancer and illness narratives outside of *A Monster Calls* and draw conclusions from this research. In the next sections, the paper will discuss the main monsters of the story (the cancer, the Monster, the nightmare vortex, and Conor as a monster), explaining their literary relationship with the story and how they converse within our culture's current cancer narratives and rhetoric.

BEREAVEMENT LITERATURE, CANCER NARRATIVES, AND THEIR CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

While it might be assumed that death is a subject too serious and dark for children and young adults, Giskin Day notes that within the past decade there has been a rise in the Western young adult (YA) book market in what is called "bereavement literature," or books about death and grief (1). *A Monster Calls* falls under this category and fits the genre conventions; the novel is a harrowing story that follows Conor O'Malley, a thirteen-year-old boy living in modern day England, as he learns how to process his mother's cancer and his own grief. The book opens when Conor is summoned by a humanoid-tree monster: a walking, talking, surprisingly witty creature that takes the form of the yew tree in Conor's backyard. Still, this Monster (the character) is not the monster that Conor has been expecting; it is not the monster that has been haunting him for months in his nightmares. Even though Conor is unfazed by the Monster's menacing qualities (his mystical powers, his strength, his unpredictability), the Monster states that he has come walking to tell Conor three stories, and, in return for those stories, Conor will tell him the "truth." Ultimately, the Monster and his stories become a metaphor for the difficulties and complexities of Conor's life in the real world as he balances his relationships, from his dying mother, to his chilly grandmother, to the teachers and bullies at his school. Along with the external monsters Conor is fighting, Conor also sees the cancer itself as a monster. And through his perception of his mother's cancer, audiences can begin to understand the methods Conor uses to cope with his grief and why.


Along with *A Monster Calls*, popular books like John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*, Jodi Picoult's *My Sister's Keeper*, Nicholas Sparks's *A Walk to Remember*, and Jesse Andrews's *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl* all discuss characters dying of cancer and how they, their families, and their friends deal with the disease. YA bereavement literature has taken its place in Anglo-Western society, and, just as any works of art would, it speaks volumes about the people that consume



it, their interpretations of it, and the culture that produces it. So why cancer? Cancer survival (or non-survival) stories are a prevalent and common trend in popular culture narratives, but why is cancer such a common antagonist in these contemporary narratives? Is it because it is one of the leading causes of death? According to the National Cancer Institute, in 2012, 8.2 million people died cancer-related deaths worldwide (“Cancer Statistics”). Is it because we have not found a successful and consistent cure? Perhaps the abundance of cancer-related narratives is due, in part, to these reasons, but the nature of these stories also highlights a specific characteristic common to Western cultures: the fear of weakness and loss of control.

In *Keywords for Disability Studies*, Eva Feder Kittay writes, “what undermines the ability of disabled people to flourish is the view that being self-sufficient, self-reliant, and self-determining is the norm and the only desirable state of persons in a liberal society” (54). From this perspective, independence is the epitome of Western culture. In her book, *Extraordinary Bodies*, Rosemarie Garland Thomson relates what liberal individualists call the “American ideal” to the disabled body, writing, “Such a self image parallels the national ideal in an individualist egalitarian democracy that each citizen is a microcosm of the nation as a whole. A well-regulated self thus contributes to a well-regulated nation. However, these four principles depend upon a body that is a stable, neutral instrument of the individual will” (42). Our society equates self-sufficiency and control with health and power, and we believe that every person is responsible for contributing to the improvement of the community. Dependency, then, is a sign of weakness. Weakness is, then, vulnerability and loss of control, and it is the vulnerable who suffer most in our society and are at risk of destruction.

Unsurprisingly, these fears are translated in the way we interpret illness narratives, or stories (fictional and nonfictional) about people coping with disease in an attempt to understand their traumatic experiences. The need for human stories in the face of inhuman diseases is vital in the road to healing; G. Thomas Couser notes in his article, “Critical Conditions: Teaching Illness Narrative,” “The more serious an illness the more it demands to be interpreted as a life event, and Western medicine does not concern itself with that demand. Illness narrative is often a way, then, of reclaiming one’s story, of re-siting one’s illness in the context of one’s whole life” (286). Experiencing a disease like cancer can be traumatic for the patient when they feel like they are the victims of their own bodies. Anglo-Western illness narratives, from personal survival anecdotes to fictional prose, give the patient power over how they are represented and portrayed. Still, these illness narrative characteristics (regaining power) can go too far, feeding into our desire



and obsession with control. Both the benefits and dangers of ideas of power and control can be seen most clearly in the “restitution and recovery” narrative structure, most commonly seen in cancer narratives.

In “The Cultural Construction of Risk Understandings through Narrative Illness,” Nancy Wong and Tracey King note that the dominant illness narrative of restitution and recovery in Anglo-Western culture emphasizes “personal agency, control, and survival” (Wong). In these types of narratives, the patient is in charge of their health and their disease. Even though the journey to recovery may be long and painful, the patient is optimistic, strong, and brave in their fight against their cancer, victorious and superior to their disease in their success. Curiously, there is an emphasis placed on the cancer as a war, a physical opponent separate from the patient’s body; in Clive Seale’s book, *Media and Health*, Susan Sontag notes the frequent use of military language to describe cancer, that cancer is “experienced as a ruthless, secret invasion . . . the disease itself is conceived as the enemy on which society wages war” and as “an evil, invincible predator” (qtd. in Seale 173). Through this language, the disease is seen as a tangible enemy that the patient must overcome to regain what is being threatened: bodily autonomy, past identity, independence, and selfhood. Even when the patient is failing, when it is clear that the patient will acquiesce to their illness, the patient is still expected to literally and metaphorically fight to the death, “consistent with the belief in Anglo-Western societies that acquiescence, fear, and denial (i.e., chaos stories) are not socially acceptable ways of dealing with disease” (Wong). Surrender is not an option, no matter what. According to restitution illness narratives, there is always something the patient can do. This speaks, again, to the idea in Western society that we believe “we can exert control over each and every experience, including death itself” (Wong). So it makes sense that the narratives we choose to focus on are ones of struggle but, ultimately, triumph.

Describing cancer as a physical monster implies the power of the individual; the situation is not hopeless, and the thought of suffering through the disease becomes a little more bearable. But through the lens of monster theory, the need to give cancer a physical body is more reflective of Anglo-Western culture than one might expect. In Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s article, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” he notes, “The monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural movement The monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read” (Cohen 4). While cancer itself is not fictional and its existence is not based on the fears of society, the rhetoric we use when talking about cancer in popular culture gives the disease a body, thereby creating a physical monster. Our monstrous interpretation




of cancer is the cultural construct and not necessarily the cancer itself.

Wong and King note that we typically ascribe to cancer “feral personalities,” using words like “savage,” “lawless,” and “relentless” (Wong). We can battle the cancer. We can fight the cancer. The cancer is an invisible opponent that we must destroy. And it is this desire to give cancer a body that, again, highlights our cultural resistance to the elements out of our control. We would like to imagine cancer as a physical monster because we can fight physical monsters. If we give cancer a face and a sword, then it is possible to imagine that by doing something (battling the monster) we can change our current situation. We monstrify cancer because, by doing so, it defines our agency and confirms our humanity (our desire to fight and find the will to live). Because without a body or a physical form, the disease becomes something that kills mindlessly. Cohen notes that a monster is “that which questions binary thinking and introduces a crisis” (6). If Anglo-Western culture tells us that we are in complete control of our bodies (that we either choose to be healthy or not), cancer and other diseases question that and challenge us to redefine the meaning of control. Perhaps we are not only afraid of dying from disease and losing control over our bodies because of it, but we fear the lack of reason or logic behind it. A disease does not care whether or not someone is a good person or if they deserve to have that disease. In our culture saturated with ideas of complete control over our lives, perhaps giving cancer a body makes cancer *less* monstrous than a formless, invisible thing that we simply cannot control. The real monster that we are avoiding is perhaps the idea that complete agency is a lie.

There is power in having control over a narrative; if we have power, then we have the ability to dictate our futures, reduce pain, and guarantee the safety of those we love. Therefore, applying these thought processes in situations of dire hopelessness can give strength. Still, this ableist belief in self-sufficiency and our ability to exert power over anything can be dangerous, causing more harm than good to our psyches. The way this belief turns toxic will be explored in this paper through the themes and characters of *A Monster Calls*. *A Monster Calls* highlights the problems associated with modern cancer narratives and the consequences of our obsession with control: a refusal to accept complexity, vulnerability, and powerlessness as natural and normal parts to being human.

THE CANCER AS A MONSTER

One of the central questions of *A Monster Calls* is, “Who is the real monster of the story?” There are four perceived or potential antagonists of the story, and the uncertainty of their roles emphasizes a primary theme of the book. These perceived antagonists — the Monster (the character), the nightmare vortex (the monster




from Conor's dreams), Conor himself, and the cancer — create the complexity and confusion that Conor needs to acknowledge and understand in order to begin to heal.

The cancer (and the rhetoric surrounding the cancer) functions as a monster in the story in how Conor perceives it as an enemy, waging war on his mother's body. Again, although Cohen's research identifies mainly fictional monsters, the way that Conor interprets his mother's cancer is not unlike how the other monsters of the story function; the cancer is a representation of Conor's powerlessness to the natural forces of the world ("the monster signifies something other than itself" [Cohen 4]), it forces Conor to question his previous definitions and perceptions of the world ("they demand a radical rethinking of boundary and normality" [Cohen 6]), and it calls Conor to address his own fears and desires ("we distrust and loathe the monster at the same time we envy its freedom, and perhaps its sublime despair" [Cohen 17]). Similar to the functioning of cancer rhetoric on a larger scale in Anglo-Western cultures, Conor also perceives the cancer as something that he is physically fighting and waging war against. Toward the beginning of the book, Conor's grandmother attempts to discuss his living situation and implies that he will live with her after his mother dies. He says, "I'm *never* going to live with you," to which his grandmother replies, "I'm sorry, but you are. And I know she's trying to protect you, but I think it's vitally important for you to know that when this is all over, you've got a home": "When all of this is over,' Conor said, with fury in his voice, 'you'll leave and we'll be fine'" (Ness 43). Conor's belief in his mother's recovery is persistent throughout almost the entire novel. When his mother tells him that the next treatment will work or that a new medication is available, he believes that her health is improving. They are doing everything they can to "fight" the cancer, and the cancer must not win. While the cancer is not a traditional monster, Conor sees it as the main antagonist he is battling.

Still, the underlying conflict that runs through Conor's actions is the belief that he deserves to be punished. What he truly desires is his mother's death and therefore the end of her drawn out suffering. But he believes that this desire is wrong and is then laden with guilt. Because of this desire, he wants to be reprimanded for his transgressions; he has done wrong because he wants his mother to succumb to her cancer. He wants the "enemy" to win, and how could a hero ever want the villain to win? This is translated most outwardly in the way that he interacts with his peers and teachers, enticing responses from bullies and almost encouraging his teachers to punish him.


In general, it is a natural instinct to want to comfort someone who is grieving or suffering, and the adults in Conor's life perceive his situation to be distressing



and absolutely devastating. When someone is grappling with the illness of a loved one, one would want to do anything they could to help that person, and the way that Conor's teachers and peers do this is by giving him "space." When he does not want to speak in class, teachers politely glance over him and ignore his lack of participation. They let him pass on assignments without punishment and go out of their way to single him out and show their support and kindness. His peers look at him differently, treating him "like *he* was the one who was ill," skirting around him, afraid to approach or hurt him (Ness 69, emphasis original). These actions are well intentioned and are not meant to be tactless, yet these are the actions that hurt Conor the most and the ones that haunt him.

When Conor's teacher, Miss Kwan, pardons him from a school fight, Ness writes, "And for a moment, Conor was entirely alone. He knew right then he could probably stay out there all day and no one would punish him for it. Which somehow made him feel even worse" (Ness 73). In the same scene with Miss Kwan, Ness writes, "Conor said nothing, and the silence took on a particular quality, one he was familiar with He knew what was coming. He knew and he hated it He couldn't look at her, couldn't see the care there, couldn't *bear* to hear it in her voice. (Because he didn't deserve it.)" (Ness 72-73, emphasis original). What Conor wants is for the world to be simple. He wants his actions to be placed in tidy categories because it gives him a sense of control in the world, but perhaps also because it gives him a better sense of understanding in a world that refuses to make sense to him. Why do good people die pointless deaths? Why do well-intentioned people make bad decisions? If Conor is punished for his perceived transgressions (desiring his mother's death) in the real world, then it reassures him that justice exists, and, if it exists for him, perhaps it exists for his mother. What Conor fears is that his "bad" actions will go unpunished and that he, a villain, will walk throughout the world unharmed. While Conor seems to outwardly insist that the real monster is the cancer, the audience begins to see that the monster Conor is grappling with is himself. Conor believes that the cancer is a monster but that he is the worse monster.

Perhaps this is what also drives his relationship with Harry, the blonde-haired, blue-eyed, charming, but vicious, schoolyard bully. Conor relishes the fights goaded on by Harry, which are not so much fights as they are Conor permitting Harry to hit him. It is as if Harry somehow understands that what Conor wants is to be seen, not necessarily in a good or bad way, but truly seen for what he is. Conor does not think the other peers and teachers see who he is on the inside (a monster), essentially invisible to the outside world. But Harry continues to see Conor, and it is only Harry that understands what Conor wants. At the climax of




their relationship, and when Harry finally understands what will hurt Conor most, he states, “Here is the hardest hit of all, O’Malley,’ . . . ‘Here is the very worse thing I can do to you . . . Good-bye, O’Malley,’ Harry said, looking into Conor’s eyes. ‘I no longer see you.’” (Ness 144-145). What drives Conor is guilt, but what hurts Conor is injustice. What hurts him is becoming invisible, his feelings, thoughts, and actions becoming irrelevant to everyone around him. After Harry leaves Conor, the Monster appears, stating, “*It was not that he was actually invisible . . . It was that people had become used to not seeing him . . . And if no one really sees you . . . are you really there at all?*” (Ness 146, emphasis original). What Conor wants is for his actions to have consequences; if he perceives his “evil” thoughts to be harmful, then maybe, if he is punished, justice will be restored. Conor mistakenly believes that he is responsible for his mother’s suffering (because he wishes for her death, because he does not believe in her recovery) and that his thoughts and beliefs have more power than they actually do (“I didn’t mean to let her go! And now it’s for real! Now she’s going to die and it’s my fault!” [Ness 190]). Conor cannot control his mother’s cancer, but his belief that he actually *can* control the cancer and her suffering through his thoughts and actions is what gives him the illusion of power. Conor fears the meaninglessness of his actions because it forces him to recognize that his power and control are, in fact, illusions; there is nothing he can do to help his mother.

This deep repression of fear causes Conor to act rashly and violently toward his friends and family, in the verbal abuse of his best friend (Ness 25-26), the almost self-inflicted punishments from Harry (Ness 18-22), and the physical destruction of his grandmother’s living room (Ness 110-114) and the school cafeteria (Ness 146-152). An understandable desire to help his mother and control her disease turns into obsessive and harmful thoughts and actions. Ultimately, this belief (that her suffering is his fault) prevents him from grieving properly, causing psychological and emotional stress. So while the cancer is not a thinking, tangible monster that fights the protagonist, the cancer forces Conor to analyze his perceptions of right and wrong and the extent of his control over his situations. This conflict of interest thus rises from Conor’s subconscious in the forms of tangible monsters.

THE MONSTER (THE CHARACTER) AS A REPRESENTATION OF COMPLEXITY AND POWERLESSNESS


One of these monsters is the Monster (the character); he is the main “monster” that Conor directly interacts with and the one that the audience sees most in the story. It is through the Monster and his stories that Conor begins to



understand that the reason he feels so vulnerable and powerless is because of the complexity and ambiguity of his emotions; Cohen mentions in his research that monsters resist easy categorization, but through Ness's description and portrayal of the Monster, it seems that the Monster and the stories he tells Conor represent complexity itself.

In the novel, Conor struggles to define who the Monster is and what his purpose in Conor's life is; the Monster insists that Conor is the one who called for him and that Conor is the one who wants his help, but it is not clear how the Monster is supposed to be helping him. The Monster is not necessarily evil because he does not encourage Conor's self-destruction; however, he threatens Conor's demise by forcing him to recognize his vulnerability. He encourages Conor to tear apart his grandmother's living room and violently attack Harry as destructive ways to express his pain, but he also encourages Conor to find peace within the world and rehabilitate. This ambiguity can be seen through the Monster's physical traits as well; the Monster describes himself as wild and untamable (*"I am this wild earth"* and *"I am everything untamed and untamable!"* [Ness 34]). Interestingly, Wong and King note in their research that cancer tends to be described with words like "insidious," "mysterious," "lawless," and "savage" (Wong). The Monster has ancient magic, the power to destroy buildings, and the power to move across time and space; he is not bound to the logic and reality of the world. But while the Monster seems chaotic and destructive, he also physically represents hope and recovery. In the story, Conor's mother begins a new drug therapy in a final attempt toward improvement; one of the ingredients in the drug is yew bark (from the same type of tree that the Monster has chosen as a body). As Conor and the audience discover the Monster's character throughout the book, it becomes harder to classify him as an actual monster, or at least what Conor perceives monsters are supposed to be (evil, villainous, antagonistic) when he also symbolizes hope in Conor's, and his mother's, rehabilitation.

Even though the Monster himself is a complex beast, it is his stories that force Conor to acknowledge ambiguity. The Monster is aware that his stories and his motives bring pain and alleviation together. He gives Conor stories that do not make sense to Conor; while each of the three stories he tells are set in different times and places, they all emphasize complexity within morality. The characters of the Monster's stories do not fit into clear categories (hero, villain, victim, etc.). For example, in the first, a right-thinking prince performs evil actions with good intentions, and the evil witch is not necessarily the enemy. In the second, a good-hearted priest creates destruction through unintended selfishness, and the Monster portrays a purposely selfish, bitter apothecary as the victim. In the third, the




line between reality and fantasy blurs when the Monster makes Conor the main character and Harry the villain, making the actions performed by Conor in the story become real. When Conor confronts the Monster about the ambiguity of these stories, he asks, “I don’t understand. Who’s the good guy here?” (Ness 63). The Monster then replies, “*There is not always a good guy. Nor is there always a bad one. Most people are somewhere in between*” (Ness 64). Conor wants a moral to the Monster’s stories and the knowledge that goodness triumphs over evil in the end. Still, the Monster makes a point that the purpose of his stories is not meant to be clear; he states, “*You think I tell you stories to teach you lessons? . . . You think I have come walking out of time and earth itself to teach you a lesson in niceness?*” (Ness 63, emphasis original). The Monster is not inherently good or evil, just as his stories, motives, and actions are not clear or straightforward. What makes this monster particularly compelling is that he specifically symbolizes complexity; he does not simply represent complexity in a certain societal norm or cultural trend, but he embodies the nature and fear of complexity itself.

What Conor fears is the complexity and the indefinable sources of his problems; he does not understand how he can want his mother to survive and so desperately wish for the end of her suffering at the same time. What the Monster forces him to confront is the idea that his mother’s cancer, his thoughts, and his entire world cannot be clearly defined and are, therefore, uncontrollable. Just as the Monster and his stories are not things Conor can control, his life and his mind cannot be controlled either. Through the Monster’s character, Conor and the audience are invited to think critically about how we define villains and heroes, and how much influence we actually have over those definitions (and consequently ourselves). Most importantly, though, the Monster and his stories prepare Conor for the ultimate test of his strength: confronting his own fears of becoming a monster.

THE NIGHTMARE VORTEX AND CONOR AS MONSTER

The monster that Conor must face in order to overcome his fears (the nightmare vortex) appears finally at the end of the novel, after the Monster has told the three tales. At the climax of the story, the Monster brings Conor to the source of his nightmare; in the scene, a swirling, black, powerful vacuum begins to pull Conor’s mother off a cliff, threatening to eat her alive. The audience assumes that this vortex is the monster that Conor refers to at the beginning of the story, and the connection to his mother’s cancer is clear; Ness writes, “cloud and ash and dark flames, but with real muscle, real strength, real red eyes that glared back at him and flashing teeth that would eat his mother alive” (Ness 179). The impossibly powerful




monster that is eating his mother away in real life is here to eat her in his dreams, and this monster seems to be a personification of the cancer. Still, as the nightmare scene continues, the audience sees that Conor is more afraid of himself than the vortex around him. As he catches his mother moments before she falls, he finds her growing heavier and heavier, until he cannot bear the weight of her and lets her plummet to her death. What Conor cannot admit, cannot even utter, is that he wanted her to fall because she was too heavy to carry by himself. This truth is what Conor is ultimately afraid of: that he himself is the monster because he is the one that causes her death.

This moment is the climax of the story, but it is also an essential coming-of-age point for Conor. As the nightmare vortex begins to consume Conor, the Monster says, “*You must tell the truth or you will never leave this nightmare . . . You will be trapped here alone for the rest of your life*” (Ness 185). In both a literal and metaphorical sense, this monster (the belief that Conor is the cause of his mother’s suffering) will kill Conor. The ugliness of the truth, represented through the way the “nightmare’s tendrils were binding him now,” will suffocate him; the longer he stays silent, the farther he pushes his words down his throat (Ness 186). Conor’s grief and guilt overwhelm him, so much that they make him incapable of processing life normally (“Conor’s grief was a physical thing, gripping him like a clamp, clenching him tight as a muscle” [Ness 190]).

Interestingly, though, the Monster (the character) says specifically that Conor must say the truth in order to be able to move on. What destroys Conor even more than his guilt is a lack of expression of that guilt and an inability to say what makes him vulnerable and afraid. The words themselves have more power than anything else; the Monster notes, “*You were willing to die rather than speak [the truth]*” (Ness 192). Conor believes that he has control over his emotions and that he has the ability to make his complex situations simple. He is evil because he desires his mother’s death. So if he denies this desire and instead tells himself to believe in a cure for her cancer, then he can find redemption. These are, then, attempts to try and control his feelings through self-inflicted punishment, anger, physical violence, and denial of his emotions. He believes he has the power to control how he feels about his mother’s illness, and so his inability to control his complex and ambiguous emotions makes him a monster.

But as the Monster and the nightmare vortex show Conor, we do *not* have the ability to pick and choose what we control. Conor does not overcome the nightmare vortex by changing his thought process, but by admitting a truth that he does not want to speak; he must admit that he does not have complete control over how he thinks and feels and that he does not have control over his



mother's cancer. There is no concrete reason why Conor's mother has cancer, and Conor has no physical way to save her. Believing that he has control and that there *is* something he can do is what nearly destroys him. In the end, the only way Conor can overcome his grief and his guilt is by physically speaking the truth and acknowledging his vulnerability and powerlessness to the Monster and, consequently, to himself. The complexities of Conor's situation will always remain complex, and he may not understand why exactly he feels certain ways. But Conor's ambiguity and lack of control do not make him inherently evil, nor do they make him inherently good. Our inability to control everything does not make us monsters, but is, instead, something that makes us human.

CONCLUSION

As a story of grief and coping, *A Monster Calls* seems to be a novel about ways we can understand the death and suffering of those closest to us. But, as a story that also participates in a larger conversation involving how Anglo-Western cultures perceive cancer, illness, and disease, it is also a story about our inevitable powerlessness to the forces beyond us. We cannot always anticipate and prevent diseases like cancer, and we cannot always save the people that deserve saving. We cannot always control the ambiguity and complexity in our lives. We do have a choice in whether or not we let that fear consume us. The monstrous antagonist of *A Monster Calls*, then, is not even the nightmare vortex or the cancer itself, but the dangerous illusion of control that we have infused in Anglo-Western culture and cancer restoration narratives. What Conor's story warns us about is the way that persistence and relentlessness can turn toxic, resisting that which makes us human.



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The Cinematic Killer: Cameras and *Peeping Tom*

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The history of horror film is the history of fear. The genre examines themes as miniscule as personal repressed anxieties or as massive as an entire culture's fears. Horror has the ability to make its viewers scared of routine activities, such as the infamous shower scene in *Psycho*, or even children's toys, like Chucky in *Child's Play*. The range of iconic horror villains, scenes, and plots proves anything can be designed to be scary.

Michael Powell's 1960 *Peeping Tom* pushes the boundaries of this assertion, that anything can be designated as terrifying, by making a camera its antagonist. The film stars Karl Boehm as Mark Lewis, a disturbed photographer and filmmaker with a fetish for filming the beautiful women he murders. In the final moments of *Peeping Tom*, Mark asks, "Do you know what the most frightening thing in the world is?" and ultimately answers his own question: "It's fear" (01:37:21-01:38:15). By the end of *Peeping Tom*, Mark's declaration is confirmed, as director Michael Powell successfully assigns a camera as an antagonist by showing its victims their own fear through a mirror attached to the camera as the victims are murdered. Powell's depiction of a serial killer filmmaker comes at a time of groundbreaking developments in camera technology, which revolutionized documentary film. Further, he allowed the camera to become the antagonist by giving it agency. Because of this portrayal, *Peeping Tom* has contributed to academic discourses on cinematic representations of voyeurism and psychoanalysis. The camera functions as a monster because it manipulates the portrayal of Mark's victims, making it a killer of reality and the literal and figurative murderer of the victims.

The film begins through a camera's gaze and follows a prostitute up a set


ABSTRACT

In Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom*, cameras are delegated the role of antagonist. Cameras become the movie's monsters, murdering women and their identities. These murders reflect flaws of and anxieties preoccupied with technological advancements in documentary film during the middle of the 20th century. The terror cameras cause in *Peeping Tom* showcases the danger in believing in an objective lens.



of stairs, when she inexplicably screams. The following scene reveals that she has been murdered. Mark Lewis films the aftermath for a personal documentary whose subjects are women that he kills. This is merely his pastime; he formally works as a film crew member and a pin-up photographer. One night, Mark meets Helen, his tenant and neighbor, and invites her into his apartment upstairs. Mark shows Helen experimental home videos, filmed by his psychologist father, of Mark experiencing trauma as a child. Helen is disturbed by this but still likes Mark, and they eventually begin dating. Still, this does not satisfy Mark's urges. He stays late at the studio one night to film Vivian, a stand-in actress on the movie set he is working on. Vivian becomes a part of Mark's documentary as he exposes a knife on the leg of a tripod and stabs her throat. He locks her in a trunk, and she is found on set the following day. Detectives visit the set to question everyone, and Mark films it for his movie. Mark repeats the same process with Milly, one of his pin-up models. Afterward, Mark arrives home to find Helen watching one of his murder movies. Mark explains to Helen that he captures ultimate fear by attaching a mirror to his camera so the women he impales must watch their own deaths. The film concludes with Mark filming himself committing suicide with the same technique.


Cameras become their own characters in *Peeping Tom* through personification, which is achieved through Mark's relationship with cameras. When referencing them, he uses humanizing language. While interrogating Mark, Chief Inspector Gregg asks Mark if anyone was with him at a specific time. Mark responds, "No sir. Just my...just my camera" (00:59:44-00:59:51). When Mark is with his camera, he is not alone. Mark's relationship with cameras, and his accompanying violent fetish involving them, has a traumatic foundation. His father, scientist A.N. Lewis, put Mark in fearful situations and filmed Mark's reaction as a case study on fear and the human nervous system. Mark's childhood was spent as the object of documentation, and cameras were always present in his rearing. Even though cameras were a source of discomfort, their critical presence in his upbringing made them sentimental for Mark—and even companions. His camera acts as a comfort blanket, reassuring him as he commits the murders. In a moment of apparent anxiety, Mark strokes his camera. Cameras receive Mark's affection, despite being an accessory to his abuse. In Mark's life, cameras are not purely harmful—they are his guardians. The cameras' aversive stability forms the basis for an unhealthy relationship between them and Mark. The enduring presence of cameras maintains Mark's relationship with them and ruins any development of a sense of privacy, which Dr. Rosan, psychologist and Mark's late father's friend, points out. The oversaturation of cameras in Mark's childhood has not only caused him to have an emotional dependence on cameras, but cameras themselves control



Mark and have changed the way he participates in the world.


Through its intricate relationship with Mark, the camera becomes a complex character ranging from Mark's friend to a monster. Mark's connection with his camera is very personal, and he is rarely seen without it. His entire identity revolves around cameras. Mark's violent fetish and both his jobs, adult picture photographer and studio camera operator, involve cameras. Even when Mark is without his camera, like when he is on his date with Helen, he surrenders to his voyeuristic urges for any provocative sights. He stares at a kissing couple with an intense, disturbing gaze until Helen draws him back in. He is not a casual, passive onlooker. His stares are purposeful and shameless, like a camera's intentional gaze, because cameras taught Mark to view in their remorseless manner. The camera is able to condition Mark because Powell allows the camera to transcend its human user by depicting it as conscious.

From the start, the camera performs menacing actions. In the iconic opening, a camera's viewfinder gazes on a prostitute named Dora as she picks up a customer and they relocate to a room. In the room, Dora screams and stares at something horrifying, but viewers do not know what the source of her terror is. Film critic Catherine Zimmer analyzes cameras throughout *Peeping Tom*, paying close attention to the opening, in "The Camera's Eye: *Peeping Tom* and Technological Perversion." In the scene when Dora screams, "[t]he implication is that the camera is the hidden voyeur, not the man who approaches her" (Zimmer 37). The scene is captured through the camera's perspective, armed with crosshairs evocative of a weapon's viewfinder, which make the intentions appear malicious. The wicked characterization of cameras continues as the film develops, and they assist Mark in all of his murderous escapades. Mark lures in women and murders them by impaling his victims with a tripod leg turned knife whilst filming them. The camera has a mirror attached, so victims can see the camera's perspective on their murder as it happens. The highlighting of the camera's perspective cultivates its role as humanized character. In the film's finale, Mark references the cameras as if they are his friends, asking Helen to, "Watch them all say goodbye, one by one" (01:39:23-01:40:17). Zimmer argues that in this finale, "The camera has, like Mark Lewis, become the monster" (48). However, throughout the film, the camera has control over Mark. A Freudian psychosexual analysis of Mark's traumatic childhood history with cameras, his overpowering need to film murders, and the fact that all his victims are beautiful women suggests a fetish. This is furthered by the phallic imagery insinuated by the murder object, a tripod leg for impalement. A person does not control their fetish; it is their fetish that controls them. Mark literally dies for his fetish.



The camera is not a monster like Mark Lewis; the camera is Mark Lewis's monster. Independent of its relationship with Mark, cameras have monstrous qualities. Cameras reduce the world to the confines of its lens, killing reality. It is also as if the camera makes choices when representing reality. In *Peeping Tom*, these choices are "constantly highlighted" (Zimmer 36). In the beginning moments of the film, the camera's gaze follows Mark as he throws out a packet of film. The shot lingers on the trashcan, as if the trashcan is an imperative element of the unfolding story. The trashcan is not crucial to the purpose of *Peeping Tom*, but what the camera must forgo to capture it is. By focusing on one thing, the camera must ignore others. The camera's inability to divulge all details while being able to select which features are revealed gives it a godlike power. With this power, the camera uses its limited domain and conscious gaze to link "technical and ideological position" (Hawthorn 303). *Peeping Tom's* opening has been described as an "ideological establishing shot," the quick sequence illustrating the main points of the film, exemplifying the camera as a weapon and beginning to provoke questions about viewership (Hawthorn 305).


A camera's gaze is influential enough to alter reality and even construct new meaning. Despite a filmmaker having positive intentions, the unavoidable visual incompleteness of a camera's perspective is powerful. A camera's restricted scope never grants a filmmaker's wholesome hopes to show cinematic truth. Mark's father, A.N. Lewis, hoped his exploitative films would contribute a benefit to the medical community larger than the detriment it would bring to his son. Independent of his experiment's abusive qualities, A.N. Lewis's films had a constructive purpose. Still Mark is a single person, so this study cannot substitute for the experiences of all people. However, most viewers do not consider the picture as incomplete, so many ethical implications accompany cinematic accounts of the real. A camera's view has the power to express truth, as passive viewers erroneously consume its images as fact. Misperceived truth corrupts reality, with most of this burden placed on recorded subjects. The misconception that a film's images are irrefutable, reliable sources is a common problem in documentary films. Fabricated reality is mistakenly perceived as real, and the identity of its subjects, real people, are murdered. This is expressed in *Peeping Tom* through literal killing. Mark's victims in *Peeping Tom* are women who, according to distinguished film critic and academic Elisabeth Bronfen, "believe [they] can control and master the masculine gaze" (Bronfen 62). Their naïve perception that they can control the camera makes these women vulnerable. These women are too trusting of the camera. Vivian goes as far as saying, "I do feel alone in front of it" (00:39:50-00:40:01). Their identities are killed as a consequence.



Peeping Tom motivates its viewers to question what happens when people are turned into commodities. Unlike Mark's personal documentary camera, *Peeping Tom*'s secondary cameras have a commercial purpose. The photography and studio cameras have the same ultimate objective of transforming subjects into objects by making them a commodity. The stars of these cameras' gazes are given a new existence, one that aims to be economically desirable. Models and actresses agree to abandon their notion of self under contractual stipulations to be compensated, and the assumption that spectators know what they are visually consuming is simulated. An audience may be immersed into the thoughtfully crafted world, but reality is promptly restored when the lights come on and the movie is over. Mark's victims are a prostitute, an actress, and a model. Other than being beautiful, the main characteristic that unites Mark's victims is their willingness to sell themselves despite possible consequences. In the film's beginning seconds, the camera gazes at Dora as she stares into a store's display of dismembered mannequins. Completeness cannot be assembled using the mannequin's fragmented parts. Moments later, the same thing will happen to her. Her individuality will be dismembered, as she is immortalized as a one-dimensional victim in newspapers and the camera's film. The lack of complete identity will transform her into a mannequin, an object able to be fashioned to satisfy one's desires.

In contrast, despite being like the rest of his victims—young, beautiful, and powerlessly alone with him—Mark spares Helen's life. Powell always shows a barefaced Helen in great lighting, contrasting her chiaroscuro-lit costars. Unlike the film's victims—Dora, Vivian, and Milly—Helen does not attempt to alter her image through makeup or profession, which may be one reason Mark pardons her. Furthermore, she is not as naïve as Mark's victims and is skeptical of the camera's gaze. When Mark tries to film Helen, she appears threatened. She responds to his traumatic home videos with discomfort and questions, demanding, "I like to understand what I'm shown" (00:25:00-00:25:12). She understands the intricacies behind a creative composition because, just like Mark, Helen creates a fabricated reality. However, unlike Mark, Helen's reality is never taken as real as it only exists within the realm of the children's novels that she writes. Mark's medium is film, a visual surrogate for authentic reality, so it is often mistaken as truth. This unites them; nevertheless, Mark's reality comes with more risks.


Of the film's three cameras—Mark's documentary camera, his photography, and the studio's camera—Mark's 16mm documentary camera is the primary star and subject of a fascinating history. Mark's conscious camera can be considered his costar, assisting him on all of his exploits. The 16mm camera was introduced during World War II, which lends it a "legacy of violent trauma" (Zimmer 47).



Compared to previous technology, 16mm cameras are small, lightweight, and portable. This allows them the ability to be at the forefront of action or, in the case of *Peeping Tom*, to perform the action. Their capabilities extended documentary film techniques. For the first time, documentary films did not have to be staged, as a camera could be brought out in real settings to record real people. Still, all genuine elements did not necessarily yield genuine results.

Around the same time as the advent of synchronized sound cameras and the production of *Peeping Tom*, two important documentary techniques were coming to the forefront—direct cinema and *cinéma vérité*. They both share an aspiration, debatably the goal of all documentary film, to accurately represent truth. However, they go about it in very different ways. Direct cinema created the infamous “fly-on-the-wall” technique, in which documentary filmmakers record their surroundings without disturbing them to try to capture a situation as an objective account. Direct cinema operates under the assumption that truth can be passively observed without the influence of a camera. Explained by Bill Nichols, documentary film study’s pioneering scholar, where direct cinema tries to portray an “absolute or untampered truth,” *cinéma vérité* only attempts “the truth of an encounter” (184). *Cinéma vérité*, literally meaning truthful cinema, “reveals the reality of what happens when people interact in the presence of a camera” (184). It acknowledges the relationship of power between people and cameras, so filmmakers try their best to create situations that will draw out truth. Brian Winston, one of the first British journalists to discuss documentary ethics, once said, “the only thing direct cinema and *cinéma vérité* have in common is their ‘equipment’” (qtd. in Zimmer 40). Despite having very different techniques, they face the same issues. Both deal with the unavoidable influence of subjectivity, which muddles truth.

The problems of both direct cinema and *cinéma vérité* are illustrated in *Peeping Tom*. Mark’s documentary lies somewhere in-between the two techniques. Sometimes, he adopts a direct cinema approach, passively filming situations around him, like the aftermath of Dora the prostitute’s murder. Inevitably, Mark becomes an active part of his film when someone asks him what paper he is filming for (00:05:19-00:05:30). The camera’s inability to be ignored is where direct cinema fails. Usually, Mark’s filming serves as a commentary on *cinéma vérité*. He does not merely reveal how people react in the presence of a camera; he shows their interaction with the camera itself. Unlike other documentary techniques, *cinéma vérité* is very upfront about the unequal distribution of power. However, that does not necessarily make the imbalance any better. In trying to draw out the truth through techniques like the interview, filmmakers sometimes create a truth. Interview questions that lead to desired answers is an example of this. No tactic can




perfectly construct power equality, as a human will always be doing the strategizing. In *Peeping Tom*, this power imbalance is blatantly demonstrated through Mark's ability to take lives through his filmmaking.

The world of a film, documentary film included, is carefully crafted through choices behind the camera, which *Peeping Tom* often reminds its audience. While posing for Mark, Milly asks him if he can hide her bruises in the photograph (00:10:25-00:10:34). A few moments later, the camera shot gazes at a beautiful woman standing by a window sill. The woman turns her head and reveals a facial deformity. Prior to her turning her head, the camera could not see the deformity and, therefore, it did not exist in the audience's universe. In reference to her facial deformity, she jokingly asks Mark if he can remove her bruises too. Mark is mesmerized by the woman and asks to film her with an obsessive demeanor. When he does film her, the frame only includes her eyes. Once again, her deformity is erased by the camera's limited perspective. Nevertheless, both of these instances of incomplete representation are intentional. A moment of the camera's will to omit can be noticed in Mark's childhood videos, but only on a re-viewing of the film. In these videos, in which Mark's father intentionally imposes fear on his child, a light can be seen. Helen questions it: "What's the light? Well I suppose it's the camera" (00:22:45-00:22:50). This light is familiar to viewers, as it can also be seen in the murder footage. It is not until the final moments of the film that the light's source is revealed: the mirror.

Editing is another critical factor in devising the world of a film. A clever sequence in *Peeping Tom* that emphasizes editing's power to make meaning is when a slice of cake is shown as a voice commands, "Cut!" The word, "cut" seems to refer to the slice of cake until the scene promptly cuts to the studio, revealing the diegetic source of the commanded "cut" (00:30:11-00:30:15). While a camera limits perspective to select the meaning, editing is the intentional sequence strategized to design meaning. In the editing process, humans are the intelligent creators. In the case of documentary film, ethical filmmakers strive to, as best as possible, recreate a situation without the addition of motivated changes. In the filming process, a person guides a camera's gaze, but he or she is working within the camera's world and ultimately under its authority. The camera's limited scope paired with the assumption that it does not lie is a dangerous combination. A camera is confined to its own frame of view, so it exploits the very concept of reality. Because of this, documentary filmmakers will always fail at perfectly representing truth, even when they so desperately attempt it.

The literal camera of *Peeping Tom* illustrates the danger of representation to its documentary subjects-turned-victims. The camera is a monster that uses Mark,



the tripod, and a mirror to achieve its goals. The literal murder from the impaling tripod is a metaphor for the identity slaughter common in cinematic portrayals. The function of a tripod itself is to create a stable frame, akin to the way we actually view the world. Steady shots allow film's viewers to sink into its universe and forget they are watching a fabricated reality or, in the case of documentary film, a mediated reality. In documentary films, stability lends to the illusion of truth. Mark's victims are literally being killed by a tripod, the camera's tool for delusional truth. The believable feigning of truth makes the accuracy of portrayals more critical, yet the camera's limited abilities do not allow for the perfect portrayal. The attached mirror is an attempt at transparency between the camera and its victims. The power imbalance is still present, as subjects cannot control their representation. However, it allows for the victims to have a firsthand account of their murder. Victims are cursed to see their murder as it occurs without the power to escape it. Subjects of *cinéma vérité* are given the freedom to candidly exhibit their character for a camera, but their domain, the camera's scope, is limited. As a result, subjects ultimately persist as objects. Ultimately, Michael Powell uses Mark's conscious camera as a platform to point out the problems with representing reality and personal identity in film. When *Peeping Tom* concludes, Mark's 16mm camera is the most threatening character. During the film's climax, one detective comforts the other two by saying, "It's only a camera." Another detective responds with fear, "Only?" (01:38:40-01:38:50).

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Monstrous Women: Exploring Historical Witchcraft and Its Presence in *The Witch*


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In the 1600s, the Puritans were still sailing to the United States—to them, the “New World”—in search of religious freedom and new beginnings; however, in their attempt to leave behind England and its influence, the Puritans brought with them Europe’s archaic views of witchcraft and women as monsters. The Puritans projected these fears of witchcraft onto women in a variety of ways: accusations of maleficarum, or the power “to cause harm to others by supernatural means”; disruptions in domestic processes, such as sudden spoiling of beer; healthcare complications; the obstruction of natural processes, like weather changes and crop yield; and more were used as rationales to

prosecute women in their communities (Karlsen 6–8). Witchcraft was also noted as a woman’s crime, with male accusation almost only occurring if the man was married or related to an already accused witch (Karlsen 49). This paranoia, largely due to overbearing religious influence, led to estimates of as many as “110,000 people . . . tortured as alleged witches and between 40,000 and 60,000 people . . . executed” worldwide from 1450 to 1750 (Russell and Brooks 12). Highlighting the consequences of religious persecution and female suppression, Robert Eggers’s *The Witch* masterfully portrays New England witchcraft as it was perceived in the 1600s, realizing societal oppression as a powerful force with many victims. Exploring a family crumbling from the influence of maleficarum and the strict

ABSTRACT

Accusations of witchcraft in America were often death sentences for women that society considered as acting outside of the norm; however, in Robert Eggers’s film, *The Witch*, embodying the role of a witch becomes a powerful tool in fighting Puritanical social expectations with magic, appearance, and behavior. Through the application of monster theory, historical contextualization, and feminist theory, this essay explores the implications of portraying the film’s main villain as a grotesque hag, the meaning behind its use of gory magic, why the protagonist chooses to become a witch herself, and finally, the consequences of othering marginalized groups from society.



religious expectations of their time, *The Witch* brings a new eye to New England's past, inspects its historical relationship with women, and even questions our own societal standards today. Through a historical contextualization of *The Witch*, an examination of women as monsters, and the exploration of modern feminist theory, the film's condemnation of the societal abjection of women who defy their mandated roles and embrace the power within inhabiting liminal spaces is revealed.

In order to immediately focus on the authority that religion has in Puritanical society, Eggers begins *The Witch* with the film's family being banished from their New England colony. William, the family's patriarch, has been accused of heresy. The audience only knows that William has been preaching a form of the gospels that the settlement cannot abide by. William's wife, Katherine; their eldest daughter, Thomasin; their eldest son, Caleb; their twins, Jonas and Mercy; and their infant son, Samuel, are sentenced alongside William. Once the family's fate has been determined, William and his family ride toward the vast wilderness as the gates of their former community close (0:01:08 - 0:03:19). The new setting of the film, now an open plain and expansive forest, becomes one of its most foreboding characteristics. As the soundtrack of the film builds, the eerie moans of a woman's soprano pierces the audience alongside cinematography that indicates a threatening presence past the tree line; in this instance, the witch is also introduced to the audience in impressive fashion, constructing a dichotomy in which this deeply religious family must coexist with a creature that is a complete inversion of their ideals.

Once the existence of the witch has been alluded to in this shot, her status as a malevolent force—rooted in actual historical conceptions of New England witches—is made immediately apparent through the lenses of several theoretical frameworks. The vilification of women as witches in Puritan America was based in deep cultural prejudices, perceptions of gender roles, and religiously-influenced societal structuring, creating a monsterization of women. This monsterization as it appears in *The Witch* will be analyzed through Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," Julia Kristeva's work on abjection, Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque, Mary Daly's "Hag-ography," and finally, an inversion of feminist mimesis theory.

DEFINING WITCHES THROUGH COHEN'S "MONSTER CULTURE"


Jeffrey Jerome Cohen posits in "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)" that monsters generally operate within literary, cultural, and filmic texts in seven different ways. While witches could theoretically fulfill every thesis, the most prominent are: "The Monster's Body as a Cultural Body," "The Monster Dwells at



the Gates of Difference,” “The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible,” and finally, “The Monster Stands at the Threshold . . . of Becoming.”

Cohen states that monsters become cultural bodies through the “embodiment of a certain cultural moment” (4). An application of Cohen’s theory to witches reveals that, in their case, witches exist as cultural bodies due to centuries of systematic misogyny. Puritanical societies attempted to justify this misogyny because they felt witches “[incorporated] fear, desire, anxiety, and dependency [into their world], giving them life and an uncanny independence” (Cohen 4). This created a real perception of women as monsters that resulted in witch-hunts and tireless persecution. As the first thesis, this theory stands as an introduction to the following theses that delve more specifically into the nuances of monsters as cultural symbols.

In his next thesis, “The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference,” Cohen states that “monstrous difference tends to be cultural, political, racial, economic, and sexual” (7). Carol Karlsen confirms that witches faced discrimination at all of these intersections in her book, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*. She states that “The characteristics of the New England witch—the demographic, economic, religious, and sexual—emerge from patterns found in accusations and in the life histories of the accused” (153). For example, on an economic level the accusations reveal that “the poor account for only a minority of the women accused. Even without precise economic indicators, it is clear that women from all levels of society were vulnerable to accusation” (Karlsen 78-79). Therefore, while poor women were often targeted purely based on socioeconomic status, women in positions of economic power were also threatened. Although women with better financial means had extensive resources available to them to combat their accusations, as well as developed social reputations to rely on as forms of defense, it becomes apparent that economic and sexual factors still dominated accusations. Similarly, “Often implicit and seldom measurable, official religious beliefs were nonetheless central in determining who witches were and what witches did” (Karlsen 119). Per Puritan belief, “There were only two kinds of women: godly women and witches,” which means that women who did not adhere to the biblical teachings of their towns were under automatic suspicion (Karlsen 251). This created a rigid social structure that kept women complacent under the teachings of their (always male) pastors and religious leaders (Karlsen 251). The idea that there were only godly women or witches becomes increasingly important in *The Witch*, as later analysis will reveal that turning to witchcraft and defying these patriarchal structures clearly becomes a source of empowerment for both the film’s protagonist (Thomasin) and antagonist (the witch).




Before delving into that analysis, though, it is integral to see the ways in which Cohen's fifth thesis, "The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible," reveals that "The monster prevents mobility (intellectual, geographic, or sexual), delimiting the social spaces through which private bodies may move," creating further impetus for female defiance (12). Cohen elaborates on this thesis, saying that "these borders are in place to control the traffic in women, or more generally establish homosocial bonds, the ties between men that keep a patriarchal society functional" (13). One of the most notable examples of how witchcraft was used to keep systems of patriarchal power in place in the "New World" was women's foray into medical treatment, especially in the form of midwives. Karlsen notes, "Midwives and healers, like women accused of abortion and infanticide, could have been likely suspects simply because they were ever-present reminders of the power that resided in women's life-giving and life-maintaining roles" (144). Furthermore, New England was in desperate need of doctors. With increasing numbers of female midwives and healers working alongside the few male physicians in the "New World," compared to the amount of male doctors involved in witchcraft cases, "one of the unspoken (and probably unacknowledged) functions of New England witchcraft was to discredit women's medical knowledge in favor of their male competitors" (Karlsen 144-145). In other words, for some women, simply ensuring that women in the community have safe, successful childbirths, or are otherwise in good health, could garner accusations from men who felt that women were unfit for medical practice.

Finally, the last thesis that Cohen writes is "The Monster Stands at the Threshold . . . of Becoming." He believes "Monsters 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 knowledge, *human* knowledge" (20, emphasis original): "These monsters ask us how we perceive the world . . . They ask us to reevaluate our cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, our perceptions of difference, [and] our tolerance towards its expression" (Cohen 20). Through *The Witch*, Eggers does precisely that. His recreation of the witch as a cultural symbol forces audiences to consider misogyny, media portrayals and expectations of women, and religion as a dominating force of social structuring, both in Puritanical America and the modern United States.

ABJECTION AND MAGIC AS SOURCES OF POWER


Due to the prejudiced nature of Puritanical society, women who embodied Cohen's definition of monstrous—women like Thomasin and the titular witch—were often banished or accused of being witches, making them human symbols



of the abject. Abjection is defined by philosopher and literary critic Julia Kristeva in her book, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, as a “jettisoned object” that “is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses” (2). She goes on to say that the abject is “a piece of filth, waste, or dung” and “the spasms and vomiting that protect me” (3). These objects, in turn, create a situation in which “I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish myself” (3). In other words, the abject is typically sourced from our own beings, but, being deemed as other, disturbing, or disgusting, we question whether “I” truly consists of these abjected objects, effectively creating a form of identity crisis. While this concept is typically applied to the individual being, abjection becomes an apt metaphor for Puritan America and its relationship to divergent women. When inhabiting the space of other, women become abjections of patriarchal society and powerful reminders of this society’s limitations. Therefore, witches are the pinnacle of this abjectness and, as seen through the lens of *The Witch*, become powerful forces that may destroy families, communities, and society’s rules, regardless of the community’s faith in their religion or social constructions.

One of the primary ways in which the Puritans abjected women who threatened patriarchal society was to make women monstrous through accusations of magic and maleficarum. Early modern Europe and Puritan America believed that witches primarily adhered to three categories of magic, but, in *The Witch*, only “the third category [which includes] such things as transvection (flying through the air), metamorphosis (shifting form), the use of familiars, blighting crops, raising storms, and otherwise controlling the forces of nature” is featured (Donovan 58). While the practice of actual magic likely did not occur historically and only existed as a means to justify the abjection of and accusations against Puritanical women, the witch’s first physical appearance in the film involves her successfully creating a flying potion, revealing that *The Witch* operates under the pretense that witches did exist in the supernatural sense. This is significant because the antagonist’s magical abilities also reveal that, in *The Witch*, there is real, tangible power in choosing to resist a society built to abject individuals at every othered intersection, driving the film’s message that defiance is empowering.

This first display of magic in the film—the witch creating her flying potion—is completed when the witch abducts the family’s infant son Samuel while Thomasin plays peek-a-boo with him at the edge of the wood. Once captured, Samuel is laid nude on a cloth in the witch’s lair, depicted as a cave in the woods. In a sudden cut, an old nude woman is seen churning and grinding together Samuel’s remains in a bowl. After completing her concoction, the witch exits her lair to




coat herself with the potion under the moonlight. This is coupled with images of her writhing on the forest floor, clutching a branch. Finally, we see her take flight on the branch, rising into the frame before the full moon (00:06:27-00:09:31). This corresponds with beliefs surrounding witchcraft in which “Witches were widely accused of using blood and parts of the human body—particularly bodies of babies—[in their brews]” (Donovan 59-60). In portraying this particularly gruesome form of witchcraft, *The Witch* recalls the aforementioned image of infanticide. Magic as infanticide becomes a representation of abjection here. The witch would be demonized by the Puritans for breaking the codes of woman as responsible for childcare and, as a result, is literally cast out, explaining the witch’s inhabitation of her cave, a border space away from society. Because the witch has already been abjected and accepted her status as demonized, she uses Samuel’s sacrifice as a source of power, making his death the catalyst for the remainder of the terror she conducts throughout the film. This sacrifice gives the witch the power to obtain revenge on the society that abjected her, symbolized through William and his family.

Samuel’s death is able to act as a catalyst due to the fact that the remains of an infant—preferably unbaptized as Samuel was—were not only associated with transvection brews but rumored to give witches other powers, such as the ability of metamorphosis. The witch utilizes metamorphosis as a way to display her power and enact revenge for her abjection, which will be elaborated upon throughout this essay.

GROTESQUENESS, HAG-OGRAPHY, AND ITS RELATION TO *THE WITCH*

The Witch’s historical contextualization and theoretical definition of women as monsters/abjections of patriarchy is able to be further built upon with its display of the grotesque form as a means to find power within an abjected border space. Literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin defines the grotesque in his book, *Rabelais and His World*, as “the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, [and] abstract” down to “the material level,” subsequently focusing on the “degradation” of form (19). The body is seen as “extremely exaggerated,” concentrating on the “acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth” (18, 21). Initially, the notion of the grotesque is interpreted as an obsession with humiliation and matters of form that humans tend to find disgusting (defecation) or inappropriate to discuss (copulation). Therefore, this concept, when applied to the female form, appears as the ultimate departure from the feminine body ideal; however, Bakhtin asserts that “This exaggeration has a positive, assertive character”; “The leading themes of these images of bodily life are fertility, growth, and a brimming-over abundance,”




resulting in a “triumphant” body that defies the norm, and in turn, is meant to be celebrated (19).

That being said, the grotesque body is not typically celebrated by most. In fact, media articles about *The Witch* label the film’s antagonist as “a grotesque creature in the woods” (Lee), “absolutely chilling” (Chitwood), and “a gnarled hag, framed like the reverse shot of Goya’s *Saturn Devouring His Son* . . . [with] withered flesh” (Ehrlich), recalling this conception of grotesqueness as inherently frightening and villainous. Therefore, Eggers’s witch not only fulfills traditional Puritanical codes of witchcraft but also resembles stereotypical portrayals of witches identified by researchers Jeffrey B. Russell and Alexander Brooks “As imaginary old hags with warts on their noses, conical hats, broomsticks, black cats, and evil, cackling laughs” (8). The witch herself is an old woman, which Russell and Brooks consider “a heedless exaggeration and a distortion of the truth . . . [as] many female witches have been quite young—sometimes even children” (12). Furthermore, the witch is always depicted as nude, with bruises and other wounds visible on her body. Similarly, her hair is thin, her teeth have rotted, her skin sags, and her nose is crooked, fulfilling every stereotypical depiction. Even her laugh is the iconic witch’s cackle. The fact that this is the only dialogue she has in the film further dehumanizes her. However, when this departure from the ideal is coupled with theory about the grotesque, the value of the witch as a hag can be uncovered.

For example, Bakhtin illustrates this idea later in his text when he further explores the grotesque body of the hag through his analysis of the Kerch terracotta collection. It is interesting to note that these images portray grotesqueness as revelatory rather than oppressive. The images are specifically

figurines of senile pregnant hags. Moreover, the old hags are laughing. This is a typical and very strongly expressed grotesque. It is ambivalent. It is pregnant death, a death that gives birth. There is nothing completed, nothing calm and stable in the bodies of these old hags. They combine a senile, decaying and deformed flesh with the flesh of new life, conceived but as yet informed. Life is shown in its two-fold contradictory process; it is the epitome of incompleteness. (Bakhtin 25-26)


Kerch’s collection recalls the image of the witch with her “gnarled” (Chitwood), “chilling” (Ehrlich), and withered appearance. While the witch is not pregnant in the film, she does embody the “life . . . in its two-fold, contradictory process,” presenting as both a young woman and the hag-like witch in the film (Bakhtin 26). As a hag, she represents a form of death, senile and decaying. Her body shrivels, and she is isolated from society; however, as a young woman, the witch reveals her form as contradictory, one that may also embody the “ideal” and regenerate into



something new and fresh. The witch is not uncomfortable in either form—her power and her fearsomeness depend on both. Finally, her default choice to reside as a hag rather than live as her “idealized” form creates the overall impression that the witch’s grotesque appearance is to be relished as powerful, a breakage from repressive norms, and overall, celebratory.

This, however, does not mean that the witch cannot be powerful within her “idealized” form. At one point in the film, Caleb, the family’s eldest son, is stranded in the woods. He finds himself standing before an ominous cave obviously belonging to the witch. Suddenly, a young woman, wearing a red cloak and a low cut dress—who the audience knows is actually the witch—emerges from the cave. Although Caleb appears frightened, he advances towards her. As the woman leans into Caleb’s face, about to kiss him, her haggard hand in its default form clutches the back of his head and violently pulls him into the cave (00:39:12-00:42:11). The witch—using her powers of metamorphosis as a tool to lure Caleb—invokes Bakhtin’s contradictory process as well as hypersexualized notions of Puritanical witchcraft, where it was believed that accused “women had committed or were thought to have committed fornication . . . or other sexual or sexually related offenses” (Karlsen 196).

The witch’s power is further displayed when Caleb mysteriously reappears at the homestead after his kidnapping. He is nude, incoherent, and showing obvious signs of possession. Caleb’s possession continues the consistency of Puritanical conceptions of witchcraft. The Puritans believed that “Favorite subjects for possession were children and nuns, both classes of innocents that demons might easily influence” (Donovan 67). The symptoms of possession “included writhing and contortions of abdominal origin, vomiting of strange objects, change of voice to deep gruff tones (‘belly speaking’), the incessant use of obscenities and blasphemies, lewd exposure, and acts of abnormal strength” (Donovan 66-67). While Caleb only exhibits contortions and the vomiting of a whole apple with a single bite in it—simultaneously mocking an Edenic biblical symbol, as well as symbolizing a lie Caleb told to his mother to cover for a hunting trip he took with William—other instances of maleficarum are present as well. In fact, witches “[were] frequently suspected of causing illness or death, particularly to spouses or infants and young children. Typically, an accuser would speak of a ‘thriving child’ who suddenly ‘have a great screech out as if it was greatly hurt,’ after which it did ‘pine away,’ continuing ‘in a sad Condition’ until it ‘soe dyed’” (Karlsen 6). Therefore, while Caleb does not experience shifts in vocal tones, nor does he use obscenities, his possession ultimately leads to the aforementioned pining away and death, all brought about by the witch in her “ideal” form (00:54:10-01:00:30).




Finally, the rhetorical value in portraying the witch primarily as a hag is further elaborated on by Mary Daly, a scholar who wrote the book *Gyn/ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*. In this text, Daly uses the term “Hag-ography” to describe the act of recovering the overlooked history of women who were either accused of witchcraft and/or coded as hags (15). “Hag-ography” concerns itself with celebrating the image of the hag, noting that “the beauty of strong, creative women is ‘ugly’ by misogynistic standards of ‘beauty’” (15). One aspect of this celebration is seen through Daly’s reveling in the laughter of the hag. She states that “Hags may rage and roar, but they do not titter,” leaving the act of tittering to “[s]elf-loathing ladies” (17). Furthermore, Daly believes that “There is nothing like the sounds of women really laughing. The roaring laughter of women is like the roaring of the eternal sea. Hags can cackle and roar at themselves, but more and more, one hears them roaring at the reversal that is patriarchy” (17). The idea of a hag’s (or witch’s) laugh becomes poignant when considering the witch’s previously mentioned cackle in the film. Through the lens of Daly’s “Hag-ography,” the witch’s cackle serves as another means of empowerment, laughing in the face of a patriarchal society that would rather have women politely “titter” while loathing themselves. Through the lens of Bakhtin and Daly, it becomes clear that *The Witch* utilizes the grotesque and “Hag-ography” to show that the life of the hag is not only an empowering one that is relevant to the witch but also to Thomasin—the protagonist and eldest daughter of William and Katherine—later in the film. Together, in rejecting social expectations, Thomasin and the witch convey the power found within embodying the hag, turning their titters into cackles through a crucial inversion of mimesis theory.

ANTI-MIMESIS AND ITS USEFULNESS TO THE OTHER

As the witch becomes an obvious portrayal of the hag and the grotesque, Thomasin is realized as a case for anti-mimesis theory. Contemporary phenomenologist Susan Kozel explains the concept of mimesis through her critique of Luce Irigaray, the originator of this theory in a feminist context, in order to sharpen the use of mimesis. In her essay, “The Diabolical Strategy of Mimesis: Luce Irigaray’s Reading of Maurice Merleau-Ponty,” Kozel defines mimesis as:


a powerful tool available for women to subvert the social order as it is presently defined and preserved by patriarchal structures. As the phase that aims to bring about the conditions for the possibility of social and cultural change, mimesis involves women consciously stepping into the sexual stereotypes provided for them by men. It thus becomes a process of eroding the stereotypes from within. (116)



In spite of mimesis's potential as a powerful feminist tool, Kozel warns that it “runs the risk of silencing the other”—because oftentimes the other does not have the privilege needed to successfully embody these stereotypes—and thus explores its use in order to “[better situate it] at the root of social and political change” (114, 116). Through this further definition of the term, its application to *The Witch* becomes evident: instead of embodying the stereotypes of womanhood to exhibit change from within, the witch as a monster embodies the antithesis of accepted womanhood in order to make a political and empowering statement about rigid conceptions of femininity operating within the patriarchy. This creates an anti-mimesis that still allows for the Puritan woman to erode stereotypes but to do so through resistance rather than adopting these stereotypes herself.

Before Thomasin embodies anti-mimesis theory, she actually represents an embodiment of mimesis in its traditional definition. In fact, Thomasin prays to God at the beginning of the film, confessing, “I know I deserve more shame and misery in this life and everlasting hellfire. But I beg Thee, for the sake of Thy son, forgive me, show me mercy, show me Thy light” (00:04:55-00:05:58). Thomasin also tends to the animals on the homestead, watches over the younger children, and, finally, obeys her mother's commands and takes her “father's rags to the brook and [washes] them” as well as “[brushes] out his woolens” (00:20:30-00:20:57). The expectations Thomasin's mother levies onto her correspond to the Puritans' ideal roles for a wife, which included “ordering things within doors, by which was meant the day-to-day maintenance of the family and the supervision of young children, older daughters, and female servants” (Karlsen 169). As Thomasin's initial conformity to society's expectations—which are echoed by her mother—are revealed, Thomasin's use of traditional mimesis is shown as a survival tactic rather than a tool for dismantling patriarchy (Karlsen 169). Therefore, Thomasin is presented with two choices: continue down the path of Puritanical idealism and use mimesis to merely survive or give in to her rebellious nature and utilize the concepts of anti-mimesis to obtain the power, status, and opportunity of a witch. She selects the latter.

Thomasin's decision to utilize anti-mimesis, sign the Devil's book, and become a witch herself is one that maintains narrative coherency within *The Witch's* feminist theoretical framework. Thomasin's first expression of anti-mimesis theory, though, is less powerful than pledging herself to the Devil. As feminist critic Andrea Dworkin states in her book, *Woman Hating*, “Women are no less terrified [of the wicked witch], for we know that not to be passive, innocent, and helpless is to be actively evil” (35). Thomasin, however, being a sympathetic protagonist, forces the audience to confront a female character that is not passive, innocent, or helpless, and still relate to her rather than vilify her. For example, Thomasin overhears her




mother telling William, “Our daughter hath begat the sign of her womanhood . . . She’s old enough. She must leave to serve another family” (00:32:20-00:34:27). The parents’ disregard for Thomasin, readily sending her away, creates compassion for Thomasin. Similarly, unhappy with the notion that she may leave, Caleb, her brother, concocts a plan to find food for the family and keep Thomasin from leaving. Instead of allowing Caleb to go alone, Thomasin forces him to let her join his journey into the woods. Her adventurous spirit is therefore in contrast to the expectations Dworkin identifies, which are thus reinforced by her parents and Puritanical society. This subversion, without adopting expected sexual stereotypes, reveals the ways in which anti-mimesis may work on a smaller scale.

In addition to defying societal standards, Thomasin also defies her parents on numerous occasions, most notably with her father. After the witch murders Caleb, William tells Thomasin, “A council will be called . . . Caleb disappeared with thee!” (01:01:31-01:01:52). Here, William accuses Thomasin of being a witch, implying her practice of maleficarum on her brother due to the fact that they went into the woods together and he returned witched. Thomasin gives a passionate reply, saying,

Why have you turned against me? . . . You ask me to speak truth? You and Mother are planned to rid the farm of me. Aye. I heard you speak of it. Is that truth? . . . You are a hypocrite! . . . You took Caleb to the wood and let me take the blame of that too. Is that truth? You let Mother be as thy master! You cannot bring the crops to yield! You cannot hunt! . . . Thou canst do nothing save cut wood! And you will not hear me! (01:02:15-01:03:29)

This plea for William to listen to her simultaneously reveals her independence and willingness to question norms. She accuses her father of acting outside of the expectations of men just as she is aware she does not conform to the expectations of women. Anti-mimesis manifests itself in this exchange, then, through Thomasin’s further refusal to be passive; Thomasin also embodies anti-mimesis in her ultimate acceptance of her perceived status as a monstrous woman.

When Thomasin is presented with the opportunity to sign the Devil’s book, the allure and power within witchcraft is revealed. At this point in the film, the witch has killed Thomasin’s entire family, whether through direct maleficarum or the tangential hysteria the witch has caused: only Thomasin remains. The Devil—who takes the shape of Black Phillip, the family’s black billy goat, throughout the movie—approaches Thomasin in human-like form and asks a simple question: “Wouldst thou like the taste of butter? A pretty dress? Wouldst thou like to live deliciously?” She answers, “Yes.” The Devil continues, “Wouldst thou like to see the world? . . . Dost thou see a book before thee? Remove thy shift.” Thomasin, nude




like the original witch of the wood, stands before the Devil's book. "I cannot write my name," she says. "I will guide thy hand," the Devil assures (01:23:10-01:25:19). This dramatization of signing the Devil's book is again in line with Puritanical notions of witchcraft. As Karlsen notes, "All of the powers a witch possessed, including maleficarum, were said to have derived from the covenant she had signed with the Devil. Satan gave her these powers, as well as his promise to satisfy her worldly desires (a promise many people believed he never kept), in return for her allegiance" (9). That being said, there is no indication that the Devil does not keep this promise. Instead, when Thomasin follows him into the wood to a coven of witches dancing and chanting around a fire, Thomasin is filled with power. The final shot of the film depicts her ascending into the air, laughing while she basks in the wonder of her newfound life. It is the first time Thomasin expresses pure joy, reiterating that there is empowerment in inhabiting a monstrous border space (01:25:30-01:27:40).

CONCLUSION

Once Thomasin signs the Devil's book in *The Witch's* conclusion, a cyclical theme in the film is closed; the creature that pursues Thomasin's family is ultimately what she becomes. There is no presumed glamour in Thomasin's choice. Instead, the audience is led to believe that she will now become like the witch that tormented her. Dworkin says that "The roles available to women and men are clearly articulated in fairy tales. The characters of each are vividly described, and so are the modes of relationship possible between them. We see that powerful women are bad, and that good women are inert" (45). Thomasin, however, rejects the social codes that were forced upon her, choosing to live a life that is free of patriarchal influence, and breaks the narrative coherency that Dworkin highlights. She deserts society to live life as a grotesque hag that will revel in her power, her appearance, and her fearsome nature. Without a theoretical framework to guide a reading of *The Witch*, Thomasin's choice may seem confusing; she is, after all, a Christian girl who was accused of witchcraft, denied it, and is now seen embodying the life of the witch. But, through the exploration of her rebellious nature as well as her condemnation of Puritanical societal constructs in her passionate reply to her father, Thomasin's choice to defy patriarchal prescriptions of gender corresponds with the film's message. *The Witch*, then, acts as a defense of the women who were executed for their perceived crimes as witches. In the end, the life of a witch is one that protests the norm, forces society to see the other, and challenges us to accept their presence or risk the consequences of suppressing them.

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Predator vs. Prey: The Human Monstrosity in *Attack on Titan*


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The latest phenomenon in the anime world, *Attack on Titan*, takes a turn away from the cute, kawaii¹ essence that Japan is known for and plunges into a dark, fantasy-like war setting, in which human existence is challenged. The fascination with this anime certainly did not stop in Japan. Instead, it became a worldwide obsession: memorabilia is sold in stores across the East and West, a two-part live-action film was produced, and *Netflix*, one of the most popular streaming services on the market, added the anime to its queue. But what most fans might not realize is that *Attack on Titan*, while a uniquely contemporary entertainment series, also represents classic Gothic techniques. Rebecca Silverman, a renowned anime critic, says in a review for *Anime News Network*: “It’s actually an excellent mix of what 18th century [sic] Gothic novelist Ann Radcliffe defined as horror versus terror: the one is physical, making you want to look away, and the other is intellectual, making you want to know what’s going to happen next.” Although the series strays from the typical ghost stories and creepy castles of the classic eighteenth-century Gothic that Silverman references in this quote, it employs Gothic undertones as it delves into the very core of death and survival. Specifically, *Attack on Titan*² depicts the predatory Titan race in a manner that suggests humanity itself is monstrous. The Titans, with their eerie human-likeness, are the literal representation of this repressed fear.

Attack on Titan tells the story of a post-apocalyptic society, set hundreds of years in the past. Humanity is at war with humanoid monstrosities known as



Artwork by Emily Dykstra of Ball State University, *Fixation*.



Titans – giant creatures that share cosmetic similarities to humans but appear to lack a human level of intelligence. The Titans mysteriously appeared approximately 107 years previous to the time in which the story takes place (“To You, After 2,000 Years”). Humans are the Titans’ sole source of food, which results in the Titans annihilating a majority of the human race. The remaining portion of humanity manages to build a system of settlements within massive walls to protect themselves from the Titans. Within the walls, humans are able to enjoy 100 years of peace until suddenly everything goes awry, and the first wall is infiltrated by Titans. The anime follows the story of Eren Yeager³ and his friends, Armin Arlert and Mikasa Ackerman, who are just children when their home, the Shiganshina District on the edge of the outer wall, is destroyed by Titans and evacuated. Eren says, “humanity was reminded that day of the terror of being at their mercy and the humiliation of being trapped inside a cage” (“Wall: Raid on Stohess”). The first episode of the series sets the tone surrounding a desperate society depleted by fear before it skips five years into the future: the Titans are on the move again, Eren and his friends have completed military⁴ training, and the divide between Titan and human blurs when Eren unknowingly reveals his ability to transform into one of the monstrous creatures. The divide becomes more muddled when the audience discovers that Annie, a soldier in Eren’s graduating class, can also transform into a Titan, and she works to destroy the human race from the inside. By the end of the season, the divide between human and Titan seems to shatter, leaving characters and audience questioning what it means to be human and how different Titans are from themselves.


Although *Attack on Titan* is a series Silverman praises for its use of Gothic tropes, stating, “the violence is intense and the monsters are terrifying,” anime horror is unique from the Gothic form. Anime has created a sub-genre over time, which anime scholar Rayna Denison describes in a chapter of her book, titled *Anime: A Critical Introduction*, as “Body Horror,” involving grotesque

¹ Kawaii means “cute” in Japanese, but it is also used to refer to a segment of Japanese culture that celebrates “cuteness.” The Kawaii culture swept the nation with characters, such as Hello Kitty and Rilakkuma, led to the rise of maid cafes and cat cafes and became so well-known that Disney World’s Epcot featured an exhibit on it in Japan’s pavilion. You can see a virtual tour of Japan’s exhibit here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFuntOKQpXo>.

² Please note: this study focuses solely on the anime of *Attack on Titan* and only includes the story as told in *Funimation*’s adaptation. The manga series was not referenced for this paper. Citations attributed to the anime are based on the *Netflix* translation, and it is important to note that exact quotes may differ in other translations.


³ Depending on the translation, “Yeager” is also spelled “Jeager.”

⁴ The military is structured in three subcategories: the Military Police Brigade is the most coveted branch for its safe location positioned within the walls; the Survey Corps conducts missions outside the walls and comes into contact with Titans more often than the other branches, and the Garrison Regiment works between the two, keeping order within the walls and confronting Titans when required.



transformations and mutations of the human body. The Titans are representative of this theory and work to challenge the societal boundaries and expectations of the culture they are present in, which makes them a perfect contemporary representation of the Gothic theory of monsters. In the first chapter of his book titled *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, Jeffery Jerome Cohen develops seven theses on monster representations in the Gothic. Four of these theses can be applied directly to the Titans. Let us start with Cohen's first thesis: the "monster's body is a cultural body" (Cohen 4). *Attack on Titan* is a Japanese creation and must be evaluated for what the existence of Titans might say about the country's repressed communal fears. Cohen states "the monster is born . . . as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place" (4). *Attack on Titan* specifically elicits fear and a thirst for survival. Cohen's theory suggests that the fears and upsets present in *Attack on Titan* were created by and within Japan's post-war culture. Denison has her own idea that nearly matches Cohen's theory but addresses the genre of anime more specifically. She states that "anime horror, by extension, is . . . linked to traditions within Japanese culture as a means of explaining the overt sense of cultural difference" (155). Both theories seem to suggest that most anime is created based on a time, event, place, or communal difference associated with Japan.

Given *Attack on Titan's* war plot and the feeling of impending doom for the human race, many scholars have linked this particular anime to World War II, specifically the bombing of Hiroshima. But what most scholars have not explored is the idea that the humans can be either the victim or the opposition. Thus, the Titans can also be placed in both roles: the attacked and the attacker. Let us start by considering Titans as representative of the bombs, or the opposition itself, which means the struggling human race featured in the series may be synonymous to the victims in the city of Hiroshima. This particular reading makes the anime unique. We are accustomed to hearing history recounted from the victor, but *Attack on Titan* is told through the eyes of the defeated. In her article, titled "What Does 'Attack on Titan' Really Mean?," published at *The Artifice*, Sara Roncero-Mendez writes, "Titans, in this light, can be viewed as the enemy occupation, who are stronger and more well-equipped than humans, who consume their lives for no good reason – not for hunger (need of resources) but for the seemingly mindless consumption of a people hopelessly outmatched." Regarding the Titans as the enemy in a setting similar to the bombing of Hiroshima prompts the audience to evaluate their own monstrous tendencies in the act of war by looking through the eyes of the attacked, rather than the attacker. This is even more influential if we consider how popular the series has become in the United States.




However, if we allow Titans and humans to switch roles, naming Titans as the victims of Hiroshima post-bombing and humanity as the opposition, the dynamic shifts. G.E. Gallas, a writer and scholar of cross-cultural storytelling, writes in a blog post that the Titans' excessively high-temperature bodies, which give off steam as they heal themselves, might be a parallel to how the bombed victims' skin "melted off" from the radiation. The main issue with this theory, one that many tend to actively resist, is that considering Titans as victims calls for sympathy from the audience. But if we attempt to visualize the Titans as the Japanese nation, as Gallas suggests, we must consider the act that initially led to the bombing of Hiroshima; many think it was the United States revenge for Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. In this case, that means the hunted versus hunter dynamic in *Attack on Titan* is actually the exploration of what it means to be the bombed versus the bomber. The humans in the anime are the Titans' prey, but humans are also the Titans' predators, in the same way that Japan was both enemy of and victim to the U.S. In the anime, Jean⁵, a fellow soldier, says "If he [Eren] wipes out the Titans by turning into a monster like that, is that really a victory for humankind?" ("Wall: Raid on Stohess"). Jean effectively names revenge as a monstrous quality. The commander of the Garrison Regiment, General Dot Pyxis⁶, comments, "If humankind perishes, it won't be because Titans devoured us. We will perish because we annihilated one another" ("Icon: Battle of Trost").

While there is speculation surrounding both of these theories, Cohen makes it clear that "the monster signifies the gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the moment into which it is received, to be born again" (4). The Titans are created around sixty-five years post-bombing, which suggests that Japan is still attempting to recreate the sense of national identity that it lost in the aftermath. *Attack on Titan* narrates this with the lack of racial representation in the series. In fact, it is explained that most races were wiped out when the Titans first appeared, which accounts for the lack of African, Indian, or Asian characters, among others ("The World She Saw"). Most characters are European, and due to the wild success of the series, fans around the world have attempted to trace the ethnicity of different characters. Based on names and appearances, twelve of the fifteen main characters are thought to be German (Al-Ani) while Mikasa is known as the last character of Asian descent left in the world ("The World She Saw"). It is significant that Mikasa is the only surviving Asian in a world dominated by the white race, since Japan would have felt alone and secluded after the Hiroshima

⁵ Depending on the translation, "Jean" is also known as "John."


⁶ Depending on the translation, "Pyxis" is also "Pixis."



bombing. But it is also significant that most of the Caucasians in the show are thought to be German. Germany was one of Japan's allies in WWII. The bond between the two countries solidifies the relationship between Mikasa and Eren. As a child, Mikasa's parents were murdered before she was kidnapped and forced to be sex slave ("The World She Saw"). Eren rescues her, murders her capturers, and accepts her as a surrogate sister ("The World She Saw"). Since that day, the two share a bond that prompts them to fight for and protect one another. There are multiple times in the anime in which Mikasa or Eren fail to save each other. Their relationship is indicative of Japan's struggle to regain a cultural identity among failed allies post-bombing.

The Titans are not just monsters manifested from a cultural fear but also monsters that can be representative of fears worldwide, and the rest of Cohen's theses explore this theory, starting with his second: the "monster always escapes" (4). This theory can be applied to the Titans in two different ways; the first is their implied immortality. Titans are so formidable because they are nearly impossible to kill. Cohen states, "No monster tastes of death but once," and the Titans are no exception (5). They "completely ignore all other lifeforms" ("First Battle") and show no interest in livestock or wildlife, but since they were able to survive 100 years without feeding on humans, it is determined that they don't need to eat, drink, or even breathe to survive ("Special Operations Squad"). This is further supported when it is discovered "they don't have a digestive track, so once they've eaten their fill of humans, they vomit them out" ("Primal Desires"). The only known way to kill the monsters is to do severe damage to the napes of their necks ("First Battle"). The soldiers are trained to take slices out of the neck at a certain depth and size with special flesh-slicing blades, but coming so close to the Titans' mouths is almost never worth the risk and results in many soldiers' deaths. With no other weaknesses, the Titans tower over the humans with insurmountable power. As Cohen suggests, they always escape, and they always come out ahead (4).

The other, simpler way of viewing Cohen's second thesis lays in the Colossal, Armored, and Female Titans. All three of these Titans are unique and separate from normal Titans. They are all skinless, intelligent, and unbelievably strong. After Eren shows intelligence and unusual strength as a Titan, it's speculated that all three special Titans are also humans in a monstrous form ("Female Titan: 57th Expedition"). Cohen believes, "We see the damage that the monster wreaks, the material remains, but the monster itself turns immaterial and vanishes, to reappear someplace else" (4). This is important in the case of these three special Titans because each of them exhibits intelligence and war strategy equal to or greater than that of the human race. Each of these three Titans help the rest of the mindless




Titan race reach the human population. For example, normal Titans are not able to breach the walls erected around the human settlements, but the Colossal and Armored Titans destroy them and then disappear (“To You, After 2000 Years”).

Next is Cohen’s sixth thesis: “fear of the monster is really a kind of desire” (14). While monsters are dangerous and feared, they might also “evoke escapist fantasies” (Cohen 14-15). The humans in *Attack on Titan* harbor an unfathomable hatred for the Titans, especially the unknown Colossal and Armored Titans, but we must question whether this hatred is manifested by the pain they cause or the power and strength they hold compared to human vulnerability.

“We distrust and loathe the monster at the same time we envy its freedom,” Cohen explains (15). This rings true in Eren’s character, who exclaims that “anyone who’s seen the outside will have achieved the greatest freedom in the world” (“Primal Desires”). He either envies the Titans for making the outside their home or despises them for preventing him from doing the same. Their desire for the Titans’ strength might reflect humanity’s mindless desire to be able to control nearly everything that happens to them and others, as well as the monstrous techniques used to achieve this goal as a way to compensate for their physical weakness.

However, out of all seven theses, the fifth, that the “monster polices the borders of the possible,” is the most applicable to the situation narrated in *Attack on Titan* (Cohen 12). As mentioned above, the remaining portion of humanity has enclosed themselves within walls in order to survive. The system consists of three different walls; the outer wall is known as Wall Maria, which falls to the Titans at the beginning of the series. The second layer is Wall Rose, which is evacuated after a second Titan attack later in the series, and the innermost wall, the most coveted location, is known as Wall Sina and serves as a home for the rich and noble. Cohen theorizes that “the monster prevents mobility, delimiting the social spaces through which private bodies may move To step outside this official geography is to risk attack by some monstrous border patrol or to become monstrous oneself” (12). The Titans are a literal representation of keeping humanity within walls, limiting the geographical area that they can populate, and they continue to limit it each time the Titans attack because a wall must be evacuated. The citizens find themselves working to keep each other inside the walls, even after a century of peace. Thus, the boundary limits set by the Titans are enforced by the humans themselves. For example, when the Survey Corps returns from an unsuccessful mission, a bystander comments “that’s what they get for going outside the walls” (“The Defeated: 57th Expedition”). The walls start to become not just a necessity for survival but a sense of comfort and security.


The world outside the walls is a mystery to most of humanity, and it is



illegal for a citizen to leave the walled-in settlements or even possess knowledge of what lays outside them (“First Battle”). Armin’s grandpa has a secret book about the outside world that once belonged to Armin’s parents. Eren and Armin find themselves reading through the book frequently as children, planning their future adventures outside the wall (“First Battle”). Although it is never stated why Armin was raised by his grandpa, it is hinted that his parents were slaughtered by the government for owning the book. Armin and Eren have to hide their own desire to see the outside world for fear of being discovered, and Armin even compares living inside the walls to “living like cattle” (“To You, After 2000 Years”).

But one question still stands, and the idea of the outside world being “illegal” only sparks more curiosity: Where did the Titans come from? As of this writing, the anime is just beginning its second season, so many questions raised by fans are still open-ended, including the question of the Titans’ sudden and mysterious appearance. But, throughout the twenty-five episodes of the show, viewers might develop a complicated distrust for the government. The structure of the leading force is not explained, but it is clear that there is a class of nobility and a king that lives in the interior of Wall Sina. When Eren first meets General Pyxis, the commander tells him a story, beginning with, “Before the land was controlled by Titans, it [was] said that humankind fought endless ethnic and ideological wars,” and then goes on to suggest that someone of power proposed the idea of a natural predator of humans so that the human race might unite as a common force and cease fighting among one another (“Icon: Battle of Trost”). Eren seems to understand the story better than Armin and Mikasa and explains, “The Titans are not our only enemy” (“Icon: Battle of Trost”). This suggests that the Titans were created by someone of power for the purpose of controlling the humans and uniting them, instead of appearing naturally like the characters originally believed.

Given the near extinction of humanity, the Titans might have backfired against their creators, or the endangerment of the human race might have been the plan all along. Assuming the Armored Titan and the Colossal Titan are actually humans in the same way that Eren and Annie are, these Titans must be people of power that have the ability and the desire to control the Titans’ actions against humanity. Normal Titans are not able to breach the walls surrounding the human settlements and only capture Wall Maria and Wall Rose when the Armored and Colossal Titans use their intelligence and strength to target and destroy the mounted cannons as well as the entry gates on the walls. Every time these two special Titans help the other Titans attack, it seems to serve as a warning against transgression in human society; the first attack of the series serves as a warning against exploration outside the wall after humans got too comfortable with 100




years of peace. After the attack, Wall Maria was evacuated, placing hundreds of citizens inside Wall Rose with little provisions. Pyxis again suggests the government played a part in the attack, stating, “Calling it an ‘operation to reclaim [Wall Maria]’ sounds well and good, but in essence, it was the government’s way of cutting down the large numbers of unemployed people that it couldn’t support” (“Icon: Battle of Trost”). The audience is left with the dreaded expectation that this will not be the last time the government interferes in society. If we accept Cohen’s thesis that the monster polices boundaries, and if we believe that the government is behind the Titan attacks, then the government, by definition, is the real monster.

But this theory only raises more questions: how were the Titans created and, aside from their appearance, how human are they? This is not explained in the anime, but assuming that the Titans are representative of the fear of humanity’s monstrous tendencies, and given the newly discovered ability of humans to transform into Titans, it makes sense that all Titans may be former humans. The most eerie evidence of this is that Titans are all shapes, sizes, and ages, and they differ in appearance from one another, just as humans do. They even possess an impossibly light weight given their size (“Special Operations Squad”), and they have no reproductive organs, making it unclear how new Titans are produced (“First Battle”). If we believe that something cannot be created from nothing, we need to consider that all Titans might once have been humans, either devoured humans transformed or former humans that forgot their sense of humanity. Armin insists, “There’s one thing I’m convinced of. A person who can bring about change is a person who is willing to give up something precious. Someone who, when faced with having to overcome a monster, is willing to abandon even his own humanity. A person who cannot give up anything can change nothing” (“Erwin Smith: 57th Expedition”) But the main force that drives this theory is that the only known weakness of Titans is located in the same place in which Eren and Annie control their own Titan forms – the nape of the neck. In fact, the only two known humans who are able to transform, Eren and Annie, seem like the only two characters who choose to confront their fears instead of repressing them, which might explain why they are able to transform and maintain control of their Titan forms.

Hange Zoe⁷, a squad leader of the survey corps, sheds some light on the obvious similarities between Titans and humans and prompts the audience to read into them. She tells the story of a tribe of cannibalistic humans that came before the Titans and highlights the main difference between the two: the humans took the time to cook their prey and enjoy it, while the Titans devour mindlessly


⁷ Depending on the translation, “Hange” is also known as “Hanji.”



("Special Operations Squad"). It is interesting that Hange draws this connection because it suggests that the human consumption of humans is worse than the Titans', even though the Titans consume more in an extremely short amount of time. But the humans knew what they were doing, and they took extra care to make sure they enjoyed it. The Titans seem to have no other nature than bloodlust. Although they have shown the ability to learn new physical skills, they cannot make emotional connections and show no remorse at the many deaths they cause ("Erwin Smith: 57th Expedition"). Hange's story compromises the monstrosity of the Titan race and instead demonizes the tribe of cannibals. Nevertheless, the comparison between the two groups is inescapable, and the Titans might be a result of the mindset of the cannibalistic tribe taken to the extreme. Either way, Hange's story suggest that every individual may have a repressed Titan within them.

Hange is one of the most interesting characters because she continues to raise questions about humanity in terms of Titans. She even captures Titans and studies them, continually asking the audience to juxtapose the two races and consider who is really the monster: humans or Titans. The study of the Titans themselves is a monstrous act correlated with the sort of experimentation you would find in a classic eighteenth-century Gothic novel like *Frankenstein*, with the Titans pinned to the ground by massive nails driven through their bodies and ropes wrapped around their necks working to restrain them ("Special Operations Squad"). Hange conducts studies to find their weaknesses, determines that they can feel pain, and even attempts to communicate with them, constantly speaking to them, touching them, and telling stories like one would with a child ("Special Operations Squad"). But Hange does connect to her subjects on a deeper level. Although it is hard to determine whether the Titans also connect to her, Hange repeatedly treats her subjects like children by mourning their deaths when experiments go wrong and even naming them; the most recent ones are known as Sonny and Bean ("Special Operations Squad"). She tells Eren, "They have such cute smiles. I really did them wrong" ("Special Operations Squad"). If Hange can see them and accept them in ways she would also accept a human, what does this mean for the rest of humanity and humans' ability to become Titans?

When Eren reveals his ability to transform into a Titan, Hange is one of the first to accept him for who he is. Other humans fear that Eren is a traitor or spy for the Titan race, but Mikasa still trusts him and says of Eren's Titan form, "What I saw appeared like the manifest anger of humankind," suggesting that no matter the form, Eren has the good of humankind on his mind ("The Small Blade"). Eren holds a bloodlust for Titans that other soldiers around him cannot match. He first discovered his ability to transform through his will to live; wasting away



inside of a Titan's stomach, he realizes, "I refuse to die here. I have to see it...the outside world" ("Night of the Graduation Ceremony: Humanity Rises Again, Part 2"). He transgresses the borders of the expected, but, instead of succumbing to the punishment of monstrosity like others before him, he embraces humanity's natural, monstrous tendencies and uses them for good to ensure the survival of his race and to make his dreams come true.


As Silverman eloquently states, *Attack on Titan* is "both gorgeous and appalling in its visuals, juxtaposing idyllic pastoral landscapes with scenes of unimaginable cruelty and bloodshed." But the anime is anything but simply a means of entertainment. It uses Gothic elements to address the monstrous tendencies of humankind, forcing the audience to sympathize with literal monsters while simultaneously envisioning themselves as one. We must look below surface level and consider what makes a monster a monster; the appearance of a monster and the acts of a monster are separate. Eren may take on the form of a monster, but his actions while in that form are anything but monstrous. On the other hand, many humans who do not even have the ability to transform into a literal monster spit out monstrous words or act in monstrous ways. Eren realizes that the survival of the human race is impossible without the eradication of the Titans, but the Titans will never disappear without first accepting the monstrous as part of a constructed self.

The first step to the human society accepting a monster within is to accept Eren and his half-monster status. Ian, a squad leader in the Survey Corps, defends Eren, stating, "Tell me then, how the hell do we defeat the Titans?! What other way do we have to change the situation? What other way can we preserve what makes us human and still win against the Titans [sic] mind-boggling power?" ("Wound: Battle of Trost"). But another fellow soldier questions, "It's not that I wasn't ready to give my life...But, what is it that I'm dying for?" ("The Small Blade"). The Titans, as well as the inner monstrosities of the human race within *Attack on Titan*, cannot be defeated until every human is able to answer, "What is it that I'm dying for?"

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Zombies Say More Than “Uungh”: A Walker’s Social Commentary

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From 1975 on, there has been a significant spike in the production of zombie films. Annalee Newitz, an American author and journalist, used her in-depth research to create a graph illustrating the correlation of this trend with the rise in violence and social anxiety in our current society. In short, the graph makes the statement that, throughout the last 50 years, zombie cinema has both reflected and commented upon the cultural anxieties of the time. Most recently, the television series *The Walking*

Dead (TWD) has drawn attention to the current violent state of society and to how our society reacts to this new societal norm. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s article, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses)” delves into an exploration of what does, and does not, define a monster. While all seven of Cohen’s theses provide useful insights, this paper will focus on the two theses, “The Monster’s Body is a Cultural Body” and “The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference.” These theses explore the idea that monsters both embody “pure culture” (Cohen 4) as well as the idea that monsters “call horrid attention to the borders that cannot – *must not* – be crossed” (Cohen 13, emphasis original). The characters in *TWD*, particularly the prominent villains, each provide an accurate illustration of both theses explored by Cohen. This paper focuses specifically on how the directors and writers address to what degree evil can emerge from new social norms through their development of violent, malicious villains, how our society is reflected in these reactions, how these villains dwell on the border of human and monster, and what that means in regards to our current societal state.

ABSTRACT

The spike in zombie cinema in recent years is thought to be due to the fact that cultural and social anxieties are on the rise. This paper explores how zombie film and television comments on these anxieties and forces its audience to think about the world around them. It specifically focuses on *The Walking Dead* and how this famous television show utilizes villains and villainous behaviors to comment on our current, violent, and desensitized state of society.

A HISTORY OF THE LIVING DEAD

To best understand the commentary provided by zombie cinema, it is important to first understand under what context the “living dead” came to be. Zombie culture can be dated back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, deriving specifically from Haitian culture. At this point in history, Haiti was under French rule and was inhabited by African slaves working on sugar plantations. The idea of the zombie originated from the combination of slavery, Haitian culture, and the accompanying casualties:

The original brains-eating fiend was a slave not to the flesh of others but to his own. The zombie archetype, as it appeared in Haiti and mirrored the inhumanity that existed there from 1625 to around 1800, was a projection of the African slaves’ relentless misery and subjugation After the Haitian Revolution of 1804 and the end of French colonialism, the zombie became a part of Haiti’s folklore. The myth evolved slightly and was folded into the Voodoo religion, with Haitians believing zombies were corpses reanimated by shamans and voodoo priests. (Mariani)

While zombie culture began in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it became popular in America beginning in 1932 with Victor and Edward Halperin’s *White Zombie* and continued with iconic zombie films such as George Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* and *Dawn of the Dead*. Throughout the years, and with the slew of zombie cinema that has been written and produced, the spike in production of these films correlates with times of high social anxiety such as the Vietnam War or the events of September 11, 2001, among others (Dendle 50, 54).

These correlations are important to note because they point directly at Cohen’s first thesis, that a monster is born from a cultural moment (4). Zombie cinema not only aims to thrill and frighten but also to provide its audience with a horrific reimagining of the society in which they reside. Kyle Bishop, author of *American Zombie Gothic: The Rise and Fall (and Rise) of the Walking Dead in Popular Culture*, observes that “since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, zombie movies have become more popular than ever, with multiple remakes, parodies, and sequels. The renaissance of the subgenre reveals a connection between zombie cinema and post-9/11 cultural consciousness” (17). While the idea of the “living dead” has been around for centuries, so has the connection between zombie commentary on societal happenings and the anxieties that accompany them. These connections begin with the projection of misery in Haitian slaves and continue on to the acceptance of violence in our media and the desensitization to violence in everyday life that is reflected in today’s zombie cinema.

SOCIAL COMMENTARY & ZOMBIE CINEMA THROUGHOUT THE YEARS


While there is a vast inventory of zombie film and television to explore, two specific works are the best representation of zombie commentary in relation to this argument: *28 Days Later* (2002) and *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). These two films provide an abundance of social commentary and illustrations of societal fears during the timeframe each film was written and produced. To understand where *TWD* fits into this conversation, it is important to first understand what has already been contributed to zombie commentaries.

To begin, Romero's choice of an African American protagonist, Ben Huss, for *Night of the Living Dead* provides a crucial example of the use of zombies as social commentary in relation to race:

The originality of this movie . . . is correlated precisely with the *absence* of any explicit reference to Ben's race in the course of the film. The absence does not of course mean that *Night of the Living Dead* escapes in any sense the imaginative constraints of contemporary racism. Rather, the zombie-image opens onto racism's genocidal violence in its own terms. (McFarland 24, emphasis original)

This movie provides its audience with the original zombie trope, without explicitly referring to the films' monsters as "zombies." *Night of the Living Dead* has a stronger, subtler theme of the effects of violence and racism in the context of the Vietnam War, which took place during both the production and debut of this film. This theme further illustrates Cohen's first theory, in that the monster is a projection of its cultural surroundings (4). The societal anxieties during the timeframe of this film accurately depict the "monstrosity" that is racism in this war-time era. The most obvious aspect of racial commentary in the film is the ending, in which Ben, after surviving a hoard of zombies and watching the rest of his group perish, is killed by a group of all white men that closely resembles a lynch mob. This not-so-subtle ending hints at a racist society and forces the audience of the film to consider the inherent racism in the film as well as the world that they live in.

While *Night of the Living Dead* has a strong focus on the racism in and around the Vietnam War era, *28 Days Later* focuses on the effects of violence on a more current society. This film addresses the idea of a "zombie" in a unique fashion. They are represented as being infected with what is described as a "rage-virus" and are therefore not, for all intents and purposes, dead but are still defined as a "living dead" character. Thus, embodying Cohen's second thesis, the monster walks the line of what is possible (5). The "monsters" defined in this film walk the border between what it means to be alive and what it means to be dead, causing the audience to question what it means to truly be a monster and, in the case of this




film, how violence plays into that definition. The opening scene of *28 Days Later* is a collection of violent video clips from across the globe being played on an endless film loop, depicting the chaos and brutal state of society. The overarching theme of this film is the correlation between violence and its influence on the masses through the idea of the “rage-virus” that overcomes the globe. This film provides the most direct relationship between the use of rage-infected zombies in the film and their commentary on our violent society.

As in many zombie films, as well as *TWD*, the villain in *28 Days Later* is revealed, to be not the zombies, but the human beings who rise to power in the new world order set by the “zombie apocalypse.” In the case of *28 Days Later*, the villain is none other than the country’s own military, the very people employed to protect the country and the citizens residing in it. This “villain” plays into societal anxieties surrounding war and military presence itself. This film was released in 2003, only two years after the 9/11 terrorist attack in New York City, while tensions were running high over the war in Iraq, happening across seas. This is not the first, or the last, commentary on the correlation between war, violence, and society’s reaction to the chaos of its surroundings.

THE WALKING DEAD

Whereas *Night of the Living Dead* and *28 Days Later* each put forth important commentaries on the state of society as well as the people who make it up, *The Walking Dead* provides a current perspective on how the undead are used to force audiences to question society and their reactions to it. *TWD* has taken the American society’s pop culture by storm through its engaging characters and continuous commentary on violence, specifically through the increase in brutality with each subsequent villain introduced throughout the past seven seasons. While the two previous examples of zombie film and their corresponding social commentary had only a few hours to make a point, *TWD* has aired 99 episodes as of April 2, 2017, each of which work to touch on various societal happenings, and has had the opportunity to grow alongside our society and culture. The writers have reflected the growing unrest in our society through the villains introduced throughout the course of the series over the last seven years of production. Although both the academic and popular culture realms have conversed over the social commentaries put forth by the abundance of zombie cinema, *TWD* has not been added to the ongoing conversation in a significant and meaningful way.


It is important for *TWD* to be addressed as valuable cinematic work. The show provides an ongoing commentary on the state of violence and unrest in our society using a “zombie apocalypse.” The depiction of a zombie apocalypse



highlights the effect of this event on the characters throughout the series because it provides the American people with a chance to question why our society is violent and why we have become desensitized to violence. While many aspects of the show provide a commentary, the villains in the series contribute the most controversial commentary on violence throughout the series. In addition, *TWD* and its accompanying villainous characters provide a detailed and exemplary example of Cohen's two theses that have been previously discussed. *The Walking Dead* television series is based upon an ongoing series of graphic novels created by Robert Kirkman. In the introduction of the graphic novel series, Robert Kirkman, who is also a writer and producer of the show, makes the statement, "[g]ood zombie movies show us how messed up we are, they make us question our station in society and our society's station in the world. They show us gore and violence and all of that cool stuff too but there's always an undercurrent of social commentary and thoughtfulness" (*The Walking Dead, Vol. 1: Days Gone By*). This insight from the creator of *The Walking Dead* depicts the importance he puts on illustrating the problems in our society through this apocalyptic zombie television series.

Keeping the underlying commentary on our society's faults in mind, the three most important villains to touch on throughout this series are as follows: Shane, the Governor, and, finally, Negan. Each villain gains relentless, vile behaviors and an indifference towards cold-blooded murder. When this show began, the 2010 murder statistics were cited by the Federal Bureau of Investigation at 14,748 and have now risen to 15,696 ("Crime in the U.S."). This data further illustrates the corresponding increase of violence in our society alongside the increase in violent villains introduced throughout the series. Each character, with their own specific attributes and villainous tendencies, works to illustrate the frightening realities of our society and how its members react to societal change.


The first villain, Shane, did not begin as a villain at all but as protagonist Rick Grimes's deputy and best friend. He was an upstanding citizen and a law enforcement official, and was presented as a character with strong morals. He protected Rick's family when the world as they knew it fell apart and protected Carol, a member of their post-apocalyptic group, from her violent husband. While Shane begins the series as an arguably decent human being, he does not remain that way for long. In the third episode of the second season, "Save the Last One," Shane takes a very clear turn to the dark side when he shoots an innocent man in the leg to save himself ("Save the Last One"). This moment is a turning point in the series, as it is the first instance of a character being overcome by this new world order. In an interview with *The Hollywood Reporter*, Robert Kirkman defends Shane by saying, "He is one of the most nuanced characters on the show. It's really a



tragic story for him because he really is trying to do good every single time he does something that seems to be crazy and irrational. He is really just a scared individual trying to feel his way through this insane world” (Goldberg). Through Kirkman’s thoughts on Shane and the struggle Shane goes through, it is clear to see the show’s commentary on the effect a major societal change has on a human being. Kirkman’s words regarding Shane’s complexity and terror imply that his reactions are natural and that Shane is simply succumbing to the pressures of the new world order. In direct relation to Cohen’s theory regarding a monster representing a cultural moment (4), Shane’s reaction to this major societal change reflects the effect on our population due to dramatic changes, such as terrorist attacks like 9/11 or natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina. Upon discussing his thesis further, Cohen states, “[t]he monster is born only . . . as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment – of a time, a feeling, and a place Like a letter on the page, the monster signifies something other than itself” (4). These dramatic events in our society, much like what happens to Shane, cause people to think, feel, and act differently, thus creating a monster such as Shane, who transforms into a cold-blooded killer because of his new surroundings. He is a representation of the monster that comes from a significant cultural moment, one that elicits fear from those affected and one that has the potential to create cruel, destructive monsters in its wake.

We now move down the apocalyptic road to Woodbury, where the audience is introduced to Philip Blake, more commonly referred to as the Governor. At first, he seems like a normal human being, as he is the leader of a sort of “safe haven” in this apocalyptic new world and introduced as a fair leader, a widower, and a father. The audience soon comes to realize that Woodbury is anything but a safe haven. The audience’s hopes and dreams of the Governor being a kind-hearted new character come crashing down when he shows his true colors, i.e., keeping severed heads in fish tanks stowed away in his closet, hosting gladiator-esque battles with walkers pitted against human beings, and two main characters being held captive and tortured in the depths of this so-called “safe haven.”


The Governor works to represent Cohen’s thesis regarding monsters “dwelling at the gates of difference” (7). As the audience is initially introduced to the Governor as a “good” character and soon finds out that he is anything but “good,” the connection is then made with the fine line between human and monster. Cohen states that a villain “moves between Monster and Man, [and] the disturbing suggestion arises that this incoherent body, denaturalized and always in peril of disaggregation, may well be our own” (9). This idea that a human being has the potential to constantly walk the line of good and evil, monstrous versus human, is well represented through the Governor throughout his time on *TWD*.



For example, in the final episode of season three, “Welcome to the Tombs,” the Governor commits what is, arguably, his worst villainous act: the brutal massacre of his own people. This act of brutality illustrates the rising acts of violence in our society. Just three months before this episode aired, twenty-seven people were killed in Newtown, Connecticut, in the tragic mass murder of multiple children and teachers. This connection between the mass slaughter conducted by the Governor and the murderous rampages happening in our own society folds seamlessly into the research exploring the correlation between zombie cinema and moments in history that create chaotic, societal anxiety, as well as Cohen’s thesis that human beings will always have the capability to walk the line of monster versus man (9).

Finally, the most recent, and villainous, character is introduced to the world of *TWD* – Negan. This barbed-wire-covered, bat-toting sociopath enters the show in a manner described by *Slate Magazine* as “remarkably gory – the bloodiest deaths in the show’s history and perhaps television’s as well” (Adams). In his grand entrance, Negan dismantles the skulls of two beloved characters on the show with a baseball bat, and what is more disturbing is his lack of remorse or even second-thoughts for his incredibly violent actions. Upon bashing the skull of a major character, Glen Rhee, Negan states, “Buddy, are you still there? I just don’t know. It seems like you’re trying to speak but you just took a hell of a hit! I just popped your skull so hard your eyeball just popped out... and it is gross as shit!” (“The Day Will Come When You Won’t Be”). This brutal villain jests at the horrific death he produced, putting forth the implication that he feels no sympathy or remorse for his murderous actions. The overwhelming violence portrayed in this episode of *The Walking Dead* ties frighteningly well into the current state of society today – a society in which its inhabitants have become numb to violence in an incredibly appalling way.

Our society is suffering from a lack of compassion due to the mass amounts of violence we see each day, and the writers and directors, of *The Walking Dead* are working to show our society the ever-growing level of inhumanity towards violence, death, and cold-blooded murder through characters such as Negan. He works to provide a social commentary on the violence that is displayed non-stop in our real-world media, which has been found to desensitize our population. In a study done by Craig Anderson and Brad Bushman, they found that, “violent media make[s] people comfortably numb to the pain and suffering of others” (273). This research further illustrates the mirrored implications between *TWD* and our society today. In *TWD*, we are shown a society in which its inhabitants are challenged with a new world order that is extremely and necessarily violent at times. The audience witnesses the rise in violence among the living characters, but it is not until




Negan arrives that we get a strong taste of the desensitization that has occurred throughout the series thus far.

Much like *TWD*, our society has been changing drastically. While we have progressed in some ways, we have regressed in other, very important aspects such as the aforementioned desensitization to violence. We see our society mirrored in that of *TWD* through Negan. He is a distinct representation of the outcome of a drastic change in the societal norm – namely that of our increasingly violent society and our growing lack of empathy towards the violence. While audience members were shocked to witness the extreme violence occur in Negan’s grand entrance, they should be just as shocked when watching the evening news and hearing about the endless shootings and other acts of violence that are happening across our country at an alarming rate. The brutality portrayed by Negan is a direct, albeit extreme, outcome of how desensitized a person can become when exposed to a new world order.

CONCLUSION

The greater implications of the social commentary put forth by the creators, directors and writers of *The Walking Dead* insinuate that our society is heading down a violent, inhumane road. Through the growing brutality with each succeeding villain throughout the series, we are shown a new perspective on the society that we are residing in. Through both an over-dramatization as well as, at times, an extremely accurate depiction of the violence and desensitization in our society today, *The Walking Dead* forces its audiences to reconsider their perceptions of violence and our society’s treatment of human beings. The ongoing commentary regarding American society through the use of zombie cinema provides our population with a new viewpoint with which to view our current station in society.


While there are ample amounts of specific correlations between zombie films and moments of cultural anxiety, the overarching theme is that, through zombie cinema, audiences are able to grasp that zombies are not the true monsters: human beings are. As a whole, the zombie is only a representation of a drastic change in society, such as a terrorist attack, natural disaster, or tragic mass murder, and the true monsters rise from this overwhelming change, or new world order. As Jeffrey Cohen stated, “a monster’s body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy” (4); therefore, the “living dead” are a physical representation of our cultural fears and anxieties, and the characters living in these apocalyptic worlds are portrayals of every human being that walks the Earth. Cohen’s theses are accurately exemplified when villainous characters of *TWD* are closely analyzed. The writers of *TWD* further support the theses that monsters both represent cultural anxieties



as well as walk a fine line between man and monster through characters such as Shane, the Governor, and Negan. Using these characters and ideas, the directors and writers address to what degree evil can emerge from cultural anxieties and grand societal changes, how these villains, and consequently our society, react to these fears and transformations, and what this means for our society's future.

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“Who Killed the World?”: Monstrous Masculinity and *Mad Max*

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Spanning nearly forty years, the *Mad Max* film saga follows Max Rockatansky, a lone warrior struggling against the monstrous manifestations of masculinity that have ripped his family, and society as a whole, to shreds. A post-apocalyptic narrative, “*Mad Max* portrays a society disintegrating into two groups, hunters and hunted” (Morris 92). From rogue motorcycle gangs to violence-based legal systems, the *Mad Max* franchise depicts a world in which the most toxic aspects of masculinity have poisoned civilization, mutating into something far more dangerous: monstrous masculinity.

Examining these forces at work on screen has roots in contemporary studies on violence and masculinity, which focus “on the multiple and complex ways that different masculinities become linked with, constituted by, and expressed through violence” (Arellano 133). This field, called critical studies of men and masculinities, “was designed to consolidate and extend feminism’s critical focus onto the terrain of masculinities by theorizing masculinities as historical, context-dependent, shifting, and multi-faceted identities” (Ashe and Harland 749). Thus, feminist theory can be extended and complicated by interrogating the diverse embodiments of masculinity and the degree to which violence plays a role in these manifestations.

In particular, the idea of analyzing *Mad Max* in this light has gained

ABSTRACT

In a futuristic, dystopian Australia, Max Rockatansky is a lone warrior struggling against the forces that have ripped his family, and society as a whole, to shreds. From rogue motorcycle gangs to violence-based legal systems, the *Mad Max* films depict a world in which the most toxic aspects of masculinity have poisoned society, mutating into something far more dangerous – something monstrous. The series presents a version of monstrosity that has sunk its claws into the very masculinity it usually serves to validate; in light of these subversions, this analysis utilizes monster theory in conjunction with gender studies to examine toxic masculinity in the *Mad Max* franchise.




import since the 2015 release of the fourth installment, *Fury Road*. Since then, scholars have studied reactions to its feminist themes; Alexis de Coning's article, "Recouping Masculinity: Men's Rights Activists' Responses to *Mad Max: Fury Road*," is a prime example. According to de Coning, men's rights activists (MRAs) attempted "a full-scale boycott" of *Fury Road*, while simultaneously "defending it, downplaying and critiquing its feminist stance" (174-175). Aaron Clary of the MRA blog *Return of Kings* called it a movie that "Trojan Horse feminists and Hollywood leftists will use to insist on the trope women are equal to men in all things" (qtd. in Maza).

Melissa Bell and Nichole Bayliss offer a potential explanation of this phenomenon in their article from the *Sex Roles* journal: "when men, particularly White men, experience job insecurity, a perceived loss of control, and a rise of income inequality, they tend to celebrate a nostalgic version of manhood. White men then see themselves as victims of feminists or the advancement of minorities, not of circumstances of society" (567). This could explain why MRAs were primed to respond violently to *Fury Road's* feminist themes, especially as the film goes further than just empowering female characters with its men who embody differing forms of masculinity than the traditional dominant archetype.

While the *Mad Max* franchise displays complex messages about gender, it also pushes against the usual construction of the monster: Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, one of the leading scholars in the field of monstrosity, asserts that "[g]iven that the recorders of the history of the West have been mainly European and male, women (*She*) and nonwhites (*Them!*) have found themselves repeatedly transformed into monsters, whether to validate specific alignments of masculinity and whiteness, or simply to be pushed from its realm of thought" (15, emphasis original). Instead of framing female and minority characters as the monsters, though, *Mad Max* presents a version of monstrosity that has sunk its claws into the very masculinity it usually serves to validate. In light of these subversions, this analysis will utilize monster theory in conjunction with gender studies to examine the monstrous nature of toxic masculinity in the *Mad Max* franchise.

THE WORLD OF MAD MAX

In *Mad Max* (1979), the title character (played by Mel Gibson) is a police officer patrolling the roads where gangs run rampant in a society whose foundation progressively leans toward violence, a predominant trait of toxic masculinity. This first film supplies an introduction to the franchise's harsh landscape; Australia's barren desert, now called The Wasteland, provides an environment conducive to the development of the monstrous: this locale evokes the sublime in that "[a]ll general




privations are great, because they are all terrible; *Vacuity, Darkness, Solitude* and *Silence*” (Burke 65, emphasis original). Here, “privation” refers to “[t]he condition of being deprived of or lacking an attribute or quality formerly or properly possessed,” or “[t]he state in which food and other essentials for well-being are lacking; . . . an extreme hardship” (“privation”). Devoid of water, vegetation, and fuel, *The Wasteland* chokes the life out of anything that tries to grow there and suffocates the humanity out of its inhabitants.

At first, Max seems to be one of the few to retain his humanity: he protects people and maintains order in what is left of a crumbling society, and he has a loving wife, Jessie (Joanne Samuel), and son, Sprog (Brendan Heath). But, violence tears this family apart when Toecutter (Hugh Keays-Byrne) and his gang brutally murder them: as Jessie tries to escape with Sprog in her arms, the men run them over repeatedly with their motorcycles, leaving Sprog dead on arrival and Jessie in critical condition with no hope of recovery (01:14:00). Now, the once-heroic figure turns from enforcing the law to exacting revenge on everyone who had a hand in his family’s deaths. In a moment when vengeful violence blurs the line dividing Max’s usual characterization from the forces of toxic masculinity, this first film concludes when he handcuffs a gang member to a car set to explode and presents him with a saw and a brutal decision: “The chain in those handcuffs is high-tensile steel. It’d take you ten minutes to hack through it with this. Now, if you’re lucky, you could hack through your ankle in five minutes. Go” (01:29:40). His revenge complete, Max then sets out into *The Wasteland* alone.

The Road Warrior (1981) takes place five years afterwards and follows the broken, empty shell of a man that Max has become. As he wanders *The Wasteland*, Max encounters a small group of people living in a gasoline refinery. In this series, society has fallen in part due to an extreme fuel shortage that brings violence to anyone possessing this treasured resource; here, a gang of motorcyclists “mad with the smell of gasoline” (00:14:40) led by Humungus (Kjell Nilsson) terrorizes the survivors, seeking to drive them away from the refinery.

Usually, monsters lie within the liminal space between the familiar and the other on the outskirts of society, but here we find monsters that more closely match David Punter and Glennis Byron’s definition: that which “is explicitly identified as that society’s logical and inevitable product: society, rather than the individual, becomes a primary site of horror” (266). In *The Road Warrior*, a feral child (Emil Minty), although only around ten years old, displays joy at the sight of violence (01:20:40), and he even participates in it with his razor-sharp boomerang (00:30:55). This boy’s twisted nature demonstrates that society has devolved dramatically since the toddler Sprog’s death, warping the innocence out of childhood. Additionally, as




with Toecutter's gang, Humungus's crew demonstrates an increasing reliance on communities of violence.

Not wanting to play the hero, Max reluctantly agrees to help the group of survivors escape. While monstrous killers produced by their societies "are rarely made accountable" for their crimes (Punter and Byron 266), Max's initial quest for revenge and his subsequent resistance toward establishment inadvertently serve as a method of justice. While he consistently insists that he does not want to be a hero, his existence on the fringes of a society gone wrong and conflict with its violent inhabitants put him in that role, nonetheless, and he becomes integral to the survivors' success over Humungus's gang. But when they set off to join the Northern Tribe, instead of going with them, Max returns to the emptiness of The Wasteland alone.

Fifteen years later, Max finds himself *Beyond Thunderdome* (1985). Despite the time lapse, he is in nearly the same condition as before, isolated in the desert, until he discovers Bartertown. With jobs, food, laws, and leadership, this community could even be called civilized, if not for the Thunderdome (and the fact that its fuel comes from pig manure). A formidable woman named Aunty Entity (played by Tina Turner) rules the town above, and Master Blaster (two characters working as one: The Master, played by Angelo Rossitto; and The Blaster, Paul Larsson) runs the underworld. Now, the series complicates its focus on monstrous men. According to Punter and Byron, societies that produce monsters ask us to turn our "attention . . . as much to the institutions that created such monsters as to the killers themselves" (266); the violence-based communities we saw developing in the earlier films have become better defined, along with their connection to socially produced monstrosity.

Bartertown may seem idyllic amidst its dystopian surroundings; however, it is anything but. What allows the town to flourish is a monstrously inhuman underground manure farm, and aboveground, Aunty maintains order through violence and deadly fights in the Thunderdome. When Max faces Blaster in the ring, though, he breaks the only rule, "[t]wo men enter, one man leaves," by refusing to continue upon discovering that his formidable opponent's mask hides a mental disability (00:37:10). Aunty then enforces another brutal law: "Bust deal, face wheel" (00:37:50), referring to a wheel of (mis)fortune that decides penalties via fate, with outcomes like death, hard labor, life imprisonment, amputation, and Aunty's choice. After being banished, Max wanders yet again through the Wasteland until he encounters an oasis community of children, leads them in a coup that spells the end of Bartertown, and again returns to The Wasteland.

Unlike the other three, *Fury Road* does not follow the same timeline as the




rest of the saga or serve as a sequel to *Beyond Thunderdome*; instead, many interpret it as a reboot of the original. However, film analyst Ryan Matsunaga observes that instead of a series of sequels, it is better to look at these movies “as an anthology of stories centering around a particular character. Both the second and third films are implied to be stories told decades after they happened, long after Max has faded from memory into myth.” He explains that the latest film exemplifies this aspect of the series best as it is not a sequel, prequel, reboot, or remake: “It’s simply one more legend of the ‘Road Warrior,’ and his journey through the wasteland” (Matsunaga). As we follow this myth, it becomes apparent that the monstrous masculinity motif transcends the originals and continues through the entire series.

In this film, Tom Hardy replaces Gibson as Max, a damaged loner haunted by those he could not save, while Keays-Byrne returns as a new villain, the tyrant Immortan Joe. If one film in the series epitomizes monstrous masculinity, it would be *Fury Road*, in which Joe and his War Boys seem to have lost their humanity entirely. The first shot of Joe displays his rotting, boil-covered back, and the face that follows is even less human: with stark white skin and blackened eye sockets, he is only able to breathe with the assistance of a mask made of a real human jaw bone and horse teeth (00:06:55). *Fury Road’s* society literally produces monstrous men in the form of War Boys. These humanoid creatures have a genetic defect that results in shortened lifespans (called half-lives) due to a phenomenon similar to radioactive decay; one way to treat their condition is via blood transfusions from healthy humans, or “blood bags” (Matsunaga).

War Boys look less than human with their pallid complexions and emaciated features, and their behavior at times also seems more akin to that of animals than of men: the first time we see them in action is when Max attempts to break free, and they swarm en masse after him into a sewer, clawing at him, climbing over each other, attacking more like a homogenous herd than an army of individual warriors (00:04:35). This aspect of their appearance evokes the sublime in that their uniformity serves as a “kind of artificial infinity” (Burke 68), making it seem as though they are all part of one collective, limitless whole. According to Cohen, monsters often “refuse . . . easy categorization,” frequently taking the form of “disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration” (6), highlighting their liminal positions between individual and whole, living and dead, human and animal.

Even though most of the monstrous men in *Mad Max* still appear human, their physical form is not as important as the function they serve: a monster, at its very essence is “something that serves to demonstrate (Latin, *monstrare*: to demonstrate) and to warn (Latin, *monere*: to warn)” (Punter and Byron 264,



emphasis original). Cohen observes, “monstrous bod[ies] . . . [are] pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read” (4). If we read, then, the bodies of these monstrous men as texts that both demonstrate and warn, we can see the devastating effects of violence, unfettered masculinity, and out-of-control consumption.


Through these monstrous characters and their violent culture, *Fury Road* portrays a society that has finally fallen prey to masculinity’s savage hunger. As a War Boy named Nux (Nicholas Hoult) makes Max his “blood bag,” Imperator Furiosa (Charlize Theron) smuggles Joe’s five captive wives out of the city. While Joe and his men try to recapture the women from Furiosa, Nux and Max become stranded and join Furiosa on a quest for the mythic “green place.” After they defeat Joe and the women gain control of the Citadel, Max once again fades into the landscape, this time losing himself in a crowd instead of the desert’s emptiness.

Looking back on the series, it becomes clear that monstrosity transcends any one installment. Every film depicts different dominant monsters, each worse than the one before: in *Mad Max*, Toecutter; *The Road Warrior*, Humungus; *Beyond Thunderdome*, Auntie Entity and Master Blaster; and *Fury Road*, Immortan Joe and the War Boys. Although they are each defeated by the time the credits roll, a new, more monstrous embodiment of violent masculinity always manifests in the subsequent installment. According to Cohen, “the monster itself turns immaterial and vanishes, to reappear someplace else” (4). Although the monsters in *Mad Max* may take on different forms, they all point to an underlying motif of monstrosity that, though it may leave one host, will always find another.

MASCULINITY IN MAD MAX

One of the more subtle thematic through-lines in the *Mad Max* films is the varying forms that masculinity can take. Lisa Arellano, a scholar of women’s, gender, and sexuality studies, explores the concept of differing embodiments of masculinity: “the dynamic of multiple masculinities . . . [can] demonstrate how representations of dominant . . . masculinity serves as the ideal in the presence of subordinate (or complicit) forms of masculinity” (134). In the *Mad Max* films, this tension lies between the dominant monstrous masculinity and humane forms of manhood that are going extinct.


One of Max’s primary challenges is to resist succumbing to this dominant, destructive force. Meaghan Morris observes that Max’s struggle is “to *not*-become [sic] another crazy in a violently male, indivisibly anarchic world” (82, emphasis original). *Fury Road* in particular focuses on showing diverse ways of embodying masculinity. De Coning points out that Max’s “masculinity is rarely played up



in the film, and is hardly in crisis. He exhibits traditional masculinity insofar as he is strong and determined, but so too does Furiosa—arguably the film’s real protagonist. In an inversion of the typical male action hero, Max features as a sidekick to the female characters who drive the action” (175). In one scene, Max recognizes that Furiosa is a better shot than he is and hands over his gun, an act of female empowerment that toxic masculinity would not allow (01:09:30). Although Max participates in the film’s most violent scenes, he takes no pleasure in it, only doing what is necessary to get them through this situation alive; he even apologizes to Furiosa for the pain he has to inflict on her to save her life (01:48:14). Thus, *Fury Road* highlights Max’s recognition that masculinity’s violent domination is the problem, not the solution.

Although men as a collective run this society, many individual males also suffer at the hands of monstrous masculinity. In her article’s footnotes, de Coning states, “Nux is also an important character in the reconfiguring of masculinity in the film and deserves further study” (176); Nux undeniably serves as an integral part of understanding the complexity of monstrous masculinity in *Fury Road*. It is important to look at the hierarchy within this world because “the intersectionality of masculinities results in relationships of power and subordination between groups of men [W]hile men as a group benefit from the social organization of gender, particular groups of men are located in socially subordinated positions due to, for example, their ethnicity or social class” (Ashe and Harland 750). As one of Immortan Joe’s War Boys, Nux belongs to a lower class. He is young and has been brainwashed into dedication to a regime that has exterminated his individual identity and instilled in him a blind willingness to sacrifice his life for Joe. But, after Furiosa and the wives show him sympathy and care, his allegiance quickly shifts and he develops agency to make his own decisions. In his final, self-sacrificing moment, Nux proves himself when he gives his life for them willingly (01:46:00), an inversion of his previous blind desire to die in battle for Joe in order to gain eternal glory.

Earlier when Furiosa locates women from her former clan, they inherently distrust Nux and Max, revealing how toxic masculinity has permeated society so deeply that a trustworthy man is the rare exception, not the rule. While the clanswomen seem to automatically trust the women, upon seeing the men exit the war rig, they look startled and ask Furiosa, “The men—who are they?” She replies, “They’re reliable. They helped us get here.” Still unsure, they look at her skeptically, and she nods (01:21:00). This scene demonstrates how all men are automatically distrusted in a way that female strangers are not since monstrous masculinity has so deeply permeated society. Max and Nux represent the potential for masculinity to




detox into forms that not only resist monstrosity, but also help dismantle it.

These varied embodiments of masculinity have the potential to do productive work off-screen as well. Bell and Bayliss's article in *Sex Roles* analyzes the documentary *Tough Guise 2: Violence, Manhood and American Culture*, observing that this second installment provides less "examples of men who reveal vulnerability or challenge hyper-masculinity" than the first *Tough Guise*, and they emphasize that "we need to see more diversified images of masculinity and male vulnerability" (567). In *Mad Max*, male characters choose to "be a man" in ways other than violent monstrosity; through this contrast, we can recognize the problematic nature of the latter.

WOMEN IN MAD MAX

In addition to the ways that these films portray monstrous masculinity, they also show how it affects women through diverse female characters. The first two films show women in a limited and more traditional light. The first main female, Jessie, is the victim of a violent crime, setting up the prevalence of gendered violence in this series since nearly every installment includes instances of or references to rape. More women appear in *The Road Warrior* where they serve as voices of reason and formidable forces in combat. When Humungus demands that the survivors either abandon the refinery or face death, the women beseech everyone to walk away with their lives (00:35:40), but the men insist on fighting. Although a woman is on the high council and female warriors fight alongside men, they either attempt to erase gender by taking on a masculine demeanor, or they mostly occupy the same positions as in the prior film.

The real shift in the series' portrayal of female characters occurs in *Beyond Thunderdome*, with Aunty Entity in particular. Her name has the phonetic similarity to "anti-entity," inviting a closer reading of what this might say about Aunty and her role in the narrative. In the film, no one ever actually says her full name out loud; in fact, if we were to go solely based on the evidence on screen, her name would just be Aunty. The fact that she has this full name in the credits, though, implies a purposeful removal from one's immediate viewing of the film, which instead invites us to retrospectively look closer at Aunty's part in this story and what her name could possibly mean. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, an "entity" is a "[b]eing, existence, as opposed to non-existence; the existence, as distinguished from the qualities or relations, of anything" or "[t]hat which constitutes the being of a thing; essence, essential nature" ("entity, *n.*"). Because the prefix "anti" means "opposed to," this frames Aunty Entity as "against existence/essence." But what is she actually opposing, if not the violent




masculinity she so clearly adopts? One possible answer to this question is reading Aunty as an inversion of other female characters who instead choose to disrupt toxic masculinity; thus, Aunty Entity serves as an antithesis to productive femininity and healthy masculinity, while showing just how pervasive this form of monstrosity has become.

Through her adoption of monstrous masculinity as a source of power, Aunty falls in line with historic examples of monstrous leadership. According to Morris, Aunty “is styled here as ‘Cleopatra-esque,’ and thus is coded . . . as an Oriental woman of beauty, ferocity and power; ruling by public rituals of punishment (‘the Law’) and behind-the-scenes intrigue, Aunty uses a deft combination of forced labour and environmentally sustainable technology to build Bartertown on a Pharaonic scale” (94). Here, Morris’s analysis alludes to the way that a female character can display a complicit form of masculinity; by calling up the image of a monstrously malevolent pharaoh enforcing ritualistic punishment and slave labor, she frames Aunty as an authoritarian ruler with absolute power.

Aunty reinforces this dictatorial image throughout the film by subjecting Max to a violent “audition” (00:13:00), ordering the assassination of her rivals (00:13:40), being the sole voice for law and justice in Bartertown (00:25:40), only following laws she wrote herself (00:37:50), and insisting on a “no mercy” policy (01:22:05). Her revealing attire and hypersexualized portrayal also demonstrate how Aunty functions as an object of the male gaze in this society, one whom men can fantasize about dominating, while she dominates them in reality through her position of power in Bartertown. Though her sexy attire could be read as empowering, the context frames her body as a site of sexualization, objectification, and domination, upon which the ever-ravenous monster of masculinity feeds. Although she is clearly a strong female character, Aunty’s existence in a society so thoroughly permeated with monstrous masculinity has led her to indulge, perpetuate, and participate in that toxicity in order to survive and thrive in it.

Unlike the previous three films, *Fury Road* highlights strong female characters who do not need to display a masculine demeanor to be taken seriously. From the beginning, it is apparent that this male-dominated society thoroughly abuses and uses women: one of the first scenes to include females shows them hooked up to milking machines like cattle (00:12:50). In such a world where women are valued only for their reproductive and sexual potential, Furiosa stands out as an independent, resilient character who uses her position as a commander in Joe’s military to fight the power instead of to perpetuate it or to submit to it. Despite her shaven head, androgynous clothing, and mechanical know-how, Furiosa also exhibits many more traditionally “feminine” traits, like compassion for



the wives, sentimentality toward her long-lost “green place” home (01:21:00), and democratic decision-making: instead of dictating the group’s actions, Furiosa and the women make decisions as a community in which everyone gives their input (01:27:30).

Women pay the price for masculinity’s rampant hunger as Joe enslaves five beautiful females as his “Breeders.” The “Breeders” are a cadre of women Joe sets apart and locks up for his own sexual and reproductive gratification: Toast the Knowing (played by Zoë Kravitz), The Splendid Angharad (Rosie Huntington-Whiteley), Capable (Riley Keough), The Dag (Abbey Lee), and Cheedo the Fragile (Courtney Eaton). The first introduction we receive to these characters is when Max stumbles upon them as they bathe from a hose: all of them wear thin, revealing white clothing, and one is clearly pregnant (00:33:05).

Still wearing the metal facemask the War Boys had affixed to his skull, Max threatens them with a gun, demanding that they bring him water and sever the chain binding him to Nux. However, his first impression that they fulfill the classic “damsel in distress” motif is anything but the truth. When combat breaks out, these women—even the one who is the most far along in her pregnancy—fight hard alongside Furiosa to subdue Max (00:35:50), volunteer for dangerous responsibilities, and turn their objectification back on their captors. The women know that Joe views them as property, and they use this fact to their advantage: because Joe wants his “treasures” back in one piece, he and his war boys are reluctant to risk damaging them, which offers the women some measure of protection while they fight to escape.

As the film works to dismantle the image of the fragile female, a group of elderly women, who often get grouped with pregnant woman in stereotypes of feminine weakness, prove to be skilled with guns, and their fierce determination to survive is equaled only by Furiosa herself. Yet, even in a world poisoned by toxic masculinity, these groups of women still maintain respect for life: one of the women is known as Keeper of the Seeds (played by Melissa Jaffer) because she holds onto countless seeds that she saved from before the earth turned into The Wasteland, planting them every chance she gets in hopes that one will take root (01:23:00). When the wives find Nux aboard the rig, they make it clear that they don’t support unnecessary killing (00:45:40). This inherent respect for life stands in direct opposition with the monstrous masculine destruction that is so pervasive in The Wasteland.

CONCLUSION

Anti-violence educator Jackson Katz states that “senseless violence will continue until we challenge and change these cultural belief systems—that men must be hyper masculine and that aggression and violence are the only methods to handle bullying, marital issues, employment disputes, and other forms of conflict” (qtd. in Bell 567). This aligns directly with Cohen’s thesis that monsters always come back; however, with the return of the monster comes the reemergence of the hero, even if that hero comes in an unexpected form.


Arellano observes, “Within a representational world where dominant masculinity is synonymous with violence (and particularly violence toward women), this opens a space for . . . unusual heroism” (143). In analyzing *Mad Max*, we can see how this same concept applies to its protagonist. Although Max might at first seem to be an unlikely hero due to his isolationist nature and the fact that he repeatedly pushes against the dominant forces that define his society, it is actually because of these characteristics that he

is able to make a difference in *The Wasteland*. By portraying Max as the antithesis to monstrous masculinity, the *Mad Max* franchise identifies the havoc that such a toxic force can take on society.

In the final moments of *Fury Road*, Max demonstrates his defiance of the monstrous masculinity that created this dystopia. After Max and the women successfully kill Joe and take the Citadel, the people would have readily accepted Max as their savior and new leader—the next reincarnation of *The Wasteland*’s ever-present monstrous masculine force. However, this is neither the way to heal the society, nor is it what Max even wants. Instead of joining the celebration, Max disappears into the crowd, only looking back to acknowledge Furiosa as the Citadel’s rightful leader, the one person with the potential to bring this broken world back to life.

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Author Biographies


Emily Barsic is a senior majoring in English literature. This is Emily's first year in the *Digital Literature Review* where she serves as the Publicity Team leader. As Publicity Team leader, she leads her team in managing the *DLR*'s social media, organizing class visits to publicize the journal, and planning *DLR* events such as guest lectures, poetry readings, and the annual gala. Along with serving as the Publicity Team leader, she also serves as a LEAD Tutor at the Learning Center where she specializes in Writing, French, Success Strategies Tutoring, a Lead Co-Editor for Ball State University's Honors College creative journal, *The Odyssey*, and a Ministry Leader for Delta High School Campus Life. After graduating in December of 2017, she intends on advocating for the rights of the differently-abled in the non-profit sector and then becoming a policy-maker.

Natali Cavanagh is a junior creative writing major with minors in linguistics and professional writing. Along with being an editor for the *DLR* this year, she is a prose editor for *The Broken Plate* and a content editor for *The Odyssey*. After graduation she hopes to pursue a career in publishing, focusing on bringing more diversity to children's and Young Adult literature.

Emily Griffis graduated from Ball State University in May of 2016 with a degree in English literature and creative writing. She plans to attend graduate school to continue studying literature, but for now she works as a free-lance editor and as a bartender at an event center. In her free time, Emily watches way too much Netflix, has long conversations with her cats, and is working on building a business to sell her embroidery.

Cassandra (Cassie) Grosh is a junior triple majoring in English literature, classical culture, and classical Latin with a minor in women's and gender studies. This is Cassie's second year in the *DLR* but her first year as Lead Editor. As Lead Editor, she has helped the editorial team learn the skills necessary for creating an academic journal while also furthering her own skill in leadership, time management, and editing. Cassie intends to study abroad in Athens, Greece this fall; return to finish her degree at Ball State; and continue to graduate school, where she will further her studies with a focus in Children's and Young Adult literature.

Madeline Grosh is a sophomore photojournalism student with a double minor in peace studies & conflict resolution and entrepreneurial management. She is also aspiring within public relations, marketing and communications. Madeline's focus throughout this year has ranged from the history and happenings of Halloween traditions to dissecting the folk lore tale of Jack and the Beanstalk. Through the *DLR*, Madeline has improved her social media, event planning and communication skills significantly. By joining the *DLR*, Madeline was also stepping out of her comfort zone and striving for something more words than media. Through this experience, she learned an incredible amount and will take these skills with her to the professional world of photojournalism. After graduating from Ball State, Madeline aspires to become a freelance photographer and tell global humanitarian and wildlife crises stories through her photographs.



Kathryn Hampshire is a senior literature major with minors in professional writing & emerging media and leadership studies. Kathryn has been involved with the *DLR* for the past three years: she started as a member of the Editorial Team during her sophomore year and held the position of Lead Editor in her junior year; this year, Kathryn served as the journal's Teaching Assistant. In this role, Kathryn has taught classes, conducted training sessions, advised staff members, and offered support to the Lead Editor and professor. After graduating in May 2017, Kathryn intends to attend graduate school at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), focusing on literary criticism, film studies, and Irish literature.


Emma Hartman is a sophomore double majoring in English studies and Japanese and minoring in travel and tourism. This is Emma's first year on the *DLR*'s Editorial Team, and she has particularly enjoyed studying the nuances of monster theory and seeing it explored through diverse, fascinating student pieces. After graduating she hopes to participate in Japan's JET program and then pursue a career at an American-based Japanese company.

Arlette Hernandez is a junior at Washington and Lee University, majoring in English literature with two minors in creative writing and Africana studies. For the past year, Arlette has been working as a Mellon Digital Humanities fellow, using archival materials to construct a project about the misperceptions of the African continent and its people. Next year she will be working on an honors thesis, which will examine acts of resistance within the gothic novels by Caribbean authors. Upon graduation, Arlette hopes to attend graduate school to further her studies in postcolonial literature.

Sarah James is a junior telecommunications and creative writing double major. This is Sarah's first year involved with the *DLR* where she serves as a member of the design team. She is also an active member of Byte, a student media organization at Ball State University where she serves as Executive Podcast Producer along with being involved in the organization as a whole. After graduating in May of 2018, Sarah hopes to participate in Disney College Program or pursue a career in the film industry.

Alexis Lawhorn is a sophomore majoring in English literature. Alexis' focus has been expanding her literature knowledge and practice in preparation for early graduation, as well as graduate school. This has been Alexis' first year on the *DLR*, so she has been working on improving her editorial skills, as a member of the editorial team, and learning about monster theory in literature. After graduating she intends to pursue an Associate's Degree in Veterinary Technology and to begin a career in writing and publishing.

Aidan McBride is a junior creative writing and Spanish double major. This is Aidan's first year in the *DLR*, where he acted as a member of the editorial team. He has particularly enjoyed seeing the variety of mediums to which monster theory can be applied, and the various ways it can be used to look at countless cultures. After his year with the *DLR*, he intends to graduate from Ball State and move on to graduate school. Beyond that, he hopes to continue his writing professionally.



Noah Patterson is a junior rhetoric and composition major with minors in communication studies and literature. This is Noah's first year with the *DLR*, acting as a member of the editorial team. As an editor, Noah has particularly enjoyed the experience of reading diverse bodies of work from students all over the world, especially learning from their scholarship and seeing the nuances of monster theory at work text-to-text. Going into his senior year, Noah is excited to finish his degree, continue working as a tutor in the Writing Center and Ball State, and prepare for graduate school to continue researching rhetoric and composition studies.

KJ Ross-Wilcox is a senior at Ball State University, who will be graduating with a degree in creative writing and double minors in film/screenwriting and theatre. This is his first year in the *DLR*, where he has been a part of the design teams creative process, while helping publicity with printing flyers and postcards for the journal and events. As a man who likes to wear many hats, after graduation KJ plans on going to professional wrestling school in pursuit of his life-long childhood dream, all while pursuing a career in motivational speaking, life coaching, slam poetry and screenwriting.

Shannon Walter is a senior rhetoric and composition major with a minor in literature. She has been involved with the *DLR* for the last two years, and has been the Design Team leader for the last three semesters. She has enjoyed expanding upon her design skills throughout the last two years as well as being apart of the publication of undergraduate scholarship. After graduting in May 2017, Shannon plans to pursue a job in non-profit marketing with which to utilize her writing and graphic design skills while including her passion for the non-profit sector.

Maggie M. Weeks-Foy is a sophomore majoring in creative writing and minoring in women's and gender studies. Maggie's focus this year has been on the relationship between gender and monster. While in the *DLR*, she has been working to improve her editing skills as well as broadening her knowledge of monsters. She intends to graduate from Ball State University.

Madison Wilde is a junior at Florida State University majoring in Public Relations and Editing, Writing and Media with a minor in Psychology. Madison is passionate about movies and their relationship with culture and society, which inspired her *DLR* entry. After graduation, she hopes to work as a film publicist.

Artist Biographies

Megan Hall is a Visual Communications major with a Women's Gender Studies and Art History minor at Ball State University. Megan draws her art inspiration from the Surrealist art movement, a slightly out of control horror and science-fiction obsession, and imagery from dreams and the subconscious. She is interested in opening up new worlds for the viewers and making them think about things differently. This is done by experimenting with emotional responses of the viewers to dark or surreal imagery. After Megan graduates from Ball State, she plans on moving to a large city and working for a design company focused on either branding or illustration.

Emily Dykstra is a senior art student with a concentration in drawing and minor in art history. She was an education intern for the David Owsley Museum of Art in the summer of 2015 and currently works as a visitor assistant, docent, and collections management intern for the museum. After graduation, she intends to work at a museum and attend graduate school within a year or two for art history and fine arts.



Artwork by Megan Hall of Ball State University, *Exploring an Unknown Universe*.