

Versatility in
monstrosity



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

VERSATILITY IN MONSTROSITY

INTRODUCTION

Since ancient times, monsters have always aroused significant interest among humans. But what is more interesting is the evolution of these monsters from something unnatural, inhumane, cruel to more of a deep psychological definition to perform the function of incorporating various social fears and problems. Today, monsters have become a subject to common parlance, where energy drinks, music bands and even companies are called 'monsters', people drive 'monster' trucks, or even employment search can be done on a website like 'monster.com'. Such process of civilization of these supernatural species furnished them with their own unique qualities and motivations which have been previously exclusively attributed to humans. In the novel "Frankenstein" written by Mary Shelley, Monstrosity plays a very important theme. It demonstrates the monstrous and disastrous consequences of delinquency, obsession and man's desire to tame nature. Victor Frankenstein desires to bestow animation upon lifeless matter by surpassing the barriers of scientific knowledge would a great example for that. Shelley encompasses the theme of monstrosity controversially, instead of agreeing with the concept that a monster is someone whose appearance is hideous, she demonstrates that the actual human, Victor Frankenstein, turns out to be more monstrous than his own creation, simply by the actions and choices he perceives. Therefore it is obviously not the external appearance but rather the actions and thoughts that explains how monstrosity associates with a being. The latent idea of monsters is also composed of various fragments that lead to the formation of

different identities—personal, national, cultural, economic, sexual, psychological, universal etc which do not fit into the norms and are used to justify treating others differently.

TOPIC SENTENCE #1: Fear of the Monster Is Really a Kind of Desire (Cohen 6)

The monster is continuously linked to forbidden practices, making us loathe the monster at the same time envy its freedom, and perhaps lead us to temptations. The novel “ The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” written by Robert Louis Stevenson focuses on the topic of duality of human beings and our dark primal sometimes even evil nature that underscores the society. Unlike the romantic novels which concentrate on natural beauty, Gothic novels focus on death and irrationality. There are also comments on Victorian morality in the novel which are contradicted by things like crime, poverty, sex, class conduct which resemble our desires and problems. The theme of the ‘ good and evil’ is a major driving concept where the good represents the civil public life while the evil stands for our desires and passions. Dr. Jekyll splits himself into two beings to be able to retain the good reputation of his self while indulging in his dark passions through Mr. Hyde. Self control is another theme in the novel which is presented by Mr. Utterson and Mr. Enfield by composing themselves as gentleman while Dr. Jekyll uses science so he doesn’t have to retain himself.

This is a paradox highly experienced in our society nowadays. Following Cohen’s second thesis, The Monster Always Escapes and understanding the philosophical point of view that when the sun goes down, the moon comes up shows that our dark selves will always resurface. Monsters are

transcultural and trans-temporal whose interpretation is “ bound to a double act of construction and reconstitution” (Cohen, 2). This shows there is no way of stopping it and when it re-emerges, it warns us about important social and cultural phenomenons which have to be addressed. The monster itself is discomposed because it crosses all the fragmented aspects of society in the form of cultural or personal established borders and henceforth undermines them. On the other hand, the monstrous body also inaugurates what “ norms” are by demonstrating what is abnormal.

Similarly, by referring to the monster, people allow themselves the secure expression of different fantasies as well acts of oppression and domination. The story before us may scare us but as long as we are aware of its nearing end and our freedom from it, we feel safe. Thus, these short term excitement we get from monster or horror lures us to try it out ourselves. Monsters also allow us to play roles we would not normally claim as our identity, for example small children dressing up in costumes on Halloween is just a base comparison. Each culture will create their own version of a monster. These cultural anxieties which give monster uncanny independence since we make them the bearers of our fears and taboos.

TOPIC SENTENCE #2: “ The monsters in Gothic novels arrange social fears, simultaneously supporting social limits by portraying them through their transgression.” (Howell, 1969).

The English Gothic novels encompass human fears and anxieties and these are usually resulted from repressed emotions. Self-isolation is a very important theme in both novels as it turns into a menacing practice for

Frankenstein, Walton, the creature and Dr Jekyll. It shows how loneliness drives them to do vivid things and can be considered as a monstrous attribute. Frankenstein's attitude on how to live and deal with the consequences of his actions is also completely grotesque. He decides not to tell Elizabeth about his horrific creation until they are married as she will be bound to him once and forever then. It is a horrid act to afflict his mistakes and subsequently lifestyle on a female. However in the 18th century this would be seen to be a typical scenario whereas the modern society will see this as utterly immoral and somewhat outrageous. So, we see that not only the conventional definition of a monster changes, but also the attributes that associate with monstrosity evolve through years. The way Frankenstein acted neglectful, selfish and put other people's life in danger for sake of his own good or the way the creation was abandoned, unloved, abused portray the different types of monstrous qualities presented in the novel which dominantly prevail in our society. So, even though the creation was the closest to a monster as compared to Victor, Dr. Jekyll or even Mr. Hyde, he possessed more human-like qualities than any other character, all he aspired for was companionship and compassion. Victor's cowardice also makes him feel very guilty and unhappy representing more qualities of monstrosity. His refusal to be accountable for his misdoings brings misery to him and misfortune to his lived ones. Shelley also illustrates the concept of monstrosity by blaming the society for its stereotypical point of view which causes the maltreatment and victimization of human beings. This is portrayed through Victor's creation being the very symbol of the danger of scientific progress, that is the Industrial Revolution.

CONCLUSION

It can be observed that Gothic novels and the whole idea of monstrosity represents various human anxieties and concepts like industrial revolution, rationalism and urbanization and how we deal with them. It also demonstrates how consequences for the rest of society can be done by a moral conflict of just a single person. So it follows that once someone picks immorality over morality, there is no redemption. We also observe that the stress on religious ideologies has significantly decreased and was replaced with ideas like Darwin's theory of evolution which derives humanity as a link to "cruelty, wickedness and applicable to animals." (Waterhouse, 1996)

The theme of monstrosity is now a perfect metaphor to describe human fears. Frankenstein demonstrates the fear of consequences of science due to violation of socially accepted norms which results in loss of power and control. It shows how the regression of only one individual might endanger the whole society. It encompasses "civilizing" as intelligent but immoral acts of humans and the revenge on the outsiders. The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde represents the fears of the dual nature of human beings and them corrupting the society from within. It raises the concern about insecurities about the potential for immoral behaviour as well as this cruelty getting out of control and threatening the society.

In both the novels, the composition of the narration reflects the monstrosity it carries. This means that the texts are fragmented in such that the story is narrated from multiple point of views which results in confusion of what to believe and eventually would lead to misjudgement of the plot. There is a

serious confrontation of new scientific ideas and practices with ancient religious theories. Through this aspects, we can finally conclude how monsters can be classified into various forms such as Human Monsters which consist of wicked attributes or diabolic practices or Technological Monsters which were created due to the misapplication of scientific knowledge. The conclusion is supported by yet another Cohen's Thesis, The Monster Is the Harbinger of Category Crisis encourages further debate about the wide variety of contrasts of the meanings of the monsters and their relations with one another.

REFERENCES

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