

The Semantics of Imaginary Monsters in Romanticism

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Introduction:

Monsters are everywhere, and always have been. These terrible and wonderful beings, since the dawn of human consciousness, have lurked at the edges and stood front and center in all our far-flung cultures. Their ubiquity and longevity are based on their power and adaptability as symbols and metaphors for a great number of things, all centered upon anxiety. Whenever we are bothered, nervous, confused, frightened, uncertain, threatened, alienated, oppressed, repressed, confined, irrational, guilty, ill, flawed, sad, or angry monsters can appear.

They are part and parcel of our condition, our imagination, our spirituality, our arts, and they won't go away - ever. We need them too much, and hence we are ever finding them, creating them, carrying them with us, and surrounding ourselves with them. They are legion.

Monsters come in two varieties: imaginary and real. The imaginary ones are much more common, and are visionary creations

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based on perversions of nature. The hybrid-the most familiar type of monster-confuses nature's categories through the mixing and matching of body parts.

The chimera (head of a lion, body of a goat, tail of a serpent), the mermaid (head and arms of a woman, body and tail of a fish), and Frankenstein's monster (a construction of organs from various humans) are all well known hybrids-.Monsters are also creatures that display extreme physiognomic exaggeration or deformity, like the one-eyed Cyclops and the flesh-dripping zombie, or beings that have unnaturally multiplied body parts, like the many-armed Shiva and the many-headed Hydra.

This paper will manipulated the theme that these monsters express more than their apparent shape can signify. They reveal the disruption of the self- motivated by various social and cultural conditions. Hybrids, Internal Demons and external Demons will be the most monsters concentrated an in this paper.

The Argument:

Over the centuries, across the globe, images of monsters have flown forth from amazing dreams and tortured wombs to populate all corners of what we have labeled The Humanities: religion, art, literature, and philosophy. Monsters are prevalent themes in mythology, folklore, fairy tales, vernacular culture, satire, psychology, cartography, alchemy, astrology, heraldry, architectural

ornament, decorative design, political cartoons, the cinema, the carnival, the circus, the freak-show, courts of royalty, and the grandparent of the modern museum, the cabinet of curiosities. Many of the foundational texts of Western liberal arts education - The Hebrew Bible, Gilgamesh, The Odyssey, the Metamorphoses (Ovid and Kafka), Beowulf, The Inferno - are chock-full of monsters. Think also of Caliban, Gargantua, Lilliputians.⁽¹⁾

The most ancient monsters, in the histories of religion, mythology, and visual representation, are the hybrids creatures, part animal (or vegetable), part human, express the fundamental anxiety of human separation from the natural order by virtue of self-consciousness. The shaman, with the mask of a beast, was the monster incarnate, and sought to address the breach between animal instinct and human knowledge, and to heal the profound alienation caused by the capacities to judge, to reflect, and to act according to will. Monsters thus, from the first, reflected, inhabited, and transgressed boundaries. This liminal quality is the root of the monster's "It goes where we cannot:

*were we dare not, and thereby can express
our fears about all the gray areas that result
from seeing the world as paired sets of
dualities: life/ death, good, evil, human/
divine, saved/ damned, self/ other.*⁽²⁾

Since myth and religion seek to both frame and erase these dualities, monsters dwell happily in their troubling fusion. In myth and religion monsters play the roles of creators - destroyer, guides, healers and defenders. They are also messengers delivering warnings.

Devil is usually described in art and literature as a hideous hybrid monster. Where as monsters like angels and demons are figured as heavenly messengers and protectors, and enforcers of morality.⁽³⁾

As for the Internal and External Demons, the gothic fiction contains two main aspects. The first is allegory, and the second is the use of symbol.⁽⁴⁾ We are always terrified by death and damnation. The realm has traditionally been the province of monsters, and the skeletal creatures of savage seem poised at the gates of hell.

The Romantics had deeply felt the contradictions of the world which they used to encounter in almost everything found their way uninterrupted to their minds and destabilized them.

Thus their monsters were both bizarre and composite. However, the compound representations of such monsters differ from their ancestral prototypes in that they do not symbolize anything. They do not stand for anything but they do rather speak up the poet's innermost feelings. This is not the same as saying that all

Romantic monsters in mythological prototypically for some of these monsters can be traced back to-at least-certain formal aspects in Greek or other mythologies too, also, it should be stressed that some of these monsters have religious background specially the Demogorgon and Blake's Behemoth and Leviathan, and some are natural; but it is the functional aspect that claims more significance in the final analysis since this aspect brings to the surface the psychology of the poet as well as the motivations behind his creation or borrowing of such monsters.

It is Romantic imagination, irrationality, and the supremacy of passion and emotion over reason that drove the poet to the borderline region of nightmare and fearful dreams. And it is in nightmare that we expect all the monsters: archetypal, natural, mythological, and fabulous who either come in part, in whole, or composite. It is the Romantic nightmare.

In what follows we provide an account on the most recurrent and representational monsters in Romantic poetry and trace them back to their origins in either religion, Mythologies or to an apocalyptic vision which gave rise to fearful nightmares and psychological disturbances – in Keats's words "that old Darkness", which in Shelley's (*Prometheus Unbound*) had originated the primal catastrophe.

The first monster we encounter in Romantic poetry is a pure creation of the movement and this is the Doppelganger.

The Doppelganger is a monstrous alter – ego of the self. Shelley was said to have met his Doppelganger and he refers to him in his "Prometheus Unbound". He says:

Ere Babylon was dust.

The Magus Zoroaster, my dead child.

Met his own image walking in the garden.

The apparition, sole of men, he saw.

For know there are two worlds of life and death.

One which thou beholdest, but the other.

Is underneath the grave, where do inhabit.

The shadows of all forms that think and live.

Till death unite them and they part no more.⁽⁵⁾

However, the Doppelganger is not monstrous in shape because it takes the representation of a man, it is monstrous in content. He is the evil counter part-an alter-ego that accompanies every man. This Doppelganger in Romantic poetry can be traced back to the mystical alterego in Islamic traditions as well as to the platonic traditions on the spiritual origins of the material world. Shelley, Blake equally share in these traditions though from different sources and through different terminologies such as male

vs female spirit in Blake, solar vs lunar in Yeats and the King vs the Queen in later Romantic traditions. According to this theme, the Doppelganger can appear anytime at night. It is very much like the vampire in decadence Romanticism or rather like the bogie or a fiend hidden within the man and its sudden appearance is a warning of an approaching death.

With some distortion in comparison to their natural prototypes. Lion and Tigers occupy a symbolic place in Romanticism. the face of a lion or the sleeky movement of a tiger normally represent two macrocosmic facades of the world. Wordsworth compares the savage rebels responsible of the September massacre in Paris in 1792 to roaming tigers.

He says:

The place, all hushed and silent as it was.

Appeared unfit for the repose of night.

Defenseless as a wood where tigers roam.⁽⁶⁾

The tiger enter into Blake's world of experience to stress the universal dichotomy and contradiction that exist very where in the world. It incorporates in Blake's imagination certain religious motifs that go back to both the OT and the objective view of the natural forces at large. However, the mythological streak in Blake's tiger emerges in the final interrogation for Blake does not think that god

has created the tiger but rather a blacksmith who has formulated such fearful symmetry and left the formulation of the butterfly and lamb to another God. Nevertheless, the natural monster and the lamb are equally powerful in being capable-at their symbolic level-of invoking ontological question of the meaning of existence through stressing the contradictory dualism of the world. Such monsters are used as symbols and this is one example of the few instances where monsters are used as signs.⁽⁷⁾

Conclusion:

As the influence of religion and superstition on human culture and affairs diminished in recent centuries, monsters found new roles centered, less on the divine and more on the individual psyche. With the intellectual illumination of the Enlightenment came shadows. The more we understood the world around us, the less we seemed to understand our own selves. Monsters crept into the dark void left by the increasingly questionable notion of an eternal soul.

The Romantic writers and artists grasped this notion immediately, and monsters became a favorite metaphor to express new anxieties surrounding the self, and its conjoined twin, the other. Monsters also appeared as the obverse of the now common coin of Reason, and as catalysts for stimulating strong emotions in readers or viewers.

Notes and References

- 1- See Bayn, Nina, ed. The Norton Anthology of American Literature. 2nd ed. New York. Norton: 1988. p.p. 112-114.
- 2- Folsom, James K. mans Accidents and god's purposes. Cambridge: cup, 1963. p74.
- 3- See Clay, Jean. Romanticism. p.p. 39-2.
- 4- See Haggerty, George E. Gothic Fiction, Gothic From. Pennsylvania: Penn State up, 1988, p.84.
- 5- Purkis, Hohn. The World of the English. Romantic Poets. Cambridge: Cup 1982, p. 152.
- 6- Wagenknecht, David. Blake's Night. Harvard: HVP. 1973, p.p. 99-101.
- 7- See Bentley, G.E (ed.) William Blakes: the Critical Heritage. Oxford: OUP. 1975, p.p.161-191.

ملخص

معاني الوحوش الخيالية في الرومانسية

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تتواجد الوحوش في كل زمان ومكان. تلك المخلوقات الفظيعة الرهيبة طالما صاحبت مختلف الحضارات منذ فجر الوعي الإنساني. وان مدى قابليتها على البقاء والتأثير يعتمد على قوتها وإمكانية اتخاذها رموزاً وتعابير مجازية لعدد كبير من الأشياء. وكل هذا حتماً يعتمد على التلهف الذي يسببه وجود تلك المخلوقات. ورغم ان الوحوش نوعان: الحقيقي والخيالي، إلا ان الأخيرة هي الأكثر شيوعاً وتأثيراً: كتلك الوحوش (الهجينة) المتكونة من أشلاء عدد من أجزاء الجسم (الافعوان ذو الرؤوس المتعددة) ووحش (الجاميرا) وغيرها. وسوف يعالج هذا البحث موضوعاً ان هذه الوحوش تتعدى معانيها الشكلية الظاهرة إلى ما هو أعمق من ذلك. فهي تكشف اضطراب الحث الذاتي من قبل عوامل اجتماعية وثقافية متعددة.

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